

UNIVERSITY OF DERBY

THE IMPACT OF THE STORYLINE  
METHOD ON THE FOREIGN  
LANGUAGE CLASSROOM:  
AN ACTION RESEARCH CASE STUDY  
WITH MILITARY LINGUIST CADETS

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## **ABSTRACT**

The Storyline method requires learners to create a fictive world and take on the role of characters in a story which they develop themselves. The story, co-created with the teacher, is based around a topic in the curriculum. In the course of the story, key questions based on curriculum-mandated aims are asked by the teacher in order to engage the learners in tasks during which learning occurs.

Although Storyline has been used for many years in the classroom, its applicability to the foreign language classroom has only been researched recently and not extensively. By establishing a simulated 'real world' and providing students with ownership of their learning, students can use and improve their language skills, developing intercultural communicative competence in a meaningful context. This action research case study investigated the impact of the Storyline method on the foreign language classroom in the context of teaching military linguist cadets at a Russian university. A fictive base of a United Nations military observation mission, invented by the students themselves, served as a meaningful context for learning.

The aim of the study was to improve the effectiveness of teaching in terms of developing language skills and raising student motivation, in the context of teaching English as a foreign language to military linguist cadets. The study found that the student response was positive, with improvements in motivation and satisfaction with the teaching and learning process. Moreover, students also showed improvements in terms of English language skills. It was also discovered that Storyline could benefit from adaption to include form-focused instruction for teaching grammar points. Additionally, explicit explanations of certain Storyline activities, in particular art work, might be beneficial when working with military linguist cadets.

Ultimately Storyline was found to be an effective foreign language teaching method for military linguist cadets in Russia and has potential for use in other foreign language teaching for specific purposes contexts owing to its capacity for making language learning more relevant to the real life contexts in which professionals find themselves.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### 1.0 Introduction

In today's conditions of globalisation and internationalisation, the English language has emerged as the world's chosen language of international communication. This is a position generally accepted internationally (Crystal, 2003; Kachru, 2004; Graddol, 2006; Harmer, 2007). In Russia there has been a trend towards the acknowledgment of the English language's global dominance and, therefore, the need to learn English (Smokotin, 2011; Nayman, Gural and Smokotin, 2013) and the effect that this has had on Russia, her citizens and domestic foreign language teaching (Ter-Minasova, 2011; Mikhina and Voronchenko, 2012). This is the background to, and reason behind, my research.

### 1.1 The English language as a lingua franca for military linguists

Modern military operations have demonstrated the existence of problems of language and cross-cultural communication and, therefore, a great need in military linguists to aid in overcoming these problems (Footitt and Kelly, 2012a; Footitt and Kelly, 2012b; Kelly and Baker, 2013). Language capability is of particular importance in peace-support operations where the absence of effective communication may lead to mistakes, which might, in a worst-case scenario, result in casualties (Crossey, 2005). With increasing multinational cooperation in defence, and the carrying out of operations with military personnel drawn from a wide range of countries and language backgrounds, the English language has emerged as an important lingua franca for military linguists:

Since the end of the Cold War, foreign language training – especially the learning of English, the de facto operational language – has become increasingly important within armed forces (Crossey, 2005: 1).

In the context of international intervention in Bosnia-Herzegovina, for NATO forces 'the use of English as a lingua franca was important for the command structure and the working practices of the military' (Kelly and Baker, 2013: 164). This was identical even for the multi-lingual United Nations – 'for UN, English was the first language' (Kelly



and Baker, 2013: 166). A Coldstream Guards commander describes this situation, contrasting how French and Russian forces reacted to English as the emerged language of communication:

... the French in a very quiet, rather subtle way transformed themselves, their staff and their senior officers from a rather aggressively Francophone military, in the proud tradition of whatever it did, slowly but surely transformed itself into a very capable Anglophone organization... the Russians came away from Yugoslavia having learned nothing at all, including having no conception of why it would have been an advantage to have developed an Anglophone capability for their officer corps (Kelly and Baker (2013: 169).

We see, therefore, an emerging picture of the desirability of having military linguists with an English language capability for any non-English-speaking country's armed forces. When on joint and multinational missions this is essential to militaries' interoperability: 'the ability of military, paramilitary and security forces, from different linguistic and national backgrounds, to work together for a common aim' (Woods, 2006: 214). In all fairness it must be made clear that this is not a case of Russia alone being 'behind the times' in English language teaching for military purposes. Crossey (2005: 1) sums up:

[T]here is no clear-cut "East-West divide" in this field and many [western countries] report experiencing similar difficulties in identifying, training and retaining soldiers with relevant language skills for international assignments. As a result, more needs to be done if the linguistic basis for interoperability is to become an effective reality, as opposed to a hit-and-miss addition to preparations for peace-support operations and... postings.

The existence of one working language in a military formation of any size streamlines the command structure, avoids unnecessary bureaucracy and limits possibilities for misunderstanding. In the post-Cold War, multi-polar world, with greater collaboration between Russia and foreign partners, a strong English language capability is essential for Russia's armed forces. Needless to say, this requires a commitment to effective English language teaching on the part of those responsible for preparing military linguists for future service. I shall now examine English language teaching in the Russian education system.

## **1.2 English language teaching in the Russian education system**

The English language has been taught widely in Russia since the end of World War II when the world divided into two spheres of influence – American and Soviet. Learning a foreign language – in practice, English – is compulsory in all schools. It is also mandated for all students in higher education. At some higher education institutions in Russia, including my own (National Research Tomsk State University), the teaching of English has a long and rich history. As a rule, Russian universities follow the Oxbridge tradition of having a relatively large number of specialised faculties, for example, ‘Faculty of Philosophy’, ‘Faculty of History’, ‘Faculty of Economics’, and so on (see University of Cambridge, 2014; University of Oxford, 2014), which are then further subdivided into even more specialised departments. Tomsk State University (TSU), for example, is home to 23 distinct faculties (Tomsk State University, 2014). The existence of any given faculty is a sign of the level of attention given to a particular field. The first dedicated faculty of foreign languages to be established in Russia was Moscow State University’s Faculty of Foreign Language and Area Studies, which celebrated its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2008 (Ter-Minasova, 2008). TSU’s Department of Foreign Languages was established in 1931 as a small department teaching English, French and German. In 1995, thanks to the efforts of its then head of department, Prof. S.K. Gural, the Department of Foreign Languages became the Faculty of Foreign Languages; now other European languages have their own departments and English language teaching is provided at no fewer than five specialised departments at the university (Gural, 2006; Tomsk State University, 2014).

It is unfortunate, though, that many schools and higher education institutions have not paid due attention to innovations in teaching methods and internationally-recognised best practice. In spite of attempts going as far back as the late Soviet period to update teaching methods in line with modern international practice (Monk, 1986), the default system of teaching English in Russia in many institutions is very much old-fashioned: teacher-centred, with an over-reliance on textbooks and a lack of communication practice and using authentic English in situations which simulate real life (Ter-Minasova, 2005, 2006; Gural and Mitchell, 2008). Rivers (2007) emphasises the importance of avoiding the ‘artificial types of drills and practice exercises to which

many learners are still subjected' in favour of having 'practice in using the language for the normal purposes language serves in everyday life', citing Jespersen's (1904: 17-18) observation that language textbooks often give the impression that:

[Learners] must be strictly systematical beings, who one day speak merely in futures, another day in [past tenses] and who say the most disconnected things only for the sake of being able to use all the persons in the tense which for the time being happens to be the subject...

Despite great changes since Jespersen's time, modern day language textbooks are not closely aligned to the real world (Chan, 2013). Such a disjointed approach to language learning and teaching cannot but cause problems in terms of developing proficiency in a foreign language. It is not enough to include English as a subject in Russian school and university curriculums; there is now an acceptance that improvements in teaching English as a foreign language need to be made in order that learners achieve intercultural communicative competence and are motivated to learn (Ter-Minasova, 2005; Obdalova, 2008). This is no less so for the teaching of English to military linguists. This provides the context to my research.

### **1.3 Purpose of the study**

The purpose of my study is to challenge the status quo in foreign language teaching that has become entrenched in the Russian system of higher education, specifically in the context of teaching military linguist cadets, with the purpose of improving learners' language skills and motivation. In the course of my research, I will augment the current approach by trialling Storyline, a task-centred method. The aim of my research is to examine whether Storyline, a teaching method grounded in Task-based Language Teaching (Kocher, 2007), can have a positive impact on military linguist cadets' learning of English and, in so doing, improve my own professional knowledge on Storyline's impact on the foreign language classroom. In the course of the study a group of military linguist cadets at Tomsk State University will be taught English as a foreign language using the Storyline method and the process will be evaluated against the framework of effective language teaching constructed in the literature review in order to answer the following research questions:

1. How do military linguist cadets respond to Storyline as a foreign language teaching method?
2. How do military linguist cadets respond to the individual features of Storyline?
3. What effect (if any) does Storyline have on military linguist cadets' language development?

#### **1.4 Chapter organisation**

Chapter One serves as an introduction to this study, justifying the importance for military linguists to know English in the modern geopolitical climate. The current specifics of foreign language teaching in Russia are discussed, leading to an explanation of the purpose of the study. Chapter Two constitutes a review of the literature and research on various foreign language teaching methods employed with military linguists, on the Storyline method itself, and on Storyline and foreign language teaching. Chapter Three covers the research aim and questions, institutional context, and discusses the reasons behind my choice of research paradigm and methodology. It describes the research design, examines ethical considerations, and covers the procedures for data collection and data analysis. Chapter Four states the findings of the study. Chapter Five follows with an analysis and discussion of the findings. Chapter Six contains my conclusions and an evaluation of the study, along with a discussion of how the study might be disseminated to a wider audience.

## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.0 Introduction**

I will begin this chapter by reviewing the literature on commonly used methods in ELT, with particular reference to the language education of military linguists. Then I shall discuss the Storyline method, its theoretical underpinnings and relationship to commonly used ELT methodologies. Finally I will examine the application of the Storyline method to foreign language learning and teaching, including its potential for the foreign language teaching of military linguist cadets.

### **2.1 Methods of teaching foreign languages in military contexts**

Teachers need the stimulation of new thinking and new techniques to keep a fresh and lively approach to their teaching, but without losing their grip on enduring truths of learning and teaching that have proved to be basic to effective language experiences (Rivers, 2007: 1).

It is the teacher, within the confines of the curriculum, who must make the decisions on what to teach and how to teach it. It is imperative that the teacher keeps up-to-date on which language teaching methods are found to be effective in developing language skills and motivation.

Ellis (2008) notes the pivotal role of the teacher in deciding how the foreign language will be taught and making choices as to methodology. It is, therefore, important in the ever-changing foreign language teaching environment that teachers ensure that the approach which they employ is effective in terms of students' progress in the foreign language and for their motivation. In examining the teaching methods used with military linguists, I shall take account of the literature on their effectiveness as foreign language teaching methods.

A variety of methods, such as grammar-translation, audiolingual, communicative and task-based language teaching, have been used in teaching foreign languages to military

linguist cadets, varying according to historical context and country. The methods shall be examined in chronological order, based on when they were adopted for use in military contexts. In reviewing them, for ease of reference, I shall use the following nine points based on the key questions posed by Larsen-Freeman and Anderson (2011: 8-9) in order to achieve a comparison of the methods' principles:

1. Goals
2. The role of the teacher
3. The role of the students
4. The teaching/learning process
5. Student-teacher interaction
6. Student motivation
7. How language and culture are viewed
8. Emphasised areas of language and language skills
9. Evaluation of students.

### *2.1.1 The grammar-translation method*

The grammar-translation method was used extensively by the British and several European militaries from World War II until the mid-1990s (Footitt and Kelly, 2012a, Kelly and Baker, 2013). The method involves students being given explanations of individual points of grammar and sentences exemplifying these points, which then have to be translated from the target language into the student's own language and vice versa (Harmer, 2007). The grammar-translation method's goal is that students should be able to read literature written in the target language, so students need to learn about the grammar rules and vocabulary of the target language (Larsen-Freeman and Anderson, 2011). Language learning is viewed as memorising rules and facts (Richards and Rodgers, 2014: 6). The teacher is the authority in the classroom, not only organizing the teaching and learning process, but controlling all aspects of its fulfilment. The teacher is not required to be creative, interactive or motivational in the classroom and the students' role is to do as the teacher says so they can learn what the teacher knows (Larsen-Freeman and Anderson, 2011). Students have to memorise lists of grammar rules and vocabulary, and attempt to produce perfect translations (Richards and Rodgers, 2014:

6). There is, therefore, little opportunity for student creativity or expression of individuality or original thought.

In acquisition of the target language, the first language is used as the reference system and students are taught to translate from one language to another. They also learn grammatical paradigms such as verb conjugations. They memorise native-language equivalents for target-language vocabulary words (Larsen-Freeman and Anderson, 2011). Grammar is taught deductively, by presentation and study of grammar rules followed by translation exercises (Richards and Rodgers, 2014: 7). Most of the interaction in the classroom is from the teacher to the students, with little student initiation and little student-student interaction (Larsen-Freeman and Anderson, 2011). As for student motivation, the grammar-translation method is not concerned with students' feelings (ibid.) and often creates frustration for students (Richards and Rodgers, 2014: 7). Literary language, the language of classical literature (for example, Mark Twain's *Life on the Mississippi*), is considered superior to spoken language and culture is viewed as consisting of literature and the fine arts (Larsen-Freeman and Anderson, 2011). Thus, modern and everyday uses of language, the importance of which to foreign language teaching is noted by Rivers (2007), are largely ignored. Priority is attached to accuracy (Howatt, 1984). Little or no systematic attention is paid to speaking or listening (Richards and Rodgers, 2014: 6). The result of this is an over-emphasis on the written word rather than spoken language skills. Evaluation of students involves written tests in which students are asked to translate from their native language to the target language or vice versa are often used, as are questions about the target culture or questions that ask students to apply grammar rules (Larsen-Freeman and Anderson, 2011).

In discussing the method Harmer (2007: 63) identifies three main features, which might be considered disadvantages:

In the first place, language was treated at the level of the sentence only, with little study, certainly at the early stages, of longer texts. Secondly, there was little if any consideration of the spoken language. And thirdly, accuracy was considered to be a necessity.

The focus on the sentence was an attempt to make grammar teaching easier by providing clear examples (Howatt, 1984). Sentences are, however, only a fragment of

speech and their study does not automatically lead to communicative competence. The grammar-translation method presupposed the superiority of literary language and the texts used in foreign language teaching were frequently written by ‘people trained in literature rather than language teaching or applied linguistics’ (Richards and Rodgers, 2014: 7). Communicative competence depends on ability in the spoken language as well as the written word. The grammar-translation sentences did have an additional purpose besides providing opportunities for practice in that ‘[t]hey exemplified the grammar in a more concentrated and, it was hoped, clearer way than texts could do’ (Howatt with Widdowson, 2004: 152). The main issue with the grammar-translation method, however, remains that its focus on individual written sentences and accuracy results in opportunities for interaction, oral communication and development of fluency being lost. Communicative competence depends on both accuracy and fluency, which are equally important goals to be pursued in language teaching (Brown, 2006). While it is true to say that accuracy, particularly for military linguists, is important in learning foreign languages, accuracy at the expense of fluency is disadvantageous to a foreign language learner’s progress. The grammar-translation method’s focus on the written word, too, is a serious disadvantage in its use with regard to military linguists who may at any time be called upon to participate in a multinational operation with all its attendant requirements of being able to communicate orally with foreign military personnel and local civilians.

Despite its various drawbacks, the grammar-translation method continued to pervade language training in the British Army. This could be seen as recently as 1993, for the teaching of Serbo-Croat during the war in the former Yugoslavia:

The traditional grammar-translation method contributed a legacy of grammatical tables, showing the inflections of root stems in different grammatical positions. One of the most complex examples was a hand-written matrix in 14 rows and 30 columns to represent the inflection of six different types of noun, adjective and pronoun in three different genders and seven different cases, in singular and plural. This grammar-translation method also involved vocabulary learning, with long lists of words to be memorised... (Footitt and Kelly, 2012a: 100).

Such an approach was not unique to the British Army; at least in the early stages of the Yugoslav conflict the teaching methods in most NATO countries were initially based on the grammar-translation method (Kelly and Baker, 2013). When called upon to



interpret, though, ‘military linguists [taught by means of the grammar-translation approach] were often ill-equipped to respond’ (Kelly and Baker, 2013: 57). The result of using the grammar-translation method for the purposes of training military linguists is perhaps best described by a former head of the Russian Language Wing of the UK’s Defence School of Languages, speaking about how military language teaching in the 1970s-1980s had not equipped learners with sufficient speaking skills:

I have to say that the [1970s] language course, though good in its way, was much stronger at instilling the rules of grammar than in encouraging spoken communication... And it was very much the grammar translation method of language teaching. And when I left the language training and started work using the language, it was still being used in a very passive way. There was very little spoken language... And I think one of the things that struck me then, and still I find now, is that the language of the classroom is in many ways quite different to the language “as she is spoke” (laughs), I think. And though I rarely got my case endings wrong, I did very often find it difficult to have an ordinary conversation with Russians, because it was not what we were used to (cited in Footitt and Kelly, 2012a: 48-49).

The grammar-translation method might be said, therefore, to produce students well versed in grammar, but unready for interaction. Richards and Rodgers (2014: 7) neatly sum up the status of the grammar-translation method:

[T]hough it may be true to say that the Grammar-Translation Method is still widely practiced, it has no advocates. It is a method for which there is no theory. There is no literature that offers a rationale or justification for it or that attempts to relate it to issues in linguistics, psychology, or educational theory.

Indeed it was in response to the problems encountered with the grammar-translation method, namely its inability to train communicatively competent linguists ready for interaction, that the British Army moved towards a communicative, scenario-based approach to teaching (Footitt and Kelly, 2012a).

### *2.1.2 The audiolingual method*

The audiolingual method is currently used by the US military as the basis for foreign language teaching (McBeath, 2006; Hare and Fletcher, 2012). The method was based on the US Army’s Army Specialised Training Program (ASTP), colloquially known as the ‘Army Method’ or ‘G.I. Method’, an ambitiously large-scale scheme running from

1943-44 to teach the combatant countries' languages to selected US Army personnel (Howatt with Widdowson, 2004). The method itself was relatively simple:

Once the linguistic content had been identified by the teaching team, the senior instructor was supposed to create the teaching materials for the students and then introduce the new items and provide any necessary explanations. He then left the native-speaker teachers, known as 'drillmasters', to practise the new patterns by a simple method of imitation and repetition. This became known as the 'mim-mem' method (mimicry and memorisation), and is the obvious forerunner of 'pattern practice' and the Audiolingual Method (Howatt with Widdowson, 2004: 304).

The Army Method emphasised intensity of contact with the target language and did not espouse a well-developed methodological basis, but was innovative in terms of its procedures and intensity rather than any underlying theory (Richards and Rodgers, 2014). The Army Method's lasting impact on language teaching and learning was its impetus to shift from a text-based approach to the audiolingual method (Cherrington, 2013) owing to the work of Charles Fries. Charles Fries, director of the first English Language Institute in the USA, based at the University of Michigan, added what he called 'contrastive analysis' which involved a comparison of the structure of the mother tongue with that of the foreign language in order to identify any differences that might cause learning problems (Howatt with Widdowson, 2004: 305). Fries had been a proponent of structural linguistics (Fries, 1952). Richards and Rodgers (2014: 59) list structural linguistics' view of language characteristics as follows:

1. Elements in a language were thought of as being linearly produced in a rule-governed (structured) way.
2. Language samples could be exhaustively described at any structural level of description (phonetic, phonemic, morphological, etc.)
3. Linguistic levels were thought of as systems within systems – that is, as being pyramidally structured; phonemic systems led to morphemic systems, and these in turn led to the higher-level systems of phrases, clauses, and sentences.

Structural linguistics propagated that language is first and foremost what is spoken and only secondarily what is written (Brooks, 1964).

In 1950s USA behaviourism began to make its mark, claiming that occurrence of behaviour depends on three learning elements: a 'stimulus' which elicits behaviour; a 'response' to the stimulus; and 'reinforcement', either positive or negative, which

encourages the future repetition or suppression of the response (Skinner, 1957). Ideas from behaviourist psychology began to influence language teaching and ‘[t]his combination of structural linguistic theory, contrastive analysis, aural-oral procedures, and behaviourist psychology led to the Audiolingual Method’ (Richards and Rodgers, 2014: 63). The desired goal of the audiolingual method is linguistic competence (Finocchiaro and Brumfit, 1983). In order to achieve this, students need to overlearn the target language, to use it automatically without stopping to think. Students do this by forming new habits in the target language and overcoming the old habits of their native language (Larsen-Freeman and Anderson, 2011). The role of the teacher is like that of an orchestra leader, directing and controlling the language behaviour of the students, and provides the students with a good model for imitation (ibid.). The teacher monitors and corrects the learners’ performance (Richards and Rodgers, 2014). The teacher specifies the language to be used (Finocchiaro and Brumfit, 1983) by providing, for example, specific vocabulary and model dialogues. Students are viewed as organisms that can be directed to produce correct responses (Richards and Rodgers, 2014). Students are imitators of the teacher’s model or the tapes supplied of model speakers. They follow the teacher’s directions and respond as accurately and as rapidly as possible (Larsen-Freeman and Anderson, 2011).

Dialogues and drills form the basis of the learning process (Richards and Rodgers, 2014). New vocabulary and structural patterns are presented through dialogues, which are learned through imitation and repetition (Larsen-Freeman and Anderson, 2011). Grammar is induced; grammatical explanation is avoided (Finocchiaro and Brumfit, 1983). Student-to-student interaction in chain drills or dialogues is teacher-directed. Most of the interaction is between teacher and students and is initiated by the teacher (Larsen-Freeman and Anderson, 2011). Learners play a reactive role and are not encouraged to initiate interaction because it may lead to mistakes (Richards and Rodgers, 2014). The audiolingual method is not concerned with student motivation (Larsen-Freeman and Anderson, 2011). It is presumed that intrinsic motivation will spring from an interest in the language’s structure (Finocchiaro and Brumfit, 1983). Every language is seen as having its own unique system. Everyday speech is emphasised. Culture consists of the everyday behaviour and lifestyle of the target language speakers (Larsen-Freeman and Anderson, 2011). Accuracy, rather than

fluency, is the primary goal (Brooks, 1964; Finocchiaro and Brumfit, 1983). The focus is on oral skills, with links to other skills as learning develops (Richards and Rodgers, 2014). The oral/aural skills receive most of the attention, with students writing what they have first been introduced to orally. Evaluation of students is discrete-point in nature, focusing on only one point of the language at a time. Students might be asked to distinguish between words in a minimal pair, for example, or to supply an appropriate verb form in a sentence (Larsen-Freeman and Anderson, 2011).

The audiolingual method, perhaps due to its roots in US military history, remains ingrained in US armed forces' language training, provided by the Defence Language Institute (DLI) where language learning is based on audiolingualism (Hare and Fletcher, 2012). Hare and Fletcher point out problems involved with using the audiolingual method where, at the DLI:

The instructor introduces new language through short dialogues which are then drilled and practised. The approach is very much instructor-centred with the teacher as a language model working in lockstep with the trainees, but it allows few opportunities for the students to have real communicative oral practice with each other (Hare and Fletcher, 2012: 205).

The audiolingual method has certain similarities to grammar-translation teaching: 'Much audiolingual teaching stayed at the sentence level, and there was little placing of language in any kind of real-life context. A premium was still placed on accuracy...' (Harmer, 2007: 64). It is also very much a teacher-centred method, with the teacher controlling all classroom procedures (Brooks, 1964). Although the audiolingual method has a firm focus on the spoken word, Byram (2013: 66) found that:

[L]earners became bored with drills and pattern practice; the move from repetition and closely guided re-use of learned structures to spontaneous re-use of those same structures was not clearly specified; contrastive analysis did not anticipate and eradicate all the errors learners made.

Indeed, students were often unable to transfer skills acquired in the classroom to real communication (Richards and Rodgers, 2014). Again, as with the grammar-translation method, it is the lack of interaction in the audiolingual classroom that is particularly worrying as regards military linguist training. The audiolingual method's focus on accuracy in individual spoken sentences results in few opportunities for oral communication and subsequent development of fluency. There are, therefore, a great many similarities between the audiolingual and grammar-translation methods, albeit

with their different respective focuses on spoken and written language. They also have common drawbacks: focus on the sentence, lack of real-life context, lack of interaction, and the focus on accuracy at the expense of fluency. An alternative approach to foreign language teaching is the ‘communicative’ approach, which emphasises the importance of learners gaining competence in communicating in the foreign language (Finocchiaro and Brumfit, 1983).

### *2.1.3 The communicative approach: Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and Task-based Language Teaching (TBLT)*

TBLT, grounded in the communicative approach, is the current preferred approach to foreign language teaching in the British military (Footitt and Kelly, 2012a; Kelly and Baker, 2013). The communicative approach emerged in the 1970s when teachers ‘observed that students could produce sentences accurately in a lesson, but could not use them appropriately when genuinely communicating outside of the classroom’ (Larsen-Freeman and Anderson, 2011: 115). Howatt with Widdowson (2004: 210) point out, however, that the underlying theory – that learning to speak a foreign language is an intuitive process and requires interaction – has remained constant for centuries, quoting Montaigne (1580) who learned Latin in such a way. The communicative approach to foreign language teaching or Communicative Language Teaching refers to both processes and goals (Savignon, 2002), but is interpreted differently by different people (Harmer, 2007). Nunan (2004: 7) considers it a family of different approaches with ‘squabbles and disagreements, if not outright wars, from time to time. However, no one is willing to assert that they do not belong to the family.’ There is a distinction between ‘strong’ and ‘weak’ versions of CLT (Littlewood, 1981; Howatt, 1984). Howatt (1984: 279) discusses the difference as follows:

The weak version which has become more or less standard practice in the last ten years stresses the importance of providing learners with the opportunities to use their English for communicative purposes and, characteristically, attempts to integrate such activities into a wider program of language teaching... The ‘strong’ version of communicative teaching, on the other hand, advances the claim that language is acquired through communication, so that it is not merely a question of activating an existing but inert knowledge of the language, but of stimulating the development of the language system itself. If the former could be

described as ‘learning to use’ English, the latter entails ‘using English to learn it.’

From the 1970s onwards it became increasingly accepted in the literature (Hymes, 1972; Littlewood, 1974, 1981; Wilkins, 1976; Widdowson, 1978; Canale and Swain, 1980) that the goal of language teaching was to develop ‘communicative competence’, otherwise students might know the linguistic rules, yet be unable to use the language (Widdowson, 1978). Wilkins (1976) wrote of the importance of looking at the notions language expresses and the communicative functions of language. What was needed, therefore, was a shift from a linguistic-centred approach to a communicative approach (Widdowson, 1990). Communicative language teaching is characterised by the systematic attention it pays to functional as well as structural aspects of language (Littlewood, 1981). CLT emphasises learning to communicate and communicative competence is the desired goal (Finocchiaro and Brumfit, 1983). To achieve this students need knowledge of the linguistic forms, meanings, and functions, from which they must be able to choose the most appropriate form, given the social context and roles of the interlocutors, and also manage the process of negotiating meaning with their interlocutors (Larsen-Freeman and Anderson, 2011). The teacher’s primary role is to facilitate communication in the classroom, establishing situations likely to promote communication (Breen and Candlin, 1980; Larsen-Freeman and Anderson, 2011). During the activities he acts as an adviser, answering students’ questions and monitoring their performance, perhaps making note of their errors to be worked on later during more accuracy-based activities (ibid.). Other roles are needs analyst, counsellor and group process manager (Richards and Rodgers, 2014: 99-100). Students are expected to be autonomous (Whong, 2013: 122) and are often expected to interact primarily with each other (Richards and Rodgers, 2014: 100). They are communicators, actively engaged in negotiating meaning (Breen and Candlin, 1980; Larsen-Freeman and Anderson, 2011).

In the teaching/learning process, almost everything is done with a communicative intent, with students using the language through communicative activities such as games, role plays, and problem-solving tasks. True communication is purposeful (Larsen-Freeman and Anderson, 2011). Meaning is paramount and contextualisation is a basic premise (Finocchiaro and Brumfit, 1983). The use of authentic language

materials is advocated (Larsen-Freeman and Anderson, 2011) since they reflect real-life communication, which is the goal of this approach. Consequently, it is important to use authentic materials in a way that is real for learners (Widdowson, 1998). The teacher may present some part of the lesson, such as when working with linguistic accuracy. At other times, he is the facilitator of activities and sometimes he is a co-communicator, but more often he establishes situations that prompt communication between and among the students (Larsen-Freeman and Anderson, 2011). Students are expected to interact with other people through pair or group work (Whong, 2013: 122). Students are assumed to be more motivated since they will feel that they are learning to do something useful with the language. Also, teachers give students an opportunity to share their ideas and opinions on a regular basis, thereby expressing their individuality (Larsen-Freeman and Anderson, 2011). Intrinsic motivation will spring from an interest in what is being communicated by the language (Finocchiaro and Brumfit, 1983). Language is viewed as being for communication and learners must use their knowledge and take into account the social situation in order to convey their intended meaning appropriately (Larsen-Freeman and Anderson, 2011). Students work on all four language skills with an integrated skills approach (Whong, 2013: 117), for sequencing is determined by any consideration of content, function or meaning which maintains interest (Finocchiaro and Brumfit, 1983). Language functions might be emphasised over forms, with a variety of forms introduced for each function (Larsen-Freeman and Anderson, 2011). Fluency and acceptable language are emphasised, with accuracy judged in the context rather than the abstract (Finocchiaro and Brumfit, 1983). Importance is placed on meaning (Whong, 2013: 119). The teacher evaluates not only the students' accuracy, but also their fluency, either informally as an adviser or co-communicator or using an integrative test which has a real communicative function (Larsen-Freeman and Anderson, 2011).

