STUDENT ATTITUDES TOWARDS AND PERCEPTIONS OF ePORTFOLIOS IN A FIRST YEAR JAPANESE LANGUAGE PROGRAMME

by
Sonja Moffat

A thesis submitted to Auckland University of Technology in partial fulfillment of the degree of Master of Arts in Applied Language Studies

2008

Primary Supervisor: Dr. Pat Strauss

School of Languages and Social Sciences
AUCKLAND UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgments), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Signed: ………………………………………

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the students who took the time to complete the questionnaires. Thanks are also due to the students who participated in the interviews and allowed their ePortfolio reflections to be used in this research project. Without these students this study could not have taken place.

In particular, I would like to acknowledge Dr. Pat Strauss, for her patience and invaluable guidance in her role as primary supervisor.

I would also like to thank my secondary supervisor, mentor, and friend, Debbie Corder for her professional advice and guidance over the years. Her enthusiasm and support have been very much appreciated.

A special thanks also goes to Michelle Duddy for proof reading this thesis.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the support, love and encouragement I have received from my partner, Simon Gallagher.

Glossary

AUT	Auckland University of Technology
AUTonline	AUT University's system for web-based and flexible learning
CEF	Common European Framework
ELP	European Language Portfolio
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
ESL	English as a Second Language
HKUST	Hong Kong University of Science and Technology
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IT	Information Technology
Kanji	Characters which are Chinese in origin and make up part of the Japanese writing system
KELP	Kiwi Electronic Language Portfolio
PDP	Personal Development Planning
QAA	QAA (Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (UK)

Abstract

Research into learner autonomy has confirmed the importance of learner competencies such as effective strategy use, goal setting and planning, maintaining motivation, and the ability to reflect and self-evaluate to the development of autonomy. The introduction of key competency frameworks to develop learner autonomy has been a focus of recent curriculum development from primary through to tertiary levels in the New Zealand education system. However, facilitating and managing the development of these learning competencies in a programme of study that has a number of different papers and staff, can be problematic. The learning portfolio is emerging as a possible medium to provide the required framework.

This study investigated the effectiveness of an ePortolio in enhancing learner autonomy in the context of a language learning programme. The aim of this study was to gain insight from a student perspective into the usfulness of ePortfolios as a tool to enhance student learning. Investigating learner autonomy and the development of self-reflection resulting from the use of ePortfolios was the main focus of the study. It also examined some of the practicalities of using an ePortfolio to develop the desired learner competencies, and discussed whether an ePortfolio provides an effective framework to record, monitor and provide feedback to students.

The results of the study reinforce the findings of previous studies in that there are benefits of ePortfolios as they encourage reflection. ePortfolios also have the potential to support the reflective process by making learning outcomes visible and they promote goal-setting. However, despite these apparent benefits, the findings suggest that there are many challenges, which have the potential to negatively influence its effectiveness.

The ePortfolio in this study was used with varying degrees of success. The findings have raised several issues regarding the introduction of an ePortfolio. The time it takes for teachers to give individual feedback and maintain an

adequate level of feedback throughout the semester was one major challenge. The extent to which learners need to be trained in the purpose of the ePortfolio and its link to reflection and developing autonomy was another issue that was raised. In addition, getting students to reflect on their learning holistically also proved to be problematic.

Overall however, findings as to the effectiveness of the ePortfolio in promoting autonomous learning appear promising, but they have highlighted the need to make changes to the ePortfolio itself. Its integration into the curriculum needs to be reconsidered to maximize its use and gain maximum benefit.

<center>**Chapter 1**</center>

<center>**Introduction**</center>

1.1 Background

This study aims to investigate the effectiveness of an ePortfolio as a platform to facilitate the development of learner autonomy, and to manage the development of associated competencies. The focus is on the perceptions and attitudes of the students involved in the trialling of an ePortfolio.

Research into learner autonomy, where students take responsibility for their learning and make a continuous effort to understand and evaluate such learning, has confirmed the importance of effective strategy use, goal-setting and planning, maintaining motivation, and the ability to reflect and self-evaluate (Cotterall, 1995; Little, 2002). The recognition of the importance of autonomy is reflected in the work currently being done in all sectors of the New Zealand education system. Of particular significance has been the development of a key competencies framework to assist the development of learner autonomy, from primary through to tertiary levels (Brewerton, 2004; Corder & Moffat, 2005; Ministry of Education, 2005a, , 2005b). The key competencies are concerned with developing lifelong learners, the effectiveness of learning, and the processes that contribute to how learners take greater control over their own learning (CDELL, 2002). However, a real challenge for educators is how to manage this learner development: giving feedback on such processes as for example, reflection and self-assessment, is particularly difficult. Portfolios are seen by some education researchers as providing the kind of environment that is needed.

Portfolios are becoming increasingly popular learning and assessment tools in language learning, and are now seen as providing a framework for students to be more actively involved and to take control of more aspects of the learning process (Kohonen, 2002). ePortfolios in particular provide flexibility and accessibility.

<center>1</center>

The adoption of a portfolio as a pedagogical language learning and reporting instrument by the Council of Europe can be seen as recognition of the efficacy of the portfolio model. In November 2004, there were some 64 portfolio models of the paper-based European Language Portfolio (ELP) validated by the Council of Europe (McDonald, 2004). The ELP is part of the Council of Europe's Common European Framework (CEF) for language teaching developed after almost 30 years of international collaboration between language experts in Europe and beyond, to promote the learning and teaching of modern languages in Europe (Corder & Moffat, 2005; Kohonen, n.d.). The CEF emphasizes the importance of learner autonomy as a goal in modern language learning and teaching, and to achieve this goal, teachers must progressively delegate pedagogic responsibility to the learners. The ELP is integral to this process (Kohonen, n.d.).

1.2 Purposes of the study

Since 1997 there has been an increase in the number of students enrolled in the Diploma in Japanese and the Bachelor of Arts (Japanese) at AUT University. Over a period of 10 years, the student demographics have changed with more students from Asian backgrounds in particular enrolling for the qualifications. Students are also entering the Japanese programmes with varying degrees of prior knowledge, learning needs, styles and abilities (Corder & Waller, 2005; 2007). Unfortunately this increase in numbers has been accompanied by a high attrition rate in the first year of study. The growing problem of meeting changing learner needs and developing more effective language learners, has given rise to the ongoing research into learner autonomy in the Japanese department since 1999. Findings from this research have pointed to such things as the importance of student/student, and teacher/student dialogue, and the 'pivotal role' of reflection in developing higher order cognitive and metacognitive knowledge and strategies (de la Harpe & Radloff, 1998). However, the issue has been how to manage the learning.

In 2005 the Japanese Department was offered the opportunity to develop an ePortfolio for Japanese language students at AUT University, modelled on one developed by the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (HKUST). The HKUST ePortfolio was based on the ELP and was developed for students of English. The AUT version called KELP (Kiwi Electronic Portfolio) was therefore adapted for our Japanese programme, and trialling of the portfolio began in 2005.

The main purpose of this thesis has been to gain insight into the effectiveness of ePortfolios in enhancing learner autonomy in the context of a first year language learning programme.

Specifically this study seeks to answer the following questions:

- What are students' views of the role of ePortfolios in enhancing their autonomy as learners?
- Does the ePorfolio provide an effective framework in which to record, monitor, and provide feedback to students?

1.3 Outline of thesis structure

The following chapter reviews literature dealing with key competencies and graduate capabilities, autonomy, reflection, the role of the teacher, ePortfolios, and issues relating to their implementation.

Chapter 3 describes the context of this study. It also outlines and provides a rationale for methods of data collection and analysis. Chapter 4 describes the research findings. The final chapter discusses emerging themes, outlines conclusions from the study and identifies areas for further research.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

This section reviews literature on key competencies, learner autonomy, lifelong learning, and the role of reflection in the learning process. It also investigates the role of the teacher as well as the role of student interaction in supporting the reflective process. The use of portfolios and in particular ePortfolios as a platform for students to actively engage in the learning process through self-reflection is explored. The benefits of ePortfolios to facilitate teacher feedback, as well as providing an environment for students to interact amongst themselves are also investigated. The various issues surrounding the implementation of ePortfolios, including students' perception of their effectiveness are also considered in the literature review which follows.

2.1 Key competencies and graduate capabilities

Key competencies are particularly relevant in current times, as knowledge is accepted as constantly evolving. As Condie and Livingston (2007) argue, the nature of learning and teaching has changed. In the past facts were "relatively stable entities that could confidently be passed from generation to generation with little alteration" (p. 338). However, more recently, it has been acknowledged that facts are:

> Much more transient and that views and theories develop and change… The knowledge of the world around us and the information that can be accessed about it is developing rapidly, (fuelled) in part by the World Wide Web. The constant changes in what we know about the world, along with changing work patterns, means that there is a greater emphasis on developing lifelong learners. (European Round Table of Industrialists, 1995 as cited in Condie and Livingston, 2007, pp 338-9)

If knowledge and understanding are subject to rapid change and modification, then developing the ability and disposition to monitor and direct one's own learning

becomes at least as important, if not more so, than the acquisition of facts, principles and theories. According to Marcoul-Burlinson (2006) students need to develop knowledge beyond disciplines and higher education must provide a context to make this happen. In fact knowledge is so wide, it is impossible to solely teach content (Plater, 2006). Siemens, as cited in Carmean and Christie (2006), states that knowledge is not what one knows, but the ability to find out what one needs to know. Passive learning is not sufficient to develop critical skills, which are needed in the workforce today. Asher (2005) maintains that students need to acquire general skills and interact with their environment in an active, critical and reflective way that allows them to face the real world in the future.

In response, policy makers, employers and curriculum developers have increasingly emphasized the importance of skills and dispositions such as "communication skills, the ability to work co-operatively in teams, problem solving and critical-thinking skills – sometimes referred to as core or transferable skills" (Condie & Livingston, 2007, p. 339).

In New Zealand the importance of developing key competencies to encourage lifelong, autonomous learning has been highlighted by the New Zealand Ministry of Education. Key competency frameworks have been developed at all levels of the New Zealand education system; from primary through to tertiary (Brewerton, 2004; Ministry of Education, 2005a). The four competencies in the tertiary key competencies framework include: Operating in social groups, acting autonomously, using tools interactively, and thinking.

Operating in social groups
This includes relating well to others, cooperating, managing and resolving conflict, asserting and defending rights and responsibilities, and motivating groups to achieve a particular outcome.

Acting autonomously

This refers to the ability to take action regarding one's interests, limits and needs. It also includes forming and conducting life plans and personal projects, and acting within a larger context.

Using tools interactively

This relates to the ability to understand, use and make meaning from language, literacy and numeracy, symbols, knowledge, and technology.

Thinking

This final competency is integral to the three competencies described above. 'Thinking' involves using cognitive and meta-cognitive strategies. This includes the ability to think critically and logically, learning to learn, and adapting to new contexts. This competency also encompasses self-awareness, reflection, and evaluation.

(Ministry of Education, 2005a)

In line with the Ministry of Education (2005a) key competencies document, Henry (2006) has identified the general skills which graduates should possess. These skills include using technology, communicating orally and in writing, collaborating, conducting inquiry, analysing and thinking critically, as well as having cultural understanding, and understanding global perspectives. In addition to these, O'Brien (2006) adds the ability to be adaptable as well as learning to learn. Pollit (2001) argues for the need to create a flexible workforce, capable of adapting to different contexts, and being able to think for themselves. Employers are not looking for 'trainees,' but employees who are equipped to learn, deal with change and contribute to change processes within an organisation (CDELL, 2002).

One example of an attempt to foster lifelong learning is the British Government's policy referred to as Personal Development Planning s. Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) has defined PDP as "a structured and supported

process undertaken by an individual to reflect on their own learning performance, and/or achievement and to plan for their personal, educational and career development" (cited in Marcoul-Burlinson, 2006, p. 169). Institutes in Great Britain were required to have policies in place to support the PDP initiative by 2005 to 2006. The objective of PDP is to enhance student employability, and assumes a shift towards student-centred learning, and the emergence of the autonomous learner (Doig, Illsley, McLuckie, & Parsons, 2006).

Through the PDP, learners are encouraged to understand what and how they are learning, and to review, plan and take responsibility for this learning. It aims to make learners become more effective, independent, and confident. In addition it aims to help learners relate their learning to a wider context, articulate personal goals, evaluate progress towards their achievement and encourage a postive attitude to learning throughout life. Another goal is to enable graduates to adapt easily to a "working environment perceived as ever-changing" (Marcoul-Burlinson, 2006, p. 170).

Developing evaluative and critical thinking skills takes time (Dam, 1995), but once these skills have been developed they encourage learning to continue beyond the classroom and beyond graduation. The focus of learning should be on continuation rather than completion (Taylor, Thomas, & Sage, 1999).

Academics are aware of the importance of these general skills and reflect them in programme goals by mapping them onto individual paper outcomes (Plater, 2006). It is essential that learners understand the importance of programme goals, including goals relating to the development of key competencies. According to Henry (2006) learners need to have sufficient opportunities to practice and gain mastery of each outcome throughout the programme. Outcomes need to be visible, so that learning becomes transparent (Kohonen, 2002). Many outcomes such as willingness to take risks, and learning skills and strategies necessary for continuous, independent learning are often not made visible and apparent to students, yet they are crucial for

autonomy. Therefore, it is necessary to pay explicit attention to these (Kohonen, 2000).

2.2 Autonomy

Currently there is a great deal of emphasis on the necessity of encouraging students to become lifelong learners. Lifelong learners "know what they know, what they have to learn" (Hargreaves, 2004, as cited in Hartnoll-Young, 2006, p. 126). Much thinking and research into learner autonomy has focused on the learner in the classroom or within a learning centre. However, true autonomy is the "freedom to learn outside the teaching context and the ability to continue learning after instruction has finished" (Field, 2007, p. 30). By 'outside the classroom,' Field refers not only to learning that takes place at the end of each teaching day, but also to developing language skills after the course has been completed, that is, lifelong learning. Boud and Falchikov (2006) argue that it is the role of higher education to equip students for lifelong learning.

Hartnoll-Young (2006) agrees on the importance of autonomous learning, and thinks that the skills to develop this should be adopted early, and continued throughout all levels of education, as well as beyond the boundaries of formal education. In order for students to achieve this status they must be able to self direct that is, plan, monitor, and evaluate their learning (Chan & Kim, 2004).

Investigations in the field of learner autonomy have not been coherent as they have not addressed the same set of questions and have covered many areas of activity "from learner strategy training to learner counseling to teacher training" (Chan & Kim, 2004, p. 4). Consequently there are many definitions of learner autonomy, and it is often equated with learner independence, to the extent that students can work on their own without guidance or direction from a teacher (Blin, 1999). Little (2002) argues that learners may be said to be autonomous when they (1) explicitly accept responsibility for their learning and (2) exercise that responsibility in a continuous

effort to understand what, why, and how they are learning and with what degree of success.

Scharle and Szabó (2000) differentiate between autonomy and responsibility. They define autonomy as possessing "the freedom and ability to manage one's own affairs, which entails the right to make decisions as well" and responsibility as "being in charge of something but with the implication that one has to deal with the consequences of one's own actions" (p. 4). Both autonomy and responsibility require active involvement, so are interrelated.

Autonomous learners need to develop personal initiative, resourcefulness, show persistence in their learning, and be aware of the aims and processes of learning (Ponton, Derrick, & Carr, 2005). Brookfield as cited in Blin (1999), broadens the definition of autonomy to include critical reflection, which means considering alternative perspectives. Autonomous learners are active investigators and problem solvers, in that they reflect on their learning, raise problems to solve, and suggest opportunities for action (Hartnoll-Young, 2006).

2.2.1 Metacognitive awareness

In order to become autonomous learners, students must develop metacognitive skills, or 'learn how to learn' which will enable them to become active investigators and problem solvers. Wenden (1995) characterizes metacognitive knowledge as "the stable, statable and sometimes fallible knowledge learners acquire about themselves as learners and the learning process" (p. 185). Wenden (1991) describes three kinds of metacognitive knowledge among language learners. 'Person knowledge' relates to the general knowledge learners have regarding factors like age, aptitude, and learning style, and how these can influence language learning. Person knowledge also includes the knowledge one has about oneself as a learner as well as the beliefs one has regarding the factors which lead to success or failure in language learning. 'Task knowledge' is also integral to metacognitive awareness. This refers to one's

understanding of the purpose, nature and demands of particular tasks. Wenden also identified 'strategic knowledge,' which relates to knowing which strategies are likely to be effective in achieving learning goals and understanding how best to approach a task.

O'Malley and Chamot (1990) define the term 'strategies' as "higher order executive skills that may entail planning for, monitoring, or evaluating the success of a learning act" (p. 44). Metacognitive skills: (1) enable students to take responsibility for their own learning, (2) regulate or check their learning, (3) analyse and develop a critical consciousness and (4) reflect on all the information available to them from today's wide variety of sources (Condie & Livingston, 2007).

2.2.2   Self-regulation

Self-regulation, which is integral to learner autonomy, involves metacognition, motivation, task engagement, constructing meaning, adapting thoughts and feelings, and actions for learning and motivation (Blackburn & Hakel, 2006).

Self-regulation has four stages: Goal-set, monitor, regulate, and reflect. In the goal-setting stage, learners are encouraged to set learning goals, as opposed to performance goals. The focus should be on strategies, not grades (Blackburn & Hakel, 2006). As a starting point for goal-setting, Field (2007) recommends that learners be asked to see themselves as they are now regarding their language learning skills, and then to imagine how they would like to be at the end of the course. He believes it is important to imagine what is possible, what they will be able to do, and how they will feel. After learners have formed the image, Field (2007) suggests writing down the specific language learning goals and devising plans to reach these goals. Stefani, Mason and Pegler (2007) advise keeping learning goals simple, measurable and specific. They should be set neither too high nor too low. They also point out that as goal-setting is a skill which many students will have had little or no experience, support and feedback from the teacher is necessary.

'Monitor' is the second stage in self-regulation and relates to the process by which people assess their learning and progress toward their goals. Blackburn and Hakel (2006) state that the 'monitor' stage should include individual feedback with suggestions on which skills and knowledge areas to improve on and suggestions for strategies to improve on those areas. 'Regulate' refers to implementation of strategies, that is, when to learn, what to learn and how to learn. The final stage, 'reflection' will be discussed in detail in section 2.3.

2.2.3 Developing autonomous learners

Field (2007) outlines skills that are targeted in training language learners to take control of their learning and become autonomous. He argues that if a learner acquires these competencies, they "ensure that a learner participates constructively when attending language classes, makes best possible use of self-access facilities, and cultivates good study habits" (p.31). Good study habits are especially important for language learners if they wish to become proficient, as most of the learning will have to be done on their own. As Nunan and Lamb (1996) state, "the most extensive and prolonged period of classroom instruction can only provide a limited introduction to the chosen language" (p. 156).

Field (2007) has developed a framework to develop learner autonomy (see Table 1). However, Field admits that the framework only ensures 'limited independence' as these skills are being developed within guided instruction, a school and a programme of study.

In the language class	Employing learning strategies Negotiating content Understanding the teacher's goals Achieving a deeper language awareness Reflecting on the process of learning Recognising one's own learning style
In the learning centre	Making needs-based choices Working intensively on examples of language Gaining motivation through practice
Outside school	Self assessment General study skills Managing learning

Table 1. Developing skills necessary to becoming an autonomous learner (Field, 2007)

A foreign language curriculum that aims to promote autonomy must focus on putting learners in control of their linguistic and learning processes (Chan & Kim, 2004).

2.2.4 Learner-centredness

In a learner-centred environment, the focus is on bringing about conceptual change in students' understanding of the world. The importance is placed on what the student does to achieve this understanding, not what the teacher does (Biggs, 1999). Nunan and Lamb (1996) discuss the implementation of a learner-centred language classroom. They maintain that language programmes should have two goals: language content goals, and learning process goals. It is necessary to systematically educate learners about what it means to be a learner. However, as they point out, "learner-centredness is not an all-or-nothing process . . . it is a continuum from relatively less to relatively more learner-centered . . . implemented at a number of different levels" (p. 12).

Level	Learner Action	Learner centredness in the content domain	Learner centredness in the learning process domain
1	Awareness	Learners are made aware of the pedagogical goals and content of the course.	Learners identify strategy implications of pedagogical tasks and identify their own preferred learning styles/strategies.
2	Involvement	Learners are involved in selecting their own goals and objectives from a range alternatives on offer.	Learners make choices among a range of options.
3	Intervention	Learners are involved in modifying and adapting the goals and content of the learning program.	Learners modify/adapt tasks.
4	Creation	Learners create their own goals and objectives	Learners create their own tasks.
5	Transcendence	Learners go beyond the classroom and make links between the content of the classroom and the world beyond the classroom.	Learners become teachers and researchers.

Table 2. Learner-centredness in programme content and learning process (Nunan & Lamb, 1996)

Benson (2001) supports the development of learner autonomy through five approaches: resource-based, technology-based, classroom-based, curriculum-based, and teacher-based approaches. However, Field (2007) maintains that "only learner-based approaches seem to embrace the possibility of development both within and beyond the place of instruction" (p. 37). Little (2002) agrees with the argument that encouraging self-assessment is a challenge in traditional teacher-led learning environments where students are not encouraged to share in the setting and evaluation of learning targets.

2.2.5 Teacher-centred learning

In a teacher-centred learning environment the 'expert teacher' transmits knowledge to the 'inexpert learner' (Biggs, 1999). Nunan and Lamb (1996) distinguish between high-structured and low-structured teaching. High-structured tasks are those in

which teachers have all the power and control. Low-structured tasks delegate power and control to the students. Nunan and Lamb maintain that successful learning depends on "teachers knowing where to locate themselves on the high- to low-structured continuum in relation to a given task" (p. 17). In a low-structured context, students can act autonomously in that they have options and have control.

Flowerdew and Miller (2005) maintain that teachers can move the locus of control to students by adopting a strategy approach to learning. A strategy approach to learning and teaching focuses on "learners making decisions based on their own preferences concerning a learning task, rather than on the teacher making the decision for them" (p. 16). They describe this learner-strategy approach as 'independent learning' which is one stage in the process of developing learner autonomy.

However, some teachers are reluctant to sacrifice control. Field (2007) accuses some teachers of having a "rather self-indulgent idea of the instructional context as the place where the bulk of language learning occurs" (p. 32). He describes how much of current teaching centres on discrete structural and functional material supplemented by free oral practice and skills development. This approach, he claims, does not prepare students to exploit resources outside of the classroom.

However, according to Dysthe and Engelsen (2004), moving the locus of control to students is a difficult process and as Dam (1995) notes, requires effort from both teachers and learners. It needs to be acknowledged that some learners do not want to self-manage and take responsibility for their learning (Hoven, 1999; Stefani et al., 2007).

Although educators should aim at developing learners who self-manage and who are independent and self-directed, these learners should not just be left to their own devices. 'Interdependency' is central to developing learner autonomy (Jones, 2001) and learners and teachers need to take joint responsibility (Blin, 1999). The student is seen as a "self-directed, intentional person who can be guided to develop his or

her competences in three inter-related areas of knowledge, skills and awareness: a) personal awareness and self-direction, b) awareness of language and communication, and c) awareness of learning processes " (Kohonen, n.d. , p. 90)

Teachers need to give individual help to learners to enable them to become autonomous and develop this awareness. It is necessary to construct a "shared understanding of the language learning process and the part they play in it. This awareness is an essential foundation of learner autonomy" (Cotterall, 1995, p. 203).

Although one of the roles of a teacher is to help learners identify and overcome their deficits, in an average lesson there is minimal interaction between the teacher and individual students (Chan & Kim, 2004). Some students may not even get the opportunity to interact directly at all with the teacher. Studies in the past (Flanders, 1970; Goodland, 1984 as cited in Crandall, 1999) have estimated that teachers talk between 60 and 75% of the time in a traditional class, with students usually talking one at a time during the rest. Although these findings are somewhat dated, they may still be relevant to current classroom practice. Crandall (1999) adds that some students may be reluctant to interact in the classroom, noting that "fear of failing or appearing foolish is a constant threat to interaction in the language classroom" (p. 233).

Developing students into autonomous learners is a desirable outcome in education the world over, not only do teachers agree that it is important for learners to become autonomous, but many learners themselves want to become autonomous. However, some students lack the required knowledge to learn more effectively (Goh, 1997).

To assist students to develop the necessary skills and knowledge to become autonomous and to counteract difficulties students have with self-management of their learning, awareness-raising is necessary. Kohonen (n.d.) has also identified the importance of providing specific learner awareness training in terms of

legitimising the goals of learner autonomy as something attainable, and increasing learner awareness of their role as a responsible learner.

2.2.6   Learner resistance to a focus on process

In order to develop learner autonomy, a shift from a content-oriented approach to teaching to a process-oriented approach to teaching is necessary (Corder & Waller, 2007). However, placing priority on process and learning to learn, over learning the actual language, is also an issue which needs to be considered (Jing, 2006). Jing suggests that reflective learning might not be well received by students who are in an examination-oriented educational system. Some learners do not see the attainment of autonomy as relating to the attainment of their learning goals.

Hiemstra and Brockett (1994, as cited in Jing, 2006) highlight two causes of learner resistance to self-direction in adult learning. They believe these two factors are self-concept, and self-awareness. Low self-confidence and poor self-concept make it difficult for adult learners to take responsibility for their learning. The authors also maintain that previous learning experiences influence the attitudes some students have towards learning. Some students prefer a teacher-directed approach to an approach which is learner-centred.

2.2.7   Resistance to the concept of autonomy

According to Cotterall (1995) different learners have different beliefs. The teacher needs to gauge readiness for changes in beliefs and behaviour before trying to foster autonomy. Jing (2006) also refers to learner readiness and believes that some students might not be psychologically ready for the 'strangeness' of new concepts or initiatives. They may not see these initiatives as legitimate tasks. In particular, Jing found that many students appeared doubtful about the usefulness of metacognitive strategies.

Cultural and educational background can affect learner beliefs about the roles of teacher and learners. Similarly, "some learners naturally prefer to manage their own learning, others can come to prefer it when they have sufficient understanding of how to do it, while yet others may never feel comfortable or successful when required to manage their learning" (Hoven, 1999, p. 163). However, whichever management style learners prefer and select, reflection is central in the development of lifelong learning.

2.3   Reflection

Reflection plays a pivotal role in fostering learner autonomy (Corder & Waller, 2007). Benson (2001) also states that an important attribute of a successful, independent, autonomous learner is the ability to reflect on experience, evaluate it, and learn from it. Boud, Keogh, and Walker (1985) define reflection in the context of learning as, "a generic term for those intellectual and affective activities in which individuals engage to explore their experiences in order to lead to new understandings and appreciations. It may take place in isolation or in association with others" (p. 19).

However, reflection is not a new area of academic research. Dewey defined reflection in 1933 as "active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge" (p. 18). Two of the most well-known researchers on reflection are Kolb and Schön.

Cycle of experiential learning
Kolb (1984) sees learning as a four stage process: concrete experience, observation and reflection, formation of abstraction and concepts, and testing in new situations. He maintains learning is achieved when a learner acts and is able to see the effect of his or her actions. The learner will then be able to anticipate the possible effect of the action in new circumstances.

'Reflection in action' and 'reflection on action'

On the other hand, Schön (1983) sees reflection as occurring in two timeframes. 'Reflection *in* action' is immediate reflection, which happens during an activity or interaction. It involves analyzing the situation, paying attention to behaviour, reshaping responses to bring about some form of change and improving practice (Boud, 1994). It is the ability to 'think on your feet'. Many people reflect 'in action' without realizing it. However, in recognizing the process of reflection in action, learners can "develop skills of responding to need in informed and appropriate ways" (O'Connor & Diggins, 2002, p. 37).

'Reflection *on* action' is analysis which occurs before or after an event, as part of the planning or evaluation process, where the implications of actions are considered and examined (O'Connor & Diggins, 2002). Both reflecting *in* action and reflecting *on* action are important with regard to making meaning of learning and improving practice.

Most subsequent research on reflection and its role in the process of learning, has its genesis in the theories of Dewey, Schön and Kolb, and expands the links between reflection and learning (Riedinger, 2006).

The work of Dewey (1933) and Kolb (1984) use the past as a point of reference for reflection. Schön's ideas on 'reflection-in-action' use the present as a starting point for reflection (Schön, 1983). Verdonschot (2006) states that the third point of reference for reflection is the future. When using the future as a starting point, there are no concrete experiences to reflect upon. Senge, Scharmer, Jaworski and Flowers (2005, as cited in Verdonschot, 2006, p. 675) describe this type of reflection as "seeing (opening up), sensing (exploring multiple meanings and perspectives to look from), presencing (linking these new ideas with the situation today), and enacting (acting in the situation at hand)". Senge et al, believe that reflecting on the future can break with the dominant ways of thinking in the past. Verdonschot (2006) believes that imagining a desired future is effective as a starting point enabling people to

think of what is needed to change the current situation into a situation similar to the one dreamed of.

Verdonschot (2006) maintains that starting with gaps or deficits is not motivating for students. She recommends focusing on what went well:

> Instead of the often-used question such as 'what went wrong?' and 'what can you do differently the next time?' It is motivating for the people involved to focus on successes, things that went well, and their own contribution that made that possible (p. 674).

Boud et al. (1985) have also investigated the relationship between reflection and emotions. They stress the importance of recalling positive feelings that occurred in the situation that is being reflected upon.

Boud (2001) has also described the importance of reflection in the learning process. Boud defines reflection as "taking unprocessed, raw material of experience and engaging with it as a way to make sense of what has occurred" (p. 10). Boud et al. (1985) also argue that only by bringing our ideas to our consciousness can we evaluate them and begin to make choices about what we will do and will not do.

Reflection can be undertaken as an informal personal activity for its own sake or as part of a structured course (Boud, 2001). Within a course, reflection may focus on special activities (for example, workshop activities), events of the past (for example, what learners bring to the course from prior experience), or concurrent activities in the learners' workplace and community that act as a stimulus for learning. (Boud, 2001)

The literature indicates that reflection is thoughtful consideration by the learner on one's learning progress. It is a process by which learners explore their work, assess their strengths and weaknesses, and consider strategies for future learning. Kohonen (n.d.) notes that "seeing options, making choices, reflecting on the consequences

and making new action plans are essential elements for the development of increasingly autonomous learning" (p. 91).

Wenden (1987) also makes the link between reflection and successful language learning. Unsuccessful learners are generally less aware of effective ways of approaching learning tasks. As Goh (1997) points out, what learners know about their learning can directly influence the types of learning strategies they choose and can even influence the outcome of their learning.

Field (2007) highlights two important processes to reflection. The first stage of reflection is introspection, for example to revisit a conversation after it is over and ask oneself evaluative questions, the extent to which one understood the conversation, and how successful one was in responding spontaneously and appropriately. The second stage in the process of reflection is what she refers to as 'rehearsal.' In this rehearsal stage learners should compare what they actually produced in the interaction, with the "target that they might have achieved, had more time been available for planning", that is, noticing the "gap between what one knows and is capable of uttering and what one actually utters on the spur of the moment" (Field, 2007, p. 36).

However, while it has been widely accepted that reflection enhances learning and is necessary in the development of autonomous learners, Cambra-Fierro and Cambra-Berdứn (2007) point out that reflection is not a task that can be imposed on students. Learners need to be willing participants. They suggest that students' attitudes towards self-evaluation processes depend on the information and encouragement they receive. Cambra-Fierro and Cambra-Berdứn have formulated a hypothesis, which they have called a 'causal model' to illustrate the link between input learners receive regarding reflection and learner 'buy-in' and ultimately positive results and student satisfaction (see Figure 1).

```
┌────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│  ┌──────────────────┐                                          │
│  │ Advice           │──┐                                       │
│  ├──────────────────┤  │                                       │
│  │ Responsibility   │──┤    ┌─────────────────┐   ┌──────────┐ │
│  ├──────────────────┤  ├───▶│ Self-evaluation │──▶│ Academic │ │
│  │ Motivation       │──┤    └─────────────────┘   │ results/ │ │
│  ├──────────────────┤  │                          │Satisfac- │ │
│  │ Self-confidence  │──┘                          │ tion     │ │
│  └──────────────────┘                             └──────────┘ │
│         Antecedents                                Consequence  │
└────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┘
```
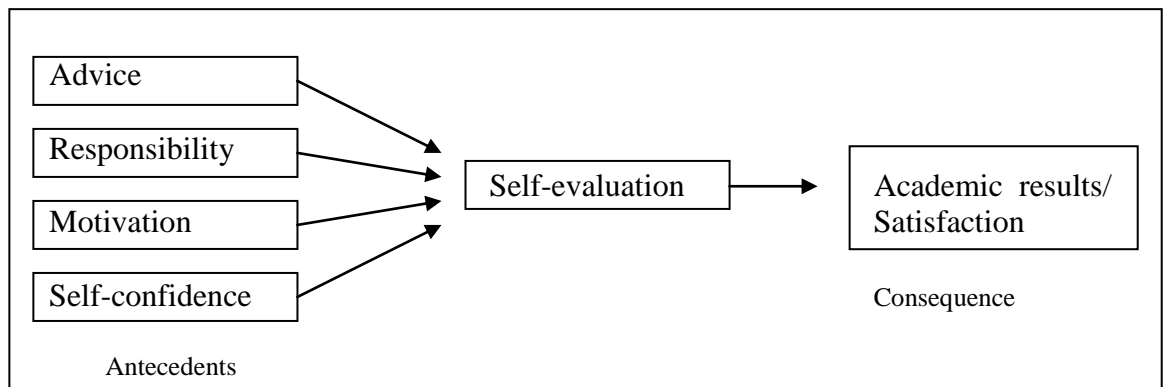
Figure 1. Causal model (Cambra-Fierro and Cambra-Berdún, 2007, p.106)

The advice (information and encouragement) that students receive has a direct, positive effect on their decision to engage in self-evaluation. As stated earlier, Cambra-Fierro and Cambra-Berdún (2007) believe that reflection is an activity that neither can nor should be imposed, so once students have received the relevant advice it is their responsibility to decide to engage in self-evaluation. Once students understand the purpose of self-evaluation and have an expectation of what they can gain from the process, this understanding will contribute to increased motivation, which will also have a direct, positive effect on their self-evaluation. They believe that students who have a good self-concept may be reluctant to change their study methods. However, students with a positive self-concept may also be more receptive of their teacher's suggestions about self-evaluation. Finally, critical self-evaluation is likely to lead to improved academic results and overall self-satisfaction.

2.3.1   The challenges of introducing reflection into a course

While the results of many studies have proven that reflection aids teaching and learning, there are many challenges which need to be overcome if reflection is to be included into a programme or curriculum. According to Riedinger (2006) such challenges include, teaching learners how to reflect, dealing with resistance, and clichéd responses. O'Connell and Dyment (2006) also cite 'writing for the teacher'

(writing what they think the teacher wants to see), lack of clear structure and purpose, and the issue of whether to assess student reflections as other issues which need to be addressed.

The issue of assessment

Kerka (1996, as cited in O'Connell and Dyment, 2006) recognizes the problem of assessing something which may be written for what the teacher wants to see. Kerka also raises issues of privacy and how perceptions of traditional power imbalances between teachers and students may potentially affect what is written and how it is assessed. However, many teachers believe that in order for the journals to be taken seriously they need to be assessed. They believe in attaching a specific weighting which counts towards the overall grade for the paper. On the other hand there are teachers who support a simple pass/fail system and believe it is all that is needed for students to take journal writing seriously.

Learner maturity

According to Ehrman (1998) students are at different stages of 'maturity' with regard to their willingness and aptitude to reflect. Corder and Waller (2007) also found that students at AUT University were at different stages of maturity. They discovered that some students were able to reflect with little support, others developed reflective skills over time. Diary entries of some students which were erratic and descriptive at the beginning of their study became more in-depth over time. However, they also found that some students showed no signs of development by the end of their study.

Student's attitudes towards reflection

Jing's (2006) study of EFL (English as a foreign language) learners in a Chinese university explored journal writing from a student perspective as a means to encourage student reflection. The findings showed 70% of participants were not interested in writing reflective diaries, although more than half of them (59%) considered it useful to their learning. Jing maintains that reflective tasks are not well

received if students cannot see rapid improvements in their language skills. "While the teacher expected to be involved more in reflective and process-oriented learning, students seemed to expect short-term, more visible results and were more interested in product-oriented learning" (p. 106).

Jing (2006) suggests activities which encourage reflection, such as journal-keeping may be considered an "added burden to compete for students' time, especially when . . . journal-keeping took time to generate visible results in language learning" (p. 108). The author found that some students were not willing to "pay serious attention to reflection and the learning-to-learn process, especially when they perceived that neither reflection nor 'process' would quickly address their immediate concerns and serve their immediate purposes" (p. 112)

While some learners see the benefits in reflection, many do not (Jing, 2006; Towndrow, 2004). Jing argues that "learner resistance is a matter of tensions and conflicts in learner and teacher agendas, and in short-term and long-term priorities in learning" (p. 113). Jing maintains that although some students may see the long-term benefits of reflective and process-oriented tasks, they are more concerned with their short-term priorities of improving basic language skills and passing examinations.

To reduce the possibility of learner resistance to reflection, Jing (2006) suggests that reflective tasks should be introduced gradually. He also describes how his "eagerness for immediate change" was probably a factor which affected the outcome of the study. Jing admits that he was very controlling in the implementation of the diaries into the curriculum and was:

> Preoccupied with the necessarily positive outcome . . . to the extent that I had failed to create a sufficiently supportive environment in which learner-teacher roles, classroom methodologies and materials were all under negotiation between the teacher and the students to clarify possible misconceptions and to accommodate students' immediate concerns. (p. 107)

These factors he admits could have been a possible source of resistance to the project amongst students. To reduce the risk of learner resistance, training is essential.

2.3.2 Learner training in reflection

The aim of developing reflective learners is to encourage students to be more self-aware and self-critical: to be honest about themselves, and open to criticism and feedback (Stefani et al., 2007). Riedinger (2006), amongst others, has stressed the importance of learner training before introducing reflective activities. Learner training should begin with discussions and definitions of reflection in order to help students understand the purpose of reflection, and what they can hope to achieve from engaging in it. Training should also include teaching students how to reflect. Riedinger states that it is necessary to provide learners with practical, down-to-earth explanations and examples.

Asking questions to encourage reflection
Riedinger (2006) describes training learners how to reflect as 'mining.' The mining begins with learners asking who, what, where, when, and why. True learning comes through mining deeper and asking how, so what, and now what. Kohonen (n.d.) agrees that specific awareness training and an orientation to reflection need to be provided to learners. He suggests starting training with learners themselves, focusing on their own experiences, beliefs and assumptions.

Lerner (2007) assists students to develop their metacognitive skills by posing a series of specific questions at the end of the course. The questions ask students to consider what they gained from the course, they encourage students to reflect on their learning processes, and what they did or did not benefit from. There are also questions which ask students to think about connections between classroom material and 'real life.' Lerner believes that reflective questions such as these provide more constructive feedback than do course evaluation forms, which are often 'brief and

sometimes cryptic' (p. 40). In this respect they are a learning tool for both teachers and students to improve their practice.

Reflective journals

Mental reflection is the first step in the reflective process, the next step is committing that reflection to paper. In her study on retrospective diary-keeping, Matsumoto (1996) observed that although many students often thought about their "classroom performance achievements, and problems in casual and less concentrated ways, they had never analysed their learning experience systematically" (p. 145). Students reported that the act of "writing down personal comments on classroom activities and analyzing the entries helped them organize thoughts which might otherwise have remained largely obscure or even unconscious" (p. 145).

Walker (1988) found that the process of writing provides objectivity in relation to a learner's experience. Writing is a means of distancing yourself from the experience to draw out potential learning. Teachers need to support learners in their writing development. With sufficient teacher support, students can develop reflective skills over time and move away from the superficial level of descriptive writing to deeper levels of analysis and evaluation (O'Connell & Dyment, 2006).

Reflective classroom tasks

Field (2007) describes particular classroom tasks which teachers can adopt to encourage reflection. He suggests video-recording communicative activities and asking learners to comment on their own contributions immediately after the activity. Doing so, "is likely to trigger recall not just of what was said but also of why it was said. Learners are thus made aware of the strategies they engage in when formulating phrases and sentences in the target language" (p. 36). Learners who may not see the relevance of journal writing or maintaining a reflective portfolio over a period of time may be more receptive to more varied activities, which achieve the same result, namely, encouraging students to become more aware of themselves as learners.

O'Connell and Dyment (2006) point out that regular feedback from the teacher during training in reflective tasks such as journal writing is necessary. They also highlight that this feedback must be sufficient and timely if it is to be effective in the learning process.

2.3.3   Role of the teacher in encouraging reflection

Although it is difficult to exactly know the extent to which students reflect, research indicates the need to support students and help them to reflect (Corder & Waller, 2005).

The teacher's contribution to the reflective process is fundamental. Teachers need to intervene when and where students are having difficulties. To encourage meaningful learning, teachers should: (a) carefully plan the whole process, (b) strive to achieve the students' active participation, (c) bear in mind the students' level of development, their previous knowledge and capabilities, and (d) facilitate the students' capacity to learn how to learn (Cambra-Fierro & Cambra-Berdún, 2007).

Reflection is not an activity that should be conducted in isolation. Dysthe and Engelsen (2004) maintain that dialogue improves reflection. Feedback and interaction help in constructing one's own meaning. Learning becomes a social activity where learner's existing beliefs attitudes and knowledge can be tested and assessed.

Matsumoto (1996) found that the 'public' nature of retrospection helped students "become aware of alternative ways of learning, beliefs, attitudes and perceptions besides their own" (p.147). However, she observed that when such discussions take place orally they are not necessarily effective. She reports that oral self-reporting is "less deliberate, less concentrated introspection than those which elicit responses of written mode" (p. 146). One student in her study reported that he forgot the content

of the oral discussions and they were therefore not helpful to his learning. This observation highlights that the function of a written, online discussion board for students to share reflections may be beneficial to students as they have the opportunity to revisit the discussion at a later date.

The role of the teacher in this process is to facilitate discussion. "A paradigm shift is needed whereby learning is not supported by teaching as a one-way instruction, but where the discovery of knowledge is to be facilitated" (Marcoul-Burlinson, 2006, p. 173). Cotterall (1998) and Healey (1999) also maintain that teachers need to adjust to a new role of facilitator rather than provider of knowledge. However, as pointed out by Cotterall (1998) the reality is that many teachers are faced with constraints imposed by time, class size, pressure to follow curriculum, and the demands of external assessments.

An additional challenge faced by teachers is the expectation of having to cater to the different needs of learners in terms of preferred learning styles. Learner differences also exist regarding readiness and willingness to become autonomous. This brings an additional challenge that teachers must face in the classroom and not all teachers will be receptive to this additional challenge. As Little (1995) states autonomy is 'messy', whereas structure is 'neat'.