Richards and Rodgers (2014: 86) conclude that:

The wide acceptance of the communicative approach... and the relatively varied way in which it was interpreted and applied can be attributed to the fact that practitioners from different educational traditions could identify with it, and consequently interpret it, in different ways.

One criticism, however, is that 'CLT has sometimes been seen as having eroded the explicit teaching of grammar with a consequent loss among students of accuracy in the

pursuit of fluency' (Harmer, 2007: 71). To avoid this, it must not be forgotten that fluency and accuracy are both important goals to pursue in CLT (Brown, 2006). There is also a criticism of CLT that 'many so-called communicative activities [for example, writing a letter] are no more or less real than traditional exercises' (Harmer, 2007: 71). Whether the activities are real or not, though, through imagination the learners can make language real when the activities are purposeful and engaging (Howatt with Widdowson, 2004). Additionally, the students will be motivated to study the foreign language because they will feel that they are learning to do something useful (Larsen-Freeman and Anderson, 2011). This is, perhaps, a key advantage of activities in CLT as opposed to those employed in the grammar-translation or audiolingual methods.

Task-based Language Teaching (TBLT, also called task-based language learning or task-based instruction) emerged from the communicative approach to language learning and communication is central to it, but the difference is one of focus (Larsen-Freeman and Anderson, 2011). Returning to Howatt's (1984) distinction between 'weak' and 'strong' versions of CLT, Ellis (2003: 30) classifies TBLT as belonging to the strong version in that the entire language curriculum is based on tasks. TBLT has its roots in Prabhu's Communicational Teaching Project in India, begun in 1979. Prabhu (1987) identified three types of task: information-gap activities (the transfer of certain information), opinion-gap activities (the articulation of an opinion, feeling or preference in a certain situation), and reasoning-gap activities (discerning some new information from information given). 'What is distinctive about [TBLT] is that tasks are seen as central and not as supportive: they are not just techniques, but constitutive principles of a new approach' (Howatt with Widdowson, 2004: 366). This is reiterated by Long and Crookes (1993: 31): 'The departure from CLT... lay not in the tasks themselves, but in the accompanying pedagogic focus on task completion instead of on the language used in the process.' In TBLT, rather than 'learning to use English', students 'use English to learn it' (Howatt, 1984: 279).

Calling this approach 'task-based' is not without its problems in terms of how to define a 'task' as opposed to other pedagogic activities such as exercises (Howatt with Widdowson, 2004). A task may be defined as:



[a] holistic activity which engages language use in order to achieve some non-linguistic outcome while meeting a linguistic challenge, with the overall aim of promoting language learning, through process or product or both (Samuda and Bygate, 2008: 69).

Ellis (2003: 3) distinguishes between the terms ‘task’ and ‘exercise’, describing tasks as being ‘activities that call for primarily meaning-focused language use’ while exercises ‘call for primarily form-focused language use’, noting however that ‘we need to recognise that the overall purpose of tasks is the same as exercises – learning a language – the difference lying in the means by which this purpose is to be achieved.’ It may be argued that both tasks and exercises require learners to pay attention to both meaning and form (Widdowson, 1998). Notwithstanding, Ellis (2003: 3) maintains that a task is concerned with ‘pragmatic meaning’ – the use of language in context by the learners as ‘language users’ in real-world communicative processes, where learning is incidental – as opposed to exercises, which are concerned with ‘semantic meaning’, the systemic meanings conveyed by forms in which participants operate as ‘learners’, where learning is intentional. The importance of meaning in tasks is a position widely supported in the literature on language pedagogy (Skehan, 1996; Lee, 2000; Bygate, Skehan and Swain, 2001; Nunan, 2004). Ellis (2003: 9-10) identifies the following criterial features of a task, briefly summarised below:

1. A task is a workplan. A task is a plan for learner activity, though the resulting activity does not always match that intended by the plan.
2. A task involves a primary focus on meaning. It seeks to engage learners in pragmatic use of the language, rather than explicitly display language forms, aiming to develop language proficiency through communicating. Thus, a task incorporates an information, opinion or reasoning gap (as defined by Prabhu, 1987), which motivates the learners to use language in order to close the gap.
3. A task involves real-world processes of language use. The workplan might involve learners in a language activity reflecting real world communication, such as asking and answering questions or dealing with misunderstandings.
4. A task can involve any of the four language skills. The workplan might require learners to listen to or read a text, produce an oral or written text, or involve a combination of receptive and productive skills.
5. A task engages cognitive processes. In completing the task learners employ cognitive processes such as selecting, classifying, ordering, reasoning and

evaluating information, but allow the choice of forms of language to remain with the learner.

6. A task has a clearly defined communicative outcome. The non-linguistic outcome of the task – the goal of the activity – is stipulated by the workplan and is the means of determining whether a task has been completed.

A number of designs for TBLT-influenced lessons have been proposed (Prabhu, 1987; Estaire and Zanón, 1994; Skehan, 1996; Willis, 1996; Lee, 2000), but the three principal stages common to all are set out in the table below (Ellis, 2003: 244).

*Table 1: Stages in Task-based Language Teaching*

<b>Phase</b>	<b>Examples of options</b>
<b>A</b> Pre-task	Framing the activity, e.g. establishing the outcome of the task Planning time Doing a similar task
<b>B</b> During task	Time pressure Number of participants
<b>C</b> Post-task	Learner report Consciousness raising Repeat task

In the pre-task stage, the teacher might highlight useful words or phrases and also help the students to understand the task’s objectives (Willis, 1996). It is during the task itself that students are able to express themselves and use whatever language they are able to in order to successfully accomplish the task. The post-task phase enables the accomplishment of three pedagogic aims: to provide an opportunity for a repeat performance, thus solidifying what was learnt; to encourage reflection on the task; and to encourage attention to forms, particularly problematic ones (Ellis, 2003: 258). After the task, learners might be asked to present a report on how they carried out the task and what they learned (ibid.). This is the ‘natural conclusion of the task cycle’ (Willis, 1996: 58).

Constituting an approach within the communicative approach to language learning and teaching, TBLT has the same goals as CLT: language learning is learning to communicate and communicative competence is the desired goal (Finocchiaro and Brumfit, 1983). To achieve this, students need knowledge of the linguistic forms, meanings, and functions, from which they must be able to choose the most appropriate form, given the social context and roles of the interlocutors, and also manage the process of negotiating meaning with their interlocutors (Larsen-Freeman and Anderson, 2011). TBLT differs from CLT in that the goals are achieved through completion of tasks (Allen, 2000). The role of the teacher is to plan the task and set the context (Larsen-Freeman and Anderson, 2011). The teacher might model collaboration, observe and monitor the student's progress and intervene if students experience difficulty (Ellis, 2003: 271). These roles are essentially the same as those of needs analyst, counsellor and group process manager identified by Richards and Rodgers (2014: 99-100) in CLT. Students interact with each other, working to understand each other and express meaning, in order to complete the task (Larsen-Freeman and Anderson, 2011). The task is given by the teacher, but the students are initiators of the interaction. As in CLT, students are expected to be autonomous (Whong, 2013: 122).

Tasks are the core unit of planning and instruction (Richards and Rodgers, 2014). Learning occurs through social interaction, with learners guided to pass through their 'zone of proximal development' (Littlewood, 1993). As for CLT, meaning is paramount and contextualisation is a basic premise (Finocchiaro and Brumfit, 1983). Likewise, the use of authentic language materials is advocated (Larsen-Freeman and Anderson, 2011). Language production is anchored in real life plausibility (Skehan, 1998). While working on tasks students have abundant opportunity to interact with each other, facilitating language acquisition since learners have to understand each other and express their own meaning (Larsen-Freeman and Anderson, 2011). As for CLT, students are assumed to be more motivated since they will feel that they are learning to do something useful with the language. Also, teachers give students an opportunity to share their ideas and opinions on a regular basis, thereby expressing their individuality (ibid.). Intrinsic motivation will spring from an interest in what is being communicated by the language (Finocchiaro and Brumfit, 1983). Language is treated as a tool for communicating rather than an object for study (Ellis, 2003). As with CLT, culture is the everyday lifestyle of

people who use the language, certain aspects of which are especially important to communication. Learners must use their knowledge and take into account the social situation in order to convey their intended meaning appropriately (Larsen-Freeman and Anderson, 2011). As in CLT, there is an integrated skills approach (Whong, 2013: 117). Students work on all four skills with an emphasis on pragmatic meaning rather than linguistic forms (Ellis, 2003). The teacher evaluates the students' success in completing the task with a focus on meaning (Larsen-Freeman and Anderson, 2011).

As mentioned previously, the teaching of foreign languages at the British military's Defence School of Languages (DSL) in the mid-1990s saw a shift from a grammar-translation approach to a communicative approach, making specific use of TBLT, directly as a result of the problems encountered in using the former, as Footitt and Kelly (2012a: 49) relate:

In-theatre experience in Bosnia-Herzegovina, compounded by longer-term experience of interpreting Russian for the Joint Arms Control Implementation Group (JACIG) and military liaison missions, encouraged [DSL] to base their course around scenario-based methods better suited to, and grounded in, the tasks that military linguists... could be expected to perform.

Footitt and Kelly (2012a: 101) describe the change in approach:

This approach focused on the needs of the learner rather than the teacher, and encouraged a high level of initiative from the learners. It attached great importance to effective communication, encouraged maximum use of the target language and emphasised task-based activities, preferably related to a relevant socio-cultural context and using authentic materials as far as possible. In many ways, this matched the situation in which military personnel had a strong sense of the purpose for which the language was required and were accustomed to using their initiative to solve problems.

Thus the communicative approach to foreign language teaching applied in the British Army made use of what has been described as a 'scenario-based approach' (Footitt and Kelly, 2012a; Kelly and Baker, 2013). This was essentially TBLT by another name where the tasks involved acting out lifelike scenarios and solving problems such as the learners might encounter in their professional activity. Learning focused on tasks that might need to be carried out on the ground and included role-play and simulated scenarios. This 'largely replaced the grammar-translation approach, and proved more effective and more motivating to learners' (Footitt and Kelly, 2012a: 231). The

advantages of using TBLT for foreign language teaching were not unnoticed in the British Army:

The scenario-based approach... was likely to motivate students by confronting them with situations they could expect to encounter on active service, and they could therefore understand the practical purpose of their language learning (...) The importance of this was recognised by military educators, who made a point of ensuring that the experience of people who had returned from active service could be incorporated in the course (Kelly and Baker, 2013: 48-49).

The experience of the British Army shows that TBLT has certain distinct advantages over the grammar-translation and audiolingual methods. First among these is the focus on ability to communicate, that is, function in the target language and negotiate meaning in interaction with speakers of the target language, be they military personnel or local civilians. Of no less importance is the question of motivation. Motivation is a fundamental factor in language learning and is recognised as promoting effective acquisition (Dörnyei, 1998, 2001). This is also the case in the foreign language teaching of military personnel (Kelly and Baker, 2013). Learner motivation shall be discussed in greater depth in subsection 2.3.3.

On the one hand, TBLT is represented as being theoretically and empirically sanctioned by psycholinguistic and SLA research (see, for example, Skehan, 1998; Ellis, 2003; Whong, 2013; Long, 2014), who note that ‘in view of the fact that [TBLT] seems to have the credentials of both practical effectiveness and theoretical validity, it is not surprising that it has become the new ELT orthodoxy’ (Howatt with Widdowson, 2004: 366). On the other hand, Lightbown (2000) reminds us that caution is needed in applying research findings to the classroom and rejecting the accumulated professional wisdom of teachers. Seedhouse (1997) notes that learner interaction does not necessarily match that intended by the teacher and further argues that limited interactions occur because ‘learners appear to be so concentrated on completing the task that linguistic forms are treated as a vehicle of minor importance’ (Seedhouse, 1999: 154). In his critique of TBLT, Swan argues that the polarisation of meaning-based and form-based instruction is ‘unconstructive and reflects a recurrent pattern of damaging ideological swings in language teaching theory and practice’ (Swan, 2005: 376). Ellis (2003: 254) agrees that this is an area that ought to be carefully monitored by teachers, but notes that ‘the nature of the interaction depends crucially on the design characteristics of tasks and

procedures for implementing them.’ This point, insofar as it relates to my study, will be addressed in subsection 2.3.1. It is interesting here to note Howatt with Widdowson’s (2004: 258) comments on Prabhu’s tasks being ‘tightly structured in order to lead to a clear outcome, [and] did not include any kind of linguistic preparation but they still succeeded in engaging the full cooperation of learners who understood what was required of them.’ Howatt with Widdowson (2004: 367) criticise the belief in TBLT that learner activities should have a ‘real-world relationship’. They point out that:

Activities can be designed in class which are real to learners to the extent that they find them purposeful and engaging, but such activities do not have to replicate what goes on in the real world... On the contrary, it would appear that learners can make even the most apparently unreal language real for themselves by the play of the imagination (...) Language play, furthermore, to the extent that it calls for a motivated attention to formal features, might be a more effective way of learning from the language than using it to arrive at real-world outcomes which are not of any particular point or interest for the learners.

Another criticism of the communicative approach as a whole, including TBLT, is that it ‘may offend against educational traditions which rely on a more teacher-centred approach’ (Harmer, 2007: 70-71). Indeed, multiple studies show that its pedagogical values often conflict with a number of cultural, social and professional values long-established in the practice of teaching in various global contexts (see, for example, Phillipson, 1992; Pennycook, 1994; Auerbach, 1995; Edge, 1996; Liu, 1998; Chowdhury, 2003; Chowdhury and Phan, 2008). At one extreme, in a study of Japanese university students in the foreign language classroom, it was found that students were responsible for less than one per cent of initiated talk (King, 2013). Furthermore, when the teacher acts as a facilitator rather than a generator of knowledge, it contradicts the socially expected role in many countries (Phan, 2008). Finally, Chowdhury and Phan (2008: 309) cite Holliday (1994) and Ellis (1996) as demonstrating that:

[t]he CLT principle of equal teacher-student status challenges the culturally endorsed hierarchical teacher-student relationship and the need to show respect to teachers in many countries, and thus faces resistance and unwelcome attitudes in those countries.

Such concerns are not limited to East Asian classroom (Littlewood, 2007); indeed they may exist in any country where traditions of teacher-led learning dominate (Watkins, 2005). This is a matter of concern in Russia, where the teaching and learning process has traditionally been teacher-led, and particularly in a military context where there

exists a very well defined and understood hierarchy of subordination. Notwithstanding such concerns, Footitt and Kelly (2012a: 102) observe that in training military linguists for the British Army:

The [task-based] approach was well aligned with wider military practices in training. Scenarios and simulations were widely used, both for small-scale tasks and for larger operations, up to the level of military exercises (...) Whereas the use of these simulations was commonplace in military training, this was probably the first time that language issues had been incorporated in such a simulation.

Given the widespread use of task-based approaches in military training *per se*, use of a task-based approach in language training for military personnel – particularly taking into account the support for TBLT in the relevant literature, albeit it in a civilian context – ought to be considered. Having decided to implement a communicative approach based on TBLT, I started to consider Storyline as a potential means of improving the English language skills and motivation of military linguist cadets. In examining Storyline I shall look at its potential advantages in terms of context. Firstly, however, I shall briefly review the current practice of teaching foreign languages to military linguist cadets in Russia.

#### *2.1.4 Methods of teaching foreign languages to military linguist cadets in Russia*

The grammar-translation method is very much in use when teaching English to military linguist cadets in Russia. Even today many teachers believe that ‘learning a foreign language means learning to translate sentences from the mother tongue into the target language and vice versa, [and] this approach to FLT still has its adherents’ (Ellis, Loewen and Erlam, 2006: 345). The problem, however, with such an approach – as discussed earlier – is its ineffectiveness in developing communicative competence (Harmer, 2007; Larsen-Freeman and Anderson, 2011; Richards and Rodgers, 2014) and inability to inspire motivation in students (Larsen-Freeman and Anderson, 2011; Richards and Rodgers, 2014). Both of these issues were also found to have created problems in foreign language teaching in military contexts (Hare and Fletcher, 2012; Footitt and Kelly, 2012a; Kelly and Baker, 2013). In my context the problem is further compounded by the use of a textbook-based approach, which allows for little freedom

in lesson planning and the organising of student activity. Student creativity is stifled and the teaching and learning process is monotonous with an entrenched routine.

This is what led me to search for a teaching method which would develop military linguist cadets' English language skills and motivate them to learn. An effective approach would be one that developed their ability to communicate and negotiate meaning in authentic situations such as they would meet on deployment in real life. Accuracy, although undeniably important, must not supersede fluency and the emphasis ought to be on intercultural communicative competence. As mentioned in the preceding subsection, a communicative approach 'may offend against educational traditions which rely on a more teacher-centred approach' (Harmer, 2007: 70-71), which is particularly true in a military context with a strong history of hierarchy and subordination to senior figures, be they commanders or teachers. As previously discussed, though, a task-based approach can fit in well with wider military training practices (Footitt and Kelly, 2012a). An effective approach to the foreign language teaching of military linguist cadets in Russia would therefore enable the development of language skills and be motivating for the students but without offending the very necessary institutional hierarchy of military life. Bearing this in mind, I shall now examine the Storyline method.

## **2.2 The Storyline method**

### *2.2.1 An introduction to the Storyline method*

The history of the Storyline method dates back to 1960s Scotland, a time when educators were seeking to make sense of a new direction in policy set out in a publication by the Scottish Education Department, titled *The Primary School in Scotland* (Scottish Education Department, 1965). Key areas for development included: learner-centred approaches, activity learning and discovery methods, differentiated group work, integration of subject areas, a skills and concepts approach. This led to the development of Storyline by Fred Rendell, Prof. Steve Bell and Sallie Harkness, then



lecturers at Jordanhill College in Glasgow, now part of the University of Strathclyde. The Storyline method began to be spread across Scotland via training workshops (Harkness, 2007). In the 1970s and 1980s the Jordanhill College staff, thanks to various exchanges and personal connections, were able to spread interest in Storyline internationally (Bell, 2007).

The Storyline method is now used in such varied countries as Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Denmark, Egypt, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Lithuania, Malta, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Singapore, Slovakia, Slovenia, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, Tanzania, Thailand, Turkey, Uganda, the UK and the USA (Storyline International, 2015). Storyline has been applied to many different spheres: early years learning, environmental education, foreign language teaching, and the training of nurses, to name but a few. Yet despite Storyline's existence since the 1960s, Mitchell-Barrett (2010: 13) notes that there is surprisingly little academic literature relating to the method and almost no empirical research in English, with most of the literature on Storyline being of an instructional nature and intended for teachers. This thesis, therefore, contributes to knowledge not only in terms of Storyline's application to the foreign language classroom, but on Storyline as a pedagogical approach *per se*.

### 2.2.2 Storyline: the practice

Storyline is succinctly described by Harkness (2007: 20) as follows:

[Learners] are invited to create a setting, invent characters and explore incidents (plot). The logical sequence of ideas, presented in the form of a descriptive narrative, provides a structure for exploring many diverse themes or topics. One very important and defining feature that marks out Storyline from other topic and project work is the central role of the characters – the human element. This allows [learners] to look at feelings as well as facts, enabling the teacher to raise questions regarding moral values, and [learners] to consider the implications of their proposed courses of action.

Creswell (1997: 10-12) lists the principles of Storyline which highlight it as a distinct method:

*The Principle of Story* – stories are essential to human experience, providing a predictable, linear structure and a meaningful context for learning. Storyline uses this principle in order to teach the curriculum in a way that reflects real life.

*The Principle of Anticipation* – a good story interests the learners, who want to know ‘what happens next’. They are involved in the process and their anticipation makes them think about it constantly, ensuring that learning goes on both inside and outside the classroom.

*The Principle of the Teacher’s Rope* – there is a critical partnership between teacher and student, which is collaborative due to the balance between teacher control and student control. The rope is held by the teacher, moving the story along, but its flexibility allows for bends and twists, giving the students their control. By following the rope, the students learn the planned curriculum.

*The Principle of Ownership* – ownership is the most powerful motivator; students feel responsibility, pride, and enthusiasm for projects in which their role is substantive. By beginning with the students’ conceptual knowledge, we acknowledge them as being participants in, as opposed to objects of, the learning process.

*The Principle of Context* – new learning is linked to previous knowledge, going from the known to the unknown. Students research, practise skills and assimilate knowledge in order to progress through the story.

*The Principle of Structure before Activity* – by asking students to build their conceptual model, we allow them to push their prior knowledge to its edges. Students discover what they do not know by articulating what they do know and seeing the gaps. The Story then gives them a structure that will enable them to find out what they want to know and to present what they discover. The structure provides equal freedom for those students who do not have the skills to accomplish the task on their own, while ensuring that those who do possess the skills have the freedom to use the structure or diverge from it.

Storyline, therefore, may prove to be a means of motivating students in foreign language learning by providing them with an interesting format which would allow both effective learning and learner ownership of the learning process. This will be discussed further in section 2.3. Harkness (2007: 20-21) lists the following planning format for Storyline as applied in the primary school:

- Storyline Episode
- Key Questions
- Pupil Activities
- Class Organisation
- Resources
- Learning Outcomes and Assessment

The story gives a meaningful context to the learning which is to take place (Creswell, 1997; Letschert, 2006) and allows reflective learning. Moreover, the reflective learning must come from the learner's own initiative; the teacher must support the learners' basic curiosity and desire for exploring and understanding their world (Falkenberg, 2007: 52). In creating a Storyline various key elements take place within the planning format as summarised below (Creswell, 1997: 7-8):

- The Storyline begins with a key question. These key questions identify learners' prior knowledge and, importantly, gaps in their knowledge which ought to be filled.
- Each Storyline employs a number of key episodes. The key episodes provide opportunities to cover what has to be learned in the course of the Storyline.
- A frieze (or display) is created to bring the Storyline to life. This display is created and developed by the learners themselves, and is a source of pride for learners, providing them with a certain ownership of the creative process.
- Each learner creates his/her own character and a biography is written. This allows learners to internalise feelings and emotions, generating a deeper and more meaningful learning experience.
- Incidents occur which involve the characters having to respond and solve problems. Such incidents provide opportunities within the Storyline episodes to use knowledge and develop it.
- The Storyline concludes with a celebration or event. This gives time to reflect on what was learned/accomplished during the Storyline and to assess whether the intended outcomes/pedagogic goals were achieved.

Storyline's structure thus has much in common with TBLT, as described earlier in subsection 2.1.3. Storyline as a particular form of TBLT is discussed in greater depth in subsection 2.3.1.

### *2.2.3 Storyline: the theory behind the practice*

The Storyline method is based on constructivist beliefs (Creswell, 1997: 9) and is influenced by Dewey, Vygotsky and Piaget (Falkenberg, 2007). Falkenberg (2007: 49) links the teaching and learning process in Storyline to constructivism, noting that in Storyline teaching can be described as facilitation of the students' learning processes, since '[t]he main point in constructivism is that, however aware a learner is or is not about the learning process, it is a construction within the learner that is important – the learner can only do it himself.' Fatum (1970: 132, cited in Falkenberg, 2007: 46) notes Dewey's assertion that 'pupils do not need something to learn. They need something to do, and it must be the kind of things that demands thinking.' Learner activities in Storyline, therefore, are not just activities, but the kind of activities that require thinking (Creswell, J., 2007; Falkenberg, 2007).

In Storyline learners are expected to 'develop their own ideas' in the course of activities (Brownlow, 2007: 39). This fits with constructivism:

Constructivists and Storyline teachers both respect the constructions of others as "viable" (...) As constructivism assumes there is no universal truth, it asks for the exchange of views in order to get closer to an intersection that serves as "reality" (Schwänke and Gronostay, 2007: 59).

This exchange of views in Storyline occurs at several stages: while answering the key questions, during the key episodes and through the resolution of the incidents. Storyline involves experiential learning, the philosophy of which means 'the possibility to use prior experiences as servants not as masters' according to Fatum (1970: 132-146, cited in Falkenberg, 2007: 46). Storyline takes special account of learners' prior knowledge. The key questions in Storyline are fundamental to identifying learners' prior knowledge and, consequently, gaps in their knowledge to be filled in the course of the teaching and learning process. 'The learner has to do something, especially something s/he never did before. The teacher must challenge her/his [learners] by letting them experience' (Falkenberg, 2007: 51). In Storyline, as in constructivism, learning takes place by discovery (Schwänke and Gronostay, 2007). The learner 'puts himself at the standpoint of the problems that have to be met and rediscovers, so far as may be, ways of meeting them' (Dewey, 1900: 108, cited in Creswell, J., 2007: 90).

Storyline fits with Vygotsky's theory that learning occurs within the zone of proximal development, building upon what the learner already knows. This is aptly summed up by Falkenberg (2007: 51-52):

Learning is developing new competencies: new skills, new knowledge and new understanding. Learning creates new possibilities for action for the learner. The new competencies can only develop in already existing competencies. Either they are built on top of the old ones, or they integrate with them. The teacher must make sure that each [learner] can start on the level of his/her own present knowledge and skills.

This is where Storyline's *Principle of Context* comes into play; 'new learning must be linked to previous knowledge. [Learners] build their understanding by going from the known to the unknown' (Creswell, J., 2007: 95). As mentioned earlier, the *Principle of Structure before Activity* allows the learners to push their prior knowledge to its edges before gaining new knowledge (Creswell, 1997). This fits with what Applebee and Langer (1983) call 'instructional scaffolding' – the support given by the teacher during the learning process, tailored to the needs of students and aimed at helping the students achieve their learning goals (Sawyer, 2006). Applebee (1986) gives five criteria for effective scaffolding: student ownership of the learning event, appropriateness of the instructional task, a structured learning environment, shared responsibility, and transfer of control.

In Storyline, student ownership of learning is governed by the *Principle of Ownership*. Appropriateness of the instructional task requires tasks to be built on the students' existing knowledge, which is covered by the *Principle of Context* and *Principle of Structure before Activity*. Structured learning environment refers to the natural sequence of thought, as in the *Principle of Story*. Shared responsibility and transfer of control are concerned with the collaborative relationship between teacher and student, provided for by the *Principle of the Teacher's Rope*. The influence of Piaget on Storyline is also commented upon and fits well with Storyline's *Principle of Context* and *Principle of Structure before Activity*. As Falkenberg (2007: 49) notes:

The learning, the comprehension, is for Piaget an adaptation, with an organisation of it connected to earlier adaptations and experiences. The individual constructs "schemes" as a kind of cognitive framework. These structures contain linked experiences and knowledge that the individual has at present.

Falkenberg (2007: 49) discusses what Piaget calls 'assimilation' (increasing mastery) and 'accommodation' (creative and quantitative changes or extensions) which occur in learning. It is by structuring learning before activity, and then placing the learning in a context comprehensible to the learners, that both assimilation and accommodation can take place.

Storyline involves problem-based learning, the goals of which include helping students develop flexible knowledge, effective problem-solving skills, self-directed learning skills, effective collaboration skills, and intrinsic motivation, with an emphasis on active, transferable learning (Hmelo-Silver, 2004). Peterssen (2001, cited in Schwänke and Gronostay, 2007: 55) suggests four guidelines for constructivist teaching:

- Enable [learners] to learn in tangible situations where they have to deal with authentic problems that call for activity.
- Create multiple contexts so that [learners] need to apply newly acquired knowledge to a variety of problems.
- Encourage [learners] to use a variety of perspectives, and make them develop a number of different views regarding a certain problem.
- Organise learning in a social context – in smaller or larger groups.

Storyline makes use of all four points in the teaching and learning process. Firstly, each Storyline involves tangible situations where student activity is aimed at dealing with authentic problems; the 'reality' created by Storyline allows all learners to participate (Ehlers, Harder, Järvinen, Brandford and Materniak, 2006). Secondly, the multiple contexts created in Storylines require learners to apply their new acquired knowledge to various problems; the context must be one in which the knowledge makes sense (Harkness, 2007). Thirdly, taking on the roles of characters as part of the Storyline topic involves using a variety of perspectives and developing different views regarding problems, in ways not possible in real life (Hofmann, 2007). Fourthly, in Storyline, learning is organised in social contexts, that is, in groups of various sizes depending on the actual activity. The learners must 'work together and communicate in a learning context' (Falkenberg, 2007: 51). The myriad of activities found within Storyline, in conjunction with Storyline's emphasis on students taking ownership of their learning, enables students to learn in their own particular ways, making use of their individual abilities (Wrigley, 2007).

Storyline, however, is a method that requires a large investment by the teacher of time and energy spent on preparation. Indeed, the teacher must pre-plan almost every activity and prepare for possible eventualities in considerable detail (Bell, 2000). Legenhausen (1998) argues that the pre-planning of tasks by the teacher results in teacher-domination of the work and does not promote true autonomous learning. In Storyline, however, the story is developed collectively by both the teacher and students, rather than solely by the teacher, which heightens the students' sense of autonomy and ownership of learning (Creswell, 1997; Falkenberg, 2007). This in turn creates a risk that teachers may feel less comfortable with their role in Storyline, which is 'quite different from that with which most classroom teachers are familiar... namely leading from the front' (Ahlquist, 2015: 41). McNaughton (2014) notes the apprehensiveness of teachers prior to a Storyline project involving educational drama, with which they were unfamiliar, but highlights the importance of the role of training. Training in Storyline typically takes place in the form of workshops at the national and international level that acquaint participants with the planning format involved and enable them to experience learning within a Storyline topic (Storyline International, 2015).

As described in subsection 2.2.1, the Storyline method is used in a variety of countries and spheres. It follows that this depends on the context in which the teacher works and, perhaps, on the willingness of the teacher's manager, institution and even government to delegate sufficient authority in the teaching and learning process. Storyline is, therefore, not necessarily suited to – or, to be more exact, a feasible method to employ in – every pedagogical context. Yet Storyline can be used to good effect when teachers have more say in choosing materials and methods (Barr and Frame, 2006). It is also necessary to note that, for Storyline to be 'more than "fun"' it must be linked to learning outcomes (Ahlquist, 2015: 41). This requires rigorous planning by the teacher to ensure that activities do result in the desired learning outcomes (see McNaughton, 2014).