Ehrman (1998) points out teachers need to provide different amount of scaffolding according to the stage of learner development of individual students. This development state varies with the "amount of challenge in the material to be learned, the degree of match of their learning styles with the curriculum and school norms, and the students' own emotional states" (Ehrman, 1998, p. 104).

It is also important that feedback be graduated, only offered when needed and be dialogic in nature (Hoven, 1999). According to Ushioda (1996), feedback can affect motivation and can affect the way students think and what they believe about themselves. Simple remarks such as 'well done' are soon forgotten. While the

importance of teacher feedback needs to be acknowledged, teachers should gradually take away the scaffolding as learners become more able to problem-solve for themselves (Hoven, 1999).

However, it needs to be understood that not all learners feel comfortable talking about their learning, even learners who are said to be autonomous (Cotterall, 1995). Some learners and particularly learners from certain cultures prefer not to self-disclose. Teachers need to be aware of this and actively try to enhance communication (Tosh, Werdmuller, Chen, Light, & Haywood, 2006).

In addition to providing feedback and guidance, the role of the teacher includes creating an environment which motivates learners; an environment where learners *want* to engage, not *have* to engage (Tosh et al., 2006; Verdonschot, 2006). O'Connell and Dyment (2006) also highlight the importance of the teacher's attitude if reflective tasks such as journal-writing are to be successful. Teachers need to approach these tasks with a positive attitude. The enthusiasm in a teacher can be 'contagious' and the students are more likely to approach the reflective tasks with enthusiasm. In addition to the teacher, interaction between students can also be effective in the reflective process.

2.3.4 Classroom environment

Goh (1997) and Matsumoto (1996) have described how individual journal writing is a stimulus for reflection and is an effective starting point to class discussion on learner strategies. In her study, Goh found that learners were capable of observing their cognitive learning *strategies* in listening and were able to verbalise these strategies. Matsumoto (1996) found that learners viewed diary-keeping as a useful learning tool to raise awareness of themselves as learners and consider ways to improve.

However, Goh (1997) maintains that the pedagogical benefits of diaries are much wider. She believes that diaries form the basis of group discussions about learning. When students become aware of others' strategies, beliefs and attitudes, they are encouraged to evaluate and improve their own learning practices. Biggs (1999) has also highlighted the importance of students working collaboratively and engaging in dialogue with each other. He maintains that good dialogue shapes, elaborates, and deepens understanding.

Goh (1997) states that classroom discussion tends to focus on content. Pre-task activities require students to brainstorm ideas and vocabulary related to the topic and post-task discussions are often limited to the understanding of a particular text. Goh maintains that these discussions need to be extended to include discussion on thinking processes in order to develop metacognitive awareness. For example, prior to a task, students should discuss strategies which might be suitable for the given task. Similarly they could anticipate any problems that might arise with the task, and could consider strategies to minimize the effects of those problems. Such discussion encourages students to try out different strategies they would not have ordinarily tried. After the task has been completed, the effectiveness of the strategies that were employed could be evaluated in a class discussion.

Goh (1997) suggests that teachers ask their students to present strategies and beliefs that they have written about to their class mates. Discussions can be focussed by setting a theme, such as asking students to consider the "relative merits of strategies . . . and select some they have never used and apply them in appropriate situations. They can meet again after a period of time to share their experiences and assess the usefulness of the strategies" (p. 368). Sharing is a valuable resource, where all students stand to benefit and can possibly make faster progress than they would if they had not shared their experiences.

2.3.4.1 The challenges of a multi-cultural classroom

According to Campbell (2007) cultural diversity makes a classroom more exciting and interesting, but it has its challenges. ESL (English as a second language) students are less likely to participate in class discussion for a number of reasons. Some students are just naturally shy, others lack the confidence in their English proficiency to contribute their opinions, as they feel they will lose face if they make mistakes. Other students feel that they "would waste class time if they take too long to formulate their thoughts and express them in English" (Campbell, 2007, p. 37). Samovar and Porter (2001, as cited in Campbell, 2007) maintain that "disagreeing with others, especially face-to-face, and arguing one's points are seen as confrontational and undesirable in many Asian cultures, in which harmony is highly valued" (p. 37). Consequently ESL students are often seen as passive, uninterested, uncooperative, or ignorant.

2.3.4.2 Online discussion

The challenge for teachers is to create an environment in which all students feel comfortable. Campbell (2007) believes that online discussion is one possible medium to achieve this. Online discussions have previously been associated with distance education, but have recently become more involved in traditional classroom settings, with the aim of promoting critical thinking, knowledge construction and learning autonomy (Wang & Woo, 2007). Online discussions allow for "flexibility in the time, place and pace of communication" (Campbell, 2007, p. 38). Students are afforded the "time to think about the messages they receive and send without the pressure of immediate response" (p. 38).

Campbell (2007) discusses the extent of the teacher's involvement in online discussions. The teacher can have a monitoring role only with minimal intervention. A monitoring role involves checking progress and ensuring that students are posting quality messages, which are on topic. Alternatively a teacher may choose to be more

involved in the online discussion. Campbell has found that she prefers to adopt a monitoring role, as she has observed that ESL students from Asian cultures "tend to be reluctant to express views that disagree with the instructor's. They feel more comfortable in a student-led, student-centred discussion" (p. 41). However, to help facilitate online discussion, Wang and Woo (2007) suggest breaking down a complicated discussion question into smaller or specific questions.

Garrison (2003) as cited in Kanuka, Rourke and Laflamme (2007) asserts that:

> The asynchronous and written communication within online learning environments provide the conditions that encourage, if not require reflection. In addition to the time to reflect, the permanent and precise nature of written communication also allows if not requires reflection to interpret and construct meaning. (p. 263)

However, Kanuka et al. (2007) found that although online discussion forums provided an "environment for active and engaged learning, the engagement they observed was not reflective" (p. 41). They also found that although the asynchronous nature of online discussion allows for time to think before responding, there was not much evidence that students were actually taking the time to do so.

However, as Wang and Woo (2007) point out, different students have different preferences with regard to mode of expression. Responses in online discussions are articulated in written form, however, some students prefer to express themselves orally in face-to-face discussions. They found that some students preferred to express their ideas orally "without paying much attention to the structure of sentences and grammars. They could also receive information cues immediately when the audience was unclear" (p. 284).

2.3.4.3 Face-to-face discussion

Wang and Woo (2007) conducted a study with students enrolled in a post-graduate diploma in education in Singapore. The study compared online discussions with

face-to-face discussions. The results showed that asynchronous online discussions were "more appropriate for group characteristics that consist of a mix of introversion and extroversion, and submissiveness and dominance" (p. 282). Such discussions resulted in more equal opportunities for group members to voice their opinions. They also found that face-to-face discussions were more real and authentic than online discussions, because participants could talk to each other in real time, see their facial expressions and clarify matters immediately.

Wang and Woo (2007) also found that face-to-face discussions provide more opportunities for interaction and included complementary remarks, comments and clarifications. Face to face discussions were more likely to be multi-dimensional compared to online discussions which tended to be more 'one-way'.

There appear to be both benefits and drawbacks of online discussion compared to face-to-face discussion. This needs to be taken into consideration when deciding on the most appropriate medium for classroom discussion.

2.4   Portfolios

If teachers are to help learners acquire and practise relevant strategies that are crucial for learner autonomy, classroom methodologies to encourage this process must be developed. An interesting approach that appears to have great potential in this regard is the use of portfolios. According to Kohonen (2000), the portfolio could be a missing link between the goal of autonomy and how to foster it. It also appears that portfolios have the potential to support the reflective process by making learning outcomes visible, and promoting goal-setting. Stefani et al. add that portfolios can be used to demonstrate skills and competencies to employers.

Lambert, DePaepe, Lambert and Anderson (2007) state that "the portfolio evolution has followed the theories and research on self-directed, self-reflective, and constructivist learning that have been tested mostly through trial and error" (p. 77).

Defining a portfolio is not simple as they are very context-dependent (Marcoul-Burlinson, 2006). However, one of the most commonly used definitions was coined by Paulson, Paulson and Meyer (1991, p. 60):

> A portfolio is a purposeful collection of student work that exhibits the student's efforts, progress, or achievements in one or more areas. The collection must include student participation in selecting contents, the criteria for judging merit, and evidence of the student's self-reflection.

To the collection, selection, and reflection requirements in Paulson's definition of portfolios, Heath (2002) adds projection. This refers to the setting of goals and corresponds with the planning, monitoring and evaluating which is characteristic of autonomous learners. In addition to collection, selection, reflection, and projection Di Biase et al. (2002) as cited in Stefani et al. (2007) have defined the fifth and final stage in the portfolio process as 'presentation'. In the presentation stage students are invited to share their portfolios with teachers and possibly peers. Presenting to others, they maintain, fosters self and peer-evaluation, as well as promoting collaborative learning and further encouraging lifelong learning.

Although Pauslon et al. (1991) state that the learner should play a part in negotiating criteria for a portfolio, Borthwick (1995) reports the need for explicit criteria to be provided by the teacher. If the teacher guides the process of selection and identifies features of good work, the learners will be better equipped to assess their own work. Consequently learners will know what to focus on when producing work and ultimately become better learners.

2.4.1 Showcase portfolios and process portfolios

Portfolios can be divided into two distinct categories; showcase portfolios and process portfolios (Tilemma, 1998). Each type of portfolio has a different purpose. A showcase portfolio is a portfolio *of* learning and is usually produced at the end of a

course or programme to demonstrate and report skills and knowledge. In comparison a 'process portfolio' is described as a portfolio *for* learning. It has a pedagogical function. Compiling this type of portfolio is an ongoing process of monitoring and self-assessing of strengths, weaknesses and needs (Kohonen, n.d. ; Tilemma, 1998).

2.4.2   The European Language Portfolio (ELP)

However, it is possible for portfolios to be a combination of both functions. The European Language Portfolio (ELP) is one such portfolio which has both showcase and process functions (Little, 2002). The ELP has three distinct sections, the Biography, the Dossier, and the Passport (McDonald, 2004).

The Biography

The Biography section of the ELP has several functions. It is where a learner can record language and intercultural experiences, for example, when and where they came into contact with the target language, who spoke it, and how they responded to the experience. In the Biography, learners can also record learning experiences and reflect on 'learning to learn.' The Biography contains prompt sheets for learners to reflect on learning skills, strategies, and abilities. In the Biography section of the ELP learning progress can also be recorded. By identifying what is known, what is left to learn becomes transparent. Consequently the learner is able to prioritise tasks, which encourages the learner to set personalized objectives (McDonald, 2004).

The Biography also includes self-assessment checklists over six levels across five language skills (spoken interaction, spoken production, listening, reading, and writing). Each skill is broken down into small, concrete communicative tasks. The checklists enable learners to be able to see progress, which according to McDonald (2004), should increase motivation.

The Dossier

This section of the ELP contains work that demonstrates language competence. The learner has complete control over what to include and can include coursework. This provides evidence of what is recorded in the Passport or Biography, and can be linked to an action plan. It encourages learners to use this evidence as a base to reflect on the ways in which they learn as well as their learning successes. As McDonald (2005a) points out the process of having to select evidence requires reflective skills, and selecting work according to criteria involves formative self-assessment. Furthermore, the Dossier is important as a learner is able to see personal growth and achievement.

The Passport

The ELP Passport is not used as frequently as the Biography or Dossier. The Passport contains a more general list of language criteria compared to the more concrete checklist of 'can do' statements in the Biography section of the ELP. The Passport is also a resumé of language learning and intercultural experiences, which is more detailed than what is recorded in the Biography. Finally the Passport is a record of certificates and diplomas obtained (McDonald, 2005b).

Research findings on the use of portfolios are difficult to generalize as they are so dependent on context, design, structure, mode, etc of each portfolio being researched.

2.4.3 ePortfolios

A digital portfolio is embedded in the same definition as paper-based portfolios, but uses digital tools to document, store, and organize. Technology is also used for feedback, discussion, and collaboration (Dysthe & Engelsen, 2004). The e-aspect of ePortfolios removes boundaries in terms of time and location (Tosh et al., 2006). According to Sherman (2006), the fact that learners can access their ePortfolios

from home extends the learning outside the classroom, to establish purpose and personal relevance to classroom activities. Other benefits of ePortfolios over traditional paper-based portfolios are that teachers can easily collect models of good (and bad) work to show future learners. Electronic materials are also easy to edit, making the removal of names, for example, very simple (Sherman, 2006).

It has been argued that the ePortfolio provides an excellent vehicle for achieving asynchronous and non-geographical opportunities for sharing and providing guidance in the process of reflection which is an essential element in developing learner autonomy (Doig et al., 2006).

However, some academics see the use of technology as problematic. The early stages of ICT (Information and Communication Technology) can be a problem for both teachers and learners. Dysthe and Engelsen (2004) believe that developing computer literacy skills increases workload for both teachers and learners.

While ePortfolios are said to enhance learning and teaching, Marcoul-Burlinson (2006) tried searching for examples of e-portfolios and good practice for reflection and collaboration. However, she found few examples of updated portfolios. Many ePortfolios are only used for a brief period, and provide little evidence of a dynamic learning process where learners engage in a lifelong learning path. In order to maintain motivation in using an ePortfolio, it should not be too prescriptive. It should be fun and encourage creativity and innovation (Stefani et al., 2007). It is also necessary for students to have freedom. If the portfolio is too mechanical and 'teacher organised' it is likely students will lose motivation to engage with it (Hirvela & Sweetland, 2005).

Hirvela and Sweetland (2005) also note that class time specifically devoted to using the ePortfolio is needed in order to generate a 'portfolio culture'. Another important factor that has been associated with the successful implementation of an ePortfolio is the need for it to be carefully integrated into the curriculum. It cannot be perceived

as a stand alone entity (Hirvela & Sweetland, 2005). The integration of the ePortfolio should be "seamless and transparent, allowing students to move easily from their course to the portfolio" (Stefani et al., 2007, p. 59). It must relate to the learning outcomes of the course. "Students have a strong radar system for detecting any aspect of a course which is not really critical for their final mark (Stefani et al., 2007, p. 59)

Stefani et al. (2007) have also pointed out that the introduction of an ePortfolio may require the realignment of teaching and learning strategies. Biggs (1999) describes 'constructive alignment' as a course where the outcomes, learning tasks and assessments are aligned. The learning outcomes express the kinds of understanding that we hope students will develop and be able to demonstrate, the teaching context should encourage students to achieve those learning outcomes through appropriate tasks and learning activities, and the assessments should give students the opportunity to prove that they have met the learning outcomes. According to Biggs (1999) if a lack of alignment exists, students will adopt a surface approach to learning.

Corder and Waller (2005) have also highlighted the need for teachers to provide cognitively challenging assessments, so that students can develop higher-order thinking and learning strategies. Although the hope is for students to develop a deep approach to learning, they found that many of their students were able to get by with simple strategies and surface learning.

It could be argued that a portfolio would encourage students to develop a deeper approach to learning. However, as with any new initiative in learning and teaching it is helpful to be aware of the pros and cons from both the teacher's and the students' perspectives (Stefani et al., 2007).

2.4.3   The benefits of portfolios to teachers

It appears that portfolios could be effective in helping learners accept responsibility for their learning, enabling learners to reflect and connect learning and assessment, as well as providing a platform for teachers and peers to give feedback and guidance. Through portfolios teachers are able to monitor and improve their teaching (Carmean & Christie, 2006). According to Sherman (2006) portfolios help with planning and teaching, as teachers can view, track and evaluate student learning. This becomes particularly useful when articulating criteria and teaching goals. Sherman also talks of portfolios providing a record of learning and a history of challenges. Understanding the journey that learners go through will help when teaching and motivating future learners.

2.4.5   The disadvantages of portfolios

While it is acknowledged that there may be benefits to both learners and teachers in introducing portfolios, certain disadvantages have also been identified. In fact, according to Stefani et al. (2007) the disadvantages or risks are as numerous as the advantages.

According to Kohonen (2002), teachers react differently to change. Some teachers may feel uncertain and threatened by change and there may be resistance from teachers as well as from learners themselves. Portfolios take time. For teachers the time it takes to design the portfolio, guide learners through the process, and provide individual feedback to learners is significant (Kohonen, 2002). If the introduction of the portfolio is not carefully planned and discussed, the innovations could become fragmented and could prove to be counter-productive.

Despite the apparent benefits, the assessment of portfolios is also an issue which needs to be investigated, as assessment can influence student motivation. However,

the focus of this study is not on whether or not portfolios should be assessed, but on student perceptions of ePortfolios and whether they feel ePortfolios enhance learning.

There has been much research conducted into the benefits of portfolios as a method to encourage autonomy through planning, monitoring, evaluating learning, and as a means to provide individual feedback to students. However, most of the literature on the effectiveness of portfolios in fostering learner autonomy tends to be 'top-down,' that is from the teacher's perspective. There is a significant lack of research on the effectiveness of portfolios from a student perspective, which is the focus of this study.

Chapter 3

Methodology

This chapter discusses the methodology used in this study to collect and analyse the data. The chapter is divided into four sections. The first section describes the methodological approach adopted for the study. The design of the instruments is described in the second section. The next section outlines the process of selecting participants, and the final section discusses how the data was analysed. The research project was granted ethical approval by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee in November 2005.

3.1 Methodological approach

This study is predominantly qualitative and adopts an interpretivist paradigm. Blackie (2000) notes that interpretive social science "seeks to discover why people do what they do by uncovering the largely tacit, mutual knowledge, the symbolic meanings, motives and rules" (p. 115) Clarke (2000) speaks of a creative process in which meanings are assembled "as determined by the individual's interpretation of his or her own intended actions and the actions of others" (p. 3) In order to assemble these meanings, the researcher first describes these relevant activities and then develops "categories and concepts that can form the basis of an understanding or an explanation of the problem at hand" (Blackie, 2000, p. 117).

This study seeks to gain an understanding of the learning needs of students and the extent to which students are autonomous in their approach to learning. It also seeks to investigate from a student perspective, the effectiveness of an ePortfolio, to record, monitor and provide feedback to students in order to encourage learner autonomy.

This study focusses on "an analysis of the meanings people confer upon their own and others' actions" (Robson, 2002, p. 549). According to Neuman (1997) such a focus entails gaining an understanding of what is meaningful or relevant to the people being studied and trying to see things from their point of view.

3.2 Data collection instruments

In this study three methods of data collection were used: questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis to ensure triangulation. As stated by Neuman (1997) triangulation refers to "using different types of measures, in order to examine the same variable", (p. 151) and it enables the researcher to view something from different angles. Robson (2002, p. 174) notes that triangulation "enhances the rigour of the research" as it involves the use of a number of sources. Triangulation also acts as a data validity check (Patton, 2002). Validity refers to the approximate certainty of the truth of a statement or claim (Lund, 2005). Patton maintains that if only one method is employed, the study becomes vulnerable to errors linked to that particular method, such as loaded interview questions or biased responses.

3.2.1 The questionnaire

The questionnaire, as McMillan and Schumacher (2001) point out, has the advantage of being relatively economical and allows questions written for specific purposes. However, with self-completion questionnaires it is often difficult to determine whether or not "the respondent is giving serious attention to the questions, or regarding the exercise as a tedious chore to be completed in a perfunctory manner" (Robson, 2002).

In this study, there are other disadvantages of questionnaires. One drawback is that the questionnaire might not tap all areas of importance and/or interest to the student. As Robson (2002) points out, person-to-person interaction in an interview is likely to provide data of a higher quality than with an impersonal questionnaire.

The questionnaire (see Appendix D) was designed to elicit both quantitative and qualitative data. According to Strauss and Corbin (1991), a combination of quantitative and qualitative data collection methods can be used effectively in the same research project and will help ensure triangulation. Quantitative data was collected using a variety of question types, including 'agree' or 'disagree', questions on a five point Lickert scale, multi-choice questions, and 'yes' or 'no' questions. Questions asking students to give examples if they responded 'yes' to the yes or no questions produced qualitative responses, as did other questions requiring open-ended responses.

The questionnaire consisted of three parts. Part A of the questionnaire provided demographic data of the participants relating to age, gender, first language, length of residency in New Zealand and whether or not they had a part time job.

Part B was designed to elicit information on the extent to which students have an autonomous approach to learning. As indicated in the literature review, autonomous learners are able to reflect on their progress through self-assessment, identify strengths and weaknesses, reflect on learning strategies, and have the ability to set goals. Participants were asked questions on all of these aspects relating to learner autonomy. Autonomous learners also take responsibility for their own learning, so questions relating to the role of the teacher and the role of the learner with regard to the learning process were also asked.

Part C of the questionnaire related specifically to computers. Participants were asked whether they had a computer at home, how comfortable they feel using a computer, whether they feel computers help with learning, and more specifically, whether or not they feel the ePortfolio would help them with their learning.

In the third week of lectures of Semester One, 2006, a lecturer who was known to the students but was independent of the project, explained the research aims and

methods to students. This explanation took place during a training session that was scheduled to introduce the ePortfolio to students. The training session was scheduled outside class time. All students who attended the training session were given an information sheet (see Appendix A) and a copy of the questionnaire (Appendix D). Students who agreed to participate completed the brief questionnaire during the training session and returned it along with a signed consent form (Appendix B).

3.2.2 The interviews

Another difficulty with questionnaires is that there is often a discrepancy between what people report in the questionnaire to what they actually do. Robson (2002) remarks that the "lack of relation between attitude and behaviour is notorious" (p. 231). Therefore, semi-structured interviews were also employed to explore issues in greater depth and allow students to discuss their behaviour.

May (2001) states that semi-structured interviews are somewhere in between quantitative interviews which are formal, structured or standardized, and qualitative interviews, which are unstructured and have no focus. As Creswell (2003) points out, the interview usually involves open-ended questions that are few in number and are intended to elicit views and opinions from the participants.

In semi-structured interviews, key questions are posed, but they allow for freedom to change such things as the sequence of questions as well as the opportunity to probe for additional information (Fielding & Thomas, 2001). This flexibility of semi-structured interviews allows the interviewer to pursue areas of particular interest and as May (2001) states, means the interview has the potential to turn the interview into a dialogue to clarify and elaborate on answers. For this reason, the interview can give in depth insight into the opinions, attitudes and values of the interviewees.

However, this data collection technique also has limitations, including the possibility of "distorted responses due to personal bias . . . Interview data are also affected by

recall error, reactivity of the interviewer, and self-serving responses" (Patton, 2002, p. 306).

Another disadvantage of interviews is that questions that are biased might inadvertently lead the interviewee to answer in a specific way. According to Robson (2002) biased questions might lead the interviewee "by the manner in which the question was asked or even the way in which the response is received" (p. 275). Therefore, the interviewer should attempt to remain neutral at all times, and should avoid sharing their own views, while at the same time appear welcoming and reinforcing.

The interviews were conducted twice, with the first set of interviews in May and the second set of interviews being conducted in October. The interviews were conducted seven months apart to see if there had been any change in students' perceptions.

The interview questions mirrored those of the questionnaire, but allowed for elaboration. Each interview schedule included a common set of questions (see Appendix E), and was designed to address the following aims of the study, namely to identify:

- The extent to which students are autonomous in their approach to learning,
- Whether participants feel the ePortfolio is a useful tool for fostering student autonomy,
- Whether changes to the ePortfolio itself are necessary,
- The best method of introducing the ePortfolio to students and what training is required to maximize its use in order for students to gain maximum benefit.

Initial questions relating to how long the interviewee has studied Japanese and why they chose to major in Japanese at university had a dual purpose. Firstly, they were

designed to reveal important information regarding the student's motivation to learn. Secondly, these questions were designed to relax the student before asking specific questions related to the ePortfolio. As indicated by Robson (2002) a 'warm-up' phase at the beginning of an interview is common. The inclusion of non-threatening questions at the beginning serves to relax both the interviewee and the interviewer.

After the 'warm-up' questions in the first part of the interview, students were asked what they most and least enjoy about learning Japanese. This also elicited valuable information regarding students' motivation as well as leading logically to questions regarding their strengths and weaknesses, and the extent to which they take responsibility for their learning in setting themselves short-term and long-term goals. As in the questionnaire, participants were asked how comfortable they felt using computers, before questions specifically related to the ePortfolio were introduced.

In the second part of the interview participants were asked whether or not they enjoyed using the ePortfolio, how often and when they used it. They were also asked whether or not there were any parts they particularly liked or disliked. Questions regarding teacher feedback were also posed, and interviewees were invited to comment on the usefulness and speed of teacher feedback.

Students were also asked to make suggestions on whether there was anything their lecturers could do to help them use the ePortfolio more effectively, and whether or not there was anything that could be done to make the implementation of the ePortfolio more user-friendly. Finally participants were asked if they had anything they wished to add.

The second interview mirrored the second part of the first interview, excluding questions about computer ownership and ease of use.

After both interviews, participants were offered the opportunity to read through their transcripts, and make any changes they liked.

3.2.3 Document analysis

Document analysis is unobtrusive if the document is not produced for the purpose of the research and the researcher has no direct contact with the person producing the document, and therefore has no influence over what is written (Robson, 2002). However, if the materials being analysed have been collected for the purposes of the study it is not an unobtrusive technique, as the behaviour may have been altered (Robson, 2002). This was the case in this study. The documents that were analysed in this study were the ePortfolio entries of students who participated in the interview process and students had given permission for these entries to be used as part of the study. They were examined to see whether students' self-reflective skills had developed over time with the use of the ePortfolio.

Although it is acknowledged that responses may have been biased, it was felt that the deductive nature of document analysis was valuable. According to Macdonald (2001) document analysis is deductive in that it leads to conclusions, which may need to be validated by supporting facts, therefore making it a valuable part of the triangulation process.

3.3 Participants

This study took place in the Japanese Section of the School of Languages at AUT University). Participants were either enrolled in the three year Bachelor of Arts (Japanese) or the two year Diploma in Japanese. The participants who took part in this study were all enrolled in the paper called Kanji 1 in Semester One of 2006, (Kanji are characters which are Chinese in origin. They are part of the Japanese writing system).

3.3.1 Participants answering questionnaires

The total number of students enrolled in this Kanji class was 27. Of these 27 students, 14 attended the ePortfolio training session to introduce the ePortfolio. At this training session students were informed about the research project and were invited to participate. It was also at this training session that the questionnaire was administered. All 14 students who attended agreed to participate in the questionnaire phase of the research.

3.3.2 Participants in the interviews

During the initial ePortfolio training session, after the questionnaire had been administered, students were invited to participate in the interview process. The names of volunteers were recorded and these students were then approached individually by the researcher during scheduled classes to make an appointment. Students who did not attend the ePortfolio training session were also invited to participate in the interview phase of the data collection process. Interviews took place in May and October.

A total of eight students volunteered to participate in the interview process. However, of the initial eight interviewees, one student withdrew from the programme after Semester One and another student stopped attending class during the second semester. For this reason, only six of the eight students were interviewed for a second time.

Five of the eight interviewees have English as their first language and three interviewees were non-native speakers of English. This ratio of native versus non-native speakers of English is not an accurate representation of class in general, which has a ratio of three non-native speakers of English to every one native English speaker. This non representative ratio of non-native speakers of English to native

speakers of English has implications for the findings which will be discussed in Chapter 4.

3.4 Data analysis

In this study, qualitative data from the questionnaires, interviews, and ePortfolio entries were coded. Punch (2005) points out that coding is both the analysis and "the specific and concrete activity which starts the analysis". Initial coding entails "putting tags, names or labels against chunks of data" (p. 199). The first labels enable more advanced coding where the researcher identifies themes and patterns. This advanced coding is achieved by multiple readings of the data. The final phase of this coding is what Neuman (1997) describes as "selective" where examples that illustrate specific themes are identified.

The quantitative data elicited in the questionnaire was analysed descriptively and was used to formulate interview questions. This data was later considered in relation to the qualitative data.

The results of the data analysis will be described in the following section.

Chapter 4

Findings

4.1 Introduction

As indicated in the Methodology chapter questionnaires, interviews and portfolio entries were used for data collection.

A total of 27 students were enrolled in the paper with which the ePortfolio was being trialled. As the students had never been required to reflect on themselves as learners as part of their Japanese course at AUT University, it was felt that a training session to introduce students to reflection was necessary. The questionnaire was administered at this training session.

At the training session the role of the teacher and the role of students were discussed. The concept of autonomous learning was also introduced. This discussion took place before students were introduced to the ePortfolio. However, only 14 of the 27 students enrolled in the paper attended the training session. Low attendance and subsequent low response rate to the questionnaire was most likely due to the fact that it was scheduled in addition to normal timetabled lessons. However, all 14 students who attended the training session volunteered to complete the questionnaire (See Appendix D).

After the questionnaires had been completed students were asked whether they would be willing to participate in the interview phase of the study. Eight of the 14 students who completed the questionnaire volunteered to be interviewed.

While the interviews provided a great deal of interesting data, some of the questionnaire responses were disappointing. Open-ended questions had been employed to allow students the opportunity to express their views and preferences. Unfortunately replies to some of the questions were monosyllabic and difficult to

interpret. However, there were a number of areas in the questionnaire that yielded interesting data and these are described below.

4.2 Questionnaire responses

There were three sections to the questionnaire. The first section collected demographic data. The second section consisted of questions relating to students' approach to learning Japanese. There were also questions, which related to the effort students believed they had put into their studies and how much progress they felt they had made. Participants were also asked to identify their strengths and weaknesses, as well as what they enjoyed most and least about studying Japanese. Students also commented on the extent to which they set short, medium and long-term goals.

In addition, there were questions regarding how often participants asked questions in class and outside of class, how often they went over tests, did homework, and attended tutorials. Following that were questions comparing how often students discussed their progress and learning strategies with their teacher and how often they discussed their progress and learning with friends. Finally, students were asked how often they used various learning strategies to study Japanese grammar and Kanji.

In this second section of the questionnaire, the questions relating to goal-setting, and the extent to which students discuss their learning with the teacher and friends elicited the most significant responses.

The third section of the questionnaire consisted of four questions relating to computers. The first two questions asked whether students had access to a computer at home and whether they felt comfortable using a computer. Students were also asked whether they believed a computer helps them with their learning and in particular whether an ePortfolio would help them with their learning. These questions were included because it was felt that students who did not have access to a computer, or who were not comfortable using a computer, might not have been as

responsive to the ePortfolio as those students who did have a computer and were comfortable using one.

4.2.1 Demographic data

Of the 14 students who completed the questionnaires 6 were enrolled in the Bachelor of Arts (Japanese) and eight were enrolled in the Diploma in Japanese. A breakdown of the demographics is as follows. The gender ratio was 3 male participants to 11 female participants. The majority of participants (10 of the total 14) were under 20 years of age. One participant was between 20 and 25 years old, and two participants were between the ages of 26 and 30. One participant fell within the 31 to 45 age range.

Students were asked to state their first language. Six students indicated that English was their first language, five students' first language was Korean and three students answered Chinese or Mandarin to this question. The non-native speakers of English had lived in New Zealand between 3 and 13 years, with the average length of residency in New Zealand being six and a half years.

4.2.2 Student perceptions

Students were asked to rate their progress in Japanese, to identify strengths and weaknesses, and to indicate their likes and dislikes. Students indicated that they were satisfied with their progress with half of the participants indicating that they were making 'excellent' or 'very good' progress.

Likes and dislikes

Participants were then asked to identify what they enjoyed most about learning the Japanese language and where they felt their strengths lay. As the questions were open-ended some participants provided more than one answer. However, some responses were too vague to be categorised with any accuracy. For example, six

students identified 'culture' as the most enjoyable aspect of classes, but provided no further details as to what they meant. A number of other responses identified 'language' and 'Japanese language' as preferences.

However, there were a number of responses that clearly identified what the students liked. Four participants found learning vocabulary enjoyable, with one adding that she *"liked finding out small things about words and Kanji I didn't know."* One participant responded to this question with *"being challenged and seeing my own progress"*. One other respondent also enjoyed seeing his own progress. Two participants referred to the word 'fun' in their responses. One participant enjoyed *"learning new vocab and fun Kanji",* the other participant stated *"in some classes the teachers are fun and I can understand more"*. Two participants enjoyed 'Kanji.'

Students were then asked what they liked least about Japanese classes. Of the 14 responses, 6 identified Kanji. This is not an unexpected finding, as students may find Kanji difficult as it involves a lot of memorisation and revision. This is supported by the fact that a further three participants stated that they disliked the 'memorisation' needed for successful language learning.

Strengths and weaknesses
Students were also asked to identify their strengths and weaknesses as far as learning Japanese is concerned. Responses to these questions were the most interesting findings from the questionnaire.

The questions asking participants to identify their strengths elicited 11 responses (refer to Table 3). As with the previous questions relating to enjoyment, participants were not restricted to one answer.

Strengths regarding Japanese ability	Number of responses
Listening	5
Speaking	5
Kanji/reading	4
Grammar	2
Writing/writing essays	3

Table 3. Self-identified strengths regarding Japanese ability

The ability to understand and speak were the skills identified most as strengths. The category 'Listening' included one response which stated 'understanding Japanese.' One participant responded with: 'willingness to speak Japanese.' This response was included in the category 'speaking.' However, it could also be a category in itself as it does not necessarily relate to speaking ability. This participant could have been signalling the importance of risk-taking when learning a foreign language.

It could be argued that listening and speaking should be considered one category of 'oral communication.' as the ability to listen and understand is necessary to be able to respond appropriately. However, it was felt by the researcher that these should in fact be categorised separately, as participants have separate listening classes timetabled in the language laboratory as well as oral Japanese classes. It is interesting that students see listening and speaking as discrete, and do not see them as skills which are inseparable. This will be revisited in the Discussion section.

The next most identified strength was Kanji. One participant acknowledged that it was her Chinese background which accounted for Kanji being a strength. Kanji in the Japanese writing system is often similar or identical in appearance to Chinese characters, which gives students from a Chinese background a distinct advantage over students who do not know how to write Chinese.

The word 'essay' appeared in responses relating to both strengths and weaknesses. The term 'essay' requires some explanation. 'Essay' does not refer to academic essay writing in the traditional sense of the word. Participants have a specific class each week called 'Sakubun' which can be translated as 'essay writing.' This 'essay writing' class requires students to write a short composition on specified topics to reinforce the use of grammar and vocabulary in context. 'Essays' are graded according to accuracy of grammar, as well as content. While it is possible 'essay writing' is a strength based on their ability to use grammar appropriately and accurately, it is equally possible that students enjoy the free nature of this kind of task.

Weaknesses regarding Japanese ability	Number of responses
Kanji	7
Speaking	8
Listening	4
Grammar	6
Writing essays	2

Table 4. Self-identified weaknesses regarding Japanese ability

Table 4 summarises responses regarding self-identified weaknesses. All participants identified at least one weakness, with 11 of the 14 participants identifying more than one weakness. The category 'speaking' includes one response specifically identifying 'pronunciation' as well as one response which described using colloquial language in situations which required more formal language. In Japanese there are different levels of politeness that are required depending on the relationship one has with the addressee and how well one knows the person. Age is also a consideration when deciding on an appropriate level of politeness.

In summary, six of the responses identified Kanji as an aspect they did not enjoy and seven viewed it as a significant weakness. Eight participants regarded speaking as a

weakness, yet only one participant identified it as something they least enjoyed. In fact, four participants identified speaking as what they find most enjoyable.

Having identified their strengths and weaknesses with their Japanese language ability, the next set of questions investigated the extent to which students set short, medium, and long-term goals in order to further develop their strengths and improve on their weaknesses.

Goal-setting

The next section of the questionnaire related to the setting of short, medium, and long-term goals. Half of the participants stated they set daily goals. Participants were asked to give an example of a daily goal. The most common examples of daily goals were 'do revision,' 'attend class,' and 'do homework'. One respondent stated 'improve vocab skills.' Only one participant responded with a specific measurable goal which could be ticked off as having been completed *("learning 5 Kanjis everyday").* This does not mean that the researcher only sees measurable goals as being effective, however, it can be argued that if short-term goals are too vague progress is difficult to measure.

Of the 14 respondents, 13 reported that they set weekly goals. As with the daily goals, revision was a weekly goal for many (seven responses). Six students identified some aspect of grammar in their weekly goal, however, goals were still vague and non specific. Examples of weekly goals ranged from simply 'improving grammar,' 'arranging grammar points' ('grammar point' refers to a grammar rule), to 'knowing all the grammars.'

There were a number of other responses. One example of a weekly goal was 'completing homework.' One student chose to *"listen to Japanese music and try to find the meanin,,"* another student prepared in advance ('working ahead'). Another student set weekly goals relating to time management *("coming to school, studying at night, study schedule").*

While all except one participant set weekly goals, only 6 of the 14 participants set monthly goals, three of which related to passing assessments and achieving good grades.

The final question on goal-setting related to setting long-terms goals. Ten participants stated they set semester or yearly goals. Eight participants said their long-term goal was to pass tests and receive good grades. Other responses were *"improving speaking to help in my future career,"* and *"become fluent in Japanese. Able to communicate with Japanese."* One other response related to time management.

This link between assessment and goal-setting, which came through strongly in the majority of interviews will be discussed further in the next chapter in relation to lifelong learning.

Study habits

The next set of questions asked participants to answer questions according to a five point Lickert scale. The scale ranged from one (never), three (sometimes), to five (often). For the purposes of data analysis responses of one and two were grouped together, three (sometimes) was treated as a separate group and responses of four and five (often) were also grouped together. It should be noted here that one weakness with the design of the questionnaire was that, what was meant by the descriptors 'often,' 'sometimes,' was not qualified. As examples were not stated (for example, 'sometimes' means approximately once a week) one participant's idea of 'often' may have been different from another's. Nonetheless, the results still give an indication of frequency and are therefore worth considering.

The first section dealt with class behaviour. Participants were first asked to indicate how often they ask questions in or after class (see Figure 2). Of major significance is that no participants rated themselves as a four or five (often). Nine participants

sometimes asked questions in class, and five were prepared to ask questions after class. It is perhaps surprising that eight students said that they never asked after class. It would be natural to assume that students would find it less stressful to ask the teacher questions on a one-to-one basis rather than asking in the presence of peers.
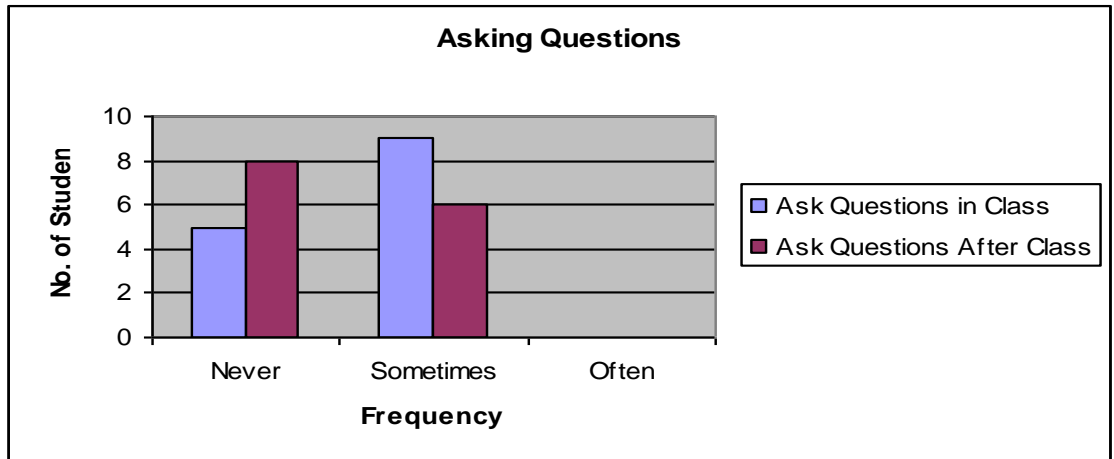

Figure 2: Asking questions in and after class

Most of the students who completed the questionnaire said that they often went over their tests, 13 participants did the homework that had been set and all 14 participants responded that they often attended class and tutorials (refer to Figure 3 below).
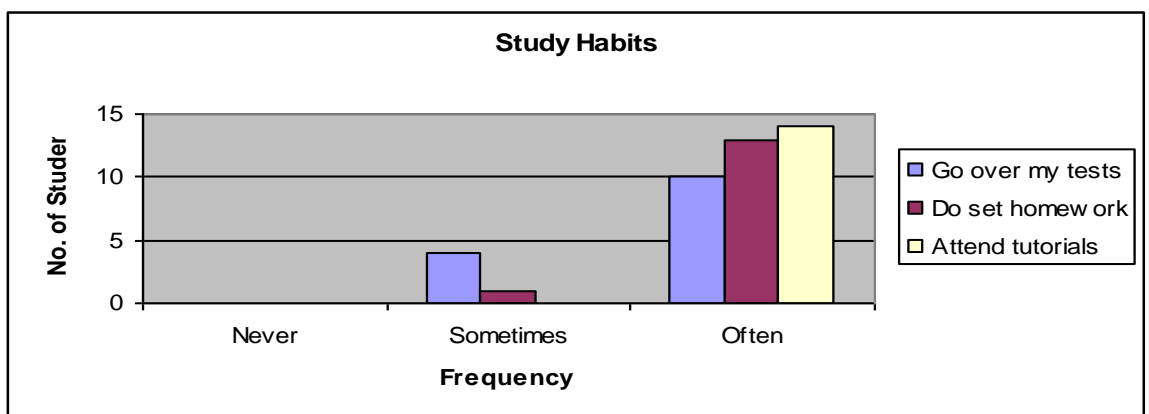
Figure 3. Individual study habits of students

These two sets of questions indicate that students tend to be traditional in their approach to learning. It might be surmised that many students believe that simply attending class, completing homework, and going over their tests will help them succeed in their language studies. However, this does not necessarily mean that students who have a more interactive approach to learning are better students than those who have a more traditional approach.

Participants were also asked to what extent they discuss their learning progress and strategies with their teachers and their friends. The researcher intended the word 'progress' to mean level of achievement. 'Ways to study' referred to learning strategies. It is not known whether the participants had a similar understanding of these terms. The possibility of a difference in intended meaning and actual interpretation is a limitation of the study.

Eight participants never or hardly ever discuss their progress or their test marks with their teacher, four participants sometimes did and only two participants often discussed progress. However, participants did often discuss their progress with friends (eight responses) or sometimes discussed their progress with friends (four).