Storyline therefore provides structured learning of a given subject, made relevant to real life through the development of a fictive world, with motivation generated through student ownership and opportunities for learner creativity. Its success does depend, though, on the teacher – and those in the hierarchy above the teacher – being willing to

employ a method that is much less rigid than the traditional teacher-centred approach to teaching and learning, while ensuring the activities lead to the desired learning outcomes. Having reviewed Storyline as a pedagogical method, I shall now move on to examine Storyline as a method for teaching foreign languages.

## **2.3 Storyline and foreign language teaching**

### *2.3.1 Storyline as a form of Task-based Language Teaching*

Creswell (1997) and Harkness (2007) discuss the Storyline method from the point of view of teaching integrated subjects within a school curriculum, as set out in subsections 2.2.2 and 2.2.3. Nevertheless, the principles they put forward may logically be applied to teaching foreign languages too.

Storyline in foreign language teaching is a particular form of TBLT (Kocher, 2007). The phases described in the literature on TBLT (Ellis, 2003) exist too in Storyline. There is the equivalent of the pre-task phase: firstly, the *Principle of Context* which allows us to understand what the student knows and does not know, upon which subsequent work is based; secondly, the *Principle of Structure before Activity* provides the opportunity for planning the during-task phase. The during-task phase involves students undertaking various activities in the course of which they solve problems and react to incidents which may arise. The *Principle of Story* governs this phase, as the characters created by the students solve the problems and react to incidents in the linear pattern common to stories. The *Principle of Anticipation* takes effect during this phase, as the learners' interest and feeling of involvement is maintained. The culmination of a Storyline topic is an event that enables the students to reflect on what they have done and what has been learnt, and corresponds to what Willis (1996: 58) considers the 'natural conclusion of the task cycle'.

Looking at Storyline's principles individually, the *Principle of Story* would provide both a natural linear structure and a meaningful context in which foreign language



learning could take place, for example, a topic on ‘a journey to the USA’, including grammar learning, story writing, role plays, practising vocabulary, learning about the target country, and so on. The *Principle of Anticipation* closely fits the organisational principles of TBLT, where learners strive to complete tasks and anticipate what will happen next. It is here that the *Principle of the Teacher’s Rope* and the *Principle of Ownership* have vital importance – by turning students into active partners in the learning process who can influence their own trajectory, they acquire greater interest in the subject and their studying of it. The *Principle of Context*, which can be applied to many subjects, is no less important in language teaching where we can build upon what the student knows and extend his/her knowledge in different directions, which ties in with the *Principle of Structure before Activity*.

The main difference between Storyline and project work or other forms of TBLT is that Storyline involves ‘many of the problems [being] solved within a fictitious story’ told by the learners themselves (Falkenberg, 2007: 46). It is the ‘integrating of tasks into the framework of a narrative [that] characterises the Storyline approach’ (Ahlquist, 2011: 43). Narrative ‘has the power to create a meaningful framework increasing the functionality of the separate activities’ (Bogaert, Van Gorp, Bultynck, Lanssens and Depauw, 2006: 123). The story gives a meaningful context to the learning which is to take place (Creswell (1997; Letschert, 2006). Krenicky-Albert (2004: 26), in discussing Storyline’s use of narrative, cites Cameron (2001: 55) as arguing that:

We can note that young children encounter narrative in many types of talk and visually too: in story books, in songs, in cartoons, on TV and video, in computer games, and as part of everyday talk in the home and in school (...) Children are... exposed to narrative from very early ages, they participate in narrative and they develop their skills in producing narratives.

It is the story that leads towards a purposeful direction of students’ activities towards its final aim, the conclusion to the story (Kocher, 1999). Krenicky-Albert (2004: 26) discusses how the narrative that is key to Storyline plays:

...a major role in the mental organisation of information, [supporting] understanding, memory and recall, as well as logical, creative and divergent thinking to solve problems [and therefore] not only for young learners, stories in foreign language teaching represent a natural, holistic and motivating approach.

This is important for making the teaching and learning process relevant and meaningful for the students, allowing them to see a structure to their learning in addition to the practical applications of their language skills. As with TBLT a potential disadvantage might be a focus on task completion rather than on language development (Seedhouse, 1999; Swan, 2005), but tasks may be designed to avoid such a polarisation (Ellis, 2003; Howatt with Widdowson, 2004).

Storyline as a specific method enables a certain problem that might arise in TBLT to be overcome. Seedhouse (1999: 154), for example, is concerned about limitation of language use in task-based interaction, where ‘learners appear to be so concentrated on completing the task that linguistic forms are treated as a vehicle of minor importance’. As Ellis (2003: 254) expands, ‘the fact [that a task] is directed at accomplishing a specified outcome, may result in a restricted variety of communication’. This can be an unintended result of task-based methods, but Ellis continues by pointing out that:

...the nature of the interaction depends crucially on the design characteristics of tasks and procedures for implementing them. Thus, richer varieties of communication characterised by more complex language use, are achievable if, for example, students are asked to perform open tasks with divergent goals and are given the opportunity to plan their performance beforehand (Ellis, 2003: 254).

Storyline presupposes students’ active participation and ownership of the story (*Principle of Ownership*, as described in Creswell, 1997: 10-12), which allows for such ‘open tasks with divergent goals’. The teacher guides student activity towards the desired learning outcome, but does not control (*Principle of the Teacher’s Rope*). Moreover, Storyline allows students ample opportunity for planning their performance beforehand (*Principle of Structure before Activity*). In Storyline, the role of the teacher is to set tasks, challenging the students to use the foreign language in a meaningful and authentic context, acting not as a ‘sage on the stage’ but more like a ‘guide on the side’ (Kocher, 2007: 120). The teacher observes the different learning processes underway, organises and coordinates the various activities, and also provides the necessary materials. The students are active and critical actors who use, display and enlarge their knowledge and skills through meaningful interaction. Storyline as an approach to be utilised in the foreign language classroom offers ‘endless possibilities’ in terms of kinds of projects:

[S]hort Storylines of only four to six double lessons... which can be carried out within one or two weeks [or] longer ones that invite the pupils to work on the story now and then (e.g. once a week) over a time span of several weeks or months (Kocher, 2007: 121).

A typical Storyline topic for the foreign language classroom involves what I shall refer to as Storyline's 'features' (Ahlquist, 2011): art work, collaborative work, individual work, listening, not using a textbook, problem solving, reading, role play, speaking, using imagination, variety of activities, and writing. Kocher (2007: 122-124) finds a variety of benefits in using Storyline in the foreign language classroom such as its openness in content and results, allowing Storyline to be used for virtually any topic and for the development of practically any part of language. I shall now discuss Storyline and intercultural communicative competence, followed by Storyline and learner motivation.

### *2.3.2 Storyline and intercultural communicative competence*

Communicative competence means the speaker's 'knowledge of the communication system and his ability to use this knowledge' (Littlewood, 1974: 36). Since the term 'communicative competence' was first coined by Hymes (1972), a variety of models have emerged, all of which refer both to a language user's knowledge and correct use of grammar and also appropriate use of the language in communication (Canale and Swain, 1980; Canale, 1983; Bachman, 1990; Bachman and Palmer, 1996; Savignon, 1997, 2002). Yang and Fleming (2013: 297) relate how 'the goal of English language teaching has gradually changed from a narrow focus on linguistic competence... to communicative competence [to] intercultural communicative competence.' Intercultural communicative competence is an extension of language communicative competence, which takes account of the intercultural aspect of foreign language use; for example, knowledge on such topics as organisational behaviour and civic studies may influence the success of business, military and diplomatic personnel in foreign countries (Mughan, 1999: 62; Coperías Aguilar, 2009: 248). Byram's (1997, 2009) model of intercultural communicative competence, for example, categorises the skills and knowledge relevant to the acquisition of intercultural competence: knowledge (*savoir*),

attitudes (*savoir être*), skills of discovery/interaction (*savoir apprendre/faire*), skills of interpreting/relating (*savoir comprendre*) and critical cultural awareness (*savoir s'engager*).

According to Byram (1997), there is an inextricable link between ability to function effectively in a language and intercultural communicative competence. Despite this, even teachers who exhibit high intercultural competence often lack effective approaches to 'culture learning' (Johnstone Young and Sachdev, 2011: 81). Added to this is the problem that achieving both intercultural and communicative objectives can be challenging, to the extent that 'even when language teachers recognise the importance of developing students' intercultural competence, they often drop intercultural aims in planning their courses, since they feel that "language and culture cannot be taught in an integrated way" (Sercu, Bandura, Castro, Davcheva, Laskaridou, Lundgren, Méndez García and Ryan (2005: 164)' (Borghetti, 2013: 256). Nevertheless, gaining intercultural competence is beneficial for language learners since 'their developing intercultural competence informs their language choices in communication' (Kramsch 2009: 244). Situating a Storyline topic in an intercultural context is conducive to developing learners' intercultural communicative competence since it makes use not only of authentic materials, but goes much further in that Storyline has particular relevance to real life and 'through authentic problematic situations, the [learners] develop and practise basic skills that are relevant to their real lives' (Krenicky-Albert, 2004: 28).

Storyline also provides a framework for authentic communication such as writing a letter, having a conversation or making a phone call. Storyline tasks, as part of a story which has relevance for the learners, provide reasons for meaningful and purposeful communication, and for the training and improving of language skills in a meaningful and authentic context (Kocher, 2007). Storyline's promotion of authentic communication is in its use of role plays and simulated dialogues which 'may be considered as promoting authentic communication, if they are integrated into meaningful situations – what they, in fact, should be, namely through the plot of the story – and if they are developed collectively by class and teacher rather than strictly pre-given by the latter' (Krenicky-Albert, 2004: 30-31). Using the foreign language in

order to communicate during Storyline tasks and improving language competence through practice in meaningful contexts is essential in language learning, and Storyline can stimulate real and meaningful communication in the target language resulting in learners developing communicative competence (Kocher, 2007). This fosters not only the language communicative competence promoted in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Council of Europe, 2011), but also the development of intercultural communicative competence.

Learning potential in intercultural communicative competence is enhanced when learners are given autonomy as opposed to a teacher-centred approach (Sercu, 2002); in turn, intercultural communicative competence fosters learner autonomy (Coperías Aguilar, 2009). As stated in the preceding subsection, Storyline enables students to become autonomous learners, since students feel responsible for their own learning and feel intrinsically motivated to work hard (Kocher, 2007). This is reflected in Storyline's *Principle of Ownership*. As might be expected, empirical research has found a strong correlation between learners' intercultural communicative competence and foreign language learning motivation (Mirzaei and Forouzandeh, 2013). This leads us to an examination of Storyline and learner motivation.

### *2.3.3 Storyline and learner motivation*

Motivation is a key factor in language learning and is recognised as promoting effective acquisition (Dörnyei, 1998, 2001; Rivers, 2007), as mentioned in subsection 2.1.3. Creswell (1997) links motivation in Storyline to its being learner-oriented and oriented to developing learner autonomy. Both of these are viewed as a prerequisite to modern language education by a wide range of authors (Bell, 1995; Cameron, 2001; Rivers, 2007). Furthermore, motivation and autonomy are viewed as having a mutual relationship (Ushioda, 2007, 2011). Bell (2000: 3) describes the 'paradox... that the teacher has planned for almost every activity in which the learners will engage but the students feel that they have ownership of the story.' Deci and Flaste (1995: 2) propose that learners are autonomous when they are 'fully willing to do what they are doing, and

they embrace the activity with a sense of interest and commitment.’ Learner autonomy may be described thus:

[T]he product of an interactive process in which the teacher gradually enlarges the scope of her learners’ autonomy by gradually allowing them more control of the process and content of their learning (Little, 2007: 26).

This fits what Kocher (1999: 17) calls ‘structured freedom’. It could be argued that this ‘structured freedom’ makes Storyline even closer to real life, in that in our own lives we exercise our own decisions, but within certain contexts which we do not and cannot control; circumstances beyond our control can impact upon the outcomes of our decisions. This is summed up by Lewis and Vialleton (2011: 218):

In language learning, many aspects of the situation are beyond the immediate control of learner or teacher. The inability to control them does not make either less autonomous (...) Autonomy, both in learning and in life, is just as much about how one reflects on and deals with what one cannot control, as about the – rather strange – desire to control whatever one can.

In Storyline, learners do retain much more autonomy than many other methods allow (such as grammar-translation, audiolingualism, and even communicative language teaching). The role of the teacher is similar to that in other learner-oriented approaches in that he/she serves as a facilitator rather than instructor/provider of knowledge (Dörnyei, 2001). This requires the learners to think more and rely on their own resources, enabling them to become independent learners who ‘learn how to learn’ and who are capable of solving problems.

Deci and Ryan (1985: 3) state that, ‘The study of motivation is the exploration of the energisation and direction of behaviour.’ Motivation may be extrinsic or intrinsic (Ryan and Deci, 2000; Deci and Ryan, 2007; Schunk, Pintrich and Meece, 2008). Intrinsic motivation refers to doing something because it is inherently interesting or enjoyable, whereas extrinsic motivation refers to doing something because it leads to a separable outcome (Deci and Ryan, 2000: 55). Students’ ownership of their learning in Storyline has been noted by many Storyline researchers to impact positively upon students’ intrinsic motivation (Ehlers et al, 2006; Creswell, J., 2007; Hofmann, 2007; Mitchell-Barrett, 2010). As summarised in subsection 2.2.2, by creating their own characters learners are able to internalise feelings and emotions, and in doing so ‘feel a strong sense of ownership’ (Harkness, 2007: 20). Indeed, ‘the learners, the creators, become

those people' (Bell, 2000: 4). In taking on such roles, their feelings of involvement and ownership might be expected to result in an increase in their motivation (Ehlers et al, 2006; Kocher, 2007; Mitchell-Barrett, 2010; Ahlquist, 2011). Creswell, J. (2007: 91) writes that 'a good story draws us into its spell as we predict what is coming, and we anticipate its unfolding with joy and excitement'. He continues by noting that Storyline's *Principle of Anticipation* ensures that learning never stops because the learners feel part of the process and do not stop thinking about the story, which 'provides an atmosphere that is conducive to motivated, active learning' (ibid.). In studies on Storyline in the secondary and young adult classrooms, indeed, increased learner engagement reflecting enhanced motivation is a common theme (see, for example, Larsson, 2003; Bergbäck and Forozin, 2004; Björkman and Sundberg, 2005; Hugosson, 2005; Lundgren, 2008; Lundström and Ljung, 2009; Ahlquist, 2011). Krenicky-Albert (2004: 32) emphasises:

...whereas many methodologies result in one single product, Storyline is stronger product-oriented with respect to nearly all activities of the learning process, from the design of place and people... to the preparation of a final event.

Since Storyline involves the creation of many 'products' the principle of ownership of these products is enhanced, which results in higher motivation for all the learners involved. Although it is true that levels of motivation may vary between individuals doing the same task and also for an individual over time (Schunk et al, 2008), in Storyline motivation which arises from engagement in one task may carry the learner into the next (Van den Branden, 2006; Ahlquist, 2011).

In Storyline, it is the learners themselves, rather than the teacher, who want to set high standards when presenting their products in class; they want to impress the audience with good and correct products so they feel '*intrinsically motivated* to work hard' (Kocher, 2007: 122) (italics in original). Storyline also encourages mutual respect and learners 'feel a very real and positive partnership with the teacher who plays a significant role as the director and designer of the story' (Bell, 2006: 58). This could have a positive impact on foreign language classrooms where the teaching and learning process has been hampered by teacher-centred methods or issues of hierarchy. In discussing Storyline and motivation, Ahlquist (2011: 50) writes:

What contributes to increased motivation seems to be the opportunity to work more independently, both individually and in groups, use skills other than reading and writing, and to be involved... [Although research has shown] some older learners to be resistant to practical work, many responded positively, one reason perhaps being that such work has a function in the Storyline.

When activities are meaningful, motivation is enhanced (Bell, 2000; Ehlers et al, 2006; Kocher, 2007). Storyline's emphasis on authentic communication and fluency, as opposed to artificial dialogues and accuracy, has a positive impact on motivation. When students communicate with each other and realise that they are understood, they are 'motivated to participate in communication' (Kocher, 2007: 123). Greater motivation ought in turn to have a positive impact on learning, and a method such as Storyline might be expected to result in greater fluency and better communication skills. I shall now conclude the literature review by discussing Storyline's potential in teaching foreign languages to military linguists.

#### **2.4 Storyline's potential for the foreign language teaching of military linguists**

Although recent years have seen the emergence of several studies into the effectiveness of Storyline as a method, including at doctoral level, at present the only doctoral level research into the use of the Storyline method in foreign language teaching is that carried out by Ahlquist (2011). Ahlquist's study showed improvements in English language skills and motivation in the secondary classroom in Sweden. This is a very different context to the tertiary classroom in Russia, even more so in the context of teaching military linguists. To understand whether Storyline can improve English language skills and motivation in such circumstances it is necessary to conduct this research study.

To restate the problems encountered in the current teaching of military linguists at my institution, the issues are developing English language skills (the learners' progress in English is insufficient and too little emphasis is placed on developing intercultural communicative competence) and student satisfaction (the current approach is insufficiently motivating for the learners as they themselves reported in student course evaluations). As previously mentioned in subsection 2.1.3, TBLT, belonging to the communicative approach family of foreign language teaching methods, is itself



supported by a body of literature (Howatt, 1984; Long and Crookes, 1993; Skehan, 1998; Ellis, 2003; Howatt with Widdowson, 2004; Larsen-Freeman and Anderson, 2011), although there are those who criticise its preference for meaning over form (Seedhouse, 1999; Swan, 2005). These criticisms, however, may be addressed through task design (Ellis, 2003; Howatt with Widdowson, 2004) and Storyline is noted for its flexibility in designing tasks and achieving the aims of the curriculum (Harkness, 2007). The inclusion of form-focused instruction as part of the pre-task stage could mitigate the criticisms by Seedhouse (1999) and Swan (2005). The effectiveness of Storyline, a form of TBLT, as a foreign language teaching method that develops foreign language skills and improves learner motivation has been noted (Ehlers et al, 2006; Kocher, 2007; Ahlquist, 2011), although it is yet to be seen whether it will prove to be as effective in the foreign language teaching of military linguists.

The literature on the foreign language teaching of military linguists indicates a need for focusing on the goal of intercultural communicative competence (Hare and Fletcher, 2012; Footitt and Kelly, 2012a). Without this, effective functioning in the target language is impeded (Byram, 1997, 2009; Kramsch, 2009; Yang and Fleming, 2013). Understanding of language and culture is recognised as being necessary when participating in missions abroad (Jelušič, 2007). Furthermore, for military linguists, mission effectiveness during multinational operations demands the ability to work with those from other nations (Szvircev Tresch, 2007; Vuga, 2010), intercultural competence being considered not only a question of individual interactions, but also one of strategic importance for mission success (Tomforde, 2010: 535) and should therefore be a 'core policy consideration' (Rubinstein, 2008: 42). These are, therefore, skills which must be taught to military personnel working in international environments (Haddad, 2010). For military linguists, in addition to linguistic and cultural competences, social skills are also crucial factors (Guo, 2015). Through interaction and problem solving in the roles of fictive characters, Storyline provides structured learning conducive to the development of such skills.

It is important that the approach to teaching fosters learner motivation (Footitt and Kelly, 2012a; Kelly and Baker, 2013). If extrinsic motivation is aided by the promise of a military career after graduation, intrinsic motivation involves the learner being

motivated by the learning itself (Deci and Ryan, 2000). Autonomy in language learning rather than a teacher-centred approach is also required (Sercu, 2002; Coperías Aguilar, 2009; Hare and Fletcher, 2012). It is anticipated that military linguists' ownership of their language learning will positively impact on their motivation (Ehlers et al, 2006; Kocher, 2007; Ahlquist, 2011). A meaningful context with relevance to the real world is also important for military linguists; the desirability of 'scenario-based' approaches based on real-life situations has been noted in the literature (Footitt and Kelly, 2012a; Kelly and Baker, 2013). Finally, in Storyline, with learners developing their own fictive world, the tasks are perhaps even more real than in other forms of TBLT, potentially making it well geared to the foreign language teaching of military linguists, hence the need to carry out this research.

In my search for an appropriate communicative foreign language teaching method I had to consider the context in which I teach. Teaching a foreign language to military linguist cadets is a challenging field not only in terms of content, but also approach. Baigorri-Jalón (2011: 176) writes how the 'military hierarchical chain of command' can interfere with the performance of interpreting. It can also hinder the teaching and learning process, resulting in a teacher-centred approach, which does not favour the development of language skills, as discussed in the literature review. Indeed, it is sometimes the case that the attitude of superiors is that all tasks, including language learning, are carried out on the premise of belonging to a 'category of a military order which has to be obeyed on the basis of the chain of command, not on the logic or intrinsic value of the actual duty to be performed' (Baigorri-Jalón, 2011: 177). There is, nevertheless, a responsibility on the part of teachers to respect the cultural environment in which they work. As previously described in subsections 2.1.3 and 2.1.4, a communicative approach in teaching 'may offend against educational traditions which rely on a more teacher-centred approach' (Harmer, 2007: 70-71). Storyline, which requires the creation of characters in a fictive world, might offer a way of avoiding such an issue. Indeed, to restate Bell's (2000: 4) observation, 'the learners, the creators, become those people', that is, the characters whom they themselves created. In creating characters, learners therefore take on the roles of those characters as part of the Storyline topic, which could lessen any potential feelings of discomfort in the absence of a teacher-centred approach to the learning process. There is also the issue of classroom management to consider,

given that the introduction of Storyline would require a significant departure from the traditional, teacher-led lesson. Discussing East Asian classrooms, Littlewood (2007: 244) draws our attention to this problem:

[In working with] large classes of often unmotivated young and adolescent learners, the activities associated with CLT and TBLT often present difficulties of practical implementation which do not exist in the smaller classes where the innovations were first developed.

Carless (2004: 656), too, found that ‘concerns over noise and discipline inhibited task-based teaching’. Although these worries are not altogether without foundation in certain contexts, the context of teaching military linguist cadets does differ. Firstly, the class sizes seldom exceed 8-10 students – fewer than in the typical western classroom whence CLT and TBLT developed – thus negating Littlewood’s first concern. Secondly, these are older adolescent/young adult learners who have chosen a career as a military linguist; therefore, a certain level of motivation and self-discipline may be inferred.

Nevertheless, introducing a communicative, student-centred approach based on learner autonomy could involve difficulties which would require greater teacher involvement in task performance. Research has shown that, with support, university students in countries with traditionally less autonomous learning environments can become more autonomous (Humphreys and Wyatt, 2014). Moreover, in implementing new approaches to teaching, teachers mould innovations to their own abilities, beliefs and experiences, the immediate school context, and the wider sociocultural environment (Carless, 2004). Or, as Li (1998: 696) describes it, ‘adapt rather than adopt’. Storyline, which has been adopted in many countries, yet adapted to a multitude of contexts from primary education to teacher education, could prove viable in the teaching of foreign languages to military linguist cadets. In addition, the greater the teacher’s awareness of the teaching context, the easier any cultural clashes may be mediated (Simpson, 2008). Samimy and Kobayashi (2004: 258) advise embracing the communicative approach ‘in a culturally sensitive and appropriate way, yet maintain[ing] its own contextual autonomy’. As a teacher of military linguist cadets in Russia with 10 years’ experience, I hope to be able to adapt Storyline to my professional context and mediate any cultural clashes that may occur. The students may well benefit from greater teacher direction initially, as they make the transition to interactive, autonomous learning. Yet, taking into account the observation that a task-based approach fits in well with common

military practices in training (Footitt and Kelly, 2012a), Storyline might prove to be a particularly effective method in the context of foreign language teaching for military linguists.

It may prove to be the case that Storyline might need to be adapted to fit this context, which requires as part of the research an investigation into the learner response to the features of Storyline in addition to Storyline *per se*. Until this moment, though, there was no research on Storyline and its potential use in the foreign language teaching of military linguists. This needed to be empirically studied. My study sought to investigate the impact of Storyline on the foreign language classroom for military linguist cadets in Russia: how Storyline impacts on learner's language skills and their motivation. The research would therefore demonstrate the applicability (or lack thereof) of Storyline to the English language teaching of military linguist cadets in Russia and, in so doing, make an original contribution to knowledge and practice. The key themes emerging from the literature and considered in the course of the study are: language development with an emphasis on intercultural communicative competence; motivation, involving student ownership of learning, opportunities for creativity and relevance to real life; and contextual appropriateness in terms of teaching military linguist cadets in Russia. This leads us to examine the question of a suitable research design and methodology.

## CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

### 3.0 Introduction

In this chapter I begin by stating my research goals, aim and questions, and institutional context. I continue by discussing my selection of research paradigm, followed by an appropriate research methodology, determining that an action research case study is ‘fit for purpose’ as described by Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011). Then I set out my chosen research design and relevant ethical considerations. I finish by discussing the processes of data collection and analysis.

#### *Research goals and aim*

To restate, the starting point for my research study was a questioning of the effectiveness of English language teaching both in Russia generally and, more specifically, in the context of teaching military linguist cadets. As a reflective practitioner responsible for the teaching of English to military linguist cadets I wanted to find a means of improving the effectiveness of teaching in terms of developing English language skills and raising student motivation. The aim of my research study is to examine whether Storyline, a teaching method, can have a positive impact on military linguist cadets’ learning of English as a foreign language and, in so doing, improve my own professional knowledge on Storyline’s impact on the foreign language classroom.

#### *Research questions*

I anticipate, in the course of my research, to find answers to the following research questions:

1. How do military linguist cadets respond to Storyline as a foreign language teaching method?
2. How do military linguist cadets respond to the individual features of Storyline?
3. What effect (if any) does Storyline have on military linguist cadets’ language development?

Research Question 1 is designed to examine the student response to Storyline in terms of motivation and learner engagement, which are identified in the literature as being key to successful foreign language learning by military linguists. Research Question 2 is concerned with how the learners respond to Storyline's individual features, in order to understand whether Storyline requires adapting for this particular context since this is the first doctoral inquiry into the application of Storyline to military linguists' language education. Research Question 3 addresses whether Storyline has a positive impact on the development of military linguist cadets' language skills. These questions should provide answers to the purpose of the study, which is an investigation into the effectiveness of using Storyline as an English language teaching method for military linguist cadets in Russia, bearing in mind the importance of context identified in the literature.

This research study was carried out at the Faculty of Foreign Languages, National Research Tomsk State University (TSU). TSU is one of Russia's leading higher educational establishments, regularly ranked among the top ten universities of Russia. It was established in 1878 as 'Imperial Siberian University', the first higher education institution east of the Urals (the Asiatic part of Russia), opening its doors to students in 1888. With the expansion of higher education in Siberia and the birth of the Soviet Union it was renamed Tomsk State University. During the Soviet period it developed rapidly, adding a great number of faculties and departments to its existing ones, although Tomsk remained a closed city to foreigners until 1993, due to the high number of military industrial enterprises located there at the time.

After the break-up of the Soviet Union in 1991 and Russia's greater participation in the global economy, the need for qualified teachers of foreign languages and translators/interpreters increased. My faculty – the Faculty of Foreign Languages – was established in 1995 and has, since its very beginnings, specialised in educating future teachers of foreign languages and translators/interpreters. In the Russian language there is one word for translator/interpreter, *perevodchik*, and the Russian education system envisages a common higher education in which there is no differentiation between preparing either translators (the written word) or interpreters (oral speech). All students

study English and one other foreign language, in addition to subjects related to their specialisation (either teaching or translating/interpreting). Some of the interpreting students undergo specialised military education at TSU's Institute of Military Education and are commissioned in the regular army as military linguist officers upon graduation. I have been employed on the teaching staff at the Faculty of Foreign Languages since 2006 and have occupied the position of senior lecturer since 2009, and the administrative post of deputy dean for international affairs since 2010. I am currently responsible for teaching English as a foreign language to military linguist cadets.

### 3.1 Selection of research paradigm and methodology

Researchers determine their choice of methodology according to the purposes of the research study and the concept of 'fitness for purpose' (Cohen et al, 2011). In terms of epistemology, research can be divided generally into quantitative and qualitative:

Quantitative research is aimed at assessing the strength of relationships between variables, and is based on the experimental method which aims to control and manipulate. Qualitative research seeks understanding by observing phenomena in their natural settings (Nunan, 2013: 594).

Stringer (2008: 22) provides a table set out below contrasting the quantitative and qualitative paradigms, using the terms 'objective science' and 'naturalistic inquiry'.

*Table 2: A comparison of the quantitative and qualitative paradigms*

<b>Objective Science</b>	<b>Naturalistic Inquiry</b>
<p><b>Purposes</b> Studies events and behaviours <i>objectively</i>. <i>Hypothesises</i> a relationship between variables of interest.</p> <p><b>Processes</b> Precisely <i>measures</i> quantities of variables. Carefully <i>controls</i> events and conditions</p>	<p><b>Purposes</b> Studies people's <i>subjective</i> experience. <i>Explores perspectives</i> on an issue or problem.</p> <p><b>Processes</b> <i>Describes</i> people's experience and perspective of the issue/problem.</p>

<p>within the study.</p> <p>Uses <i>statistical analysis</i> of data.</p> <p><b>Outcomes</b></p> <p>Seeks <i>explanations</i> for events and behaviours.</p> <p>Describes <i>causes</i> of events and behaviours.</p> <p><i>Generalises</i> findings to sites and people not included in the study.</p>	<p>Allows events to unfold <i>naturally</i>.</p> <p>Uses <i>interpretive methods</i> to analyse the data.</p> <p><b>Outcomes</b></p> <p>Seeks to <i>understand</i> events and behaviours.</p> <p>Constructs <i>detailed descriptions</i> of events and behaviours.</p> <p>Findings are <i>setting and person</i> specific.</p>
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It is important, though, to note at this stage the confusion that can arise from the various terms used in literature. As Stringer points out:

Distinguishing between different research paradigms is not always straightforward. The problem partially relates to the rather loose use of associated terminology, where the literature often refers to *quantitative* and *qualitative* methods as equivalent to the distinction between objective science and naturalistic inquiry and fails to differentiate between the research *paradigm* and the research *methods*. There is a difference, for instance, between qualitative *research* and qualitative *methods* (...) it is possible to use numerical or quantitative data within a naturalistic study to clarify emerging perspectives (Stringer, 2008: 22).