The questionnaire also revealed that the majority of participants (10) never or hardly ever discussed how they study with teachers, only 3 participants sometimes discussed learning strategies with their teacher and only one of the 14 participants often discussed their learning (see Figure 4). These results are a concern and suggest that students need to be encouraged to discuss their learning more with the teacher. The introduction of a medium such as an ePortfolio might be one method to facilitate such communication between students and teachers.
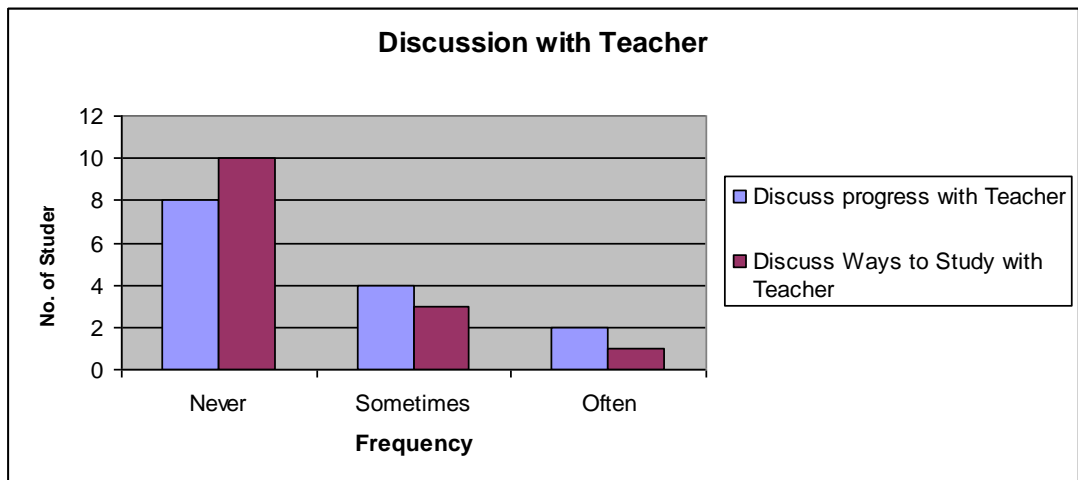
Figure 4. Discussion of progress and study strategies with the teacher

There was a relatively even spread between participants who never, sometimes and often discuss how they learn with friends (Figure 5).
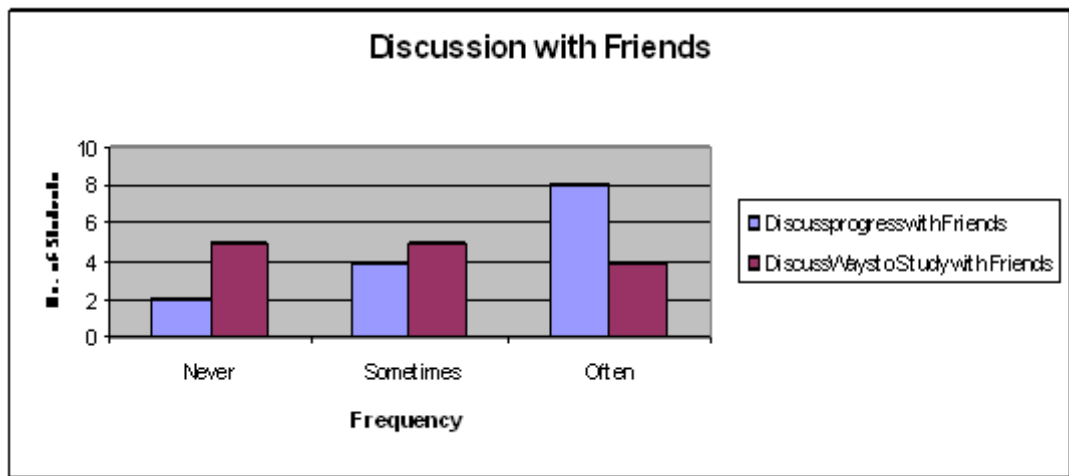
Figure 5. Discussion of progress and study strategies with the friends

It is not surprising that students communicate more with their peers than they do with their teachers. Students simply have more opportunities to communicate with their peers outside of class time. In addition, they feel comfortable talking with their friends.

Questions relating to how often participants use specific strategies to learn grammar were also asked. The most common strategies were 'referring to other textbooks' and 'doing textbook exercises'. Other learning strategies were also employed often or sometimes, but of significance is that only approximately one third of participants sometimes or often employed less traditional methods of study, such as mind maps.

Participants were also given the opportunity to list other strategies they use to study grammar. Two participants made an effort to use Japanese in daily life with friends and family, two participants listened to Japanese music, cue cards were used by one participant, and one participant watched Japanese videos.

Kanji learning strategies were also investigated. Traditional learning methods again featured most prominently; 12 participants often wrote Kanji repeatedly and 11 participants often did textbook exercises. Eight students often used the Kanji learning computer software developed by AUT University. The spread of participants who used the other strategies that were listed in the questionnaire was insignificant.

Students were also asked how much responsibility they felt for their own learning; 11 of the 14 participants agreed strongly that the student is responsible for his own learning. Two participants were neutral and one student disagreed with this. The majority (79%) of participants accepted responsibility for their learning; how this is translated into action will be explored in the following section.

4.2.3 Part C of the questionnaire

Results show that 13 of the 14 participants had a computer at home, and 11 participants felt very comfortable using a computer. The other 3 students chose the neutral, middle option on the five-point Lickert scale.

The final two questions asked whether participants felt that a computer helps learning and in particular, whether the ePortfolio would help with their learning. 11 students felt that a computer assisted the learning process, 8 students felt that the ePortfolio would be an effective tool to help them with their learning, and 6 students chose the 'neutral' response. No one answered negatively, however, it is very possible that students responded as they thought the teacher would want them to respond. Students knew that the study in which they were participating was to evaluate the effectiveness of the ePortfolio as a learning tool. For this reason not too much dependence can be placed on these responses.

4.3 Summary of questionnaire findings

The questionnaires did not reveal as much significant data as had been hoped. The design of the questionnaire was flawed in some respects as the resulting data was often difficult to categorise and interpret. Similarly, students may have been inclined to respond with answers they felt the researcher wanted to hear.

Despite these limitations, the questionnaire revealed that students were able to identify their strengths and weaknesses which is one characteristic of an autonomous learner. Goal-setting is also integral to autonomous learning. However, in their responses there was little evidence of students setting specific, achievable, realistic goals.

The topic of goal-setting will be discussed in more detail when the findings of the interviews are described.

The lack of discussion on progress and learning strategies between teachers and students was highlighted in the questionnaire findings and was also a topic of discussion in the individual interviews.

4.4 Interview findings and ePortfolio reflections

As mentioned in the Methodology section two, interviews were planned with each of the student volunteers. The first set of interviews was conducted in the first semester of the academic year, in May 2006. The second set was conducted five months later in the second semester. At the time of the second interview students had been using the ePortfolio for approximately six months. This section compares and contrasts the interviews, as well as the reflections in the ePortfolios themselves.

As stated earlier, all participants were asked the same open-ended questions at both interviews. Questions were generally asked in the same order for each participant, and the conversation moved from their likes and dislikes of studying Japanese, their strengths and weaknesses, to goal-setting. Interviews then progressed to more specific questions regarding the ePortfolio.

The areas that elicited most dialogue were the purpose for introducing the ePortfolio, the value of reflecting on one's learning progress, and the effectiveness of the ePortfolio to self-assess one's abilities and to set goals. The impact of teacher feedback on students' use of the ePortfolio as well as on their perception of its usefulness also gave rise to interesting dialogue. In addition, a number of students commented on the usefulness of the Discussion Board function as a means of communication between students.

The findings of these interviews will be described in three groups. The first group included five of the eight student volunteers. These five students had access to the ePortfolio in both the first and the second semester. They were using the ePortfolio at the time of both interviews.

The second group of interviews was with two students, who were also interviewed in both May and October. However, the difference between these two students and the students in the first group is that these two students were not using the ePortfolio at

the time of the second interview. In fact, in Semester Two they did not have access to it, as they were not enrolled in the paper to which the ePortfolio was attached. Nonetheless the comments of these students were seen as very valuable as it was interesting to compare their comments and change in perception from when they were required to use the ePortfolio and when they were no longer required to use it.

One student falls outside of the above two categories and her interview will be described separately. This student was only interviewed once, because she withdrew from the course at the end of Semester One, 2006.

Despite there being inconsistency of access and use of the ePortfolio between the eight students who volunteered to be interviewed, the interviews are all valuable. In fact, these differences allow for insight from a number of perspectives.

4.4.1 Students who accessed the ePortfolio in semester one and semester two

The demographic details of this first group of five interviewees can be briefly summarized. There were two males and three females. Two participants were born in Taiwan, one was born in Korea, and the first language of two participants was English (one born in New Zealand and one born in the United Kingdom). The ages of the students ranged from 18 to late twenties. The length of time they had been studying Japanese varied from one year to six years. Their motivation for studying Japanese varied.

Student A

Student A is an 18 year old New Zealander, who began his tertiary studies as soon as he finished high school. He studied Japanese through his five years of secondary schooling and chose to continue with his Japanese studies at a tertiary institute, because he *"really enjoyed studying it at high school."*

Student A chose to use the ePortfolio during designated class time and did not access the ePortfolio outside of timetabled hours in the computer laboratory.

The interview with Student A revealed the link he saw between seeing one's progress and feeling good about oneself. He said, *"when you compare what you know now to what you knew before, it just makes you feel good."*

Student A was not able to state the reason why the ePortfolio had been introduced into the course *("I remember reading something about it, but I forget now")*. This comment highlighted the importance of preparing students thoroughly before implementing an ePortfolio, so they fully understand the reason why it is being introduced and the benefits they can hope to gain by using it. This will be discussed further in the next chapter.

Student A admitted in his first interview, that if maintaining an ePortfolio were not a course requirement he probably would not use it because he was 'lazy.' He conceded however, that it *"makes you think about what you're doing wrong and how you can improve and all that stuff."* He believed that the introduction of the ePortfolio changed the way he studies in that it now makes him reflect on his learning.

> *Like before, I'd do something and then I'd get my marks back and I'd think, oh yeah, whatever. But now I actually think about what I did wrong or how I can make it better. Things like that.*

Strangely however, he did not like being asked by the teacher to elaborate and reflect at a deeper level.

> *I leave a comment and the teacher leaves a comment and I have to make another comment … it took me so long to make that first comment and I have to explain it even more… I thought it [the original comment] was good enough, but obviously not. Haven't explained it well enough.*

However, it is interesting to note, that he was capable of introspection in the portfolio. In both interviews, Student A identified speaking Japanese as one of his weaknesses; *"It's because I never speak it. I don't know why, but I just don't speak it"*. Student A has reflected on this weakness in his ePortfolio reflections.

> *Speaking is still probably my weakest point. Compared to last year I've gotten a lot better, but it still isn't at a high level. I lack confidence in my speaking and I never actually speak Japanese at all. I have plenty of Japanese friends that I can talk to, but when I try to nothing comes out.*

Student A later wrote in his ePortfolio, that he was more comfortable speaking with Japanese people that he met for the first time, but was not comfortable speaking with Japanese people he already knew. He was trying to identify the reason why speaking was his weakness and what he needed to do in order to improve; *"If I actually started speaking Japanese I'm sure it would improve... My sister is getting a host sister from Japan in August for a few days, so I will use this opportunity to practice my Japanese and improve my confidence."*

A comparison of his earlier and later reflections revealed how his level of reflection had developed from having simply identified the problem *("My speaking is pretty bad, but I did alright in the test, I guess")*, to discussing strategies with the aim of overcoming his weaknesses.

Student A said in both of his interviews that the only goals he set were long-term ones. In his first interview, Student A said *"I never set goals. I try to but..."*. When asked to elaborate on what he meant by 'trying to set goals', he stated *"I'll learn this by this time. Or I'll do this. But I just don't do it."* Setting goals versus following through and acting on them is an issue which will be investigated further in the Discussion section.

In the second interview Student A described an example of a long-term goal for the year as being selected on the exchange programme to Japan, which he was successful in doing. It is also interesting to note, that despite believing he did not set

short-term goals, Student A's statement with regard to speaking Japanese with his sister's Japanese host sister could in fact be considered evidence of goal-setting. Whether or not more guidance and structure is needed to encourage students to be more conscious of goal setting will be further investigated in the Discussion section which follows.

Student B

Student B is also an 18 year old male student. He was born in the United Kingdom, but has lived in New Zealand since the age of six. Student B has studied Japanese for a total of six years, with five of those six years as a secondary school student.

Speaking to Japanese people is what Student B said he enjoyed most about studying Japanese and he believed this was his strength. In terms of weaknesses, Student B has identified Kanji as the aspect of learning that he found most challenging.

Discussion on goal-setting revealed that Student B did not set regular short and medium-term goals and the extent of his long-term goal-setting involved passing his exams each semester.

Student B described what he believed to be the purpose behind the introduction of the ePortfolio. He saw it as a means *"for students to be more self-aware of their weaknesses and strengths and know what to focus on in their courses."* However, Student B maintained that he reflected on his strengths and weaknesses and did not need to commit his thoughts in writing; *"I don't mind, like, having to identify your own weaknesses, but I don't really like having to write it down."*

He also acknowledged that part of the reason he did not like reflecting in the ePortfolio was because he was *"not a very written person, I suppose, I am better at talking."*

In the initial interview Student B said that he accessed the ePortfolio once a week during class time. With regard to contributing to the Discussion Board, he said *"I was made to use it twice, but I haven't since then."* He did not see the Discussion Board as being necessary; *"we see people everyday, so if we really want to ask them a question we have a chance."*

In the second interview, Student B spoke frankly on the role of the Discussion Board, *"our Discussion Board is very pitiful, there is actually a note that says "is anyone there?" and a reply which says "no."*

He also discussed the influence the teacher has in encouraging students to utilise the various sections of the ePortfolio. He described the difference between the first semester of using it and the second semester. *"For Kanji 1 we were pretty much forced to do it…"* It appears his teacher in Semester Two was not as 'forceful' as his first semester teacher in encouraging students to access the portfolio and contribute to the online discussion. However, he did say that initially he did not find the course work particularly difficult, so consequently he did not have much to reflect on. As the course became more challenging, he described leaving messages for his teacher on the ePortfolio, *"I am having trouble with this ..., what do I do?"*

Kanji becomes progressively more difficult to master and this is reflected in Student B's portfolio entries. In the middle of March his reflections were very brief *"currently I am up to date with Katakana and the Kanji."* However, by August one of his reflections read *"Freaking out. I'm not going very well with learning Kanji. I'm getting behind and if I learn them I seem to forget them five minutes later…I need to put more time into Kanji…a lot more time"*.

After 'freaking out' in August, he reflected in his ePortfolio one month later *"I finally put that effort in and am now on top of writing and reading the Kanji. I still however need to learn the meanings of some of the more obscure compounds."*

In his ePortfolio, Student B identified an area of weakness and took steps to improve on it. However, he believed he could have achieved this without the assistance of an ePortfolio as a platform for discussion. He discussed his problems with his Kanji teacher orally as well as communicating in written form through the ePortfolio.

> *Normally I get oral feedback as well as if I left a note there*
> *[on the ePortfolio] because I see XXX [his Kanji teacher]*
> *pretty much every day, so she will see me in class and be like*
> *"oh, I saw your message, I left you a message back," blah,*
> *blah, blah… she types it up as well. She also talks to you.*

Clearly from these comments made by Student B, it can be said that some students do reflect on their strengths and weaknesses and may not necessarily need to commit their thoughts in writing. It can also claimed that when some students have difficulties they do in fact discuss their progress with the teacher, and prefer this discussion to be face-to-face dialogues rather than through another medium such as the ePortfolio. This is another point which will be addressed in the following chapter.

Another interesting detail which emerged from the interviews with Student B was the fact that the ePortfolio and reflecting on one's learning was perceived by students to be part of the Kanji paper only and they did not see the wider application. *"With the ePortfolio, because it is only part of the Kanji courses, that's the only bit I use it for. I think I have only left one [other] comment [not relating to Kanji] which you replied to".*

The issue of students seeing the purpose of the ePortfolio being attached to one particular paper, needs to be addressed. Similarly, associating the ePortfolio with a specific paper because it is taught by the teacher who provides the feedback in the ePortfolio also needs to be discussed.

In his second interview, Student B suggested there be clearer guidelines for what one has to put as evidence of achievement. He said it became difficult to post evidence when students were not allowed to keep their tests. In particular he was referring to

the Kanji tests. The lecturers prefer to keep the tests, so future students have less chance of finding out the content of the tests in advance. The reason why lecturers do not allow students to keep tests and the validity of this student comment will also be addressed in the following chapter.

Student C

Student C is a Taiwanese student who is in the 20 – 25 age range. She has already graduated with a Bachelor of Business and Marketing as well as a Bachelor of International Management. She has *"always wanted to do Japanese after college, but went on to do other degrees, so came back to it [Japanese]."*

The discussion with Student C was very mature and objective. Not only did she give her own personal views on the ePortfolio, she also discussed issues from a broader educational viewpoint.

She believed the purpose of introducing the ePortfolio was for teachers to better understand their students' needs. *"I think it's just a better way of understanding the students and how they are progressing throughout the course."* She also said it was a useful method of communication for teachers to post announcements to students.

Like Student B, Student C also found it difficult to think of relevant evidence to attach to her ePortfolio as proof of achievement; *"for the evidence part, there is not really evidence that you can post up there."*

Student C made some interesting comments regarding the ePortfolio as a platform for discussion. In the first interview she said it was a useful tool to ask the teacher questions. In March, Student C asked the teacher for advice on how to improve her speaking. The teacher suggested she attend the conversation evenings at the New Zealand Japan Society. Student C said she found going to the conversation evenings very useful and reflected on this in her ePortfolio.

> It [New Zealand Japan Society conversation evening] is such a great social event to attend. There are many Japanese people and groups with different levels where I can practice speaking Japanese continuously. I will definitely continue to go to the conversation exchange events.

In the second interview Student C was less positive about teacher feedback. *"There is not as much feedback than what we've got last semester… we would post up, I post up questions but sometimes they are not answered, so I don't really find it that helpful this semester."* When asked in the second interview whether she felt it helped with her learning, she replied: *"if there is feedback it helps."*

Student C said she would not use the ePortfolio if she did not have to as part of the course. However, she recalled having found the ePortfolio very useful in the first semester. *"I just started Japanese and having not studied Japanese for a long time it [the ePortfolio] was good to use. But this semester there is so much grammar and Kanji you sort of leave it aside."*

She now prefers to approach the lecturers *"straight away and ask the question or email it, rather than posting it online."*

With regard to the Discussion Board, Student C provided useful feedback and even suggested ways in which it could be improved. *"I think the Discussion Board is good, but it's only good when people actually go in and discuss. Sometimes you have one comment and people never go in and reflect on what you said."* She suggested it would be used more if there were set topics to discuss and participation in the Discussion Board were made compulsory.

Student C also commented on how she believed other members of her class perceived the ePortfolio. *"People don't take it seriously and they make up stuff … they just write up what the teacher expects."* She elaborated on this by adding that even if it "fulfils what the lecturer wants" it is *"not really self-learning, you are just doing it for the purposes [of doing it]."*

This comment relating to students not taking the ePortfolio seriously and writing what they believed the teacher wanted to hear was a very important observation and will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Five.

In addition to expressing her personal views on the role of the portfolio and its effectiveness in achieving pedagogical goals, Student C gave constructive feedback regarding the structure of the ePortfolio itself. She felt that having the student's comments and the teacher's comments in separate boxes on the screen meant that it was difficult to follow the flow of the dialogue. She suggested the comments be integrated to look like a conversation, so one can see what comment was made and the subsequent response.

Other ways she suggested to make the ePortfolio more user-friendly were to just have general comments. In both interviews she argued that the current system of encouraging students to reflect on individual achievement criteria with 'I can' and 'I can't' statements was repetitive and time consuming. *"I actually prefer using the general statement because you can get everything out instead of going to every one of them and having to look back at each one and teacher's actually quite time consuming as well."* In the second interview this issue was brought up again and she had continued to only make general comments.

Student D

Student D is Korean and falls within the 26 to 30 year old age range. She has lived in New Zealand for approximately 13 years. She is studying Japanese and hopes to use her Japanese language abilities to complement her Information Technology (IT) qualifications. Student D's sister currently works in the Technical Support team of an IT company in Sydney and covers the Japanese market as well as the Australian market. Student D aspires to follow a similar career path to her sister.

Student D said that although she enjoyed speaking Japanese, she did not particularly enjoy writing as it was difficult to use grammar correctly and she has identified this as her weakness. She saw her strength as listening, and in her spare time she said she watches a Japanese channel on satellite television.

Student D's feedback on the ePortfolio did not differ significantly between the first and the second interview. In both interviews she described the extent of her goal setting as writing down assignment deadlines and test dates in her diary. Her long-term goal as identified in the second interview was to sit the Japanese Proficiency Test.

Student D believed the ePortfolio was introduced, so it does not "make us [students] lazy." She said that she found that if she wrote something down in the ePortfolio, it forced her to study.

If the ePortfolio were not a course requirement, Student D said she would still continue to use it. As with Student C, she saw it as a useful communication tool between teacher and students, *"Because I can get some advice from the tutor which I don't know… because sometimes at school it is hard to asking the questions so I can ask them online."* Student D explained how the teacher's advice had proven to be useful. She explained how she had identified that she needed to improve her reading comprehension skills, so she asked the teacher for some advice on how to improve. The teacher directed her to a Japanese language journal in the library, which has graded passages. Student D replied to the teacher in her ePortfolio *"Sensei [teacher], I went to the library to looked at Nihongo Journal. It looks very useful to improving my weakness of reading."*

The general comment section of the ePortfolio is what Student D tended to use most often. She did not tend to self-assess using the individual achievement criteria. *"I am not normally using 'I can' and 'I can't' because sometimes I am sort of in the middle of that so I am not sure which question I should be selected."* The advantages and

disadvantages of having a Lickert scale rather than the two point 'I can' and 'I can't' self-assessment criteria will be explored in the chapter which follows.

The Discussion Board was another section which Student D specifically referred to in her interview. She read what others had to say, but had not actually made a contribution to the discussion herself. When asked why she has not contributed, she suggested it was because of shyness. *"Actually I haven't write but I always reading what the others do… Maybe shy?"*

Lack of fluency in English and fear of making mistakes in front of their peers could be one possible reason why some non-native speakers of English might be reluctant to contribute to online discussions.

Despite not feeling comfortable making a posting on the Discussion Board, it was on the Discussion Board where she read about Student C's experience of attending the New Zealand Japan Society's conversation evening. Having read the posting she decided to attend the following conversation evening with another class member. She reflected on this in her ePortfolio, *"Today I went to Auckland NZ Japan Friendship Society for conversation. It was great. I can talk with Japanese as free-talking … It would be very helpful to improving speaking Japanese skills. I'll go next meeting as well."*

Student D saw the ePortfolio as being of benefit not only to students, but also to teachers *"Maybe teachers help to students… to figure out what their problem and then they can improving with their teaching."* However, despite having identified it as being useful in both interviews, she stated that she only *"half and half"* liked using it, because *"sometime it is like feeling like getting lazy to writing something."* The issue of maintaining students' motivation to continue using the ePortfolio will be addressed in the Discussion section.

Student E

Student E is also in the 26 to 30 year old age bracket. She comes from Taiwan, and has lived in New Zealand for over 11 years. At the time of the first interview she had been learning Japanese for one year. She said she enjoyed learning Japanese because it *"sounds interesting… the language sounds beautiful."* She also said she enjoyed learning new vocabulary and consequently being able to use the new vocabulary herself. Student E watched Japanese television drama series in her spare time and believed that one of her strengths was being able to have a general understanding of texts and conversations, without being able to understand each word.

The long-term goal of Student E was to be able to speak Japanese fluently and with confidence. In both interviews, Student E said that she did not often consciously set short-term goals. However, she did sometimes identify things which needed to be done, but like student B she did not always follow through on these good intentions.

In the first interview when asked about the ePortfolio, Student E said she neither liked nor disliked using it. *"I don't like it, but I don't hate it. No comment. It's not loving it. It's just in the middle. Neutral."* She later went on to explain that she was not used to self-reflection, however she acknowledged that she could probably get used to it. Despite feeling uncomfortable analysing her weaknesses, she believed she would continue to use it if it were not compulsory. *"There should be benefit because every time you go up I have to think about what I did. What I did well, what I didn't do well…"*

In May, Student E estimated that she accessed the ePortfolio approximately every two to three weeks, whenever she remembered to access it. She said she enjoyed using the Discussion Board saying that it was a good way to get to know one's classmates. Like other students, it was through the Discussion Board that Student E learned about another student's experience of attending the New Zealand Japan Society conversation evenings, which she herself attended, and like other students, found useful.

By the time of the second interview, she believed she was accessing the ePortfolio less often, saying, *"because no one remind me … so I keep forgetting it."* It also appeared that she was still not altogether comfortable reflecting on herself as a learner; *"I don't like to think what is my weakness…you know solve this, solve that … criticising myself."* In spite of not enjoying the self-reflection aspect of the ePortfolio, she recognized that the ePortfolio was useful and she acknowledged that change was necessary in order to improve on herself. *"I am kind of like afraid of knowing my weakness and afraid of to change things. I don't like to change things."* The time it takes for some students to become willing to engage in self-reflection and become autonomous is a matter which will be discussed in Chapter Five.

Student E explained that in her first semester of using the ePortfolio she attached evidence of learning outcomes she believed she had achieved. However, by the second semester of using it, she was no longer providing evidence, saying *"we don't have anything to upload."*

Student E also discussed how she thought her fellow class members perceived the portfolio. She maintained that some students did not like the ePortfolio, because they did not believe the ePortfolio helped them with their learning. She identified another possible reason why students did not like the ePortfolio was because they could not think of anything to write.

> *I am just thinking that not many students like to do it, but I think it helps in some way…They don't think it helps, I think… I think some of them don't know what to write and sometimes I don't as well.*

Although this is for the large part anecdotal regarding other students, Student E also identified sometimes being at a loss at what to write. This issue will be addressed in the next chapter.

Student E identified another reason, which may affect students' use of the ePortfolio. Like other interviewees Student E made the link between teacher feedback and motivation, *"when we write the comment on the ePortfolio, we do want to hear the feedback from the teacher, otherwise we don't want to write more things on it."* When specifically asked how she would react if the teacher were not to reply, she simply responded *"we would probably not write anything on it anymore."*

4.4.2 Students who accessed the ePortfolio in semester one and did not have access in semester two

During the second interview it was revealed that two students did not have access to the ePortfolio. They did not have access because they were not enrolled in the Kanji paper to which the ePortfolio was attached, although they were enrolled in the general Japanese language paper.

Typically students take the general Japanese paper and the Kanji paper concurrently. However, at the time of the second interview Student F and Student G were repeating the Japanese paper which they had not passed the previous semester. Although they had passed the Kanji paper, with the guidance of the Programme Leader they decided it would be better not to continue to the next level of Kanji. It is sometimes problematic when students are studying different levels, as they have not learnt the grammatical structures which are used in example sentences and reading comprehension passages. They decided they would concentrate on their Japanese paper and enroll in Kanji again the following semester.

As students access the ePortfolio through AUTonline while enrolled in the Kanji paper, it meant that students, like Student F and Student G who were not enrolled in Kanji in a given semester, had no access to the ePortfolio. This flaw in the system has since been resolved and students are now able to access the ePortfolio from any paper, not just from the Kanji papers.

Student F

Student F is a New Zealand born woman who is in her twenties. At the time of the first questionnaire, Student F was in her second semester of studying Japanese and had been studying full-time on the Diploma in Japanese for approximately nine months. Since leaving high school she had worked for several years before enrolling to study at tertiary level. She said that knew she wanted to go back to study, but she was not certain what she wanted to study. During the first interview Student F said her motivation for continuing to study Japanese was *"to get to know people outside of English speaking areas."*

When discussing the topic of goal-setting, Student F acknowledged that she found learning Japanese 'challenging,' therefore it was necessary to set small goals in order to pass each semester. However, despite acknowledging the importance of setting short-term, achievable targets, she was in fact not doing this. *"I do need smaller ones [goals] though to get me to where I want to go, because I am looking at the big picture instead of breaking it down."*

In the second interview, Student F said that she was still not consciously setting goals. Going to class, and doing homework continued to be short term goals. Her longer-term goals largely related to passing assessments, although her goal for the year was to improve 'studying techniques.'

She believed the ePortfolio was introduced so that students could see *"how far you have come ... and where you've gone wrong ... and where you need help."* She also referred to the asynchronous aspect of the ePortfolio in asking for and providing feedback; *"You can do it in a time when you are not in class and online the teacher can get back to you when they are not in class, if they have time."*

With regard to the ePortfolio and the role it plays in language learning, Student F felt that the ePortfolio enabled her to see her progress and this increased her confidence:

I went back to things I hadn't touched in a while, I was like 'I can do that now' and that made me confident because before I couldn't…some weeks later I could actually do it and I was excited I could write it down.

At the time of the first interview Student F believed she would continue to use the ePortfolio if it were not a compulsory part of the Japanese course. She said tracking her progress helped her feel better about herself; *"before I would just forget about how well I did, if I did well."* However, when asked again in the second interview five months later, she revealed that she probably would not use it as, *"I think because I am not using it I feel like I don't need it."*

Although she was not using the ePortfolio when interviewed for a second time, she was able to answer specific questions relating to the ePortfolio based on her use of it the previous semester. She continued to have difficulties with its usability and *"being someone who is not good with computers"* it took her *"ages to learn how to use."*

Student F also pointed out that she *"couldn't think what to write, because [she] used it once a week and [she] found that not a lot happened in the week"*. Consequently she felt she was repeating herself in her reflections.

Other interesting points to note from the second interview with Student F related to the use of the Discussion Board. At the time of the first interview she had used the Discussion Board *"a couple of times,"* but had only had one reply. Since then, she said it had been useful. She recalled one particular occasion when she had wanted to find a Japanese radio station to improve her listening skills. She posted this online and one of her classmates replied, suggesting a Japanese radio programme that she might find useful.

In the second interview Student F also revealed that she felt she *"didn't get a lot of teacher feedback."* Since she *"wrote a lot"* she thought she would have had more

feedback although she acknowledges that there were probably *"lots of other people writing lots."* This observation highlights a problematic issue which will be explored in the next chapter.

Student G

Student G is 18 years old and was born in New Zealand. She has studied Japanese since her first year of high school, but admits that her final high school result for Japanese was 'appalling.' Nonetheless she enjoys learning Japanese; *"I do enjoy speaking Japanese and being able to write it. It still fascinates me at times."* She elaborated on her enjoyment of Kanji saying, *"when I write the Kanji it takes me away from everything."*

Her daily goals consist of writing a 'to do' list of the things she needs to accomplish that day. If she knows she is going to have a busy week, she will write a 'to do' list at the start of the week. Her long-term goals she writes in her diary at the start of the year. During the year she occasionally reads through her goals to remind herself and ticks off those that she has already achieved.

> *At the start of each year I have a diary and I always put in my stuff that I want to achieve. some of that is related to Uni… It's funny because you go back and you read it and think 'Oh, I didn't know I wanted to achieve that' and you tick it off and say ' Oh, I have already done that.'*

Of the eight students that were interviewed, Student G was the only one who did not have access to a computer at home. She accesses the ePortfolio from the computers in the AUT library or in the computer laboratory where she has some of her classes.

Initially Student G used the ePortfolio approximately once a week. When asked why she used the ePortfolio she replied; *"To check on my progress and to see if I have got any feedback from the teacher to help me improve."*

However, she acknowledges that despite receiving feedback on how to improve she does not always do what the teacher suggests. *"It's useful, but sometimes time consuming ...It can take a long time to do what she said."*

In her first interview, Student G also referred to how her teacher encouraged students to log in and reflect on their learning as well as contribute to the Discussion Board; *"But sometimes she keeps nagging away ... 'Cause she just constantly asks me if I have been on it. Or, I haven't seen you online yet."* Student G recalled how her teacher reproached some students in her class who had not accessed the ePortfolio in a while. *"They hadn't checked theirs in 47 days, 57 days. And I just burst out laughing. I couldn't help it, 'cause I always check mine."*

4.4.3 Student who accessed the ePortfolio in semester one and withdrew from the course

Student H
Student H was interviewed only once as she withdrew from the course after one semester.

Student H is 17 years old. Her mother is Japanese, but Student H's first language is English. She had studied Japanese for three years at high school before enrolling in the Bachelor of Arts (Japanese) at AUT University. By enrolling in the Japanese course she was hoping to learn more about Japanese culture, but she did admit that Japanese was her 'back up' subject. By 'back up' it could be presumed that she meant it was not her first study programme of preference. Although it is not known why she withdrew, the fact that she was not completely committed to study Japanese could have been a possible cause for her withdrawal.

In the interview Student H said her strength was listening, as her mother speaks to her in Japanese at home. Although she replies to her mother in English, she believed her speaking ability is better than her ability to write.

Like other students, Student H's daily and weekly goals were to do homework and revise what she had learned during the week. Her long-term goal was to pass her exams. Student H said she accessed the ePortfolio *"about once or twice a week"* from the AUT computers as she did not know how to access it from home. She believes she would use the ePortfolio even if it were not compulsory as *"it makes you want to progress, to write it down to show you have done better than before, better than when you started."*

4.5 Summary of findings

There was a lot of positive feedback from students regarding the ePortolfio. However, a number of issues were raised. What is important is that students need to understand the rationale behind its introduction. This should be done before its introduction, but reminders may also be necessary.

Feedback from the interviews can be grouped under seven categories. These categories and the main points are summarised below and will be analysed in more depth in the Discussion section.

1. *Students' understanding of the rationale behind the introduction of the ePortfolio*
   Students reported that the ePorttfolio was introduced in order to:
   - Help students identify their strengths and weaknesses.
   - Highlight the progress students have made and increase self-confidence.
   - Assist teachers in understanding their students' needs.

2. *Reflection*
In general there were positive comments made on the benefits of reflection. However, it appears some students were reluctant to reflect on themselves as learners, and there were students who were uncomfortable discussing their

weaknesses. Other students claimed they reflect, but prefer not to write it down. Analysis of portfolio entries revealed that over time some students were writing longer reflections and were analysing their learning in greater depth. It appears that reflection is a skill which can be developed. Of significance to this study was the anecdotal observation made by several participants regarding the attitudes and practices of other students in the class. They claimed that there were students who wrote in their ePortfolios what they thought the teacher expected. This could possibly be due to the fact that they were unsure of what to write. It could also be due to not wanting to expose themselves as 'bad' or 'lazy' learners.

3. Goal-setting

The interviews revealed that most students have long-term goals. However, many students did not set short-term and medium-term goals which were measurable. Some students reported that they regularly set goals, but they did not necessarily follow through on them.

4. The role of the teacher

The role of the teacher elicited a great deal of discussion. Some students preferred to ask the teacher for advice online rather than face-to-face. Other students preferred to ask for advice in person. Several students reported that the amount and quality of individual feedback affected their willingness to engage with the ePortfolio. There was mixed response regarding the extent to which they liked encouragement from the teacher to access the ePortfolio. Some students like the teacher to remind them to use the ePortfolio. Other students did not appreciate the constant reminders.

5. The Discussion Board

There was mixed responses to the usefulness of the Discussion Board facility of the ePortfolio. Some students found it to be a useful means of sharing ideas and resources. However, not all students were comfortable contributing to online discussion. One student who constantly monitored the discussion without taking part found some of the information that her classmates shared was useful. Some students

did not like using the Discussion Board at all and preferred to interact with peers in person. In order to make the Discussion Board more focussed and effective in general, several students suggested that topics of discussion should be guided by the teacher.

6. *Providing evidence of achievement*

An issue that was highlighted by three out of the eight students was the requirement to post evidence. Some students found it difficult to find appropriate evidence which they could attach to their portfolio, particularly when they were not allowed to keep their tests. It also became apparent that classroom tasks and activities did not encourage reflection.

7. *Usability and structure of the ePortfolio*

It took some students longer than others to become familiar with the technological side of the ePortfolio. There were two students who reported having technical difficulties. One student did not know how to access the ePortfolio from home and another student reported a lack in confidence using computers. Some students described particular design and layout features of the ePortfolio which they found frustrating and said that these could possibly affect students' use of the ePortfolio. Several students found that the two options for self-assessment criteria ('I can' and 'I can't) were limiting. They felt that more options for each criteria would make reflection easier and be more effective in highlighting progress in learning.

When students were asked whether or not they would continue to use the ePortfolio if it were not a course requirement there was mixed response.

These issues will be addressed in the following chapter.

Chapter 5

Discussion

5.1 Introduction

The benefits of ePortfolios in assisting students to develop as autonomous learners are that they encourage reflection; they have the potential to support the reflective process by making learning outcomes visible, and that they promote goal-setting. It has also been argued that the ePortfolio provides an excellent vehicle for achieving asynchronous and non-geographical opportunities for sharing and providing guidance in the process of reflection (Doig et al., 2006), and it encourages more in-depth communication between teachers and students and between students themselves.

In this study, the findings suggest that there are benefits to both teachers and students through reflection in an ePortfolio. However, despite these apparent benefits, this study indicated that there are many challenges, which have the potential to negatively influence its effectiveness.

This chapter begins with a discussion on the benefits for learning and teaching through the introduction of an ePortfolios as a platform for reflection, goal-setting, and online communication. It also examines the issues of introducing reflection into a learning programme. This is followed by a discussion on the implementation of an ePortfolio with a focus on delivery needs. The chapter concludes by highlighting the limitations of the study and identifies areas for further research and development.

5.2 Issues around ePortfolios

Literature has highlighted the link between reflection and the successful language learner (see section 2.3). As with the previous research conducted at AUT University by Corder and Waller (2005; 2007) there were a number of benefits of reflection

which were also highlighted in this study. Several interviewees identified increased motivation to learn as a benefit of reflection. The introduction of reflection also appeared to have encouraged a shift in attitude away from a focus on marks for some students. In addition, an examination of portfolio entries revealed that reflective writing skills developed in some students over time and enhanced their learning. In-depth reflections in turn, are also of benefit to teachers, as teachers become more aware of their students' needs, and this is, in turn, is beneficial for students. However, despite these apparent benefits, some students saw reflection as an added burden. Other challenges regarding reflection related to assessment and students writing for the audience.

The role of goal-setting was another issue which was identified in the study, as was the need for ongoing learner training. The ePortfolio as a platform for online communication also produced mixed results and has highlighted several other concerns.

5.2.1 Reflection in ePortfolios

The study revealed that some students felt the primary benefit of reflection was being able to see their progress. Some students found that monitoring progress was a source of motivation. This reinforces what Verdonschot (2006) asserts that focusing on success is motivating, rather than constantly focussing on gaps or weaknesses. It is possible that in this study the primary focus of student reflections and feedback from teachers has been on weaknesses in learning, as well as strategies to improve. In the future it would seem advisable to place more emphasis on positive learning outcomes and individual success.

The data also showed that some students exhibited a shift in attitude towards their learning through the process of reflection. A number of students who admitted to having been focussed on marks previously, were now examining how they had

performed in assessments; what they had done well, what they had not done so well and they were now considering ways in which they could improve.

An examination of portfolio entries showed that some students developed in their ability to reflect which enhanced their learning, but there was less development in other students. This mirrors what Corder and Waller (2005; 2007) found in their examination of student's reflections in learning journals. Initial shallow reflections which simply identified weaknesses, became more in-depth, in that some students began to explore the reasons behind their weaknesses and in time these students began to identify strategies to improve their weakness. In this regard it can be said that reflection raises awareness and enhances learning.

The importance of teacher feedback was also highlighted in the findings. Not only did dialogue appear to improve the quality and depth of reflection, but it also had an impact on student motivation. The amount and quality of individual feedback from the teacher can affect students' willingness to engage in the reflective process. Dialogue and feedback improve reflection. Teachers need to assist students in developing reflective skills. As discussed in the literature review, students need to be encouraged to move away from a superficial level of descriptive writing to more in-depth analysis and evaluation (O'Connor & Diggins, 2002). Teachers also need to give individual help to assist learners to gain and understanding of the learning process and the part they play in it. This is supported by Dysthe and Engelson (2004), who state that reflection is not an activity that should be conducted in isolation. As mentioned previously, scaffolding is important and students need varying levels of support and guidance to develop tools required for independent study (Corder & Waller, 2005).

Despite seeing the benefits of reflection, some students admitted that they probably would not continue to use the ePortfolio if it were not a course requirement. Informal feedback in the interviews indicated that many students see reflection as an added burden. As Jing (2006) states, reflective tasks are not received well if students

cannot see rapid improvement in their language skills. Students still appear to be concerned with their short-term priority of passing exams.

A second significant issue was whether to assess reflection. This issue has been discussed at length in the literature. It could be argued that ePortfolios should not be assessed as assessment could influence what students write. It is difficult to establish the extent to which students write for the audience. It is equally difficult to establish why some students make up some or all of their reflections. Some students may simply wish to please the teacher, others may be influenced by the reflections being assessed. Other students may make up their reflections, as they simply lack skills in reflective thinking and writing.

The advantages and disadvantages of different assessment methods have also been widely discussed. There has also been discussion on whether to assess reflection and portfolio entries on a simple pass/fail basis, whether to attach a specific weighting, or whether to assess it at all. The ePortfolio in this study was assessed on a simple pass/fail basis. It was felt that a pass/fail criteria would encourage students to reflect, and if reflections were not assessed at all, students would not engage in the process. It was also felt that specific marks attached to the ePortfolio might encourage students to write what they believed the teacher wanted to read. These are issues which warrant further investigation.

5.2.2 Goal-setting

Related to reflection is the ability to set goals. As stated by Hartnoll-Young (2006), autonomous learners are problem solvers. Through active reflection autonomous learners identify problems to solve and suggest opportunities for action by setting goals. Wenden (1995) maintains that learners should be encouraged to set learning goals as opposed to performance goals. Goals should relate to strategies, not grades.

However, this study has revealed that most goals do not appear to relate to strategies. The findings have highlighted a definite link between goal-setting and grades. It could be argued that it should not be an issue whether students' goals are based on learning strategies or on assessment, as long as the student is motivated to achieve the goals which they have set for themselves. However, such a focus on assessments is not compatible with the concept of lifelong learning. One can ask oneself what goal students will set for themselves after they graduate when they no longer have grades to use as motivation.

The findings of both the questionnaires and the interviews showed that students were more inclined to set long-term goals than short and medium-term goals. Quantifiable, measurable short-term goals are the stepping stones to achieving broader, less quantifiable long-term goals, such as speaking Japanese proficiently. It could be suggested that students need guidance and support to set smaller goals and it is the role of the teacher to provide this support. However, there is a danger that if students are required to set short, medium, and long-term goals through the ePortfolio, students may be inclined to write goals for the sake of it, without the intention of ever following through on them. Success should not be measured by whether or not students set goals, but by whether or not they are realistic and achievable.