The selection of research paradigm represents the researcher's worldview (Holliday, 2007) and the researcher's worldview in turn determines the design of the study (Cohen et al, 2011). Qualitative research assumes that social settings are 'unique, dynamic and complex' (Hatch, 2002: 9). Cohen et al (2011: 219) assert that:

The social and educational world is a messy place, full of contradictions, richness, complexity, connectedness, conjunctions and disjunctions. It is multilayered, and not easily susceptible to the atomization process inherent in much numerical research. It has to be studied in total rather than in fragments if a true understanding is to be reached.

This is particularly the case in the dynamic atmosphere of a foreign language classroom where not only the perspectives of teacher and students may differ, but also the perspectives between students themselves. Ontologically, this fits with the constructivist paradigm according to which there is no one objective reality; rather there are multiple



realities which are ‘constructed by individuals who experience the world from their own vantage points’ (Hatch, 2002: 15). Realities are experientially based, local and specific (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). Constructivist researchers are interested in individual constructions of reality. Moreover, in their studies they are joined with participants in co-construction and it is therefore ‘impossible and undesirable for researchers to be distant and objective’ (Hatch, 2002: 15). Creswell (2013: 8) maintains that ‘social constructivists believe that individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work’, that they ‘develop subjective meanings of their experiences’ (ibid.) and that the purpose of research ‘is to rely as much as possible on the participants’ views of the situations being studied’ (ibid.).

In selecting a methodology, I considered the possibility of employing an experimental approach to my study, in order to assess the impact of using Storyline in my classroom. An experiment involves changing the value of a variable (for example, in our situation, the teaching method – Storyline) – the independent variable – and observing the effect of that change on another variable (for example, in our situation, the effectiveness of teaching and learning) – the dependent variable (Cohen et al, 2011). Experimental studies have been used to observe the effect of various teaching strategies on student learning (Creswell, 2013). After lengthy consideration, however, I decided that it would not be appropriate for my research. One of the greatest problems in using an experimental approach in such a context is the near-impossibility of controlling extraneous variables, of which there are many:

including such variables as class size, student learning styles, ethnicity, race, gender, social class, type of [learning institution], parenting style experienced by students, motivation, personality, illness, drug use, intelligence, aptitude, school size, exposure to media, and so on (Stringer, 2008: 17).

Additionally, experiments might be easily distorted by participant effects; the ‘Hawthorne effect’ – the fact of simply participating in an experiment might be sufficient to alter participants’ behaviour (Cohen et al, 2011). In any case, research settings which are controlled or manipulated tell us little more than how people react in narrowly defined and artificial contexts (Hatch, 2002: 7), whereas constructivists, as qualitative researchers, study ‘the lived experiences of real people in real settings’

(Hatch, 2002: 6). Experiments involving controlled conditions and manipulation of participants also generate ethical issues (Cohen et al, 2011).

Action research as an approach to investigation may be employed by constructivists (Koshy, 2010: 80). The term ‘action research’ was coined by Lewin (1946, 1948). Action research is a ‘systematic approach to investigation that enables people to find effective solutions to problems they confront in their everyday lives’ (Stringer, 2014: 1). Moreover, action research is an ‘approach to inquiry that is directly relevant to classroom instruction and learning and provides the means for teachers to enhance their teaching and improve student learning’ (Stringer, 2008: 1). The change/improvement can be applied variously and is not necessarily limited to one social actor. ‘Action research is concerned equally with changing *individuals*, on the one hand, and, on the other, the culture of the groups, institutions and societies to which they belong’ (Kemmis and McTaggart 1992: 16, italics in original). Cohen and Manion (1994: 192) write that action research as an approach to research is:

essentially an on-the-spot procedure designed to deal with a concrete problem located in an immediate situation. This means that ideally, the step-by-step process is constantly monitored over varying periods of time and by a variety of mechanisms (questionnaires, diaries, interviews and case studies, for example) so that the ensuing feedback may be translated into modifications, adjustment, directional changes, redefinitions, as necessary, so as to bring about lasting benefit to the ongoing process itself rather than to some future occasion.

Action research can be viewed as a self-reflective cycle, which can be summarised as: 1) plan, 2) act, 3) observe, and 4) reflect, leading back to a new cycle (Kemmis, 1997). This self-reflective cycle is aimed at solving a given problem. In my situation, the concrete problem is that of the effectiveness of the teaching and learning process of my students, in the context of institutional practice. The main purpose of action research is ‘to improve practice – either one’s own practice or the effectiveness of an institution’ (Koshy, 2010: 9). Improving my own practice and, in a wider sense, the effectiveness of my institution is precisely what I hope to achieve in my study. In thinking about ‘how I can teach’, my overall aim is indeed to enhance my teaching and improve student learning, that is, improving educational practice. I have identified the concrete problem located in an immediate situation: the teaching and learning process as regards teaching foreign languages to military linguist cadets at my institution. In order to address this

problem, I intend to plan a solution and act, all the while observing the results of my actions, and finally to reflect in order to improve the teaching and learning process. These are the reasons behind my selection of action research as the basis for my study.

Action research, however, can mean different things to different researchers (Nunan, 1992). There is a distinction between those who emphasise reflective practice and those who advocate 'critical' action research (Kemmis, 1997: 177). Hughes, Denley and Whitehead (1998) discuss the term action research being 'hi-jacked' and directed to certain more overtly political ends. The distinction between the two camps (the reflective practitioners and the critical theorists) lies in their interpretation of action research:

For the former, action research is an improvement to professional practice at the local, perhaps classroom level, within the capacities of individuals and the situations in which they are working; for the latter, action research is part of a broader agenda of changing education, changing schooling and changing society (Kemmis, 1997: 177).

Cohen et al (2011: 350) write that it is questionable whether the latter interpretation is realisable; there is no consensus in the literature. In any case, the scope of my study is the improving of foreign language teaching for military linguist cadets at my institution, involving reflection on my practices as a teacher. I would describe myself, therefore, as an action researcher in the reflective practitioner model (Stenhouse, 1975; Schön, 1987; Elliott, 1991; Cohen et al, 2011).

The idea of teacher-researchers being action researchers is supported in research literature (McDonough and McDonough, 1997; Ellis, 2008; Stringer, 2008, 2014; Burns, 2010). Writing on the study of second language acquisition Ellis (2008: 689) concludes that:

[S]ome educationalists might feel that research undertaken by professional researchers will always be of limited value to language teachers and that a more worthwhile and exciting approach is action research, where teachers become researchers by identifying research questions important to them and seeking answers in their own classrooms.

Teacher reflection makes use of action research to understand students and their learning (Edge, 2000). This led me to consider action research as being particularly fit-for-purpose in my research.

Many action researchers favour case study research since case studies concentrate on what is unique (Wallace, 1998). The specific focus of the case study therefore becomes a positive advantage for action researchers. Looking at the uniqueness of my own situation – which is as unique as that of any teacher in his/her context – an approach that embraces a specific focus on a unique case seems to be particularly appropriate. In discussing typology of case studies, Stenhouse (1983: 21) describes one type of case study as teacher research, in other words, ‘classroom action research or school case studies undertaken by teachers...’ Action research frequently uses case studies (Efron and Ravid, 2013), which are a powerful means of capturing real data which can serve as a basis for action (Koshy, 2010). An action research case study involves the teacher using his/her participant status to carry out the research (Stenhouse, 1983; Sturman, 1999). In my situation, I am a teacher using my participant status to carry out this research, which is to serve as a basis for action.

The case study is a research strategy with an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context (Yin, 2013). Case studies can allow us to penetrate situations in ways that are not always susceptible to numerical analysis (Cohen et al, 2011). The benefits of carrying out case studies are that they enable us to explore the ‘how’ and the ‘why’ of events, being both exploratory and descriptive (Yin, 2013). Case studies’ peculiar strength lies in their attention to the subtlety and complexity of the case in its own right and being a step to action, beginning in a world of action and contributing to it (Cohen et al, 2011: 292). In my situation I need to explore the ‘how’ and ‘why’ of the impact of my chosen teaching strategy on students’ learning, suggesting that a case study would be a suitable approach to my research.

Hitchcock and Hughes (1995: 317) list some main features of case studies (italicised by me), which I have commented on in terms of applicability to my research:

- *It is concerned with a rich and vivid description of events relevant to the case.* In my research I believe the full picture can only be conveyed adequately by providing a rich and vivid description of what happened in the course of the study, in order to achieve better understanding of the findings.

- *It provides a chronological narrative of events relevant to the case.* This fits in well with the action research process of planning, acting, observing and reflecting, necessarily done in a chronological order.
- *It blends a description of events with the analysis of them.* The events themselves and their description are an integral part to their analysis, and the combination of both assists in conveying the full picture of what occurred in the course of the research.
- *It focuses on individual actors or groups of actors, and seeks to understand their perceptions of events.* In action research there is an inherent imperative to empower all participants and take account of their perception of events. It is important to me, and to the validity of the study, to take account not only of my own perceptions of events, but those of my students too.
- *It highlights specific events that are relevant to the case.* In my study I hope to identify what specific events in my classroom are relevant to the effectiveness of the teaching and learning process. A case study, with its very peculiar focus on the ‘how’ and ‘why’ (Yin, 2013), will allow me to do this.
- *The researcher is integrally involved in the case.* As a practitioner-researcher my integral – as opposed to detached – involvement is essential in the carrying out of my research. This is important in action research in particular and common in qualitative research in general.
- *An attempt is made to portray the richness of the case in writing up the report.* I believe that any activity, especially human activity, can only be truly reflected in rich detail. I hope, therefore, to portray such richness in this thesis.

A case study approach has particular value when the researcher has little control over events (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995). Shaughnessy, Zechmeister and Zechmeister (2003) argue that the lack of a high degree of control in case studies, with little control over extraneous variables, makes it difficult to draw inferences on cause-and-effect. Cohen et al (2011: 289), however, maintain that:

Case studies can establish cause and effect, indeed one of their strengths is that they observe effects in real contexts, recognizing that context is a powerful determinant of both causes and effects.

Case studies are, therefore, useful when conducting research in classroom conditions where it might be considered both impossible and undesirable for the teacher to exert or attempt to exert full control. This is particularly the case when investigating a student-centred teaching method as opposed to a teacher-centred method such as grammar-translation or audiolingualism, as discussed in the literature review. These considerations led me to select a case study design as appropriate for my research.

In selecting an appropriate approach to my research, I took into account what I was trying to achieve: improving teaching and learning. Stringer (2008: 14-15), discussing action research in education, writes that initial inquiries into teaching will be based on such questions as:

- What is to be taught?
- How can it be taught?
- Which teaching strategies will be appropriate?
- Which learning activities will be effective?

Although ‘what is to be taught’ is already fixed as part of the curriculum, the ‘How can it be taught?’ depends on me; I am fortunate to have been granted a wide degree of autonomy in terms of the actual teaching and learning process. It is thanks to this autonomy that I am able to undertake the research described here. As part of my research the question of ‘Which teaching strategies will be appropriate?’ is of key consideration, along with the no less important question of ‘Which learning activities will be effective?’. The above quoted questions, therefore, fit my own study very well and are a useful starting point in terms of designing the research process.

Stringer (2008: 36) provides certain key points for research design in action research, summarized below in the order laid out in this chapter:

- Building a preliminary picture: identifying the research problem and the people affected by or having an effect on the problem.
- Focusing: refining the statement of the research problem, the research question, and the research objectives.
- Framing: establishing the scope of the inquiry.
- Sampling: determining procedures for identifying project participants.

- Ethics: taking steps to ensure that no harm is done to people through their inclusion in the research.
- Data gathering procedures: determining how information will be gathered – including interviews, focus groups, observations, review of materials and equipment, and so on.
- Validity: establishing procedures used to enhance the strength of the research.
- Data analysis procedures: selecting methods of distilling information to identify key features, concepts, or meanings – for example, event analysis, categorising, and coding.

These points apply to my study as follows. In my situation the preliminary picture is ineffectiveness in the teaching and learning process and students who are unmotivated to study English due to a teaching and learning process that does not allow them ownership of their learning or demonstrate relevance to real life and their future professional activity. As their teacher, I hope to have a positive effect on this problem. This leads me to focus in on the research problem, which is improving the effectiveness of foreign language teaching in my institutional context.

As a practitioner-researcher, examining first and foremost my own practice and that of my students, my research for the purposes of this study will be limited in scope, focused on a group of my students. The participants, therefore, will be me and a group of military linguist cadets taught by myself. The research will take place at my own timetabled classes with the given group at the Faculty of Foreign Languages, Tomsk State University. It will be conducted over a four-week period, thereby covering the whole of the teaching one topic in the curriculum. The key issue for investigation is the student experience of the teaching and learning process using the Storyline method. In choosing participants I was, as a practitioner-researcher, limited to working with my own students. As a teacher of two groups of military linguist cadets, I knew early on that I would be constrained in terms of participant selection. In the previous year I had conducted a pilot study with the one group of military linguist cadets that I then taught – the following year the second group was added to my timetable.

The pilot group enabled trialling of the data collection methods and data analysis, discussed further in sections 3.3 and 3.5. Since, at the time of this research, these were

final-year students who were preparing to take their graduation exams and who had already participated in the earlier pilot study, I chose the second group of military linguist cadets as participants in this study. Having said that, the group of 4<sup>th</sup> year military linguist cadets that I selected for participation in this study is a fairly typical sample of such groups: during the semester in question there were 7 students, all male, aged between 20-21 years, of mixed ability in terms of English according to the Common European Reference for Languages (CEFR) scale (Council of Europe, 2011). Each military linguist cadet was randomly allocated a number and subsequently referred to by the abbreviation Cdt (Cadet) and the participant number allocated to him, for example, 'Cdt1'. Two of the students (Cdts1 and 7) were 'advanced' speakers at C1 on the CEFR scale; two of the students (Cdts2 and 4) were 'intermediate' speakers at B1 on the CEFR scale; the remaining students were 'upper intermediate' speakers at B2 on the CEFR scale. A descriptor of language ability according to the CEFR scale is provided in the table below:

*Table 3: The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)*

<b>C1</b>	<b>Advanced</b>	<p>Can understand a wide range of demanding, longer texts, and recognise implicit meaning.</p> <p>Can express him/herself fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions.</p> <p>Can use language flexibly and effectively for social, academic and professional purposes.</p> <p>Can produce clear, well-structured, detailed text on complex subjects, showing controlled use of organisational patterns, connectors and cohesive devices.</p>
<b>B2</b>	<b>Upper Intermediate</b>	<p>Can understand the main ideas of complex text on both concrete and abstract topics, including technical discussions in his/her field of specialisation.</p> <p>Can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without strain for either party.</p> <p>Can produce clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects and</p>



		explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options.
<b>B1</b>	<b>Intermediate</b>	<p>Can understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, and so on.</p> <p>Can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken.</p> <p>Can produce simple connected text on topics, which are familiar, or of personal interest.</p> <p>Can describe experiences and events, dreams, hopes and ambitions, and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans.</p>

In cases where the wider population is 30 or fewer, such as in a group of students, it is recommended to include the whole of the wider population as the sample (Krejcie and Morgan, 1970), thus ensuring that the sample better represents the features of the wider population (Cohen et al, 2011: 145). I therefore anticipated that all the members of the given group would form the study sample, although of course I recognised the possibility that some of the students from the group may be excluded from the study on the basis of poor attendance, for example due to illness, or due to a lack of desire to participate in the study. As it turned out, all 7 students elected to participate in the study. Attendance was 100%, which is not unusual for military cadets. Before reviewing the procedures for data collection, ensuring reliability and validity, and data analysis, I shall examine ethical considerations.

### **3.2 Ethical considerations**

Ethical considerations arise in any kind of research study. ‘The research community and those using the findings have a right to expect that research be conducted rigorously, scrupulously and in an ethically defensible manner’ (Cohen et al, 2011: 73). They may arise from the nature of the research project itself, the context for the research, the procedures to be adopted, methods of data collection, the nature of the participants, the type of data collected, and what is to be done with the data (ibid.). I received approval for my research study from the University of Derby’s ethics committee and from the dean of the Faculty of Foreign Languages, Tomsk State University, which required me

to detail in advance what I planned to do in the course of my research and what steps I would take to ensure that the research would be carried out ethically. Informed consent is a fundamental tenet of any ethical research; the researcher ‘explains the purpose of the study, and does not engage in deception about the nature of the study’ (Creswell, J.W., 2007: 141-142). The participant is thus able to make a free decision on whether to participate based on a full understanding of what the research is about and what it will entail. Moreover, ‘informed consent implies informed refusal’ (Cohen et al, 2011: 78). This means that the participants are able to decline participation or withdraw after the commencement of the research.

Prior to the study I informed the group of intended participants about the nature of the research – the trying out of a new method in order to examine its appropriateness and research its effect on the teaching and learning process. I ensured that all students were aware that they could elect not to participate in the study without any consequences and, furthermore, if they chose to participate they could withdraw from the study at any time prior to the end of data collection without prejudice to their studies. Each student completed a participant consent form (see Appendix A) and retained a copy; as it turned out, all the students elected to participate in the study and none chose to withdraw. The researcher must take steps to protect the participants’ anonymity (Creswell, J.W., 2007). As mentioned in section 3.1, each student was randomly allocated a number (from 1 to 7) to guarantee confidentiality in the writing up of the research. Although each student’s number was known to me, which was necessary in order to compare the pre- and post-Storyline questionnaires and organise the interviews, they are referred to in this study only by number and it was made clear to all the participating students that no data identifying them as individuals would be released to non-participants without their prior consent. Although, given the small number of groups of military linguist cadets, it would be possible to identify the group, this did not worry the students. Another potential issue in the small-scale, practitioner research is the difficulty of preserving participants’ anonymity from each other (Drake and Heath, 2011). This likewise was made clear to the participants, but again was not a matter of concern for them. It is important to note that no sensitive or particularly personal information was sought from the participants (Diener and Crandall, 1978; Cohen et al, 2011); rather, the study examined the student response to a teaching method, and issues of privacy were not a

concern of the students. Nevertheless, upon completion of the study, any materials that might identify individual respondents, including interview tapes and my personal records, were destroyed.

In undertaking this study I had to be mindful of the fact that I was in a dual role as both teacher and researcher. Though teacher-researchers can use their close proximity to the research as an advantage (Hammersley, 1993), an insider researcher such as a 'practitioner-researcher' essentially 'inhabits the hyphen' (Drake and Heath, 2011: 25) and must safeguard against losing sense of sight of oneself in the context of perceptions by other actors (Humphrey, 2007: 23). Due to my role at the faculty as a senior lecturer and deputy dean, in addition to being a researcher for the purposes of this study, I was concerned that the fact that students' questionnaires were not anonymous and that they were to be interviewed by me might have some kind of impact on the answers they gave. I therefore explained to each of them both orally and in writing (in the participant consent form), before each questionnaire and interview, that they had an important role to play in helping to improve the teaching and learning process. I reiterated the importance that they should speak freely and not try to provide answers that they might think I was looking for. Being military linguist cadets they were accustomed to being spoken to frankly and listening to those in positions of authority. I believe that they appreciated their role in the research and answered freely, fully and truthfully. Similarly to Mitchell-Barrett (2010: 75), it was important for me that the participants 'felt comfortable during the research process and that they had a positive experience', so it was an advantage that the research was conducted during their normal lesson times, in a setting which they found familiar.

Although difficulties may arise in practitioner research if there are conflicts between roles as a researcher and as a practitioner (Gorman, 2007), the purpose behind the research was to improve the teaching and learning process and, therefore, involved me doing what I would do anyway as a teacher – trying to find the most effective way to teach my students and help them to learn, while ensuring they were motivated. Furthermore, being both a teacher and a researcher may be seen as advantageous in that, in practitioner research, 'it is through a merging of these functions that the person

develops their unique and applicable perspective on their research project' (Drake and Heath, 2011: 32).

Methodological issues are important ethical considerations. Methodological rigour is not merely a technical issue, but an ethical one: 'To ensure a sense of inclusion and ownership among all stakeholders it is vital that all their perspectives are considered in the design of the action and its implementation' (Burton, Brundrett and Jones, 2014: 83). Moreover, research participants have a right to expect reliability and validity; the reliability and validity of a study depends on a true reflection of the perspectives of the participants (Morrison, 1996). When the researcher is an active participant in the research process, the issue of objectivity must be addressed. It is debateable, however, as to whether research ever really can be objective (ibid.). Hammersley (1993) writes that all knowledge is a construction; the obvious implication is that objectivity is impossible to attain. Koshy (2010: 99) points out, though, that 'case studies, as in the case of action research, are sometimes criticised for the inevitable subjectivity involved in creating a narrative, but this subjectivity is reduced by sharing the data with those who are involved in the study.' By sharing the data with the research participants and confirming my interpretation of the data with them, the knowledge is jointly constructed and thus the objectivity of the study is increased. Furthermore, their inclusion and ownership is enhanced. I shall examine questions of reliability and validity in greater detail after a discussion of the data collection.

### **3.3 A description of the 'UN Team Site' Storyline**

Careful designing of a Storyline topic is fundamental to its success in the classroom, as with the planning of any topic for any classroom. In qualitative research the data gained and the context in which they were gained are indivisible (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). In order to enable a full understanding of the data and findings, I shall first examine the context by reviewing a description of the Storyline topic.

The 'UN Team Site' Storyline topic was designed in late 2012 by me and Lieutenant Colonel Mikhail Shevchenko of the Institute of Military Education, National Research

Tomsk State University, specifically for the teaching of English to military linguist cadets. Taking into account the current trend for the United Nations (UN) to intervene in localised armed conflicts by means of deploying peacekeepers or military observers this is a topic of current interest to military linguists worldwide. Russia is an active participant in the UN and provides significant numbers of military personnel for various UN missions around the globe. A UN team site is essentially a military base for personnel seconded to the UN from its member countries, making it a multicultural and multilingual environment conducive to developing intercultural communicative competence. Although the UN works in both English and French, as a rule, the vast majority of UN team sites operate in English. Storyline topics are specific in design, allowing students to explore wider issues through a deep learning experience in a specific context (Harkness, 2007). For example, instead of wider standalone topics such as ‘the UN’ or ‘peacekeeping’ or ‘armies of the world’, a specific topic such as the ‘UN Team Site’ Storyline that I am about to describe, enables integration of the curriculum and the opportunity to learn about wider issues based on personal experience, as in real life. This is echoed in Mitchell-Barrett (2010: 96):

By choosing more specific contexts for learning, Storyline practitioners would advocate that, in a Storyline, [learners] can fully engage with specific topics in real and meaningful ways, allowing students to deeply engage with their learning experiences.

I shall now examine how this is achieved in the design of the Storyline used in the study.

The planning format, as described earlier, consists of the following areas detailed by Harkness (2007: 20-21): Storyline Episode, Key Questions, Learner Activities, Class Organisation, Resources, and Learning Outcomes and Assessment. Taking into consideration the fact that the primary purpose in my classroom is the teaching and learning of English, I have added a category for language skills employed during Storyline. All the activities are carried out in English. The brief planning format for the ‘UN Team Site’ Storyline is shown in Appendix J.

The first principle in Storyline is the *Principle of Story*, providing a predictable, linear structure and a meaningful context for learning by reflecting real life (Creswell, 1997; Letschert, 2006). It is the ‘logical sequence of ideas, presented in the form of a

descriptive narrative [which] provides a structure for exploring many diverse themes or topics' (Harkness, 2007: 20). Each Storyline is made up of a number of key episodes, which provide opportunities to cover what has to be learned in the course of the Storyline (Creswell, 1997). The 'UN Team Site' Storyline employs eight episodes, each of which is designed to occupy the whole of a 90-minute lesson, but is capable of being compressed in case of time restrictions. I chose to allot a full lesson to each episode; overall we spent four weeks working on the Storyline at two lessons per week. The episodes are:

1. The officers
2. Our team site
3. Team site organisation
4. Serving at the team site
5. Life at the team site
6. Incidents
7. Review
8. Celebration (leaving party)

The starting point for any Storyline topic is either the setting or the characters (Harkness, 2007). The 'UN Team Site' Storyline begins with the characters. An essential component of Storyline is the 'key questions' (Creswell, 1997; Harkness, 2007). The Storyline begins with a key question on which countries contribute officers to UN missions. This question is given as homework set in advance, meeting the *Structure before Activity* principle (Creswell, 1997). It is crucial for the students to acquire this information beforehand so that they are able to subsequently create a character who could realistically be a member of a UN mission. The homework requires the students to research such information, select a non-English-speaking foreign country and write a brief report on the country and its armed forces, thereby gaining useful background knowledge for when they come to create their characters.

The 'UN Team Site' Storyline requires students to create characters who are officers in foreign, non-English-speaking armies. The reasons for this are as follows. Firstly, by creating a character in a foreign army, rather than the Russian army, the students have to research information on the given country and its armed forces, which corresponds to

the view that language is not studied in isolation (Rivers, 2007). This also allows the students to make links between their military curriculum and their English language studies. Secondly, by creating a character in a non-English-speaking army, the students are able not only to take on the role of the character – a key element of Storyline (Bell, 2000) – but also achieve better empathy with the role of a non-native speaker of English (their character) in an English-speaking environment (the UN team site). This would not be achievable if they were to take on the roles of, for example, officers in the American/British/Canadian armies. A useful analogy, perhaps, is – if one is a student of French – imagining oneself as a foreign tourist in Paris rather than a Parisian in Paris. In addition to learning about the city, the sights, the restaurants (all of which are appropriate topics for a French language class) one can explore language issues that might arise in communication while also attaining ownership of learning. Such a methodological choice enables ‘the coherent implementation of intercultural and communicative objectives’ (Borghetti, 2013: 254) necessary for developing the intercultural communicative competence discussed in subsection 2.3.2.

Ownership of learning is enhanced by each student creating his/her own character from coloured paper and various materials capable of fitting onto a sheet of A4. The students give their characters names, ages, ranks, and write short biographies for them, which are displayed on the sheet of A4. As stated in subsections 2.2.2 and 2.3.3, by creating their own characters, the students can internalise feelings and emotions, generating a deeper and more meaningful learning experience corresponding to the *Principle of Ownership* (Creswell, 1997; Bell, 2000; Kocher, 2007). Having created their characters, the students (in character) introduce themselves to each other and talk about their respective militaries, first in pairs, then as a group. Throughout the course of the Storyline, the students act out their roles in character. For homework, the students write formal letters of application for their characters to serve at a UN mission. The *Principle of Anticipation* operates throughout the Storyline, as the students are interested in how the story will develop. Such anticipation ensures that learning goes on both inside and outside the classroom (Creswell, 1997: 10).

The second Storyline episode starts with a key question on the UN and its role in resolving armed conflicts around the globe. This is designed to elicit prior student

knowledge and gaps in their knowledge, which enables the teaching process to be directed at filling these gaps, making for productive learning. Storyline's *Principle of Context* presupposes that new learning is linked to previous knowledge, with students researching, practising skills and assimilating knowledge in order to progress through the story (Creswell, 1997: 11). The discussion then focuses in on UN team sites: what they are and what they look like, leading to the creation of a word bank and the students making a frieze (display) collectively to represent a UN team site. This frieze is subsequently displayed at the front of the classroom. The frieze, made by the students themselves, visually brings the Storyline to life, providing learners with a certain ownership of the creative process (Creswell, 1997: 11), and creates a motivating learning atmosphere (Kocher, 2007).

The third episode involves students deciding on a setting for the Storyline in the form of a UN team site, in a fictive location of their choosing. The purpose of the episode is to develop abilities in collaborative work along with vocabulary and language skills. The students discuss the team site's organisation and select a team site commander from among their characters. They discuss the positions available for officers and the responsibilities involved. After voicing their preference for which positions their characters would like to occupy, the final selection is made by the team site commander. A standard operating procedure (SOP) for the team site is reviewed and decided on by the students, who then write it down. Finally, a homework task is given to the students to write a report on their team site's organisation and SOP.

The fourth Storyline episode begins with students considering in pairs what the daily routine of a team site is like and what their characters would be doing. The students then watch a documentary video about life at a real UN team site in order to check their concepts and make notes. This develops the students' understanding of what serving at a team site involves. After watching the documentary video, they discuss what they have found out as a group, using their vocabulary and developing their language skills.

The fifth episode starts with students discussing as a group the possible feelings, positive and negative, which officers might experience while serving at a UN team site, and how they might affect work. The students then read a short story about serving



away from home and discuss it in pairs, followed by a group discussion on how they might support each other. For homework, the students write an email home about life at the team site practising vocabulary and using themes covered in the episode.

The sixth episode begins with the key questions ‘What incidents might occur at a team site?’ and ‘How could you respond?’ An integral part of any Storyline is the occurrence of ‘incidents’ (Harkness, 2007) generated initially by the students and then followed by teacher-given examples, which require the participants to react to them and consider an appropriate resolution. Such incidents provide opportunities within the Storyline episodes for students to use their newly-gained knowledge and develop it (Creswell, 1997). In pairs, the students discuss potential incidents and then tell the group how they might respond. As a group the students discuss these incidents and the appropriateness of the responses. For the next step, the teacher provides examples of real-life incidents and the students discuss best responses as pairs and report to the group.