While acknowledging the important role of goal-setting in the learning process, it must also be acknowledged that some students are making excellent progress without consciously setting short and medium-term goals.

5.2.3 Online communication

As mentioned earlier, reflection does not take place in isolation without support and supervision (Corder & Waller, 2005; Dysthe & Engelson, 2004). Korhonen, Kohonen, Tolkki, Syvänen & Ahonen (2007) state that in addition to individual space, an ePortfolio must contain bilateral work spaces for dialogue between teacher

and student. An ePortfolio must also contain communal work space for the class as a whole.

The Discussion Forum is a facility which is attached to the AUT University ePortfolio. It was included to give students the opportunity to interact with each other outside of the classroom. Students were encouraged to share ideas, resources and learning strategies with their classmates. As Goh (1997) states, sharing is a valuable resource. She has found that if students discuss learning strategies, this discussion encourages them to evaluate and improve on their own learning process. The results of this study showed that sharing was in fact useful for some students. One student shared her experience of going to the New Zealand Japan Society's conversation evening, which encouraged others to attend.

Students benefit by sharing their learning, but as Campbell (2007) asserts, some ESL students prefer not to participate in class discussions because they are naturally shy or lack confidence in their English ability. Campbell believes that an online forum has the potential to encourage these students to participate. The asynchronous nature of online discussions allows shy students and ESL students the time it takes to formulate responses. One participant is a non-native speaker of English and admitted in the interview that she was shy. This student accessed the online discussion, but chose not to contribute. Nonetheless she said that she found that merely observing the contributions of others on the Discussion Forum was useful.

The findings also showed that there are other clear benefits to be found in the online communication capability of ePortfolios. The introduction of the ePortfolio facilitated communication between teachers and students. The questionnaires revealed that students are likely to discuss their learning progress with friends, but most students never or hardly ever discuss their learning progress with the teacher. Those students that asked questions tended to ask in class rather than outside of class time. It could be assumed that it would be less stressful to ask questions on a one-to-one basis rather than asking questions in front of peers. Possibly students feel the

teachers are unavailable to ask questions outside of scheduled classes, and they may not want to be an imposition. The ePortfolio invited students to ask questions and, as some students reported in their interviews, they preferred to ask for advice online rather than face-to-face. In this respect the ePortfolio has been a great success in increasing the amount of dialogue between teachers and students.

The benefit of the asynchronous nature of online communication was also noted in the interviews with one student acknowledging that it enables teachers to give feedback when it suits. This benefits students who feel they are being an imposition by asking questions, or students who are reluctant to ask questions due to shyness. However, not all students appreciate the online mode of communication. Wang and Woo (2007) also found that different students have different preferences with regard to mode of expression. There were some students who preferred to ask questions in person. This is not unexpected. Students have different learning styles, different needs and, as has also been revealed in this study, they also have different preferences regarding modes of communication. To cater to students who prefer to communicate in person, in addition to the ePortfolio, it might be necessary to timetable duty hours where students are encouraged to come and ask questions without an appointment.

While some students reported the benefits of using the Discussion Forum it was felt by the researcher that it was not used as effectively as had been initially hoped. This is most likely due to the fact that students were free to use the Discussion Forum as they liked. Goh (1997) maintains that discussion on thinking processes can develop metacognitive awareness. However, for a Discussion Board to be effective in developing metacognitive awareness, it is necessary for the teacher to provide topics of discussion. Participants also identified the need for topics to guide discussion. As Wang and Woo (2007) state, breaking down a complicated discussion into smaller, more specific questions facilitates online discussion

5.3 Delivery needs

From the findings of this study several issues were raised regarding the introduction of the ePortfolio. The time it takes for teachers to give individual feedback and maintain an adequate level of feedback throughout the semester was one major challenge. The extent to which learners need to be trained in the purpose of the ePortfolio and its link to reflection and developing autonomy was another issue that was raised. In addition, getting students to reflect on their learning holistically also proved to be problematic.

5.3.1 Generous time allocation

It could be argued that teacher feedback should not be necessary for autonomous students, but some students in this study reported that they did not want to write anything if they did not get feedback.

However, the time it takes for teachers to reply to students is an issue. Some students who were regular users of the ePortfolio felt that the amount and frequency of teacher feedback was inadequate. While the importance of feedback is acknowledged, it can be difficult to maintain the feedback throughout the semester. Students who were interviewed also acknowledged how much time it must take for teachers to respond.

Kohonen (2002) pointed out that portfolios take time. The time it takes to guide learners through the process and provide individual feedback is significant. However, as the feedback from the questionnaires revealed, prior to the introduction of the ePortfolio there had not been much discussion about progress and learning strategies with the teacher. Giving feedback has definite advantages and, regardless of the mode in which the feedback is given, it will always be time consuming and thus a workload issue.

The issue of time has been raised in various studies on the effectiveness of ePortfolios, but this issue does not appear to have been resolved. Ways in which to realistically provide enough feedback to students need to be discussed, trialled, and monitored. If this issue is not resolved there is a risk that students will not continue to use the ePortfolio until it is not used at all. As Marcoul-Burlinson (2006) states, there are very few portfolios that she could find that have been used over any length of time. Perhaps the time commitment needed to maintain motivation is a contributing factor to many portfolios only being used for a brief period of time.

5.3.2 Needs a team approach

Despite the reported benefits to teaching and learning, it is likely some teachers will resist the introduction of portfolios (Kohonen, 2002), but if the ePortfolio is to be successful at AUT University it needs to be adopted across the entire programme by the teaching team. Corder and Waller (2007) also identified a need for a team approach when they introduced the Kanji learning software at AUT University. As they point out, students need to receive consistent messages from all teachers, not just one teacher.

However, currently it appears that some participants in this research project attached the ePortfolio to a particular part of the course that was taught by the teacher who provided the feedback. Consequently they tended to only reflect on that area of the learning in the ePortfolio, rather than reflecting holistically on their learning. A team approach amongst staff would encourage students to view their language learning more holistically. It would also ensure that the ePortfolio project does not collapse should a key staff member leave.

While a team approach is desirable, as was discussed earlier, the time commitment associated with ePortfolios and the resistance of some teachers to change, could prove challenging. Just as Jing (2006) observed that reflective activities should not be imposed on students, such activities should not be imposed on teachers

(Kohonen, 2002). No matter how beneficial reflection and portfolios are in developing learner autonomy, if they cannot be realistically managed they are of no benefit at all, and will in fact be counter-productive.

5.3.3   Needs learner training

Kohonen (n.d.) and Riedinger (2006) amongst others have emphasized the importance of learner training, however, it has proven difficult to find practical examples of such training. This could be due to the fact that, as Marcoul-Burlinson (2006) states, ePortfolios are very context-dependent. When deciding on the extent of training to give students, it was felt that if too much time was spent on training prior to students actually accessing the ePortfolio they would lose interest. In this study, two training sessions were scheduled to introduce the concept of learner autonomy, the role of reflection in developing learner autonomy, as well as the roles of both teachers and students. The purpose of introducing the ePortfolio, its structure and how to use the ePortfolio were also explained.

As stated earlier, the attendance at this training session was poor. The reason for this low rate (52% of students enrolled in the class) and subsequent low number of questionnaires administered in this study, could be due to the fact that it was scheduled outside of normal timetabled lessons. Some students may have felt that they could choose whether or not to attend the training session or that it was not as important as their usual content-based lessons. These factors will be considered when scheduling future training sessions and deciding on how best to inform students of these workshops in order to maximize attendance. As mentioned earlier, it might be worth devoting specific class time to using the ePortfolio in order to develop a 'portfolio culture' (Hirvela & Sweetland, 2005).

One student who did attend both training sessions said that after some months of using the ePortfolio she was still unsure of how to access the ePortfolio off-campus. It appears that although training sessions were conducted, they were inadequate.

Several other students could not state the purpose for which the ePortfolio was introduced. According to Stefani et al. (2007) students' motivation to maintain an ePortfolio will to a large extent be dependent on their understanding the purpose.

It appears that in addition to these initial training sessions, reminders regarding the benefits of reflection may also be necessary. If all staff members are actively involved in the ePortfolio and students receive reminders from more than one source they are more likely to develop a better understanding of the purpose and process of the ePortfolio than if they receive encouragement and guidance from one lecturer.

Cambra-Fierro and Cambra-Berdún (2007) stress the importance of not imposing reflection on students in order to achieve student 'buy-in.' How best to persuade students of the benefits of reflection through an ePortfolio needs to be carefully thought through, and, as Jing (2006) asserts, gradual introduction is just as crucial as the method in which reflection is introduced.

5.4   Areas for further development and research

The findings in this study have highlighted the need for further research and development.   Development in many areas including the ePortfolio itself is necessary in order to maximise its potential as a teaching and learning tool. Once such changes have been implemented, it will be necessary to examine the effectiveness of these changes.

5.4.1 Further development

As defined earlier, a portfolio is a collection of student work that exhibits the student's efforts, progress, or achievement. A portfolio should also contain evidence of the student's self-reflection (Paulson et al., 1991). The definition has been extended by Heath (2002) to include the setting of goals and corresponds with the planning, monitoring, and evaluating which is characteristic of autonomous learners.

The ePortfolio that was introduced and trialled in this study did in fact encourage students to reflect on their learning and to set goals, by providing a checklist of criteria. However, an issue that was highlighted in this study was the requirement to post evidence of learning and achievement. Some students found it difficult to find appropriate evidence which they could attach to their portfolio. It became apparent that classroom tasks and activities did not encourage reflection. More open-ended learning tasks and assessments where students have more flexibility and control over the content and process are more likely to elicit work which can be used as evidence of progress and achievement and will elicit more reflection. This study confirms the findings of Corder and Waller's (2007) previous study into learner autonomy at AUT University, that assessments need to be cognitively challenging in order to develop higher-order thinking and learning strategies.

As stated previously, language programmes should be learner-centred and should have both language content goals and learning process goals (Nunan and Lamb, 1996). Learners should make their own decisions based on their own preferences. Flowerdew and Miller (2005) maintain that a learner-strategy approach is one essential stage in the development of learner autonomy.

This study has facilitated discussion between members of the Japanese Section at AUT University regarding its teaching, learning and assessment practices. Teachers are currently reviewing tasks and activities that provide more creativity and challenge which encourage reflection. This is one successful outcome of the study.

5.4.2 Further research

The ePortfolio that was introduced at AUT University proved that it could be effective in helping learners accept responsibility for their learning, enabling learners to reflect as well as providing a platform for teachers and peers to give feedback and guidance. However, in order to maximise the benefits of the ePortfolio, issues which reduce its effectiveness need to be resolved.

It was found in this study that more thought and development into learner training was necessary in order to gain student 'buy-in' and for students to understand the purpose of implementing an ePortfolio. More research into the most effective means of introducing reflection and the ePortfolio is necessary, as is the extent and role of ongoing learner training.

This study also revealed that the ePortfolio needed to be better integrated into the course, so it is not perceived by students to be an 'add-on' to their studies. Students need to be encouraged to reflect on their learning holistically. How best to achieve this also warrants further investigation.

There also remains the unresolved issue of whether or not, and how best to assess reflection. While this study does not focus on the issue of assessment it is certainly an area, which is of interest to educators. Different methods of assessing reflection and ePortfolios need to be trialled, monitored and evaluated.

Involving the whole teaching team should also help encourage learners to reflect on all their language skills. However, how to get teacher 'buy-in' is just as crucial as getting student 'buy-in' if the ePortfolio is to be successful. This is also an area for further research. In the Japanese Section at AUT University, the recognition and acceptance of a need to incorporate more challenging and creative teaching, learning and assessment activities into the curriculum is certainly a first step in the right direction.

However, even after such changes have been implemented, there still remains the significant issue of how best to manage the time it takes to have dialogue with students, and provide sufficient and timely feedback. If feedback is not regularly maintained, student motivation will decrease and the ePortfolio will become redundant. This is also an area that is in need of further investigation.

5.5   Limitations of the study

Limitations regarding the generalisability of the findings need to be acknowledged. One obvious limitation which restricts the generalisation of findings to larger populations is the small sample size. Only 14 students completed the questionnaire and of those 14 students only 8 volunteered to be interviewed and to have their ePortfolio reflections analysed.

The ratio of native English speakers to non-native English speakers of the eight interviewees was not an accurate representation of the actual class, and may also limit the generalisability of the findings.

Another factor which limits this study further is the fact that there was a difference between the eight students who were interviewed in terms of the different lengths of time that they had access to the ePortfolio. Five students had access to the ePortfolio at the time of both interviews. However, it was revealed that two students only had access in the first semester and were no longer using it ta the time of the second interview in Semester Two. One of the eight students who volunteered to provide data through interviews and ePortfolios was in fact interviewed only once as she subsequently withdrew from the course.

However, despite these differences between participants, it is felt that the data collected provide student insight into ePortfolios from a number of different perspectives. The findings provide a greater understanding of the issues that have emerged in previous research into learner autonomy, the role of the teacher and the student in facilitating learner autonomy, as well as the use of a portfolio to manage learning and serve as a medium to develop learner autonomy.

5.6   Conclusion

The introduction of the ePortfolio in this programme has had mixed results. The aim of this study was to investigate the role of reflection through the use of an ePortfolio from the perspective of the learner. The mixed responses that were received revealed that the ePortfolio has had its successes. However, there were equally as many shortcomings, which need to be discussed, monitored, evaluated, and if necessary changed, if the ePortfolio is to be more effective in developing learner autonomy.

If the delivery needs, such as time allocation and learner training required to support the process can be resolved, the ePortfolio will be more effective in recording learning, monitoring progress, and providing feedback to students. As a result, students will be encouraged to take more control of their learning and become more autonomous through the process of self-reflection.

Field (2007) believes that some learners who do not see the relevance of journal writing and reflective portfolios may over time be more receptive to other activities, which achieve the same result, by encouraging reflection. Such activities will help them develop more of an awareness of themselves as language learners. This is also an issue which needs to be considered. There may be other methods of achieving the same positive results as can be achieved by using an ePortfolio.

Research has shown that teachers also benefit from reflection (Carmean & Christie, 2006; Sherman, 2006). Through student reflections teachers can monitor student progress and use this to evaluate and plan their teaching. Reflection enhances teaching and in turn enhances learning. This confirms what Stefani et al. (2007) have found from their research into ePortfolios, that student reflections provide insight into the curriculum and course design and these reflections have the potential to facilitate change. The findings have encouraged teaching staff to model reflection and critically consider their own teaching practice. In this respect, the ePortfolio has

been a useful tool for professional development. This, in turn, will be of benefit to learners themselves.

As stated in the Introduction section, this study was a trial of a project at AUT University to enhance learner autonomy. This trial sought to discover whether students felt the ePortfolio enhanced their autonomy as learners. The findings revealed mixed results. Some students reported that they benefited from the process of reflection, which is integral to being an autonomous learner. However, there are some lecturers in the Japanese Section who have begun to develop more creative assessments than in previous years, the findings revealed the need for better alignment between learning outcomes, learning tasks, and assessments across the whole teaching programme. The lack of cognitively challenging tasks and assessments was highlighted by the fact that students had little in terms of evidence that they could attach to their ePortfolios. How to achieve 'constructive alignment' across all levels of the Japanese programmes must become a priority if students are to develop a deeper approach to learning.

This study also sought to find out whether an ePortfolio provides an effective framework in which to record, monitor, and provide feedback to students. The literature shows that support and guidance in implementing and maintaining an ePortfolio is essential. The findings from this study support this, with students highlighting the need for timely, ongoing feedback.

The ePortfolio also provided a forum for students to share their own learning experiences with each other. If discussions are managed better, such communication has the potential to be more valuable to students. It was also found that the online aspect of communication suited some students. In this respect it can be said that the ePortfolio supports diversity and a range of individual learning styles.

The biggest issue that was identified in this study and which remains to be resolved, is the issue of time. If more staff are trained in how to facilitate learner autonomy

through the use of an ePortfolio, students may be more likely to recognise its relevance. A team approach will also encourage students to see the ePortlfolio as an integrated part of their course, which is embedded in the curriculum. Without a team approach students are only ever likely to see it as an 'add on'.

As with previous research done at AUT University by Corder and Waller (2005; 2007), this study has highlighted the need to support and guide students through their development as learners. This study has also reconfirmed the need to make a shift from a focus on content to a focus on process. Corder and Waller's studies were the catalyst to make this change. The introduction of an ePortfolio was an attempt to make this shift happen. With better constructive alignment of outcomes with tasks and assessments and changes to how the ePortfolio is implemented, it is hoped that students will be provided with better opportunities to develop higher cognitive processes, which will increase their potential of developing as autonomous learners. The Japanese Section at AUT University is committed to improving learning and teaching and will continue to research, adapt and trial initiatives to encourage students to develop as lifelong, autonomous learners.

References

Asher, J. (2005). Building work-based learning into the school curriculum. *Education + Training, 47*(1), 64-69.

Benson, P. (2001). *Teaching and researching autonomy in language learning*. Harlow, England: Pearson Education.

Biggs, J. (1999). What the student does: Teaching for enhanced learning. *Higher Education Research and Development, 18*(1), 57-75.

Blackburn, J., & Hakel, M. (2006). Enhancing self-regulation and goal orientation with ePortfolios. In A. Jafari & C. Kaufman (Eds.), *Handbook of research on ePortfolios* (pp. 83-89). Hershey, USA; London, UK: Idea Group.

Blackie, N. (2000). *Designing social research*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Blin, F. (1999). CALL and the Development of Learner Autonomy. In M. Levy & R. Debski (Eds.), *WorldCALL. Global perspectives on computer-assisted learning* (pp. 133-147). Lisse, The Netherlands: Swets & Zeitlinger.

Borthwick, A. (1995). Body of evidence. *Vocational Education Journal, 70*(3), 24-28.

Boud, D. (1994). *Conceptualising learning from experience: Developing a model for facilitation.* Paper presented at the 35th Adult Education Research Conference, College of Education, University of Tennessee.

Boud, D. (2001). Using journal writing to enhance reflective practice. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education, 90*, 9-17.

Boud, D., & Falchikov, N. (2006). Aligning assessment with long-term learning. *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education, 31*(4), 399-413.

Boud, D., Keogh, R., & Walker, D. (1985). *Reflection: Turning experience into learning*. London: Kogan Page.

Brewerton, M. (2004). Reframing the essential skills: Implications of the Key Competencies Project.   Retrieved 28 March, 2007

Cambra-Fierro, J., & Cambra-Berdún, J. (2007). Students' self-evaluation and reflection (part 2): an empirical study. *Education + Training, 49*(2), 103-111.

Campbell, N. (2007). Bringing ESL students out of their shells: Enhancing participation through online discussion. *Business Communication Quarterly*, 37-43.

Carmean, C., & Christie, A. (2006). ePortfolios: Constructing Meaning Across Time, Space, and Curriculum. In A. Jafari & C. Kaufman (Eds.), *Handbook of research on ePortfolios* (pp. 33-43). Hershey, USA; London, UK Idea Group.

CDELL. (2002). Introducing and supporting key skills in higher education: Agendas, ideas and issues for university departments.   Retrieved 25 March, 2007

Chan, W. M., & Kim, D. H. (2004). Towards greater individualization and process-oriented learning through electronic self-access: Project "e-daf". *Compute Assisted Language Learning, 17*(1), 83-108.

Clarke, S. (2000). Researching enterprise bargaining: A qualitative approach. *Education Research and Perspectives, 27*(1), 1-18.

Condie, R., & Livingston, K. (2007). Blending online learning with tradtitional approaches: Changing practices. *British Journal of Educational Technology, 38*(2), 337-348.

Corder, D., & Moffat, S. (2005). Teach them how to fish - the link between portfolio and competencies. *The New Zealand Language Teacher, 31*, 30-37.

Corder, D., & Waller, G. (2007). Using a CALL package as a platform to develop effective language learning strategies and facilitate autonomous learning. In L. Miller (Ed.), *Autonomy in the Classroom* (pp. 7-26). Dublin: Authentik.

Cotterall, S. (1995). Readiness for autonomy: Invesigating learner beliefs. *System, 23*(2), 195-205.

Cotterall, S. (1998). Roles in autonomous language learning. *Australian Review of Applied Linguistics, 21*(2), 61-78.

Crandall, J. (1999). Cooperative language learning and affective factors. In J. Arnold (Ed.), *Affect in Language Learning* (pp. 226-245). Cambridge, UK; New York; Melbourne: Cambridge University Press.

Creswell, J. (2003). *Research design*. London: Sage.

Dam, L. (1995). *Learner autonomy 3: From theory to classroom practice*. Dublin: Authentik.

de la Harpe, B., & Radloff, A. (1998). *Do first year students reflect on their learning? Why they should and how they can*. Paper presented at the Conference Name|. Retrieved Access Date|. from URL|.

Dewey, J. (1933). *How we think*. New York: D. C. Heath.

Doig, B., Illsley, B., McLuckie, J., & Parsons, R. (2006). Using ePortfolios to enhance reflective learning and development. In A. Jafari & C. Kaufman (Eds.), *Handbook of Research on ePortfolios* (pp. 158-167). Hershey, USA; London, UK: Idea Group.

Dysthe, O., & Engelsen, K. S. (2004). Portfolios and assessment in teacher education in Norway: A theory-based discussion of differnt models in two sites. *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education, 29*(2), 239-258.

Ehrman, M. (1998). The learning alliance: Conscious and unconscious aspects of the second language teacher's role. *System, 26*, 93-106.

Field, J. (2007). Looking outwards, not inwards. *ELT journal, 61*(1), 30-38.