The seventh and penultimate episode provides an opportunity for the learners to review the knowledge gained. The teacher lists the new knowledge and practised skills, and the students write them down. The students discuss what they enjoyed and did not enjoy as part of the Storyline. For homework, the students write a short diary of their service at the team site, based on their knowledge and previous homework. This enables the students to demonstrate what they have learned and how they can apply their knowledge.

The eighth and final episode gives an additional opportunity for reviewing the students’ progress and concluding the Storyline. Harkness (2007: 24) notes:

It is important that each Storyline comes to a satisfactory conclusion. This often takes the form of a celebration of learning but, depending on the topic, it may involve a visit... or entertaining a visiting expert.

Such an event gives time to reflect on what was learned and accomplished during the Storyline and to assess whether the intended outcomes and learning goals were achieved (Creswell, 1997). Given the logistical difficulties of visiting an actual UN team site, the ‘UN Team Site’ Storyline is designed to end with a so-called leaving party in which the students participate ‘in character’. This provides an opportunity for reflection on their learning. In our case, we were fortunate to be able to invite a senior army officer who

had previously served at a UN team site. The presence of an expert guest lends to the reality of the Storyline and serves as a reminder that, though the Storyline itself was invented, the knowledge gained by students has true practical applications to real life.

Although the curriculum is planned by the teacher and the development of the Storyline is guided by the teacher, the students create their own characters and select a location of their choice. This is the *Principle of the Teacher's Rope* – a critical partnership between teacher and student, which is collaborative due to the balance between teacher control and student control (Creswell, 1997) – evident throughout Storyline. The students are provided with a UN team site framework in which to operate, but make choices as regards their team site organisation, roles and responsibilities, SOP, and responses to incidents. Creswell (1997: 10) describes this principle:

The rope is held by the teacher, moving the story along, but its flexibility allows for bends and twists, giving the students their control. By following the rope, the students learn the planned curriculum.

The students are, therefore, provided with ownership of their learning, which proceeds within a teacher-generated structured framework, thereby enabling the achievement of the state-mandated curricular goals without diminishing student creativity.

A distinguishing feature of Storyline is the learning that takes place during the 'story' co-created by the teacher and students. An explanation of how learning occurs in the course of the Storyline's 'story' (the fictional content, key learning intentions and assessment criteria) is provided in the table below. The last 5-10 minutes of each Storyline class are devoted to formative assessment in the form of teacher feedback, which is given orally and takes into account the assessment criteria as set out below; after homework is checked, the first 5-10 minutes of the following class are also devoted to teacher feedback in the form of written corrections/suggestions for improvement, followed up with oral clarification where necessary. In the course of classes, where appropriate, teacher feedback/corrections are also given. It should be noted that university procedures provide for summative assessment, in the form of tests and examinations, only at the end of each university semester. A description of how learning occurs during the 'story' of the Storyline is provided in the table below.

Table 4: Learning during the ‘story’ of the UN Team Site Storyline

Episode	Fictional Content	Key Learning Intentions	Assessment Criteria
1. The officers	The students are officers in the armed forces of non-English-speaking armies. They introduce themselves and become acquainted with each other.  As homework, they write formal letters of application to serve at a UN mission.	To understand how to speak about oneself when making introductions.  To understand how to present information on armed forces.  To understand how to write formal letters.	Extent to which the student is able to use appropriate vocabulary, grammar, register, ask and respond to questions.  Extent to which the student is able to demonstrate understanding of the structure of ‘their’ chosen army.  Extent to which the student is able to demonstrate understanding of formal letter writing (structure, vocabulary, register, past simple, present simple, present continuous,).
2. Our team site	The students, in role, discuss the role of the UN in resolving armed conflicts, followed by a discussion of what a UN team site should look like.	To understand the role of the UN in resolving armed conflicts.  To understand the set-up of a UN team site.	Extent to which the student is able to use appropriate vocabulary, grammar, register, and participate in multilateral discourse.  Extent to which the student is able to demonstrate understanding of the UN’s role in peacekeeping.  Extent to which the student is able to demonstrate understanding of a UN team site’s set-up.
3. Team site organisation	The students, in role, make decisions on their team site’s organisation and allocation of responsibilities. They also decide their team site’s standard	To understand types of team site organisation.  To understand different positions which exist at UN team site and their respective responsibilities.  To understand how to write SOPs and reports on	Extent to which the student is able to use appropriate vocabulary, grammar and register in both informal oral discussions and formal written English.  Extent to which the student is able to demonstrate

	operating procedure (SOP). For homework, they write a report on their team site's organisation and SOP.	decisions taken.	understanding of positions, responsibilities, SOPs and report writing (vocabulary, modal verbs, active and passive voice).
4. Serving at the team site	The students, in role, talk to each other about what they do as part of their jobs.	To consolidate understanding on the responsibilities involved in different positions. To consolidate understanding how to talk about one's responsibilities.	Extent to which the student is familiar with the responsibilities of different positions. Extent to which the student is able to use appropriate vocabulary and grammar in talking about job responsibilities (vocabulary, modal verbs, imperatives).
5. Life at the team site	The students, in role, complete homework involving writing an email home about their lives at the team site.	To understand how to write informal emails (structure, vocabulary, register). To understand how to use vocabulary and grammar regarding events and their feelings about them.	Extent to which the student is able to use appropriate vocabulary, grammar and register in informal written English (linking words, past perfect, past perfect continuous).
6. Incidents	The students, in role, decide how to respond to various incidents which occur at their team site.	To understand how to follow SOPs. To understand decision-making in the chain of command.	Extent to which the student is able to use appropriate vocabulary and grammar in spoken military English (vocabulary, subjunctive mood, imperatives).
7. Review	The students, in role, complete homework involving writing a short diary of their service at the team site.	To consolidate understanding of cultural learning during the Storyline (knowledge on foreign armies, UN team sites, positions and responsibilities). To consolidate understanding of language learning during the Storyline (vocabulary and grammar in context).	Extent to which the student is able to demonstrate cultural learning (knowledge on foreign armies, UN team sites, positions and responsibilities). Extent to which the student is able to demonstrate language learning (vocabulary and grammar in context).

8. Celebration (Leaving Party)	The students, in role, attend a leaving party to celebrate the end of their service at the team site.	To further consolidate understanding of cultural learning during the Storyline (knowledge on foreign armies, UN team sites, positions and responsibilities).  To further consolidate understanding of language learning during the Storyline (vocabulary and grammar in context).	Extent to which the student is able to use appropriate vocabulary, grammar, register, and ask and respond to questions in formal spoken English.  Extent to which the student is able to demonstrate understanding of the structure of 'their' chosen army, the UN's role in peacekeeping, a UN team site's set-up, and understanding of positions, responsibilities, SOPs and report writing.
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### 3.4 Data collection

In gathering data a researcher is guided by the research questions (Stake, 1995). It is, after all, the research questions which determine what kind of data we might need in order to answer them. In my study, the research questions relate to the impact of a particular teaching method on the teaching of certain students in a very specific context. It is important to use multiple sources of evidence in case study research, where the most important advantage is:

[T]he development of *converging lines of inquiry*, a process of triangulation and corroboration [meaning that] any case study finding or conclusion is likely to be more convincing and accurate if it is based on several sources of information' (Yin, 2013: 116) (italics in original).

My data collection process began shortly before the commencement of the study with a pre-study questionnaire. In the course of the study I kept a teacher's diary of what happened in the classroom and how the participants responded to the Storyline activities. The students maintained journals throughout the Storyline topic, recording their perspectives. Immediately after the study the participants completed a post-study questionnaire and I conducted interviews with them individually, followed by a focus

group with all the students together. These data collection methods will be discussed in detail later in this section.

In case study research it is necessary to maintain a chain of evidence which would ‘allow an external observer... to follow the derivation of any evidence from initial research questions to ultimate case study conclusions’ (Yin, 2013: 122). Finally there is the issue of storing data; particularly important is the developing of backup copies of computer files (Davidson, 1996). My appreciation of this importance grew after almost losing my collected data halfway through the study due to a computer virus. In the course of my study I recorded all the data in raw form, though anonymised in order to ensure the confidentiality of participants’ responses. Additionally, maintaining a case study database of raw data increases the reliability of the entire case study and the methodological problem of determining construct validity will have been resolved, increasing the quality of the case study overall (Yin, 2013). I will examine these points further in my discussion of reliability and validity.

When selecting data collection methods, I had considered using pre- and post-study language tests as a measure of the impact of the Storyline method, but eventually decided against this. It is impossible to say whether the participating group would have made as much (or, indeed, even more) progress if other (or even the previous) teaching methods had been used. This issue could have been addressed by using a control group for comparison, but that would have created problems of another nature. Firstly, using a teaching method I believe to be less effective would raise serious questions of an ethical nature in terms of a potential negative impact on students’ learning. Secondly, as described above in my discussion of an experimental approach, it would have been extremely difficult to control the many inevitable variables, for example, differences between individual students, such as individual ability and motivation levels (see Stringer, 2008). Additionally, test results are not particularly revealing in explaining the reasons behind student progress. McBeath (2006: 55), a teacher of English to military students for over 25 years, discusses the quantifiable data that satisfy many of the stakeholders in the US military’s American Language Course (ALC):

Broadly speaking, students who attend courses at the Defense Language Institute and who plough through the 36 volumes of the ALC, five hours

a day, six days a week, will make gains of some 3 percent to 5 percent on their [test] scores for every book they finish.

At first glance such results would seem to lend support to the view that the US military's audiolingualism-based language course is effective in its teaching. McBeath believes, however, that '[T]he success rate of the ALC is probably dependent on the instruction being based in Texas' (ibid.), with the learners being immersed day-and-night in an English-speaking environment throughout the course. The effect of the immersion of foreign learners in an English-language setting makes it virtually impossible to state that their gains in English are due entirely to the teaching method employed. This underlines the importance of a research design that takes particular account of the participants' perspectives on the effectiveness of the employed teaching method in the teaching and learning process.

It is important to differentiate paradigm and methods for it is possible to 'use numerical or quantitative data within a naturalistic study to clarify emerging perspectives' (Stringer, 2008: 22). Stake (1995: 62) distinguishes between the qualitative and the quantitative case study researcher: the former 'lets the occasion tell its story, the situation, the problem, resolution or irresolution of the problem', whereas the latter 'keeps focused on categories or key events, attentive to background conditions that may influence subsequent analysis but concentrated on what constitutes a tally'. In my research I was a qualitative case study action researcher, letting the occasion tell its story, but also making use of descriptive statistics to support the telling of the story and assist analysis.

Prior to the study's commencement, I asked the students to complete pre-study questionnaires rating their perceived ability in language skills and providing information on what they like and do not like about their English classes. The information provided by the students enabled me to identify which problematic areas in teaching and learning could be tackled using Storyline, which allowed me to refine the approach used over the given period. During the study I employed participant observation, keeping a teacher's diary to record what happened during classes in terms of student reception and participation, which also enabled refinement of the approach. The students kept journals throughout the study, making entries after each class on what

they liked and did not like, and their thoughts on language skills. At the end of each week I collected the journals and read the students' entries over the weekend. Upon completion of the study I asked the students to complete post-study questionnaires rating their perceived ability in language skills and providing information on what they liked and did not like about their English classes taught using the Storyline approach. I also conducted interviews and a focus group with the students to obtain richer data on issues such as motivation of students and their personal perception of Storyline and their progress in English during the study. In order to keep track of each student's development throughout the course of the research, each student was given a participant number against which data on student responses were entered. I shall now review the various data collection methods.

#### *3.4.1 Questionnaires*

The pre-Storyline questionnaire (Appendix B) was handed out and completed by the students a few days before the start of the study. The questionnaire was written in standard English with vocabulary which was familiar to the participants. The students wrote their participant number on the questionnaire and proceeded to answer the questions. They answered the questions using a Likert scale of five points where 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 4 = agree, and 5 = strongly agree. The data, in conjunction with the data from the post-Storyline questionnaire responses, would allow a comparison of each participant's development during the course of the study.

The questionnaire was trialled prior to the study with a group of military linguist cadets in the course of the pilot study and corrected accordingly to avoid miscomprehensions; for example, the second statement in the original version of the pre-Storyline questionnaire read *I am motivated to learn English*. This was a source of confusion to the students who interpreted it as asking about their general motivation to learn English, whereas I had meant their motivation to learn English in the context of the earlier approach to the teaching and learning process. Opportunities for misunderstanding during this study were avoided by changing the statement to *I am motivated to learn*



*English in class*. It ought to be noted that this misunderstanding applied to all the students, rather than being caused by (lack of) language proficiency. As a result of the piloting, the questions in the revised version of the pre-study questionnaire were correctly understood by all the participants.

Closed questions (for example, rating scales) in questionnaires are quick to complete, straightforward to analyse, and non-discriminatory in terms of how articulate the respondents are (Wilson and McLean, 1994). Although open questions enable participants to:

write a free account in their own terms, to explain and qualify their responses [they] can lead to irrelevant and redundant information; they may be too open-ended for the respondent to know what kind of information is being sought (Cohen et al, 2011: 382).

In designing the pre-Storyline questionnaire I was wary about confusing the participants as to what information they should provide and so sought to keep the questionnaire simple and straightforward. Most importantly, though, I was aware that I would have the opportunity to interview each participant individually upon completion of the study and, therefore, decided that the interview stage would be the most appropriate time to elicit richer information and probe their responses in greater detail. The resulting questionnaire thus contained seven questions.

The post-Storyline questionnaire (Appendix C) was handed out and completed by the students at the first class immediately after the four-week period of Storyline. Its design was similar to that of a post-course evaluation questionnaire. The initial seven questions were the same as in the pre-Storyline questionnaire in order to allow me to examine the students' perception of how they had developed during the Storyline period. The first three questions asked them to state the extent to which they agreed with statements regarding their satisfaction with how English was taught, their motivation to learn English, and their progress in English. This would enable a comparison to be made of the participants' perception of the previous teaching approach and Storyline as a method in foreign language teaching in order to answer Research Question 1 (How do military linguist cadets respond to Storyline as a foreign language teaching method?). Questions 4-7 related to the students' perception of their proficiency in language skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing). This would allow a comparison to be made of the previous

teaching approach and Storyline as a foreign language teaching method, which was relevant to Research Question 3 – What effect (if any) does Storyline have on military linguist cadets' language development?.

In order to obtain more detailed data regarding the student response to the specific activities done during Storyline (relevant to Research Question 2) and to gain understanding of how the students perceived Storyline affected their language learning (relevant to Research Question 3), their response to Storyline features was of interest. The eighth question provided the students with a list of what they had done as part of the Storyline and asked them to underline all the Storyline features that they believed had helped their English to improve. In the pilot study, the ninth question originally asked the students to list the five features that they liked most. The reason for these two separate questions was my acknowledgement that the students might like a particular activity but not consider it useful in the teaching and learning process and vice versa. After administering the post-Storyline questionnaire in the pilot study, however, I encountered a problem that made me reconsider the design of the ninth question. While looking through the answers provided by the students, I noticed that one student had misunderstood the question and written down, along with three features of Storyline that he enjoyed, two additional features that he liked, which were answers appropriate to the tenth question. I asked him to answer the ninth question again and discovered that his answers to the question the second time did not fully correspond to his previously selected three features. I reached the decision that asking the participants to select five features that they enjoyed most was too arbitrary and that a better question would be to ask them to indicate every feature that they particularly enjoyed, without reference to a pre-given arbitrary number. For this study I therefore re-designed the ninth question, which asked the participants to list each feature that they had particularly enjoyed.

In the course of the pilot study it also became apparent that in some cases I had overlooked other things that some of the students liked or did not like. I therefore considered including open questions since they might result in gaining information that otherwise might not be caught in the questionnaire. Additionally, they put the responsibility for and ownership of the data much more firmly into respondents' hands (Cohen et al, 2011). I thus added two questions to the post-Storyline questionnaire that

asked for open-ended responses. The tenth question asked the students to write about anything else that they liked during the Storyline, recognising that I might have overlooked something important. The eleventh and final question asked the students to write anything that they did not like and provide an explanation, if appropriate. These additional questions would prove to provide data not only on Storyline's applicability to my particular context, but also on whether any key aspects of Storyline should be adapted to the context in which I work.

### *3.4.2 Teacher's diary*

Observation can play a key role in teacher-led research (Burns, 2010), especially because when teachers act as observers they are 'privileged' observers since they are 'an organic part of the institutional environment' (McDonough and McDonough, 1997: 116). In action research, the purpose of participant observation is to 'enable an observer to build a picture of the lifeworld of those being observed... It enables teachers to see how students go about the tasks that have been assigned them' (Stringer, 2014: 113). Teacher observations in such a study are valuable in answering the question of the impact of the Storyline method on the foreign language classroom due to the teacher's ability to 'compare a learner's level of active participation and language use in the Storyline with that in the normal English class' (Ahlquist, 2011: 79). In this study I observed each class as an active participant, not an easy task given the dual role of teacher and researcher; the participant role may demand too much attention in order to fulfil the observer role, resulting in not having 'sufficient time to take notes or to raise questions about events from different perspectives' (Yin, 2013: 113). It can be difficult to keep field notes while teaching and videotaping the classes for later analysis can be helpful (Burns, 2010). I decided against videotaping, however, as in my experience the novelty of a video camera in the classroom proved distracting for students and, ultimately, non-conducive to effective teaching and learning. I kept a teacher's diary throughout the study, making entries after each class. In spite of the fact that I was also teaching the classes, as opposed to being a passive observer, I was able to keep a record of what happened during classes (what we did and the overall student response), each student's participation (how each student responded to the various Storyline activities in

terms of positive/negative/neutral responses and use of English), and students' individual development (use of English) in the course of the Storyline topic. The observation was semi-structured and therefore hypothesis-generating (Cohen et al, 2011), which would allow for subsequent clarification in the course of the study by means of the other data collection methods. An excerpt from my teacher's diary (an entry made after one class) may be found in Appendix D.

The presence of a researcher in the classroom can influence the participants of a study (Hatch, 2002). One particular advantage of simultaneously observing my own students while teaching was that my presence did not prove to be a distraction, which it might easily have been had I been observing somebody else's class. Yet, in any study involving observation, there is the possibility that the Hawthorne effect – the mere fact of participating in a study may affect the participants' behaviour (Cohen et al, 2011: 314) – might have affected my students' behaviour by, perhaps, influencing them to work harder. As with any study involving human participants, behaviour is difficult to control or explain. Here, triangulation involving, for example, questionnaires and interviews, is useful in providing different data on participants' perspectives, which enhances the reliability and validity of the research (Stake, 1995; Burns, 2010; Yin, 2013). In presenting the data, 'chronology is used as the organisational principle, thereby enabling not only cause and effect to be addressed, but also possessing the strength of an ongoing story' (Cohen et al, 2011: 302). Data from the teacher's diary on individual students' participation and development would provide points for discussion in the interviews and focus group. The teacher's diary itself, though, constituted a stand-alone testament to the development of the group as a whole and Storyline's impact on the teaching and learning process. It would therefore provide relevant data to help answer Research Questions 1, 2 and 3).

### *3.4.3 Student journals*

Hatch (2002) considers journals as a data source to be supplementary to other data collection methods; for me they were a useful supplement to my own observations, the questionnaire responses, the interviews, and the focus group. The participants were

asked to maintain journals during the course of the Storyline topic, and to make entries after each Storyline class, guided by the following headings:

- What are your feelings about today's class?
- What did you enjoy?
- What did you not enjoy?
- Write about your language use.

The headings for guidance and the entries themselves were all written in English, the students' English being of sufficient level to allow them to communicate their thoughts fluently, even if not always grammatically correct. Asking research participants to 'make written reflections on their experiences can be a powerful way to get another take on participant perspectives' (Hatch, 2002: 140). The journals were aimed at providing data not only on the classes individually, but also on the development of students' perspectives throughout the Storyline. The student journals would therefore be relevant to all of the research questions. They were meant to be written as reflexive journals, thus enhancing the dependability of the research (Cohen et al, 2011). Such journals may be written as personal diaries for 'reflection, speculation and catharsis' (Lincoln and Guba, 1985: 327). In action research such reflection on the part of participants is valuable; reflective writing forms part of many action research projects (Hatch, 2002: 140). The students made their entries in their own free time after classes and handed in their journals at the end of every week (after every two Storyline classes). I read the journal entries over the weekend as part of Kemmis' (1997) action research self-reflective cycle of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting, leading back to a new cycle. Having worked with the students, observed their response to Storyline in class and having read their own reflections in their journals, I was able to better reflect on my own practices and plan the new cycle: the next classes.

Journal data are also particularly useful in 'guiding the direction of other data collection methods' (Hatch, 2002: 141). If journal entries draw the researcher's attention to something that has been missed or was unanticipated, 'adjustments can be made for future interviews' (Hatch, 2002: 141). 'The quality of the journals as data depends on the effort which a learner is prepared to expend on the task, the ability [to express themselves] and not least their affective state at the time, which might not be the same as when they did a particular task' (Ahlquist, 2011: 74-75). As it turned out, the

students' journal entries varied in length; some participants wrote rather briefly and others provided lengthier pieces. Nevertheless, each student made the expected entries after each class and I saw nothing to be gained by cajoling more reticent participants to write more than they wished. An excerpt from a student journal (an entry made after one class) may be found in Appendix E.

#### *3.4.4 Interviews*

When designing a research study, it is important to bear in mind that we cannot observe everything, but others observe what we do not necessarily see:

Two principal uses of case study are to obtain the descriptions and interpretations of others. The case will not be seen the same by everyone. Qualitative researchers take pride in discovering and portraying the multiple views of the case. The interview is the main road to multiple realities (Stake, 1995: 64).

This is no less important in action research, where the perspectives of all participants are valued and must be taken into account (Efron and Ravid, 2013; Stringer, 2014). For me it would have been inconceivable not to conduct interviews with my students; to not have done so would have been to ignore their voices as co-participants in the study.

Cohen et al (2011: 411) describe the purposes that interviews may serve as a research technique: firstly, as a means of gathering information having a direct bearing on the research objectives; secondly, to test hypotheses or suggest new ones, or as an explanatory device to help identify variables and relationship; and thirdly, to validate other methods, or to go deeper into the motivations of respondents and their reasons for responding as they do. The third purpose is expanded upon by Stringer (2008: 55) who discusses interviews in terms of 'understand[ing] the natural world' of the learner and understanding it in the learner's terms. In my study, the interviews serve all three of these purposes: Firstly, they gather important, rich data. Secondly, they help identify the relationship between Storyline and the effectiveness of the teaching and learning process. Finally, they validate the questionnaires and teacher's diary, at the same time going deeper into the participants' motivation and reasons behind their responses:

By providing access to what is 'inside a person's head', these approaches allow investigators to measure what someone knows (knowledge or

information), what someone likes or dislikes (values and preferences), and what someone thinks (attitudes and beliefs) (Tuckman and Harper, 2012: 214).

Different types of interview are fit for different purposes:

The structured interview is useful when researchers are aware of what they do not know and therefore are in a position to frame questions that will supply the knowledge required, whereas the unstructured interview is useful when researchers are not aware of what they do not know, and therefore, rely on the respondents to tell them (Lincoln and Guba, 1985: 269).

In my situation, I knew what I wanted to find out, yet could not claim to be fully aware of what I did not know, for example, the participants' perception of Storyline and how it affected the teaching and learning process in terms of both effectiveness and motivation. I was relying on the interviews to provide richer, more detailed data than would be possible to gain from a questionnaire. There is the 'focused interview' in which the interviews may remain open-ended, but the researcher generally follows a certain set of questions (Yin, 2013: 107). Yin continues by observing that 'a major purpose of such an interview might simply be to corroborate certain facts that you already think have been established' (ibid.). I therefore chose to conduct focused interviews, which involved some repetition of questions from the questionnaires, for purposes of validity, and questions designed to understand the students' preferences in the teaching and learning process. In interviews, 'further information may be required through the skilful use of prompts, which enable participants to reveal more details of the phenomena they are discussing' (Stringer, 2014: 108). Prompt questions such as *Can you explain that a bit more?* were prepared in case further probing of a particular issue was required.

I selected the wording of the questions carefully; specific questions may cause a respondent to become cautious or guarded, resulting in less-than-honest answers whereas non-specific questions may lead circuitously to the desired information (Tuckman and Harper, 2012). As the researcher is the research instrument, the effective interviewer is not only knowledgeable about the subject matter but also an expert in interaction and communication (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2015). After careful consideration, I ultimately decided against using non-specific questions for two reasons: Firstly, bearing in mind that English was a foreign language for the respondents, I wanted to keep the language straightforward. After all, using elliptical phrases could

easily cause unwarranted anxiety for an English language learner. Secondly, as already discussed, military cadets are accustomed to straightforward, specific language and to answering questions in a straightforward and specific manner. I therefore chose to keep my questions straightforward and brief, as recommended by Brinkmann and Kvale (2015). A researcher must also be honest and put the participant at ease, and not risk biasing responses (Tuckman and Harper, 2012). The interviewer therefore needs to establish an appropriate atmosphere in order that the participant feels secure to talk freely. I was conscious throughout of the need to avoid asking leading questions and reacting to participants' responses in such a way that might influence them; interviewers 'should take a neutral stance throughout these activities and neither affirm nor dispute, verbally or nonverbally, the information that emerges' (Stringer, 2014: 109). The focused design of the interviews provided me with an opportunity to understand the participants' real thoughts by allowing me to follow up their answers. The students were encouraged to speak in detail about their personal feelings regarding the teaching and learning process both before and during Storyline. The students were also asked if they would like to say anything about Storyline or the previous teaching approach not previously discussed. An interview schedule detailing the themes for questions is provided in Appendix F.

By providing an additional opportunity to understand the students' perspectives and, equally importantly, checking and confirming that I correctly understood the participants' responses to Storyline, the interviews would provide relevant data to help answer all three research questions. Given the small size of the group, I conducted post-Storyline interviews with each of the participants in order to follow up their responses in both the pre- and post-Storyline questionnaires. Interviewing all of the students, rather than a selected sample, meant that each participant's perspectives were recorded and listened to, which helped to reduce the possibility that a person's views would be missed or discounted. This, in turn, served to increase the validity of the research. The interviews were carried out in the space of one day with each student individually in an empty classroom. The students did not know the questions in advance; they knew that they would be asked about Storyline and their thoughts on their language development. The interviews lasted from 20-25 minutes, the difference in time being due to the varying lengths in responses, and were recorded for later transcription. The interviews



were in English as all the students had a sufficiently functional language level to negotiate meaning, in other words, to understand and make themselves understood.

When it came to transcribing the interviews I wanted to avoid the common problem of transcription becoming solely a record of data rather than a record of a social encounter (Cohen et al, 2011). This is particularly important in action research, where the researcher is a co-participant and collaborates with the other participants throughout the course of the research, with the participants' role being equal to that of the researcher. It is through such rich interaction that a clear picture emerges of the research. I had considered the possibility of making video-recordings, but ultimately chose against it on the grounds of it being not only time-consuming to analyse, but also potentially distracting for the interviewees. In any case, in interviewing, the qualitative data obtained might be interpreted by different researchers in different ways (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2015). One way to minimise this, and provide a moment for reflection, was to conduct a focus group, in which all the participants would collectively review the data obtained from the pre- and post-Storyline questionnaires, teacher's diary, student journals, and interviews.

#### *3.4.5 Focus group*

The questionnaire responses, teacher's diary, journal entries and interviews generated useful data on the students' attitude to their previous English classes, and how Storyline had impacted on the students' ability in English and on their motivation. They also provided interesting data on what the students had enjoyed or not enjoyed. After analysing the questionnaires, teacher's diary, journal entries and interviews I brought the group together, during a normal class time, in order to conduct a focus group of all the participants. By providing yet another opportunity to confirm previous findings and explore the students' perspectives on Storyline, the focus group would provide relevant data to help answer all three research questions).

I had long considered using a focus group as an appropriate means of collecting data for the study. Focus groups are useful for research triangulation, adding to the depth and

richness of understanding gained from individual interviewing and observations (Hatch, 2002). ‘A focus group may be envisioned as a group interview, with questions providing a stimulus for capturing people’s experiences and perspectives’ (Stringer, 2008: 66). Focus groups may be regarded as a specific form of group interview in which:

...the reliance is on the interaction within the group who discuss a topic supplied by the researcher (Morgan 1988: 9), yielding a collective rather than an individual view. Hence the participants interact with each other rather than with the interviewer, such that the views of the participants can emerge – the participants’ rather than the researcher’s agenda can predominate. It is from the interaction of the group that the data emerge (Cohen et al, 2011: 436).

The role of the researcher is as a ‘moderator who encourages participants to generate discussion around particular topics’ (Hatch, 2002: 132). Having more than one participant present can provide two versions of events – a crosscheck – and one can complement the other with additional points, leading to a more complete and reliable record (Arksey and Knight, 1999). Moreover, ‘the unit of analysis is the view of the whole group and not the individual member; a collective group response is being sought’ (Cohen et al, 2011: 433). All the participants had provided their individual perspectives on Storyline and I wanted to provide them with the opportunity to share their experiences and discuss their thoughts, with each other and me, as equal active participants to understand their collective group response to Storyline as a method. It can be said that this is useful ‘where a group of people have been working together for some time or common purpose, or where it is seen as important that everyone concerned is aware of what others in the group are saying’ (Tavakoli, 2013: 250). The focus group allowed for discussion of these data. Again, given the small group size, the focus group comprised the whole group. This, as for the interviews, had the advantage of not excluding any of the participants, thus ensuring that everybody had the opportunity to voice their views. For the focus group schedule detailing the themes for discussion, see Appendix H.