Fielding, N., & Thomas, H. (2001). Qualitative Interviewing. In N. Gilbert (Ed.), *Researching social life* (2 ed., pp. 123-143). London: Sage.

Flowerdew, J., & Miller, L. (2005). *Second language listening: Theory and practice*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Goh, C. (1997). Metacognitive awareness and second language listeners. *ELT Journal, 51*(4), 361-369.

Hartnoll-Young, E. (2006). ePortfolios for Knowledge and Learning. In A. Jafari & C. Kaufman (Eds.), *Handbook of research on ePortfolios* (pp. 125-134). Hershey, USA; London, UK: Idea Group.

Healey, D. (1999). Theory and research: Autonomy and language learning. In J. Egbert & E. Hanson-Smith (Eds.), *CALL environments: Research, practice, and critical issues* (pp. 391-402). Alexandria, Virginia: Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages Inc (TESOL).

Heath, M. (2002). Electronic portfolios for reflective self-assessment. *Teacher Librarian, 30*(1), 19-24.

Henry, R. (2006). ePortfolio thinking: A provost perspective. In A. Jafari & C. Kaufman (Eds.), *Handbook of research on ePortfolios* (pp. 54-61). Hershey, USA; London, UK: Idea Group.

Hirvela, A., & Sweetland, Y. L. (2005). Two case studies of L2 writers' experiences across learning-directed portfolio contexts. *Assessing Writing, 10*, 192-213.

Hoven, D. (1999). CALL-ing the learner into focus: Towards a learner-centred model. In M. Levy & R. Debski (Eds.), *WorldCALL. Global perspectives on computer assisted learning* (pp. 149-167). Lisse, The Netherlands: Swets and Zeitlinger.

Jing, H. (2006). Learner resistance in metacognition training? An exploration of mismatches between learner and teacher agendas. *Language Teaching Research, 10*(1), 95-117.

Jones, J. (2001). CALL and the teacher's role in promoting learner autonomy [Electronic Version]. *CALL-EJ Online*, 3. Retrieved 29 May 2005 from http://www.tell.is.ritsumei.ac.jp/callejonline/journal/3-1/jones.html.

Kanuka, H., Rourke, L., & Laflamme, E. (2007). The influence of instructional methods on the quality of online discussion. *British Journal of Educational Technology, 38*(2), 260-271.

Kohonen, V. (2000). *Student reflection in portfolio assessment: making language learning more visible*. Babylonia: University of Tampere.

Kohonen, V. (2002, March 2002). *Student autonomy and the teacher's professional growth: fostering colleagial culture in language teacher education.* Paper presented at the Learner Autonomy Symposium, Dublin University.

Kohonen, V. (n.d.). The European Language Portfolio: From portfolio assessment to portfolio-oriented language learning [Electronic Version], 77-94. Retrieved 3 March 2005 from http://www.script.lu/activinno/portfolio/kohonen-european-language-portfolio.pdf.

Kolb, D. (1984). *Experiential learning: Experience as the source of learning and development*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall.

Korhonen, V., Kohonen, V., Tolkki, L., Syvänen, A., & Ahonen, M. (2007). e-Portfolios within life-wide professional development. In M. Kankaanranta, A. Grant & P. Linnakylä (Eds.), *e-Portfolio: Adding value to life-long learning* (pp. 253-275). Jyväskylä, Finland: University of Jyväskylä Institute for Educational Research.

Lambert, C., DePaepe, J., Lambert, L., & Anderson, D. (2007). E-portfolios in action. *Kappa Delta Pi Recod, 43*(2), 76- 81.

Lerner, J. (2007). Teaching students to learn: developing metacognitive skills with a learning assessment. *College Teaching, 55*(1), 40.

Little, D. (1995). Learning as dialogue: The dependence of learner autonomy on teacher autonomy. *System, 23*(2), 175-181.

Little, D. (2002). The European Language Portfolio: Structure, origins, implementation and challenges. *Language Teaching, 35*, 182-189.

Lund, T. (2005). The qualitative - quantitative distinction: Some comments. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research, 49*(2), 115-132.

Macdonald, K. (2001). Using Documents. In N. Gilbert (Ed.), *Researching social life* (2 ed., pp. 196-209). London: Sage.

Marcoul-Burlinson, I. (2006). e-Portfolio: Constructing Learning. In A. Jafari & C. Kaufman (Eds.), *Handbook of Research on ePortfolios* (pp. 168-178). Hershey, USA; London, UK: Idea Group.

Matsumoto, K. (1996). Helping L2 learners reflect on classroom learning. *ELT Journal, 50*(2), 143-149.

May, T. (2001). *Social research: Issues, methods and process* (3 ed.). Buckingham: Open University Press.

McDonald, A. (2004). A frame for learning 1. *English Teaching Professional, 35*, 10-12.

McDonald, A. (2005a). A frame for learning 2. *English Teaching Professional, 36*, 16-18.

McDonald, A. (2005b). A frame for learning 3. *English Teaching Professional, 37*, 12-14.

McMillan, J. H., & Schumacher, S. (2001). *Research in education: A conceptual introduction* (5 ed.). New York: Longman.

Ministry of Education. (2005a). Key competencies in tertiary education: Developing a New Zealand framework (Discussion document). Retrieved 13 March, 2007, from www.minedu.govt.nz/index.cfm?layout=document&documentid=10354

Ministry of Education. (2005b). Draft achievement objectives in the New Zealand curriculum - Working document.   Retrieved 13 March, 2007

Neuman, W. L. (1997). *Social research methods: Qualitative and quantitative approaches*. London: Allyn and Bacon.

Nunan, D., & Lamb, C. (1996). *The self-directed teacher: Managing the learning process*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

O'Brien, K. (2006). ePortfolios as learning construction zones: Provost's perspective. In A. Jafari & C. Kaufman (Eds.), *Handbook of research on ePortfolios* (pp. 74-82). Hershey, USA; London, UK: Idea Group.

O'Connell, T., & Dyment, J. (2006). Reflections on using journals in higher education: a focus group discussion with faculty. *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education, 31*(6), 671-691.

O'Connor, A., & Diggins, C. (2002). *On reflection*. Lower Hutt, N.Z.: Open Mind Publishing.

O'Malley, J., & Chamot, A. (1990). *Learning strategies in second language acquisition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (3 ed.). Thousand Oaks; London; New Dehli: Sage Publications.

Paulson, F. L., Paulson, P. R., & Meyer, C. A. (1991). What makes a portfolio a portfolio? *Educational Leadership, 48*(5), 60-63.

Plater, W. (2006). The promise of the student electronic portfolio: A Provost's perspective. In A. Jafari & C. Kaufman (Eds.), *Handbook of research on ePortfolios* (pp. 62-73). Hershey, USA; London, UK: Idea Group.

Pollit, D. (2001). A flexible workforce for the modern economy; The role of education and training. *Education + Training, 43*(7), 345-376.

Ponton, M. K., Derrick, M. G., & Carr, P. B. (2005). The relationship between resourcefulness and persistence in adult autonomous learning. *Adult Education Quarterly, 55*(2), 116-128.

Punch, K. (2005). *Introduction to social research*. London: Sage.

Riedinger, B. (2006). Mining for meaning: Teaching students how to reflect. In A. Jafari & C. Kaufman (Eds.), *Handbook of research on ePortfolios* (pp. 90-101). Hershey, USA; London, UK: Idea Group.

Robson, C. (2002). *Real world research* (2 ed.). Oxford, UK: Blackwell.

Scharle, A., & Szabó, A. (2000). *Learner autonomy: A guide to developing learner responsibility*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Schön, D. A. (1983). *The reflective practioner: How professionals think in action*. New York: Basic Books.

Sherman, G. (2006). Instructional roles of electronic portfolios. In A. Jafari & C. Kaufman (Eds.), *Handbook of research on ePortfolios* (pp. 1-14). Hershey, USA; London, UK: Idea Group.

Stefani, L., Mason, R., & Pegler, C. (2007). *The educational potential of e-Portfolios: Supporting personal development and reflective learning*. London;
New York: Routledge.

Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1991). *Basics of qualitative reseach: Grounded theory procedures and techniques*. Newbury Park, Calif.: Sage.

Taylor, I., Thomas, J., & Sage, H. (1999). Portfolios for learning and assessment: Laying the foundations for continuing professional development. *Social Work Education, 18*(2), 147-160.

Tilemma, H. (1998). Design and validity of a portfolio instrument for professional training. *Studies in Educational Evaluation, 24*(3), 263-278.

Tosh, D., Werdmuller, B., Chen, H., Light, T., & Haywood, J. (2006). The Learning Landscape: A conceptual framework for ePortfolios. In A. Jafari & C. Kaufman (Eds.), *Handbook of research on ePortfolios* (pp. 24-32). Hershey, USA; London, UK: Idea Group.

Towndrow, P. (2004). Reflections of an on-line tutor. *ELT Journal, 58*(2), 174-182.

Ushioda, E. (1996). *Learner autonomy: The role of motivation*. Dublin: Authentik.

Verdonschot, S. (2006). Methods to enhance reflective behaviour in innovation processes. *Journal of European Industrial Training, 30*(9), 670-686.

Walker, D. (1988). Writing and Reflection. In D. Boud, R. Keogh & D. Walker (Eds.), *Reflection: Turning Experience into Learning* (pp. 52-68). London: Kogan Page.

Wang, Q., & Woo, H. L. (2007). Comparing asynchronous online discussions and face-to-face discussions in a classroom setting. *British Journal of Educational Technology, 38*(2), 272-286.

Wenden, A. (1987). How to be a successful language learner: Insights and prescriptions from L2 learners. In A. Wenden & J. Rubin (Eds.), *Learner strategies in language learning* (pp. 103-114). London: Prentice Hall.

Wenden, A. (1991). *Learner strategies for learner autonomy: Planning and implementing learner training for language learners*. New York: Prentice Hall.

Wenden, A. (1995). Learner training in context: a knowledge-based approach. *System, 23*(2), 183-194.

INFORMATION SHEET

Date Information Sheet Produced: 27 October 2005

Project Title: To e-porttfolio or not to e-portfolio

I am studying towards a Master of Arts in Applied Language Studies at AUT. As part of my studies I must do a thesis. I have chosen to do my thesis on e-portfolios and whether they assist student learning. Taking part in this research is voluntary. If you decide not to take part you will not be disadvantaged in any way.

Information collected for this study will be used to evaluate whether or not electronic portfolios help you to become a better learner. E-portfolios will also be evaluated in terms of how user-friendly they are. We would like to have information from students who do use it and students who decide to reflect on their learning in a different way. Data from this study will be used in my thesis and may be published in articles or conference proceedings.

This research will benefit both students and teachers. I believe you will benefit because information that you provide will be fed back into improving the Japanese programmes. You will also benefit because teachers will better understand your needs as a student and how to help you more. I will share this information with other researchers by presenting at conferences and writing articles.

I will be collecting data in two parts. All students in Kanji 1, 2 and 3 will be invited to participate in Part One and some students will be asked to participate in Part 2.

Part One

If you volunteer to take part in this research:

- You will be asked to complete two questionnaires during the course of the semester, which I will use during the semester to help my research.
- I will monitor how often you use the e-portfolios/portfolios.
- I will read your comments in your e- portfolio/portfolio to find out how you approach your studies.
- I will monitor your assessment results to see how you are progressing over the semester. I will use this information to give you feedback about how you can learn better.

Part Two: Interviews

Some of you will be asked to take part in an interview when you start using the e-portfolio/portfolio and again at the end of the semester. If you agree to take part in the interviews, I will ask you what you think about e-portfolios/portfolios and how they affect the way you study. Each interview will take approximately 15-20 minutes.

I will be asking you to write the last four digits of your student ID on the questionnaires so that I can compare what you say in the questionnaires with your e-portfolios and your marks. Information you provide in the questionnaire and in your portfolio entries will be confidential. If I write about individual students as examples, your real name will not be used. The completed questionnaires will be stored in a locked cabinet. You can withdraw your questionnaire from the study at any time up until the end of data collection. If I ask you to take part in the interviews you have every right to say no and you will not be disadvantaged in any way. You do not need to give any reasons if you do not wish to take part.

If you have any questions regarding this project, I can be contacted by phone on 921-9999 ext. 6830 or by email: sonja.moffat@aut.ac.nz You can also contact either one of my supervisors:

Dr Pat Strauss	Debbie Corder
Phone: 921 9999 ext 6847	Phone: 921 9999 ext 6080
email: pat.strauss@aut.ac.nz	email: deborah.corder@aut.ac.nz

If you have any concerns regarding my conduct during this research , please contact the Executive Secretary, AUTEC, Madeline Banda, madeline.banda@aut.ac.nz, 921-9999 ext 8044

If you agree to participate in this project, please fill in the attached consent form and return it to me.

Thank you
Sonja Moffat

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 21 November 2005
AUTEC Reference number 05/178

AUT
AUCKLAND UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY
TE WĀNANGA ARONUI O TĀMAKI MAKAU RAU

CONSENT FORM

(Questionnaires/Portfolios/Assessment Results)

Title of Project: To e-portfolio or not to e-portfolio

Researcher: Sonja Moffat

Supervisors: Dr Pat Strauss and Debbie Corder

I have read and understood the information provided about this research project. I understand that taking part is voluntary and I have the right to say no.

I have been given an explanation of the role I will play as a participant in this project. I agree to complete the two questionnaires during the semester and allow parts of my portfolio to be quoted. I also agree to let you look at my assessment results.

I understand that my name will not be used and that all information I provide will be confidential.

I have had an opportunity to ask questions and to have them answered.

I understand that I may withdraw myself or any information that I may provide at any time prior to completion of data collection, without being disadvantaged in any way. If I withdraw I am not required to provide an explanation.

I agree to take part in this research project

I agree that information that I provide may be used in presenting findings at conferences and in articles.

I wish to receive a copy of the report from the research: tick one: Yes O No O

Participant signature: ....……………………..

Participant name: ………………………………………………………………

Participant Contact Details (if a copy of the report is required):

………………………………………………………………………………………..

………………………………………………………………………………………..

Date:

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 21 November 2005 AUTEC Reference number 05/178

Note: The Participant should retain a copy of this form.This consent form will be held for a period of six years

CONSENT FORM 2

(Interview)

Title of Project: To e-portfolio or not to e-portfolio

Researcher: Sonja Moffat

Supervisors: Dr Pat Strauss and Debbie Corder

I have read and understood the information provided about this research project. I understand that taking part is voluntary and I have the right to say no.

I have been given an explanation of the role I will play as a participant in this project. I agree to take part in an interview when I begin to use the e-portfolio/portfolio and at the end of the semester. Each interview will last approximately 15-20 minutes.

I understand that the interview will be recorded on tape, transcribed and returned to me for checking. I understand that I can change the transcription or say that I do not want you to use my material. I also understand that my name will not be used and that all information I provide will be confidential.

I have had an opportunity to ask questions and to have them answered.

I understand that I may withdraw myself or any information that I may provide at any time prior to completion of data collection, without being disadvantaged in any way. If I withdraw I am not required to provide an explanation.

If I withdraw, I understand that all relevant tapes and transcripts, or parts thereof, will be destroyed.

I agree to take part in this research project

I agree that information that I provide may be used in presenting findings at conferences and in articles.

I wish to receive a copy of the report from the research: tick one: Yes   O   No   O

Participant signature: ....……………………..

Participant name: …………………………………………………………….

Participant Contact Details (if a report is required):

…………………………………………………………………………………………..

…………………………………………………………………………………………..

Date:

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 21 November 2005 AUTEC Reference number 05/178

Note: The Participant should retain a copy of this form.

e-Portfolios
Questionnaire

PART A

Please answer the following questions about yourself:

1   What are the last four digits of your student ID number? …………..…..

2   What course are you enrolled in?

                                              BA   Diploma

3   What is your first language?   …………………………

4 How long have you lived in New Zealand?   …………………………

5   Please tick your age group

                      under 20   20-25   26-30   31-45   over 45

6   Are you Male or Female? Please tick.

                            Male   Female

7   Do you have a part-time job?

                              Yes   No

If yes please tick the situation that best applies to you

……   I work less than 10 hours per week

……   I work between 10 and 20 hours per week

……   I work more than 20 hours per week

PART B

1 Please tick the statement which best applies to you:

……   I try very hard in Japanese lessons
……   I try quite hard in Japanese lessons
……   I sometimes try in Japanese lessons
……   I don't really try at all in Japanese lessons

2 Please tick the statement which best applies to you:

……   I am making excellent progress in Japanese
……   I am doing well in Japanese
……   I am making satisfactory progress in Japanese
……   I am not making much progress in Japanese
……   I am making poor progress in Japanese

3 What do you enjoy *most* about learning Japanese?

……………………………………………………………………………………

……………………………………………………………………………………

4 What do you enjoy *least* about learning Japanese?

……………………………………………………………………………………

……………………………………………………………………………………

5 What do you think are your ***weaknesses*** regarding your Japanese ability?

……………………………………………………………………………………

……………………………………………………………………………………

……………………………………………………………………………………

……………………………………………………………………………………

6 What do you think are your ***strengths*** regarding your Japanese ability?

……………………………………………………………………………………

……………………………………………………………………………………

……………………………………………………………………………………

……………………………………………………………………………………

7　Do you usually set *daily* goals for yourself relating to your Japanese studies?

☐　　☐
Yes　　No

If yes please give an example/examples of the types of daily goals you set for yourself.

…………………………………………………………………..

…………………………………………………………………..

8　Do you usually set *weekly* goals for yourself relating to your Japanese studies?

☐　　☐
Yes　　No

If yes please give an example/examples of the types of weekly goals you set for yourself.

…………………………………………………………………..

…………………………………………………………………..

9　Do you usually set *monthly* goals for yourself relating to your Japanese studies?

☐　　☐
Yes　　No

If yes please give an example/examples of the types of monthly goals you set for yourself.

…………………………………………………………………..

…………………………………………………………………..

10　Do you usually set *semester or yearly* goals for yourself relating to your Japanese　studies?

☐　　☐

If yes please give an example/examples of the types of semester or yearly goals you set for yourself.

…………………………………………………………………..

…………………………………………………………………..

11 How often do you do the following? Circle the number which best matches
    (1 = never; 3 = sometimes; 5 = often). Please answer each question.

		Never		Sometimes		Often
(a)	Ask questions in class	1	2	3	4	5
(b)	Ask questions after class	1	2	3	4	5
(c)	Go over my tests	1	2	3	4	5
(d)	Do set homework	1	2	3	4	5
(e)	Attend tutorials	1	2	3	4	5
(f)	Discuss progress/ test marks with the teacher	1	2	3	4	5
(g)	Discuss progress/ test marks with friends	1	2	3	4	5
(h)	Discuss ways to study with the teacher	1	2	3	4	5
(i)	Discuss ways to study with friends	1	2	3	4	5

12 To what extent do you agree/disagree with the following statements?

	Strongly Disagree		Neutral (neither agree nor disagree)		Strongly Agree
(a) The teacher is responsible for evaluating how much I have learnt	1	2	3	4	5
(b) How well I succeed depends on me	1	2	3	4	5
(c) Knowledge is something the teacher should pass on to me rather than something I should discover for myself.	1	2	3	4	5

13   How often do you use the following strategies to learn Japanese *grammar*?

		Never		Sometimes		Often
(a)	Self-access language lab	1	2	3	4	5
(b)	Listening to tapes at home	1	2	3	4	5
(c)	Referring to other textbooks	1	2	3	4	5
(d)	Writing example sentences	1	2	3	4	5
(e)	Doing textbook exercises	1	2	3	4	5
(f)	Memorising textbook explanations	1	2	3	4	5
(g)	Mind maps	1	2	3	4	5

(h)   Other (please explain) ………………………………………………..

14   How often do you use the following strategies to learn **Kanji** (Japanese characters)?

		Never		Sometimes		Often
(a)	Flashcards	1	2	3	4	5
(b)	Writing over and over again	1	2	3	4	5
(c)	Doing textbook exercises	1	2	3	4	5
(d)	Using QT kanji computer software	1	2	3	4	5
(e)	Testing each other with a friend	1	2	3	4	5
(f)	Looking up words in a dictionary	1	2	3	4	5

(g)   Other (please explain) ………………………………………………….

PART C

1 Is there a computer at your home?

        ☐   ☐

      Yes   No

		No, not at all				Yes, very
2	Are you comfortable using a computer?	1	2	3	4	5
3	Do you think using a computer helps learning?	1	2	3	4	5
4	Do you think an e-portfolio helps you with your learning?	1	2	3	4	5

Thank you for taking the time to give your feedback.

Student …………………

e-portfolio student feedback
interview questions

Warm-up: How long have you been studying Jpn? Why are you studying Jpn?
What do you enjoy most about learning Jpn?
What do you enjoy least about learning Jpn?
What do you think are your weaknesses?
What do you think are your strengths?
Do you usually set daily goals? Weekly? Monthly? Semester? Yearly?
Do you have the use of a computer at home?
Are you comfortable using a computer?
Do you use the e-portfolio?
Why do you use it?
Would you have used it if it weren't part of the course?
Do you know why we are actually doing all this?

Do you like using the e-porfolio?
What parts of it do you use?
How often do you use it?
Is there anything you don't like about it?
Do you use the discussion board?
Do you think the e-portfolio helps you with your learning?
Is there anything we can do now to help you using it?
Do you find the feedback useful? Fast enough?
Is there anything you can suggest that we do to make it clearer?
Are there any general comments you would like to make?