Among the disadvantages of focus groups, though, are the possibility that group dynamics might result in reticence by some and dominance by other participants, and that a ‘public line’ may be offered instead of a more honest, personal response (Arksey and Knight 1999: 76). Cohen et al (2011: 437) agree and add that:

[Focus groups] tend not to yield numerical, quantifiable or generalizable data; the data may be difficult to analyse succinctly (...) the number of topics to be covered may be limited; intragroup disagreement and even conflicts may arise; the data may lack overall reliability.

I believe I was able to negate some of these potential disadvantages. As an already-existing group of students, rather than a group of strangers, the participants had long-established group dynamics and worked well with each other. Some might see this as a possible disadvantage; Hatch (2002: 134) notes that using focus groups made up of people who know each other is usually avoided because people ‘who are familiar with each other engage in conversations based on what they assume they already know about one another and one another’s perspectives.’ In my study, for obvious reasons, this was unavoidable. I would argue, though, that the ‘focus’ of the focus group was the discussion of a common experience and that their acquaintanceship was not necessarily a problem, but possibly an advantage, allowing them to discuss that which each had experienced. In addition, as their regular teacher I was able to ensure everyone had an opportunity to speak and be heard. Also, having previously administered the questionnaires, read their journal entries, and conducted interviews, I was already privy to the participants’ ‘honest, personal responses’ and was able to draw on these – by this stage anonymised – responses as points for discussion in the focus group. In the course of the class’s allotted 90 minutes the group was able to cover all the topics instigated by me and with virtually no interference from me, except to move them on to the next point when they had discussed all they could on a particular topic. In actual fact, I seldom had to interrupt ‘dominating’ participants or prompt ‘reticent’ ones.

The focus group’s meeting took place according to the framework recommended by Stringer (2008: 69): ‘A general statement by the facilitator contextualising and framing the issue should be followed by a series of *focus questions* similar in format to those provided for individual interviews’ (italics in original). The various responses to the pre-Storyline questionnaire were read and then the participants were asked to discuss them with as little interference from myself as possible. This provided an opportunity to talk about the teaching and learning process before Storyline. After discussion of the pre-Storyline questionnaires, we moved on to aspects of journal entries, and the responses to the post-Storyline questionnaires and from the interviews. As mentioned previously, these were discussed by the students with as little interference from myself

as possible. It must be noted that all the data discussed were anonymised; nobody's name or identifiable response was read out. Throughout the focus group I involved myself only in order to keep the discussion on-topic, or to pose questions regarding issues that were overlooked by the students or that emerged during the discussion. In order to enhance the validity of the study, the focus group proceedings were recorded for later transcription in order to provide data for subsequent triangulation of the other data collection methods.

### **3.5 Reliability and validity**

In any research study, the questions of reliability and validity arise.

[R]eliability is a necessary but insufficient condition for validity in research; reliability is a necessary precondition of validity, and validity may be a sufficient but not necessary condition for reliability (Cohen et al, 2011: 179).

There is no clear consensus in the research community on whether qualitative research can or should have reliability (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Yet Cohen et al (2011: 201) argue that lack of reliability in such research is no great disadvantage:

Indeed the premises of naturalistic studies include the uniqueness and idiosyncrasy of situations, such that the study cannot be replicated – that is their strength rather than their weakness.

They do, however, propose that reliability might be enhanced through repeating the methods of data collection and analysis (Cohen et al (2011: 201), citing LeCompte and Preissle, 1993). In my research, reliability is enhanced through the use of pre- and post-study questionnaires, all containing the same questions and completed by the participants at the same time. The use of a uniform interview schedule also helps to ensure a higher degree of reliability when collecting these data (Bell, 1987; Drever, 1995). Cohen et al (2011: 195) state that:

[T]riangular techniques in the social sciences attempt to map out, or explain more fully, the richness and complexity of human behaviour by studying it from more than one standpoint and, in so doing, by making use of both quantitative and qualitative data.

In the study I used pre- and post-study questionnaires to obtain statistical data. In order to examine what occurred in the course of my research I made use of triangulation by means of my teacher's diary, the student journals, the interviews, and a focus group of

all the participants. This repetition of data collection and analysis served to enhance the reliability of the study.

Validity is a matter of degree since ‘[i]t is impossible for research to be 100 per cent valid; that is the optimism of perfection’ (Cohen et al, 2011: 179). The question then is how to achieve greater, rather than less, validity. Validity can be both internal and external: internal validity means the extent to which the data represent what is being studied, whereas external validity refers to the extent to which the findings can be generalised (Cohen et al, 2011: 179). For validity, there is a need for discipline and protocols in qualitative research, as opposed to depending on mere intuition and good intention, i.e. triangulation (Stake, 1995). Furthermore, ‘with data triangulation, the potential problems of construct validity also can be addressed because the multiple sources of evidence essentially provide multiple measures of the same phenomenon’ (Yin, 2013: 116-117). These multiple sources of evidence must comprise a corpus of data which represents sufficient voices for later analysis with triangulation (Burns, 2010). I chose the previously detailed different research instruments for the study in order to justify its validity.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) state that due to the impossibility of finding objective measures of validity, it is necessary in qualitative research to establish trustworthiness. ‘Trustworthiness’ is ‘the extent to which we can trust the truthfulness or adequacy of a research project’ (Stringer: 2008: 48). Trustworthiness can be established with procedures for attaining: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Triangulation assists in establishing credibility and trustworthiness (Efron and Ravid, 2013). This is supported by Burton et al (2014: 208),

Bringing together data from different sources, by means of different methods and reflecting different perspectives, the validity of findings can be enhanced considerably and the trustworthiness of the research process can be strengthened.

As already mentioned, triangulation and participant debriefing played key roles in the study. ‘Transferability’ means the extent to which results might be applied to other contexts than the research setting, which for qualitative research involves providing ‘sufficiently detailed descriptions of the context and the participants to enable others to assess the likely applicability of the research to their own situation’ (Stringer, 2008: 50).

Such ‘thick description’ also ‘allows the audience to perceive authentically the participants’ views and “enter” their world by... sensing their experiences’ (Efron and Ravid, 2013: 70). To this end I have included a detailed description of my action research case study. As for ‘dependability’, ‘[t]rustworthiness also depends on the extent to which observers are able to ascertain whether research procedures are adequate for the purposes of the study’ (Stringer, 2008: 50). I therefore have described in detail the research procedures involved in my study. ‘Confirmability’, concludes Stringer, requires the researcher to retain information for review in order to enable others to ‘be able to confirm that research accurately and adequately represents the perspectives presented in the study’ (Stringer, 2008: 50). Maintaining a database of raw data allowed me to enhance the reliability of the case study, as discussed in Yin (2013).

The ‘validity of *action research* is verified through procedures establishing credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, *degrees of participation* and *utility*’ (Stringer, 2008: 52) (my italics). In discussing validity and utility Stringer points out that the utility of the outcomes is a great source of validity since the ‘power of the processes is nowhere more evident than in effective actions emerging from the research’ (Stringer, 2008: 52). This of course does not mean that demonstrated utility alone validates research, but it is an important component of validity. Discussing validity and participation, Stringer explains that a greater degree of credibility is ‘gained through the use of participatory processes’ because when participants are involved in analysing and discussing data, as in the interviews and focus group, ‘they are in a position to constantly check and extend the veracity of the material with which they are working’ (Stringer, 2008: 51). By using interviews and a focus group for data collection, thereby enabling the participants to ensure that their perspectives had been correctly understood and interpreted, the credibility of this study was enhanced.

### **3.6 Interpreting the data**

Data analysis takes place throughout a research project. ‘There is no particular moment when data analysis begins. Analysis is a matter of giving meanings to first impressions as well as to final compilations’ (Stake, 1995: 71). Analysis is the organisation of data

in ways that allow us to ‘see patterns, identify themes, discover relationships, develop explanations, make interpretations, mount critiques, or generate theories’ (Hatch, 2002: 148). At the heart of action research is the aim for improvement, for positive change (Koshy, 2010; Efron and Ravid, 2013; Stringer, 2014). The primary purpose in data analysis is to answer the research questions (Hatch, 2002: 150). These are:

1. How do military linguist cadets respond to Storyline as a foreign language teaching method?
2. How do military linguist cadets respond to the individual features of Storyline?
3. What effect (if any) does Storyline have on military linguist cadets’ language development?

In the course of the study, therefore, data was obtained regarding three separate areas reflecting the research questions: the student response to Storyline, that is, the impact of Storyline on learners’ satisfaction and motivation (relevant to Research Question 1); the learner response to Storyline features (relevant to Research Question 2); and the impact of Storyline on the learners’ language development (relevant to Research Question 3).

To gain understanding of the data obtained in the course of the study, interpretive analysis was employed in the manner proposed in Hatch (2002: 181), making use of the various data collection methods used. Firstly, the data were read in order to get a sense of the whole. Impressions previously recorded during the study in the teacher’s diary were reviewed, along with data from the questionnaire responses and the student journals. The data were then coded where interpretations were supported or challenged, prior to being clarified with the participants at the interview stage. The data from the interviews were then reread and coded before being clarified again in the focus group. Finally, excerpts supporting the interpretations were identified and referred to in the write-up. Interpretation should be linked to research purposes and therefore the data are presented according to research question for convenience (Cohen et al, 2011: 552).

It is coding that ‘leads you from the data to the idea’ (Richards and Morse, 2007: 137). This research being a study of student response and language development, the codes were ‘positive response’, ‘negative response’ and ‘use of language’. Subcodes, in turn, were more specific observations related to the codes (Saldaña, 2013: 12). For example, a subcode might be ‘enjoyment’ by a learner of an activity, which would be coded as a

positive response. The coded data were subsequently categorised in accordance with the research questions (see subsection 3.6.6). The interviews and focus group provided opportunities to consult the participants, termed ‘member checking’, as recommended by Efron and Ravid (2013: 71), in order to check the trustworthiness of my interpretations (Ezzy, 2002; Saldaña, 2013). The codes and relating subcodes employed in the study are set out in the table below.

*Table 5: Codes and subcodes employed in the study*

<b>Code</b>	<b>Subcode</b>
Positive response (Pos)	Engagement (the learner is engaged in the activity) Enjoyment (the learner is enjoying the activity) Intercultural communicative competence (ICC) (the learner is demonstrating ICC) Motivation (the learner is demonstrating motivation) Relevance (the learner expresses that the activity is relevant to learning)
Negative response (Neg)	No engagement (the learner is not engaged in the activity) No enjoyment (the learner is not enjoying the activity) No intercultural communicative competence (ICC) (the learner is demonstrating lack of ICC) No motivation (the learner is demonstrating lack of motivation) No relevance (the learner expresses that the activity is not relevant to learning)
Use of language (LU)	Listening (the learner is engaged in listening) Reading (the learner is engaged in reading) Speaking (the learner is engaged in speaking) Writing (the learner is engaged in writing)



### *3.6.1 Questionnaires*

In examining the impact of the Storyline method on the foreign language classroom over a four-week period, the natural starting point was to analyse the pre-Storyline questionnaires. The analysis took place at the beginning of the study. The pre-Storyline questionnaire data, identified by randomly-allocated participant numbers, were subjected to interpretive analysis as to whether a response was positive, negative and demonstrated use of language. The corresponding post-Storyline questionnaire answers were cross-checked with those in the pre-Storyline questionnaires to allow for an examination of the impact of Storyline on these aspects of language learning. This allowed for the creation of a bar chart comparing the participants' answers on the five-point Likert scale (calculated as a mean) as regards the earlier teaching methods and Storyline. The bar chart comparison of students' satisfaction and motivation pre- and post-Storyline thus enabled an analysis of how the students viewed Storyline as impacting on their language learning compared to the previous approach.

The eighth question asked which features of Storyline, based on the activities which the students did in the course of Storyline (see Ahlquist, 2011), the students believed had been useful in improving their English; the responses to this question resulted in the creation of a bar chart showing how the group as a whole viewed each feature's utility in their language learning, based on the number of times each feature was selected by participants. Since Storyline is the sum of these individual features, the responses to this question were extremely important for analysing Storyline's impact on the students. The ninth question required the students to list the Storyline features that they particularly enjoyed; the responses to this question resulted in a bar chart displaying the features' popularity among the group as a whole, based on the number of times each feature was selected by participants. The answers to these two questions were coded as regards student response, which enabled an interpretive analysis of the students' views as to which Storyline activities had been beneficial in their language learning and which they had particularly enjoyed or not in order to answer the research questions.

Since motivation is a key component of language learning (Dörnyei, 1998, 2001; Rivers, 2007) it was important to understand what aspects of Storyline military linguist

cadets liked, particularly given the absence of any previous research on Storyline's applicability to the foreign language teaching of military linguist cadets. The tenth and eleventh questions in the post-Storyline questionnaire asked the participants to mention anything else they liked and to write about anything that they did not like. These were open-ended questions and in some cases were unanswered and in other cases resulted in short answers. As with responses, non-responses to questions in the post-Storyline questionnaire were followed up with the students during the interviews to provide an additional opportunity to clarify likes and dislikes. Interpretive analysis as described at the beginning of this section was employed as regards these responses; the data were coded according to whether the comments were positive or negative, and then categorised according to the research questions.

### *3.6.2 Teacher's diary*

Throughout the study I was continually taking the opportunity to examine my teacher's diary of the Storyline classes. The information that I had recorded in the diary on what happened during the classes, and on each student's participation and development in the course of the Storyline, was used as a basis for questions during the interviews to help me clarify any points raised and check that I had properly understood the data from the questionnaire responses and what I had observed in class. Moreover, I reread my teacher's diary throughout the Storyline period, as part of Kemmis's (1997) self-reflective cycle, which allowed me to reflect on what had happened during the class and then plan the next one, act and observe, leading back to reflection and a new cycle. This is a key feature of action research, enabling me to bring about lasting benefit to the ongoing process itself rather than to some future occasion (Cohen and Manion, 1994). Taking advantage of my position as a teacher-researcher (McDonough and McDonough, 1997; Ahlquist, 2011), I also made notes on the individual development of each student, as I saw it, which were coded and addressed during the interviews. My notes on the overall development of the students' English during the Storyline were addressed in the focus group. Although I was combining the roles of teacher and researcher, thereby not always having as much time as I would have liked to make notes (Yin, 2013), the teacher's diary provided data on the students' response to Storyline

overall, to each individual Storyline feature, and also on language. Again, interpretive analysis of such data was conducted by coding the data as regards positive student responses, negative student responses and use of language. The data were then categorised according to the research questions.

### *3.6.3 Student journals*

I checked the student journal entries over each weekend, which provided me with an additional source of information regarding the student response and allowed me to plan/adapt subsequent classes after reflection as part of the action research cycle. The journal entries constituted qualitative data which were likewise coded as regards student response and language use and subjected to the same interpretive analysis as for the above data collection methods.

### *3.6.4 Interviews*

The interviews enabled the students and me to discuss in greater detail their responses in the pre- and post-Storyline questionnaires, and their thoughts and feelings about Storyline based on their own experiences during the previous four weeks. The responses were subjected to the same interpretive analysis and coding as described above. They proved important for validating data from the earlier data collection methods. The focus group enabled a discussion of a variety of issues emerging first from the pre-Storyline questionnaire, such as the students' thoughts on their previous English classes, followed by a valuable discussion of the impact Storyline had had on the teaching and learning process, and on themselves as individuals in terms of progress and motivation. An excerpt of an interview transcript may be viewed in Appendix G.

### *3.6.5 Focus group*

Prior to the start of the focus group, each student was given the opportunity to acquaint himself with the transcript of his interview in order to check its accuracy and so that they could refresh their memories of what had been discussed and the answers they had provided. The focus group allowed for a discussion of my observations as per the teacher's diary and issues arising from the student journals, post-Storyline questionnaires and interviews. The data from the focus group were interpreted and coded as for the other data collection methods in terms of student response and use of language. Most importantly, the focus group provided an opportunity to ensure that I had correctly understood and interpreted the participants' responses to Storyline. An excerpt from the focus group transcript may be found in Appendix I.

### *3.6.6 Mapping the data*

The collected data were mapped in various ways. While the research was in progress, the data obtained from the various collection methods were collated per individual student for ease of viewing and to enable comparison of emerging data, such as between pre- and post-Storyline questionnaires, my teacher's diary and the student journals, and for clarification of my understanding of student response such as during the interviews and the focus group. Of most importance in the process of data analysis is constant checking to ascertain that the researcher is correctly interpreting the data (Burns, 2010). Thus, the interviews and focus group involved me clarifying with the learners their perceptions and so working as collaborators in the process of data analysis. Additionally, the data were subjected to interpretive analysis and coded according to whether student responses were positive (Pos) or negative (Neg), and as to use of language (LU). A determination of whether responses were categorised as positive or negative was made by me and subsequently clarified with the relevant learner during the interview or focus group. Finally, upon conclusion of the Storyline topic, the interpreted data were categorised according to the research questions, that is, the student response to Storyline as a foreign language teaching method, the student response to the individual features of Storyline, and the effect of Storyline on the students' language

development. Where appropriate, the coded data were also themed according to their relevance to the various features of Storyline (for example, where there was a positive/negative response to a particular Storyline feature). I shall now move on to an examination of how the students responded to Storyline – the findings of the study.

## CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

### 4.0 Introduction

This chapter sets out the findings of the research from the various data collection methods: pre- and post-Storyline questionnaires, the teacher's diary, student journals, interviews and the focus group. The analysis of the data is organised by research questions which, as Cohen et al (2011: 552) state, is a 'very useful way of organizing data, as it draws together all the relevant data for the exact issue of concern to the researcher, and preserves the coherence of the material.' First I shall describe the typical format of a Storyline episode, and then review data on how the students responded to Storyline as a foreign language teaching method, taking account of student satisfaction and motivation, plus the student response to the individual features of Storyline. There follows an analysis of data on the student response to the individual features of Storyline. Finally, data are examined showing the effect of Storyline on students' language development. Individual military linguist cadets are referred to by the participant number allocated to them at the beginning of the study (see section 3.1), for example, Cdt1 and so on.

The typical format of a Storyline episode as part of the UN Team Site Storyline involved pre-task, during-task and post-task phases (Ellis, 2003). Upon commencement of the class, I informed the students of the topic and what language learning was expected to take place (for example, in terms of vocabulary and grammar, such as words to describe feelings and modal verbs). I also provided an explanation of what tasks the students would complete in the course of the class. This constituted the pre-task phase, which served to prepare the students for the activities which they would complete in the next phase. After answering any questions that the students had, I asked them to take out their characters as a sign that they were 'in role'. Responsibility for task completion was thus transferred to the students, guaranteeing their autonomy and ownership of the learning process. The students would then, in character and using their language skills, proceed to complete the task. I would involve myself only when I saw that my assistance would be particularly beneficial or, for example, if asked a question by one of

the students. This was the during-task phase, in the course of which the students made use of and developed their language skills. Upon completion of the task, the students would come out of character for the final 5-10 minutes in order to receive my feedback on their learning. This constituted the post-task phase during which the students consolidated their knowledge.

## **4.1 Student response to Storyline as a foreign language teaching method**

### *4.1.1 Questionnaires*

The questionnaires generated data representing changes in the students' satisfaction and motivation over the course of the Storyline topic. All seven participants completed the pre- and post-Storyline questionnaires, which allowed an analysis to be made of each student's response to Storyline. The first three questions in the questionnaires concerned participants' satisfaction with teaching, motivation to learn English in class, and satisfaction with their progress in English. This enabled a comparison to be made of the participants' perception of the previous teaching approach and Storyline as a method in foreign language teaching. The findings from the students' answers to the questions are set out below.

#### *Satisfaction with teaching*

With regard to satisfaction with teaching, five of the students (Cdts1, 2, 3, 4 and 6) were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with the teaching approach employed prior to Storyline, and two of the students (Cdts5 and 7) reported being satisfied. In the post-Storyline questionnaire five students (Cdts1, 3, 4, 6 and 7) reported being satisfied, and two students (Cdts2 and 5) said they were strongly satisfied. Thus, all but one of the participants (Cdt7) reported higher satisfaction with the teaching approach during Storyline than before. Cdt7 answered that he was equally satisfied with the teaching before and during Storyline; this was a point I deemed necessary to clarify in interview – see subsection 4.1.4.

### *Motivation to learn English*

In the pre-Storyline questionnaire, four of the students (Cdts2, 3, 4 and 6) neither agreed nor disagreed that they were motivated to study English in class, and three (Cdts1, 5 and 7) agreed that they were motivated. In the post-Storyline questionnaire two students (Cdts2 and 3) agreed that they were motivated to study English in class, and five students (Cdts1, 4, 5, 6 and 7) stated that they strongly agreed that they were motivated. This represents an increase in motivation for all the participants.

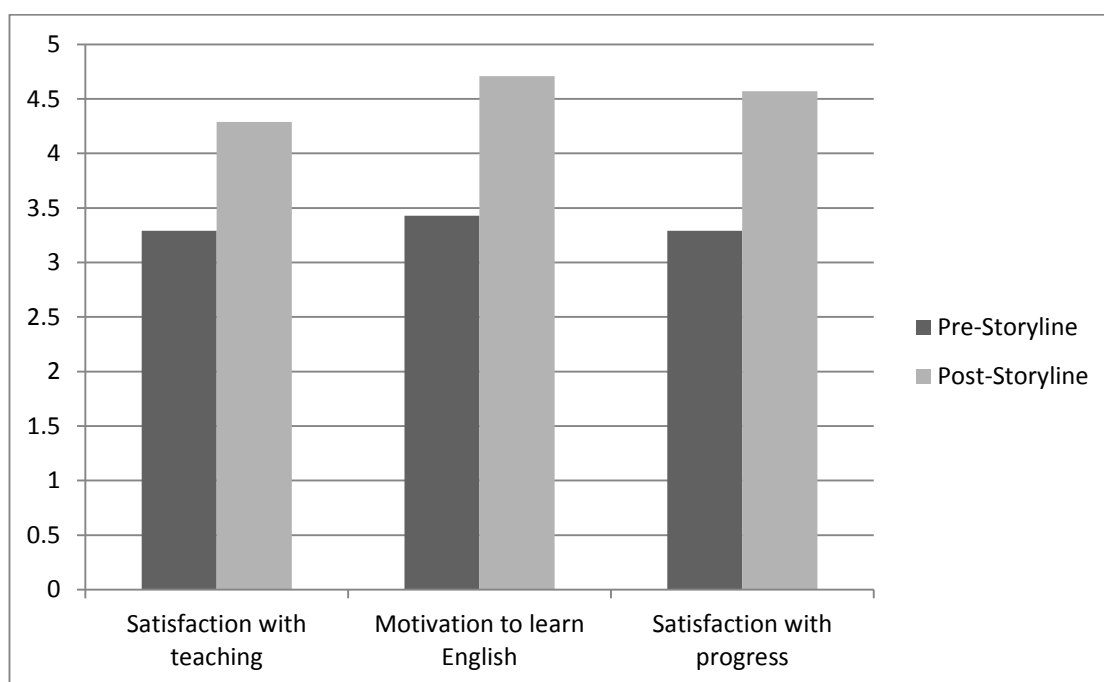
### *Satisfaction with progress*

There was a spread of opinion regarding students' satisfaction with their progress in English prior to Storyline: one student (Cdt4) was unsatisfied, three (Cdts1, 5 and 7) were satisfied, and the remaining three (Cdts2, 3 and 6) were neutral. After Storyline, three students (Cdts2, 3 and 4) stated that they were satisfied with their progress in English, and four students (Cdts1, 5, 6 and 7) answered that they were strongly satisfied. Each of the participants, therefore, reported an increase in satisfaction with their progress.

The above data suggest a positive student response to Storyline as a foreign language teaching method. A comparison of the answers relating to the questions on student satisfaction and motivation asked in the pre- and post-Storyline questionnaires (calculated as a group mean) is provided in Chart 1.



*Chart 1: A comparison of students' satisfaction and motivation pre- and post-Storyline (five-point Likert scale)*



#### *4.1.2 Teacher's diary*

The teacher's diary supports to a great extent, and so helps to confirm, what the participants wrote in their questionnaires and student journals, and what subsequently emerged during the interviews and focus group. The data from the teacher's diary on the student response to Storyline as a foreign language teaching method are presented in this subsection chronologically, as a narrative, in order to provide an overview of how the student response developed over the course of the study.

The Storyline itself began with a mixture of interest and apprehension on the part of the group; the interest being due to the new format of learning, and the apprehension for the same reason. The students quickly adjusted to the new approach, although art work received a mixed response (see subsection 4.2.2 for the findings and analysis of the student response to the individual features of Storyline). The key questions generated a lively discussion in English, in which all the students participated although in the first classes Cdts1 and 7, both extremely proficient learners, spoke more than the others and

Cdts2 and 4, both less proficient learners, began to involve themselves actively only after my encouragement.

The second class involved a discussion of the key questions which led to the creation of an extensive word bank of key vocabulary, which the students copied down for future reference. All the participants were fully engaged and made good contributions to the discussion, though Cdt4 needed some initial prompting. The third Storyline class began in an atmosphere of positive discussions of the key questions, but the atmosphere became slightly strained due to Cdt2's negative response to an aspect of collaborative work (see subsection 4.2.2 for details). Nevertheless, this issue was resolved satisfactorily and was not observed to have a lasting impact on the students. In the fourth and fifth Storyline classes, which involved watching a short documentary film about life on a UN team site and reading a short story about serving away from home followed by discussions, the participants continued to be engaged and made active contributions, suggesting satisfaction with Storyline as a foreign language teaching method and greater motivation.

The sixth class proved to be the liveliest of all the classes in the course of the Storyline topic. In their initial discussion as pairs and a trio the students thought up interesting incidents that might occur and proposed possible solutions, ranging from reports of breaches of ceasefire agreements to intercultural misunderstandings, which resulted in active group discussion. This was followed by my providing the students with real-life examples of incidents, solutions to which they were to discuss in their pairs/trio and then report back to the group. The students' enthusiasm at times led to them interrupting each other and I had to remind them twice to be courteous listeners as well as active contributors.

Towards the end of the Storyline, conversation in class began to turn towards the students' opinion of the new teaching method. The seventh – penultimate – class seemed to be almost a disappointment for the students as they realised that we were approaching the end of the Storyline topic. Cdts1, 5, 6 and 7 asked almost simultaneously if we could 'do another Storyline'. Upon asking the group if they would like to do so, all the students answered in the affirmative. In discussing what they had

learned, the participants spoke at length on vocabulary and speaking skills, plus information specific to UN team sites. When I listed new knowledge and practised skills, such as grammar and writing skills, the students almost seemed surprised, as they realised that they had learned many new things without even noticing. This feeling was summed up by Cdt1 who said, *'It was fun and we didn't think that it was learning.'* The discussion on what the students had enjoyed and not enjoyed was heavily slanted towards the positive rather than the negative, possibly because they were still caught up in the enthusiasm of the latest classes. When given the opportunity to reflect – in their journals, interviews and the focus group – they were able to do so more deliberately. The students all seemed to be looking forward to the final Storyline class: the celebration or 'leaving party'.

The eighth and final class provided another opportunity for the students to reflect on what they had learned and share their thoughts with each other. All the participants spoke positively about their learning experience and enthusiastically shared their newly gained knowledge with our invited guest, a senior army officer who had served at a UN team site. The students listened to his stories about his own service at a UN team site with great interest and asked questions, demonstrating their own knowledge. Several times during the class, the students stated that they would like to use Storyline again in the teaching and learning process and variously told me and our guest that Storyline was fun, interesting and effective, and *'better than our other classes'*. The time seemed to pass very quickly and involved so much speaking by the participants that at the class's conclusion half the snacks and the cake were untouched and were, therefore, divided up among the students and taken home for later consumption. The teacher's diary, therefore, indicates a positive student response to Storyline as a foreign language teaching method. Subsections 4.2.2 and 4.3.2 contain detailed findings and analyses of, respectively, the student response to the individual features of Storyline and Storyline's impact on language development.

### 4.1.3 Student journals

The student journals provided the perspectives of the other participants in the study, and therefore provided relevant data to help answer all of the research questions. Each student made an entry in his journal after each Storyline class, without exception, which boded well for the study. As it turned out, though, some students were more forthcoming than others in terms of what they wrote and the detail of their thoughts. Indeed some students commented on some aspects of what they had done, but not on others. Overall, however, the journal entries support my own observations in the teacher's diary regarding the students' responses to Storyline, yet also reveal what was not necessarily visible to me: the students' own thoughts and feelings on what they were doing.

Writing on their feelings about classes, common words used repeatedly are *'fun'*, *'interesting'*, *'useful'* and *'effective'*. Cdt1, for example, wrote the following about the first class: *'The class was fun and interesting. I liked it.'* Many students wrote that they liked learning English using Storyline, such as Cdt2 after the fifth class: *'It's good to learn English in such way!'* which is supported also by Cdt7 writing after the sixth class: *'I didn't know I could learn English in the fun way.'* There is also evidence of intrinsic motivation: *'Before Storyline I studied hard because I wanted to be an officer, but Storyline is good because now learning English is more interesting and fun way to study'* (Cdt7 after the eighth class). There were occasional negative comments when describing certain activities that were not enjoyed by individual students (see subsection 4.2.3). Overall, therefore, the student journals indicate a positive student response to Storyline as a foreign language teaching method.

#### 4.1.4 Interviews

The interviews, which took place shortly after the Storyline topic, provided an additional opportunity to understand the students' perspectives. Equally importantly, they were useful for checking and confirming that I correctly understood the participants' responses to Storyline.

There was a consensus among the students that they felt ambivalent about the teaching and learning process prior to Storyline, with no particularly strong feelings either way, characterised by such comments as 'OK' (Cdt1s and 4) and 'not bad' (Cdt5). When discussing the teaching and learning process during Storyline, however, the students were much more positive. All the learners described Storyline as *'interesting'*. Cdt2 related how it was *'very interesting to think about what we'll do in the next class.'* Cdt3 said it was a *'completely new'* way of learning for him and *'I thought it was cool'*. All the participants reported increased motivation. When asked why they thought they had become more motivated, the students' answers were similar. Cdt1 noted that he felt *'more involved in the learning process'*. Cdt5 and 6 said that they felt close to their characters and the story they invented. Cdt4 spoke about how he learned real-life things that he could use immediately, in terms of both language and information.

Speaking about which teaching method they preferred, all the participants chose Storyline. Cdt1 said that this was because he thought Storyline was *'interesting and innovative'*. Cdt2 stated that Storyline was *'more interesting'* than previous classes, which was true for the other students as well. Cdt7 said that Storyline was *'brand new'* after classes that were too routine. Cdt7, when I asked him about his level of satisfaction – in the questionnaires he reported the same level of satisfaction – replied that he was happy with the teaching and learning process both before and during Storyline, as he felt he had progressed well in both, but added that he found Storyline more interesting and motivating. When asked if they would prefer to continue using Storyline or not, all the participants answered in the affirmative. The interviews also provided the students with an opportunity to say, in their own words, which Storyline features they liked and why (see subsection 4.2.4), and for me to clarify my understanding of the same. To sum

up, the interviews show a positive student response to Storyline as a foreign language teaching method.

#### *4.1.5 Focus group*

The focus group provided yet another opportunity to confirm previous findings and explore the students' perspectives on Storyline. After discussing the findings from the pre- and post-Storyline questionnaires the participants were unanimous in their preference for Storyline as opposed to the methods earlier employed in the teaching and learning process. The students all agreed that the previous teaching methods were too routine and not particularly interesting. Common opinions were that Storyline as a method was much more interesting and flexible, allowing students to be creative and be more involved in their learning, while using their imagination. They had looked forward to each class and were motivated to work harder. The students began to discuss using Storyline to cover upcoming topics in the next academic year before I decided to intervene to ask them to name specific features of Storyline that they enjoyed (see subsection 4.2.5 for data from the focus group on the student response to individual features of Storyline).

Towards the end of the focus group, I asked the participants whether or not they would like to continue working with Storyline in the future. The group was unanimous in answering affirmatively. Finally, I asked the participants if they would like to add anything else, at which point the students reiterated their desire to continue working with Storyline in future classes. On this positive note the focus group session concluded. The focus group thereby confirmed the positive student response to Storyline as a foreign language teaching method.

#### 4.1.6 Summary

The various data collection methods show a positive student response to Storyline as a foreign language teaching method. From the data we can infer enhanced learner motivation owing to student ownership of the learning process, greater opportunities for learner creativity and perceived relevance to real life. Storyline was conducive to the students developing their intercultural communicative competence. The cadets quickly became accustomed to a learner-centred approach to teaching and no significant cultural problems were observed, which is evidence of Storyline's contextual appropriateness as a foreign language teaching method for military linguist cadets in Russia.

### 4.2 Student response to the individual features of Storyline

#### 4.2.1 Questionnaires

The post-Storyline questionnaire asked the participants to choose the features of Storyline which they particularly enjoyed (without being restricted to an arbitrary number). It is important to note that these data refer to what the students 'particularly enjoyed' rather than what they liked *per se*.

#### *Problem solving, using imagination, role play*

According to their responses, all of the students chose *problem solving*. All the participants also selected *using imagination*. *Role play* was selected by all the students but one (Cdt5).

#### *Language skills*

All of the students except one (Cdt4) chose *speaking in English*. Except for two students (Cdt2 and 4), all the participants chose *writing in English*. Four chose *reading in*

*English*, which was not chosen by Cdts2, 3 and 5. *Listening to English* was also chosen by three students (Cdts1, 4 and 6).

#### *Collaborative work and individual work*

All of the students except one (Cdt5) selected *collaborative work*. Only two students (Cdts5 and 6) selected *individual work*.

#### *Variety of activities, not using a textbook*

Doing a *variety of activities* was selected by all apart from Cdts2, 4 and 7. *Not using a textbook* was chosen by four students, but not selected by Cdts3, 5 and 7.

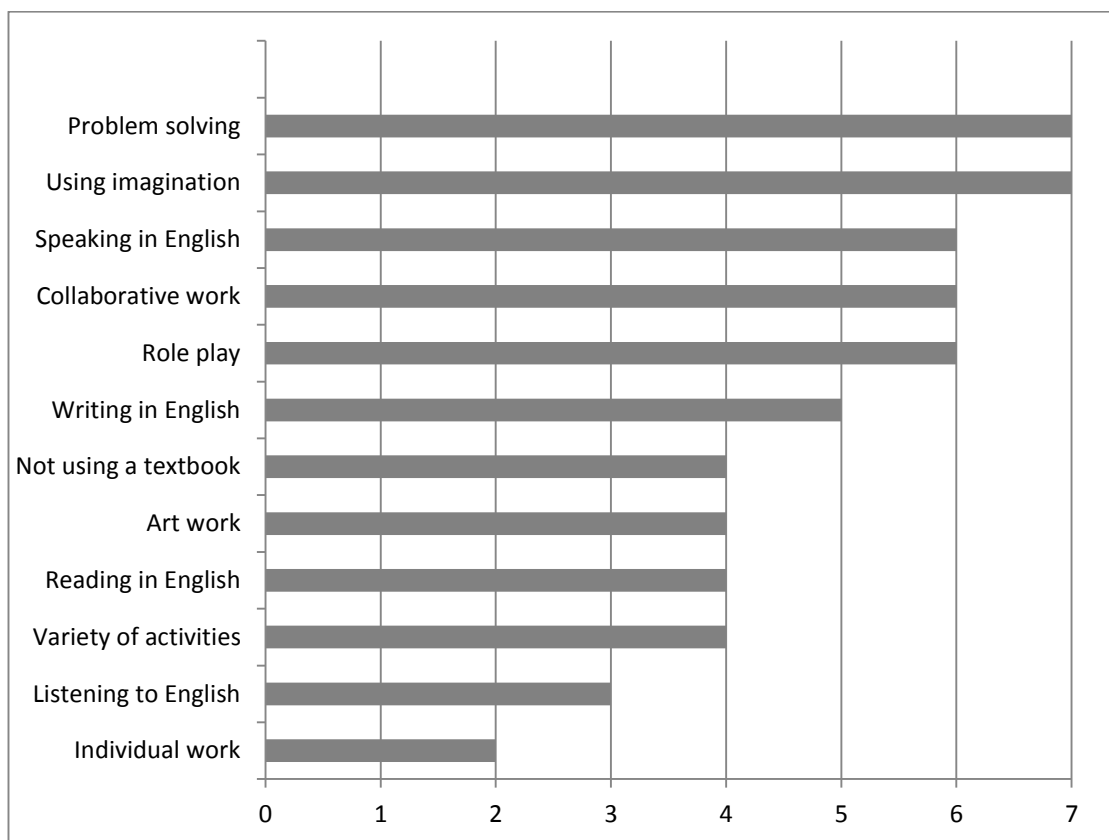
#### *Art work*

Four students selected the *art work* as something they had particularly enjoyed, but not Cdts1, 2 and 5.

The data show that almost all the features were particularly enjoyed by a majority of the students. They provided a useful basis for discussion during the interviews and focus group on the student response to Storyline's individual features. Chart 2 shows the number of participants who particularly enjoyed each individual feature of Storyline.



Chart 2: Features of Storyline particularly enjoyed by the participants



Answering Question 10 (If there is anything else that you liked or was useful for learning English, please give details), another feature identified by students in the additional questions as helping them to improve their English was the structure which Storyline provides in covering a topic (Cdts2, 4 and 6). This was summed up well by Cdt4, who wrote: *'It is very important to listen or to read the information and then discuss it. It is useful to speak about one object during 3-4 classes, to work with different aspects of the theme.'* A second additional feature identified by students was Storyline's relevance to real life, which was commented upon by Cdts4 and 6. Question 11 (If there is anything that you did not like or was not useful for learning English, please give details) attracted responses from only two students. Referring to the initial art work, Cdt2 wrote *'I didn't understand why we create a character, by hands'*. Cdt6 wrote that he did not like having to work with everyone in the group, a point which I resolved to follow up on during the subsequent interview. The remaining students left

the question unanswered or wrote comments such as *'everything was fine'* (Cdt1) or *'nothing more to say'* (Cdt7).

#### 4.2.2 Teacher's diary

During the Storyline topic I was able to observe how the students responded to the features of Storyline. As for the data on the student response to Storyline as a foreign language teaching method, the findings here are presented chronologically in the form of a narrative, in order to show how the student response developed in the course of the Storyline topic.

Prior to the first Storyline class, the students had been given their homework – to write a report on a UN-contributing non-English-speaking country and its armed forces – in advance of the Storyline topic. Each student selected a different country and conscientiously prepared a well-written report in English: Cdt1 on Germany, Cdt2 on Tajikistan, Cdt3 on Switzerland, Cdt4 on Pakistan, Cdt5 on France, Cdt6 on China, and Cdt7 on India. As their teacher I could see that a greater degree of effort by all the students had been put into writing these reports than was usual for homework tasks, thus constituting a positive student response to the Storyline features *individual work* and *writing in English*.

Despite early dominance in discussions by the extremely proficient Cdts1 and 7, and initial reticence by the less proficient Cdts2 and 4, the student response to *speaking in English* and *listening to English* was positive. It was the art work that first impacted heavily on the students. These were young adults who were unused to being asked to create characters using various craft materials, even more so in the foreign language classroom. In spite of this, they all began in earnest to create their characters, though some were evidently working with greater pleasure than others. This was mainly due to their perception of how talented they were in such matters with some participants voicing their uncertainty as to their art skills (*'I don't think my character will look very good'* – Cdt5). Other students greatly enjoyed the task (*'Art was one of my favourite subjects at school and I still like to draw'* – Cdt7, student journal). The student response

to *art work* was, therefore, very mixed, with both positive and negative responses. Upon reflection, I ought to have given a better indication of the amount of detail required and the time to be spent on it. As it turned out, the participants spent varying amounts of time and effort on creating their characters. I resolved to provide clearer guidance in future.

All the students, though, seemed to enjoy inventing their characters' biographies and making them as realistic as possible, using their imagination and knowledge gained during the homework task. This was a positive student response for *using imagination* and *writing in English*. They seemed to enjoy the experience of speaking and interacting 'in character', and listened to each other respectfully and with apparent interest. Thus, positive student responses to *speaking in English*, *listening to English*, *using imagination* and *role play*. Again, the homework – writing letters of application 'in character' to serve at a UN mission – was completed with a noticeably greater degree of effort than usual, thus constituting a positive student response to *writing in English*, *using imagination*, *role play* and *individual work*. This would suggest an increase in motivation, possibly due to greater student ownership of learning, and will be discussed in the next chapter.

The second class saw an overall positive student response to *speaking in English* and *listening to English*, though Cdt4 needed some initial prompting. The second half of the class was dedicated to the creation of a frieze representing a UN team site, involving the whole group working and cooperating together. Having reflected on the relative lack of structure in the previous class's art work, I gave the students more detailed instructions on the work and set a (flexible) time limit for completion. I was initially concerned that in carrying out the task, some students might feel sidelined, but the group responded well and shared out the responsibility for various aspects of the work. This resulted in positive interaction among the participants in deciding what the team site should have and where everything should go. Cdt7, the arts enthusiast, took the leading role in the actual creation of the frieze but everyone made valuable contributions, including Cdt5 who made important suggestions on the layout. Overall, the student response was positive to *collaborative work*, *art work*, *using imagination*, *speaking in English* and *listening to English*.

The third Storyline class began with the group deciding that their team site would be located in Western Sahara as part of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO), a mission which they had read about in the previous semester. In character, the students selected the character of Cdt1, a mature individual and natural leader, to be the team site commander, a decision that all the participants were happy with. Discussion of which positions the other characters should take up, however, was much more controversial. The characters having put their cases forward, the team site commander made the necessary appointments. Cdts2 and 3 had both wanted the same position – recreation and welfare officer – for their respective characters and the team site commander (Cdt1’s character) made his decision in favour of Cdt3’s character, which Cdt2 was not happy about (*‘I think my character had better experience’* – teacher’s diary) with which Cdt1 disagreed, adding *‘Sometimes in the army you don’t get the position you want’* (teacher’s diary). Discussion then quickly turned to the standard operating procedure (SOP) for the team site, which took place in a more collegial atmosphere, though Cdt2’s participation was noticeably muted. After the class I asked him to remain behind and we discussed his unhappiness with the decision. In the course of our talk we came to the conclusion that, whatever his feelings, his character would not let a small setback influence his work but would carry on and prove his worth as an officer. Cdt2 left in a seemingly happier mood, though I resolved to keep a closer eye on his participation. The group response was positive to *using imagination, speaking in English, listening to English, role play* and *problem solving*. The response to *collaborative work* was mostly positive, with the exception of Cdt2’s reaction to Cdt1’s decision.

The fourth class began with students working in pairs and a trio (there being an odd number of students in the group) considering life at a UN team site. Cdts1, 2 and 3, whom I had put together for the paired discussion, worked very well together, and I was glad to see that Cdt2 had got over his previous disappointment and was making valuable contributions to the discussion. Thus the student response to *using imagination, speaking in English* and *listening to English* was positive. I then showed the group a short documentary film about life at a UN team site, which all the students watched with interest while making notes in English on what they saw. Watching the film added

to the participants' background knowledge and enabled their discussion to reflect true realities of life at a UN team site. Again, the student response to *using imagination, speaking in English* and *listening to English* was positive.

We began the fifth class with a discussion of positive and negative feelings that officers might experience while serving at UN team sites. The discussion involved fluent language use on the part of all the students, taking into account their own characters' personality, background, family situation, and so on. When reading the short story about serving away from home, the students seemed very engaged and the classroom atmosphere was quiet and conducive to the task. Reading the short story introduced some new ideas, including cultural problems, and generated interesting discussion. The student response, therefore, to *speaking in English, listening to English, reading in English, using imagination, role play* and *problem solving* was positive. I was heartened to see that the homework involving the characters writing emails home to their families was the best I had ever seen from the students. Thus a very positive student response to *writing in English, individual work, role play* and *using imagination* was observed. In the sixth class the learners were all caught up in the atmosphere. Cdt6 even stayed behind for a few minutes after class to further discuss with me possible solutions to a potential incident, something unprecedented for him; he was typically the first to leave as soon as a class ended. Three students (Cdt2, 5 and 6) asked what we would be doing in the next class. Thus the student response was very positive to *problem solving, using imagination, role play, collaborative work* and *speaking in English*, and mostly positive to *listening to English*.

The seventh class was essentially a review of what we had covered during the Storyline topic, in the course of which the students spoke enthusiastically and at length in English, speaking positively about many of the individual features of Storyline. This also indicates a positive student response to *speaking in English*, the now established medium of the classroom. During the eighth and final class the participants again spoke positively in English about their learning experience and their newly gained knowledge. They listened enthusiastically to the stories of our guest about his own service at a UN team site. Thus the final class saw a positive student response to *speaking in English* and *listening to English*. The teacher's diary, therefore, indicates a mostly positive

student response to the individual features of Storyline, with the exception of *art work*, which received a mixed response.

#### 4.2.3 Student journals

The student journals further illuminated participants' responses to the various features of Storyline and provided richer data than were available from the questionnaires. By providing a window into the learners' thoughts about many of Storyline's features, they gave a useful basis for subsequent data collection in the interviews and focus group. It should be noted that some of the features overlap, for example, *role play* and *using imagination*. Additionally, *problem solving* typically involves *speaking in English*, though not necessarily vice versa, and *collaborative work* and *using imagination*. The features directly concerning language skills – speaking, listening, reading and writing – are reviewed in the subsequent section on language skill development.

#### *Problem solving, using imagination, role play*

*Problem solving*, the most popular feature according to the questionnaire responses, was commented upon very positively by all seven of the students, for example, Cdt6: '*I really enjoyed talking about incidents and solving them.*' Indeed, for the sixth class (Incidents) all the students wrote that they enjoyed discussing how best to react to the various incidents. When writing about the fifth class, students enjoyed talking about how they might support each other, such as Cdt1: '*It was interesting to decide how we would solve problems of officers.*' It also proved to be an effective way of including the less proficient students, too, and encouraging them to speak, for example, Cdt4 after the sixth class: '*I liked that people listened to my ideas.*'

*Using imagination* was often mentioned indirectly by the students as something they enjoyed, as seen in the comments provided below by Cdts5 and 7 on *writing in English* and the comment by Cdt3 on *collaborative work*. There were no negative responses recorded. The majority of the students wrote comments very positive about *role play*, for example, Cdt6 after the sixth class: '*It was fun being comrades together on a team*

*site.* It should be noted that this included several of the writing tasks, too, such as the application letter and the email, as indicated in the comments by Cdts5 and 7 on *writing in English* below. None of the journal comments on role play were negative.

#### *Collaborative work and individual work*

*Collaborative work* was mentioned only in passing, and received positive responses ('*we worked well together*' – Cdt3 after the seventh class). No negative responses were recorded in the journals. *Individual work* such as the initial homework immediately prior to the first Storyline class, attracted a range of comments such as '*boring*' (Cdt2), '*hard*' (Cdt4), and '*interesting*' (Cdts1 and 6). Three students wrote descriptively that they had done the tasks, but did not provide responses indicative of feelings, for example, '*I researched a country for my character*' (Cdt3 after the first class). The responses to these tasks, as seen in the data obtained from other data collection methods were mixed, and required clarification during the interviews and focus group.

#### *Variety of activities, not using a textbook*

Although many students commented on separate activities in their journal entries, only one wrote explicitly that he enjoyed the *variety of activities* ('*I like that we do a lot of different things during our classes*' – Cdt5 after the fourth class). There were some implicit positive comments, though, for example, Cdt1 after the second class: '*We did so many interesting tasks today.*' No negative responses were recorded. None of the students mentioned *not using a textbook* in their journal entries.

#### *Art work*

*Art work* was commented upon by all the students with comments both positive (Cdts3, 4, 6 and 7) and negative (Cdts1, 2 and 5). Positive comments tended to describe the *art work* as being fun or new, whereas negative comments were due to students not seeing any relevance to their English or in the case of Cdt5 after the first class: '*I didn't like to create the figure of my character because I hate art work!*' After the creation of the UN team site frieze, however, there were no negative comments, with students variously

describing the task as fun or interesting. Ultimately, therefore, four students responded positively and three negatively.

#### *4.2.4 Interviews*

In the course of the interviews, I asked the participants to share their feelings regarding the various features of Storyline and sought clarification of the data obtained previously from the questionnaires, teacher's diary and student journals. The features directly concerning language skills – speaking, listening, reading and writing – are reviewed in the subsequent section on language skill development.

#### *Problem solving, using imagination, role play*

*Problem solving* was spoken of extremely positively by Cdt3, 6 and 7, and also Cdt5 who enjoyed '*reacting to a situation and handling it*'. The remaining students stated that this was an enjoyable and useful way to learn English, although Cdt2 mentioned that it was difficult to speak in English all the time. There were no negative responses to problem solving itself. *Using imagination* was mentioned positively by Cdt2 because, in his words, '*you create your own inspiration*'. It was also enjoyed by Cdt4 who liked '*creating a story about characters and situations*' and Cdt5 who said '*I tried to invent a story and develop it*'. Cdt7 particularly liked creating his character's biography. The other participants also talked positively about using their imagination, and all agreed that it was useful in their learning; there were no negative responses. *Role play* was mentioned by Cdt1 because '*it was interesting to communicate on interesting topics*'. Many of the students also talked about taking on their character's role during role plays and feeling as though they were that character. ('*I felt like I was a real officer in a real situation*' – Cdt2; '*It's like being a real team site commander with all the responsibility*' – Cdt6). Cdt5 said that he had not chosen *role play* because, according to him, he preferred to work alone instead of in pairs or threes, but acknowledged that it had helped his English to improve a lot. Ultimately, all the student responses to role play were positive.



### *Collaborative work and individual work*

*Collaborative work* was highlighted by Cdt4 as something he had enjoyed, saying that working with more proficient students helped him to improve his English. Cdt5 was the only student who, in the post-Storyline questionnaire, had not selected *collaborative work* as a feature he enjoyed or had helped his English. I had already observed that he seemed to be happier in class when working individually, though he was certainly not shy, being happy to speak in front of the group. I therefore asked him in the course of the interview whether he enjoyed collaborative work or individual work, to which he replied that he preferred working individually so that he could employ his own imagination without being restricted by others' thoughts (*'I prefer to work alone because I can use my own imagination'* – Cdt5). When asked if there was anything he did not enjoy in Storyline, Cdt6 answered *'almost nothing, except sometimes having to work with some people'*. My prompting led me to discover that this was not collaborative work *per se*, but that he did not like working with Cdts2 and 4 on the grounds that he perceived them as being much worse speakers of English than himself, although this particular attitude was something he had not expressed and I had not noticed any manifestations of it in the course of the classes. The responses by Cdts5 and 6 were the only negative ones.

Talking about *individual work*, all the students with the exception of Cdt2 talked positively about the tasks involving students working individually, particularly with regard to writing tasks but also doing research (the initial homework task). Typical comments were that it enabled the students to think (Cdts1, 6 and 7). Cdt5 talked about being able to *'create purely my own ideas'*. For the other students, though, it was sometimes *'boring'* (Cdts2 and 3) or difficult (Cdts2 and 4). Regarding Cdts2 and 3, both explained that they preferred more active work and working with others, with Cdt2 adding that he did not like reading in any language. Cdt4 felt that in working with others, he could improve his language skills more easily than working alone.

### *Structure, variety of activities, not using a textbook, relevance to real life*

During the interviews the participants and I discussed the two additional features that had emerged in the student journals and questionnaire answers – Storyline’s *structure*, first mentioned by Cdts2, 4 and 6, and *relevance to real life*, first mentioned by Cdt6. The students responded positively when asked about the structured activity in Storyline, with Cdt7 saying that it was a good way to learn. Cdt1 talked about being able to *‘practise immediately what I learned’*. There were no negative responses regarding the structure of Storyline. The *variety of activities* was spoken about very positively, for example, Cdt7: *‘exploring things in interesting ways and new structure of a class’*. The students contrasted this with the previous teaching methods, which had been very formulaic in terms of lesson plans. There were no negative responses.

*Not using a textbook*, despite not having been explicitly commented on earlier, was seen as a positive feature by all the students, who spoke variously about, for example, the interesting tasks (Cdts1, 2 and 7) and the freedom to be creative (Cdts5 and 6). Cdt6 again related this feature to Storyline’s closeness with real life. As for Storyline’s *relevance to real life*, Cdt2 reported that he liked the fact that the written tasks were relevant to reality, saying that he could better understand the purpose in doing the activities. This was something also mentioned by Cdts3 and 4. Cdts1, 5 and 7 spoke of this, too, as an advantage over the previous teaching methods. Again, there were no negative responses regarding Storyline’s relevance to real life.

### *Art work*

*Art work* was mentioned positively by some students, such as Cdt7 – the talented artist – but also by Cdt3 who said *‘I didn’t expect, but I liked art work, creating with hands. I tried really hard, it was something new.’* Cdt6 also remarked that he liked *‘making my own character’*. Despite being liked by some of the students, art work attracted negative comments from three students. This was aptly summed up by Cdt1 who said that it was a question of personal likes and dislikes, and that he disliked such activities. Cdt5 also said that he did not like it because *‘I don’t have any abilities’* and added that he did not understand the purpose behind art work, but that perhaps looking at the characters could

encourage the students. Cdt2 also stated that he did not understand the reasons for doing art work in a foreign language class.

#### *4.2.5 Focus group*

##### *Problem solving, using imagination, role play*

In the focus group specific features were mentioned as having been enjoyed such as *using imagination*, for example, living in an imaginary world and being someone else, and *problem solving*. The students considered Storyline's relevance to the real world to be particularly useful, along with its use of authentic texts. *Role play*, they stated, required them to put their new language knowledge into practice and gave them valuable insights into their future professional work. They agreed that they felt more motivated to learn English, and to use and develop their skills.

##### *Collaborative and individual work*

Speaking on *collaborative work*, the students felt that they had worked well together and accomplished a lot, improving their language skills in the process. *Individual work*, though less popular, was seen as contributing to the other activities, and also as developing their language skills. The group agreed with Cdt5 that the information they discovered was useful and provided a foundation for future activity.

##### *Structure, variety of activities, not using a textbook, relevance to real life*

The structure of Storyline, the students believed, allowed them to learn efficiently and effectively, applying their newly gained knowledge and expanding upon it. Increased motivation, according to the participants, was due to opportunities for creativity and perceived links to real life, for example, as Cdt1 said: *'I can see myself doing these things and solving these problems in my future profession.'* This was a point with which the entire group agreed. The students agreed that they had enjoyed having the

opportunity to practise the various language skills to a greater extent than previously, of which more may be found in subsection 4.3.5.

### *Art work*

*Art work*, which had attracted a mixture of both positive and negative responses, generated some debate among the students as to its utility and relevance to the teaching and learning process. The students asked me why it was included as part of their work, which led me to briefly explain the purpose of art work in Storyline, that is, providing students with ownership of their learning, raising motivation and enabling the students to become more emotionally involved. As a result of my explanation, Cdt1 agreed that it had some utility, though Cdt5 seemed to remain unconvinced. Cdt5 suggested that we continue using Storyline without the art work, to which the remaining group members did not object; their opinion was reflected in Cdt7's comments: *'I liked the art work, but I don't mind if we don't do it next time. It's more important to use our English.'* Overall, as it turned out, the participants were ambivalent about *art work* as a feature – something I shall discuss in the next chapter – but all were very enthusiastic about using Storyline in their future English classes.

### *4.2.6 Summary*

The vast majority of the Storyline features were enjoyed by the students and perceived as being useful in their language development. The most popular features were problem solving, using imagination and role play, which had a positive impact on learner motivation due to the students having ownership of their learning, opportunities for creativity and the belief that the tasks were relevant to real life. Along with collaborative work and these most popular features, Storyline's structure and variety of activities had a positive effect on the students' development of intercultural communicative competence. The very mixed response to art work raises questions about this feature's contextual appropriateness, which will be addressed in the discussion.

### 4.3 The effect of Storyline on the students' language development

#### 4.3.1 Questionnaires

In the post-Storyline questionnaire, the participants were given a list of what they had done during Storyline and were asked to underline all the features they considered had helped in their language development, based on their experiences during Storyline.

#### *Problem solving, using imagination, role play*

The students unanimously answered that *problem solving, using imagination, and role play* had assisted their language skills development.

#### *Language skills*

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the students were also unanimous in listing *speaking in English, writing in English, reading in English, listening to English* as helping in their language development.

#### *Collaborative and individual work*

All the participants except one (Cdt5) listed *collaborative work* as helping them to improve their English. All of the students but one (Cdt2) listed *individual work* as helping them to improve their English.

#### *Variety of activities, not using a textbook*

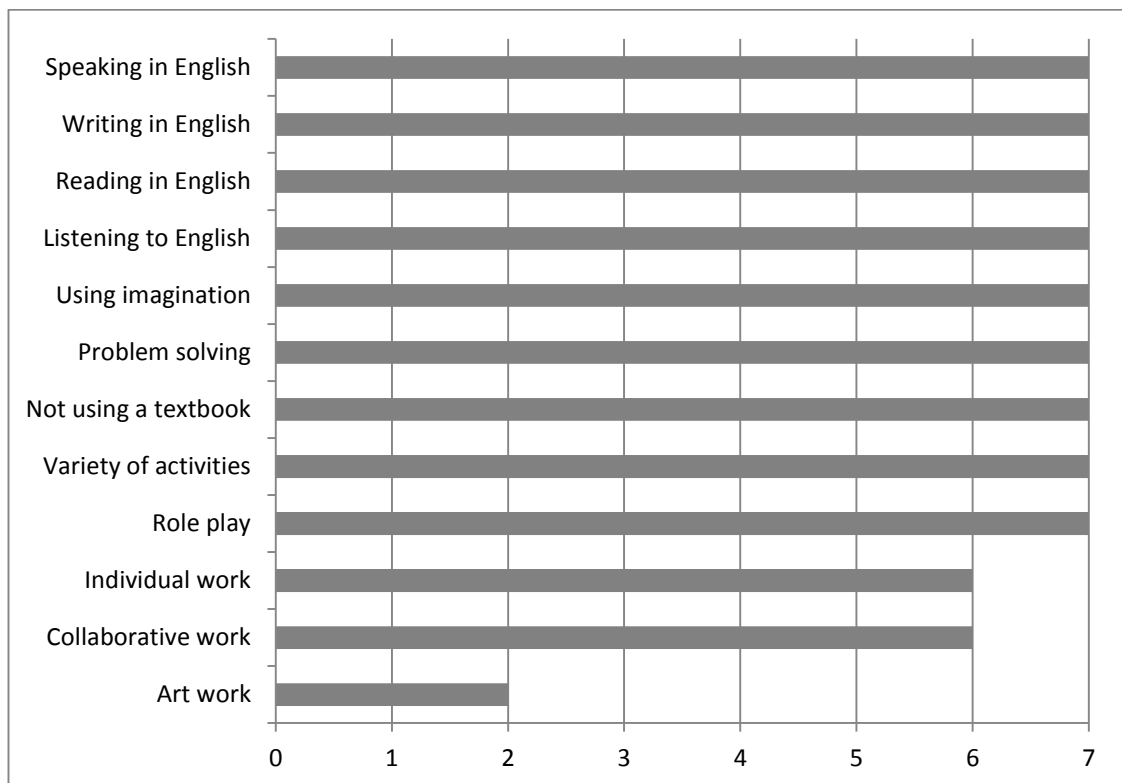
The students all answered that doing a *variety of activities and not using a textbook* had helped them to improve their English.

### *Art work*

*Art work* was listed by only two students (Cdts6 and 7) as helping to improve their English.

The data show that all the students identified 9 of the 12 Storyline features as being useful in their language development, and that all but one identified each feature except one (*art work*) as being useful in their language development. This again suggests that the students perceived the vast majority of Storyline features as having a positive effect on their language development. For convenience, Chart 3 provides an overview of the number of times each feature was selected by the students as useful in their language development.

*Chart 3: Storyline features selected by the participants as useful in their language development*



Questions 4, 5, 6 and 7 of the pre- and post-Storyline questionnaires asked the students to comment on whether their classes helped them to improve their language skills. This allowed a comparison to be made of the previous teaching approach and Storyline as a foreign language teaching method, which provided relevant data to help answer Research Question 3. The students' perspectives on their language skills development during Storyline are provided per skill – listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

### *Listening skills*

As for listening skills, prior to Storyline three of the students (Cdts3, 6 and 7) neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement that 'My classes help me to improve my listening skills'. One student (Cdt4) disagreed, whereas three students (Cdts1, 2 and 5) agreed. Post-Storyline five of the students (Cdts1, 2, 3, 4 and 6) agreed that their classes had helped them to improve their listening skills, with two (Cdts5 and 7) strongly agreeing. This represented an increase in satisfaction with listening skills development for five of the participants, Cdts1 and 2 being satisfied both before and during Storyline.

### *Speaking skills*

When asked in the pre-Storyline questionnaire whether they agreed with the statement 'My classes help me to improve my speaking skills', one student (Cdt4) strongly disagreed and three students (Cdts1, 2 and 3) disagreed, with only three students (Cdts5, 6 and 7) neither agreeing nor disagreeing. None of the students agreed with the statement. In the post-Storyline questionnaire, however, three of the students (Cdts2, 3 and 4) agreed and four (Cdts1, 5, 6 and 7) strongly agreed that the Storyline classes had helped to improve their speaking skills. This represents an increase in satisfaction with speaking skills development during Storyline for all of the participants.

### *Reading skills*

Prior to Storyline, four students (Cdts2, 3, 4 and 5) neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement 'My classes help me to improve my reading skills', and three students (Cdts1, 6 and 7) agreed that their earlier classes had helped them to improve their

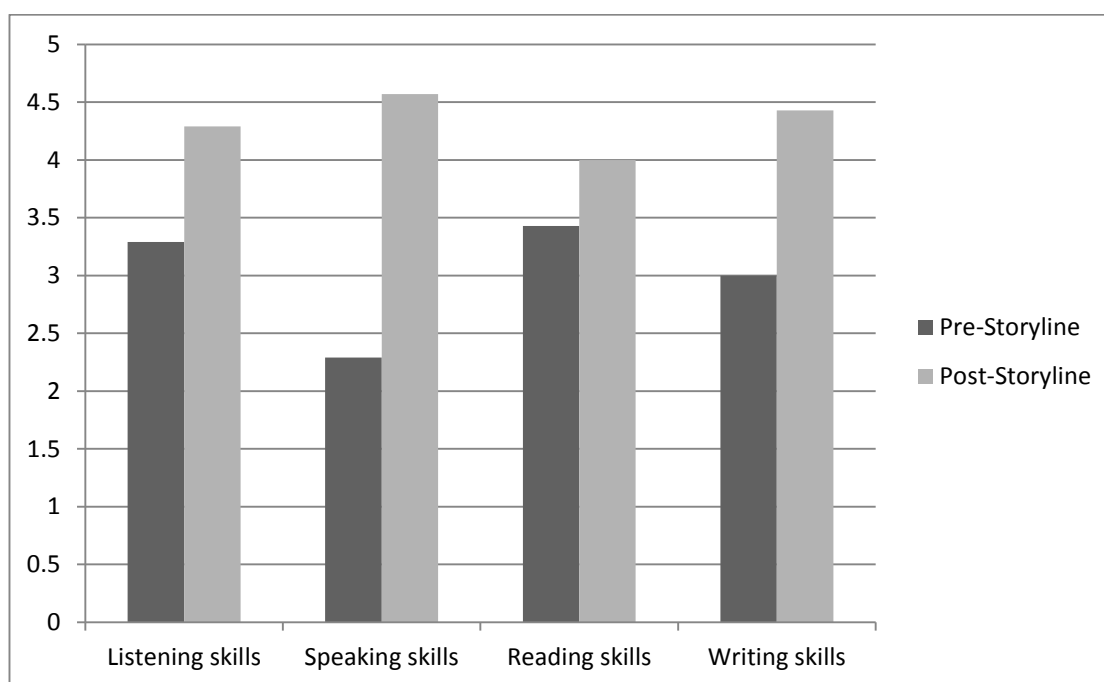
reading skills. After Storyline, five of the students (Cdt1, 3, 4, 5 and 6) agreed with the statement, one (Cdt7) strongly agreed and one (Cdt2) neither agreed nor disagreed. This represented an increase in satisfaction with reading skills development for four students; three students' answers were identical to those in their pre-Storyline questionnaires – two students (Cdt1 and 6) agreed with the statement before and after Storyline, while one student (Cdt2) neither agreed nor disagreed.

### *Writing skills*

In the pre-Storyline questionnaire five students (Cdt2, 3, 5, 6 and 7) reported neither agreeing nor disagreeing with the statement 'My classes help me to improve my writing skills', one student (Cdt4) disagreed, and one student (Cdt1) agreed. After Storyline, however, all the students agreed with the statement, three of whom (Cdt3, 5 and 7) strongly agreed. This represents an increase in satisfaction with writing skills development for all the students except one (Cdt1) who was satisfied both before and after Storyline. The above data suggest that the students perceived Storyline as having a positive effect on their language development. A comparison of the answers relating to the questions on language skills development asked in the pre- and post-Storyline questionnaires (calculated as a group mean) is provided in Chart 4.



Chart 4: A comparison of students' perspectives on language skills development pre- and post-Storyline (five-point Likert scale)



#### 4.3.2 Teacher's diary

A positive impact on language development was observed from the first class; the students took care to use appropriate English when introducing their characters and seemed to enjoy the experience of speaking and interacting 'in character'. They spoke relatively fluently and with a greater emphasis on accuracy, using relevant vocabulary and making appropriate use of the present simple, present continuous and past simple tenses. They also listened to each other respectfully and with apparent interest. Thus, positive student responses to *speaking in English* and *listening to English*. Again, the homework – writing letters of application 'in character' to serve at a UN mission – was completed with few spelling and grammar errors, and use of appropriately formal vocabulary and register, thus constituting a positive student response to *writing in English*.

The second class involved a discussion of the key questions which led to the creation of an extensive word bank of key vocabulary, which the students used actively during the lesson. During the class, all the students participated in the discussion and demonstrated knowledge of the correct usage of specialist terms and word collocations. In terms of speaking, though, the more proficient students had a tendency to dominate and Cdts2 and 4 – less proficient speakers – contributed more in non-verbal ways such as carrying out art work tasks rather than fully involving themselves in discussing what to do and how to do it. I resolved to be more proactive in future classes, if necessary, in encouraging the less proficient students to actively participate. Overall, the student response was positive to *speaking in English* and *listening to English*.

During the third Storyline class, the students, remaining in character throughout and speaking entirely in English, debated their various merits and preferences at length. Cdt2 involved himself fully in the discussions without any intervention from me and, after some encouragement, Cdt4 lost some of his reticence in speaking and made good use of newly-learned vocabulary. Overall, the participants were speaking more fluently than usual, with fewer hesitations, and were listening to each other without interrupting. The discussion went so well that I allowed it to continue longer than originally planned, which was aided by the fact that the group had made their decision on the location of the team site unexpectedly quickly. The reports written by the students as homework varied in detail, with the more proficient students (Cdts1, 3, 5, 6 and 7) writing more, whereas the less proficient students (Cdts2 and 4) wrote in considerably less detail. All the students, however, were working at their personal best and using appropriate language in terms of vocabulary and grammar. The students were able to use modal verbs such as ‘could’, ‘should’ and ‘would’ correctly, in addition to demonstrating accurate use of active and passive voice. This counted, therefore, as a positive student response to *writing in English* and *individual work*.

In the fourth class, where I showed the group a short documentary film about life at a UN team site, all the students watched with interest while making notes in English on what they saw. This was a positive student response to *listening to English* and *writing in English*. Again, Cdts2 and 4 wrote less than did the others, but their effort was noticeably improving. This was followed by group discussion of life at a UN team site,

which was very productive and involved extensive use of new vocabulary. The students continued to use modal verbs correctly. They also demonstrated understanding of the different uses between imperatives and infinitives in English, which can be a source of confusion for Russian learners of English since infinitives in Russian may be used as imperatives. Cdt2 and 4 participated actively and made good contributions to the group's interaction. Again, the student response to *speaking in English* and *listening to English* was positive.

The fifth class, which began with a discussion of positive and negative feelings that officers might experience while serving at UN team sites, involved fluent language use on the part of all the students. Reading the short story about serving away from home saw the students engaged and interested. During the subsequent discussion the students demonstrated their understanding of the text's rich vocabulary concerning feelings and examples of the subjunctive mood. Finally, talking in role about how their characters might support each other cemented use of vocabulary and gave the students new practical meaning in terms of grammar, such as how to employ the subjunctive ('*Now that I use it, I can understand how it works*' – Cdt6, teacher's diary, for whom learning to use the subjunctive earlier seemed unassailable, he confided). The student response, therefore, to *speaking in English*, *listening to English* and *reading in English* was positive. The homework involving the characters writing emails home to their families was the best I had ever seen from the students. All the participants, including the less proficient among them, wrote in rich and fluent English with virtually no spelling mistakes and showing good understanding of the present perfect and present perfect continuous tenses. This constituted, therefore, a very positive student response to *writing in English*, *individual work*, *role play* and *using imagination*.

In the sixth class I observed that all the participants made maximal contributions and spoke entirely in much more fluent English, not worrying excessively about making errors and demonstrating continued correct use of imperatives and the subjunctive. Thus the student response was very positive to *speaking in English* and *listening to English*. During the seventh class, in discussing what they had learned, the participants spoke mainly about vocabulary and speaking skills. The student response to *speaking in English* was, therefore, positive. The homework involving the characters writing diaries

was completed with the level of effort I had become accustomed to during the Storyline topic: more fluent speech, rich and appropriate vocabulary, correct spelling, and improved grammar, thus constituting another positive student response to *writing in English*. During the final class we all spoke English (including our guest) and the students enjoyed asking and answering questions in almost fluent English, demonstrating the progress they had made in terms of vocabulary (in particular, specialist terms and word collocations) and grammar (in particular, past and present tenses, the subjunctive and imperatives). Thus the final class saw a positive student response to *speaking in English* and *listening to English*.

Throughout the Storyline project, I observed that language development was supported by the students jointly ‘scaffolding’ each other’s language production (see section 5.3). In the course of the study, the students’ scaffolding occurred through co-construction, other-correction and continuers, as opposed to comprehension checks, confirmation checks and clarification checks. Thus, not only were students required to use and develop their language skills, but the less proficient students were also provided with a useful source of support on the part of their more proficient peers.

The teacher’s diary, therefore, indicates a positive impact of Storyline on language development.

#### 4.3.3 Student journals

Speaking in English, a very popular aspect which featured throughout the Storyline topic, attracted many favourable comments, for example, Cdt1 after the third class: ‘*It was good to talk so much.*’ But for the two less proficient students speaking could be difficult, for example, Cdt2 after the third class: ‘*We have to talk a lot, but I don’t always know what to say*’ and Cdt4 after the same class: ‘*It’s difficult sometimes to speak because my English is not so good.*’ Cdt4 had also written after the first class that his first presentation (of his character) did not go as well as he had hoped: ‘*I forgot many words and grammar and it was not so good.*’ Towards the end of the Storyline topic, however, his comments on this aspect became more positive, for example, after

the sixth class (Incidents): *'I knew a good solution and I said about it well and everyone liked it.'* Although there was no direct mention in the journal entries of listening to English itself, watching the documentary film (which was in English) was commented upon positively by all the students. It must also be noted that good listening is closely connected to successful problem solving, collaborative work and role play.

As for reading in English, five students (Cdt1, 4, 5, 6 and 7) wrote that they enjoyed reading the short story about serving away from home; the remaining students did not address this in their entries. Writing in English was enjoyed by most, for example, Cdt6 after the first class: *'It was fun to do something using our new words'*. Cdt7 wrote after the same class: *'I liked to write the application letter from my character because it was like in real life.'* This is a point followed up on by Cdt5 who wrote after the fifth class: *'It was interesting to write an email because I felt myself like in my character's situation.'* Again, the two least proficient students had difficulties with the writing tasks; Cdt4 wrote after the first class that the first task – the report writing – was difficult, but in subsequent entries made no negative comments on writing and even enjoyed the email task (*'writing the email was fun'* – after the fifth class). On the other hand, after the same class, Cdt2 wrote *'too much writing homework'* in his entry for the class.

When writing specifically on their language use, the participants' comments were generally short and descriptive, limited to what they did in the course of the Storyline topic, such as mentioning that they spoke a lot in class or wrote a report (for example, *'today spoke a lot about hypothetical problems and solving them'* – Cdt6). The lack of such data to analyse from the student journals required me to rely more on the remaining data collection methods.

#### 4.3.4 Interviews

The students all spoke positively as regards the individual language skills – speaking, listening, reading and writing – although the level of language proficiency determined to a large degree the extent to which each learner enjoyed each feature. Cdt3 liked the

fact that there were plenty of opportunities to speak, as did Cdt5. When asked about reading in English, all the students recalled positively the short story they had read, with Cdt4 and 6 mentioning that they had greatly enjoyed reading it. Although Cdt2 and 4, the less proficient students, initially answered that there was nothing they did not enjoy during Storyline, their journal entries indicated otherwise. With Cdt2, further prompting resulted in him saying that he found some tasks involving research, reading and writing to be boring and that he did not like writing. As for speaking, he said that he found it difficult to express himself orally at length, but overall enjoyed speaking in English. Cdt4 admitted having found the aforementioned tasks challenging, but said that they had helped to improve his English, which in turn raised his motivation.

Discussing how their language skills improved during Storyline, all the students confirmed that they believed their speaking, listening and writing skills had improved. The students felt overall that their reading skills had improved during the course of Storyline, but not as much as their other language skills since they perceived their reading skills as having been better than their other language skills prior to Storyline. Mentioned specifically were gains in terms of vocabulary (Cdt4, 5 and 7) and also spelling (Cdt6). Speaking in front of the class was mentioned positively by Cdt1 who believed it *'very useful to have presentation experience'*. This was also mentioned by Cdt3 and 5, and by Cdt4, who spoke about his improved English. The only negative comments in regard to Storyline and language development involved a perception by Cdt1 and 5 of insufficient attention paid to grammar in comparison with previous classes. This was a point I decided needed further exploration with the participants in the subsequent focus group. To sum up, the interviews show a positive effect on language development.

#### *4.3.5 Focus group*

In the course of the focus group, the students all agreed that the previous teaching methods were too routine and not particularly interesting, although they acknowledged that they had made some progress in English, especially in terms of reading skills, but

that their speaking skills had not developed as much as they would have liked due to their spending the majority of time working with a textbook.

During Storyline the students perceived a great improvement in their English language skills, particularly in regard to speaking skills and expansion of their vocabulary. They enjoyed the fact that Storyline gave them far greater opportunities to speak and, indeed, speak almost entirely in English during each class and practise new vocabulary. In the words of Cdt7, '*we immersed ourselves in English*'. The less proficient students both considered that their speaking skills and vocabulary had improved considerably, particularly Cdt4. All the students also noted improvements in their listening skills, which they attributed to the increased amount of time spent communicating in English.

The participants' writing skills had also improved and they perceived this as being due to the interesting nature of the tasks and their close connection to real life combined with the freedom to be expressive in what they wrote (Cdts5 and 6). In terms of reading skills, the students noted a slight improvement ('*it was a bit easier*' – Cdt6) but attributed this mostly to the perceived relevance of the reading tasks to real life (Cdts1, 5, 6 and 7) and again noted that the previous teaching methods had a definite focus on reading. I brought up the issue of learning grammar, to which Cdts1 and 5 had felt insufficient attention was paid during Storyline. When we recalled – as we did during the seventh class – the grammar that we had covered during the Storyline topic such as, for example, the present perfect, present perfect continuous, and subjunctive, the students accepted that they had in fact learned much. There was a consensus, though, that although the practical aspects of grammar had been covered very well in the course of the teaching and learning process, more explicit attention could have been paid to grammar forms in order to provide more comprehensible explanations of usage. Their attitude was that grammar had always been explained to them explicitly by the teacher and they therefore found such teacher-led explanations easier to comprehend. This point is discussed in section 5.3. Nonetheless, the focus group confirmed the positive effect of Storyline on language development.

#### *4.3.6 Summary*

The various data collection methods suggest that Storyline had a positive impact on students' language development due to improved motivation since they were provided ownership of language learning, opportunities for language creativity, and perceived that they were learning to use language in ways that would be relevant to real life, specifically, in their future careers. Additionally, in the course of Storyline the cadets developed their intercultural communicative competence, all of which would support the view that Storyline is appropriate to the context. The students were, though, of an opinion that explicit grammar instruction could have been incorporated into Storyline, to be discussed in subsection 5.3.2.

#### **4.4 Conclusions and implications for Storyline**

The data from the various data collection methods have been set out per research question. Improvements have been noted in student satisfaction with teaching, student motivation and student satisfaction with progress. The student response to the features of Storyline was mostly positive, with only a small number of the features receiving a mixed response. The students reported that Storyline had a positive effect on their language skills, particularly in relation to the productive skills – speaking and writing. As the participants' teacher, and a participant researcher, my observation is that Storyline had a positive impact on the foreign language classroom, an observation which is shared and supported by the students as co-participants in the study. It seems, therefore, on the basis of the data obtained that Storyline as a foreign language teaching method received a positive student response (Research Question 1), the individual Storyline features received a mostly positive student response (Research Question 2), and that Storyline had a positive impact on the English language skills of the military linguist cadets (Research Question 3). In the next chapter I shall discuss the findings before coming to evidence-based conclusions on the impact of Storyline on the foreign language classroom.



## CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

### 5.0 Introduction

In this chapter I will discuss the findings of the study, as presented and analysed in the previous chapter, in relation to the literature on foreign language teaching methods and Storyline. The discussion is organised according to the research questions. First I shall discuss how the students responded to Storyline as a foreign language teaching method. Next I shall reflect on the student response to the individual features of Storyline. Finally, I shall consider the impact of Storyline on the students' language development.

### 5.1 Student response to Storyline as a foreign language teaching method

The findings show an increase in learner motivation, which all the students agreed had improved thanks to Storyline. As discussed in subsection 2.3.3, motivation may be divided into two basic types: '*intrinsic motivation*, which refers to doing something because it is inherently interesting or enjoyable, and *extrinsic motivation*, which refers to doing something because it leads to a separable outcome' (Deci and Ryan, 2000: 55) (italics in original). As for intrinsic motivation, as previously stated in subsection 4.1.2, '*fun*', '*interesting*', '*useful*' and '*effective*' were common responses for many of the students; what Rivers (2007: 1) calls a 'fresh and lively approach... basic to effective language experiences'. Motivation in Storyline is also said to come from increased student ownership of learning, due to opportunities for student creativity and control of the learning process (Creswell, 1997; Kocher, 2007). In language learning, greater attention is now being paid to the relationship between autonomy and motivation (Benson, 2006). Intrinsic motivation may be positively impacted upon through a 'sense of personal autonomy' (Deci and Flaste, 1995: 30). This sense of personal autonomy was reflected in student responses to Storyline, such as Cdt1's interview comments that he felt '*more involved in the learning process*' (subsection 4.1.4). Additionally, several of the students reported that they enjoyed '*creating*', be it stories, characters or solutions to problems. It is interesting to note the comments contrasting Storyline and the

previous teaching approach by Cdt7, written in his journal after the eighth class: *'Before Storyline I studied hard because I wanted to be an officer, but Storyline is good because now learning English is more interesting and fun way to study'* (subsection 4.1.3). Comments such as these suggest that while the opportunity for an army commission provides a stimulus for extrinsic motivation, irrespective of teaching method, Storyline as a method had a positive impact on students' intrinsic motivation.

Gardner (1985) conceives motivation in language learning as subsuming three components, namely, motivational intensity (effort), desire to learn the language (want/will) and an attitude towards the act of learning the language (task-enjoyment). Student motivation was closely connected to the participants' sense of ownership (see the interview comments by Cdts1, 5 and 6 in subsection 4.1.4.). Learner ownership is fundamental to Storyline and mandates the students themselves taking responsibility for their learning, which is aided through the use of imagination and taking on another's role (Hofmann, 2007). This was accomplished and enjoyed by the students. Kocher (2007) notes, too, that in Storyline students are motivated to work hard and set high standards for themselves in order to impress the audience with their skills. The increased effort was accompanied by reflective learning coming from the learners' own initiative, which is an important tenet of Storyline (Falkenberg, 2007: 52) and had an impact on learner motivation. The students described Storyline as interesting and related that they looked forward to each class and wondered what would happen as part of the topic; this resulted in greater efforts regarding preparation and higher motivation, indicating that they displayed the task-enjoyment described in Dörnyei (1998). Moreover, motivation arising from engagement in a task carried the students into the next (Van den Branden, 2006; Ahlquist, 2011). No less important for student motivation was their perception that they were engaged in meaningful activity (Creswell, 1997; Kocher, 2007), learning useful things (see, for example, the comments by Cdt1 that he learned language and information that he could apply immediately, noted in subsection 4.2.4), as identified by Hofmann (2007) and Larsen-Freeman and Anderson (2011).

The students adjusted to Storyline very well, as seen from their responses and continued engagement throughout the Storyline topic. There emerged intrinsic motivation, from the way tasks were presented (Dörnyei, 2001), in addition to the already-existing

extrinsic motivation of studying hard in order to graduate and earn an army commission (see the comments by Cdt7 in subsection 4.1.3). They developed into autonomous learners; by taking control of their learning, within the framework provided by me as the teacher, an atmosphere of collaboration emerged that allowed the participants to progress in their learning with minimal teacher intervention. As described by Bell (2006), the partnership between teacher and learners was very real and positive. Issues of hierarchy arose only in limited cases when it was necessary for me to intervene in order to, for example, ensure the timely completion of tasks and the moving forward of learning. Otherwise, divergences in learner interaction and teacher expectation, as per Seedhouse (1997), did not occur. Not only did the roles of the students change, but also my role as teacher changed. As mentioned earlier in the discussion of Storyline as a method, Bell (2000: 3) talks about the ‘paradox... that the teacher has planned for almost every activity in which the learners will engage but the students feel that they have ownership of the story’. This did not, however, lead to teacher domination, a specific concern of Legenhausen (1998), but created an atmosphere of ‘structured freedom’ Kocher (1999: 17). Indeed, teachers must respect and accept the learners’ decisions (Bell, 2006). It might be said that the students gained ownership of their learning, whereas I ‘retained ownership’ of the teaching. Instead of being a figure of control, my role became that of facilitator of the educational process, as described in Kocher (2007). This role is aptly defined in Harmer (2007: 108), who writes that a facilitator is:

‘[O]ne who is democratic rather than autocratic, and one who fosters learner autonomy through the use of groupwork and pairwork and by acting as more of a resource than a transmitter of knowledge.

The role of the teacher as an organiser of the educational process and facilitator of learning, as envisaged in Storyline (Creswell, 1997; Harkness, 2007), led to a true sense of collaboration as we worked together for the purposes of a common goal – to advance the students’ progress in English. Indeed, throughout the Storyline topic the students and I worked in an atmosphere of mutual liking and respect (Rivers, 2007) that proved particularly conducive to the effectiveness of the teaching and learning process. I observed that my intervention as regards issues of classroom management (students not working or not paying attention) was required no more often than previously. The students themselves seemed to appreciate my role as an adviser (‘*you helped us to teach*

*ourselves*' – Cdt4, interview) and I noticed that they asked more questions in order to find out information. Dörnyei (1998) discusses the importance of learner autonomy to motivation. In the course of the Storyline topic I acquired greater understanding of how much the students themselves could achieve when given ownership of their learning and came to appreciate how powerful this was as a motivator in foreign language learning (Ehlers et al, 2006; Kocher, 2007; Ahlquist, 2011). Chan (2013) notes the important role of the teacher in promoting interactional authenticity in the foreign language classroom, which cannot be achieved via a textbook. The students favourably contrasted the changing role of the teacher before and during Storyline (*'Before, the textbook guided us. In Storyline, the teacher guides us to be more flexible'* – Cdt1, focus group). This suggests that Storyline was both culturally appropriate (Harmer, 2007) and contextually appropriate (Footitt and Kelly, 2012a; Kelly and Baker, 2013) and contributes to knowledge on Storyline's application to the teaching of military linguist cadets in Russia.

The students' clear preference for Storyline as opposed to the previous teaching methods was due to various factors such as increased satisfaction with the teaching during Storyline, greater motivation to learn English using Storyline, and higher satisfaction with progress in the course of Storyline. Satisfaction with the teaching and learning process itself seems to be closely connected with student autonomy and ownership of learning (Deci and Flaste, 1995; Dörnyei, 1998; Ushioda, 2007, 2011) and also with the students' perception of what they are learning as being useful and meaningful (Letschert, 2006; Hofmann, 2007, Ahlquist, 2011; Footitt and Kelly, 2012a; Kelly and Baker, 2013). The study's finding of enhanced learner motivation supports the findings of doctoral research by Mitchell-Barrett (2010) and Ahlquist (2011), and makes an original contribution to knowledge on Storyline's capacity to motivate language learners at the tertiary level of education. The overall positive student response indicates that Storyline was both culturally and contextually appropriate, and thus also makes an original contribution to knowledge on Storyline's application to the teaching of military linguist cadets in Russia.

## 5.2 Student response to the individual features of Storyline

The Storyline features attracted a range of responses from the students. I shall first discuss three of the most popular features of Storyline, which are indivisible from each other. For the purposes of the discussion, those features of Storyline directly concerning language use (listening, speaking, reading and writing in English) are discussed in the next section.

### 5.2.1 *Problem solving, using imagination and role play*

*Problem solving* was unanimously selected by the students in the post-Storyline questionnaire as being useful in their language development. It was also a feature that they all reported particularly enjoying. Tasks must be presented to the learners in a way that motivates them to perform the task (Dörnyei, 2001). The importance of meaning in tasks has often been emphasised (Skehan, 1996; Lee, 2000; Bygate, Skehan and Swain, 2001; Nunan, 2004). This is supported by the student response and shall be examined later in subsection 5.2.3 in the discussion on *relevance to real life*. Moreover, as Mathews-Aydinli (2007: 5) notes:

For adult English language learners in particular, carefully chosen problems directly related to their everyday lives can be not only highly motivating but also practical for them to work on.

In Storyline it was the relevance of the problem-solving tasks to the students' future careers that was motivating, while also being practical. In the context of the Storyline topic, a definite advantage was the fact that the students also found them interesting due to their authentic nature, as noted by Kocher (2007). The problem-solving tasks were also an effective means of including the less proficient students, who were motivated to participate and found support from other group members in working to solve the problem. This is a point to be further analysed in the discussion on collaborative work later in subsection 5.2.2.

*Using imagination* attracted an exclusively positive learner response. The students employed their imagination successfully throughout the Storyline topic in order to fulfil a wide variety of tasks, from creating their characters' biographies to solving problems.

Imagination underpinned the students' creativity throughout the study. This was also evident when they were 'in character', as they were almost entirely throughout the Storyline topic. As Howatt with Widdowson (2004) point out, through imagination the learners can make language real when the activities are purposeful and engaging. The problem-solving tasks succeeded in engaging the students, who responded positively and used their imagination in order to develop their language skills. This was observed especially during the role play tasks. Furthermore, when language learning involves using imagination learners do not confine themselves to learning in the classroom (Asher, 1993) but anticipate and imagine what might happen next, using and developing their English as they do so.

Storyline enabled them to create their own context and story, in which they could explore their language and master new skills. This allowed them to 'experiment with language without getting hurt' (Perez-Prado, 2003: 6). Ahlquist (2011) found that learner imagination might have been linked more to the learners' characters than the story, due to their greater creative freedom in developing them than the story itself, whereas in my study both seemed to play an equally significant role. This is probably because of the increased relevance to real life, owing to the age difference and greater ability of the military linguist cadets to identify with their characters. In other words, the students in my study were military linguist cadets taking on the role of military officers in a multi-lingual environment – a role they were being prepared for – while Ahlquist's study involved secondary school pupils taking on the roles of various family members, which perhaps involved a greater imaginative leap. For the students in the study it seems, therefore, that the role play was more meaningful.

*Role play* has a long history of use in the foreign language classroom (Livingstone, 1983) in order to provide opportunities for meaningful interaction (Richard-Amato, 1988). In the course of the Storyline topic role playing had the hybrid function of both imitating the real world and promoting the 'imaginative self-expression of the inner world of each student's mind' (Al-Arishi, 1994). In observing the students communicating 'in character' their interactions were much more natural than prior to Storyline. They became immersed in their roles and seemed much better motivated to perform the set tasks, as noted in Bell (2000). The language used in these interactions

was richer and the communication was more fluent than earlier and lasted longer, which matches Ellis's assertion that:

[R]icher varieties of communication characterised by more complex language use, are achievable if, for example, students are asked to perform open tasks with divergent goals and are given the opportunity to plan their performance beforehand (Ellis, 2003: 254).

The students related how they enjoyed being 'someone else' and that it was useful experience both from a language point of view and in terms of their future profession. Taking on a role that is close to one's (future) profession resulted in more natural role play and, therefore, allowed the students to feel secure in the role and able to pay more attention to language.

Role play techniques imitate what happens in the world outside the classroom', i.e. '[learning] to talk to people by actually talking to them: L2 learning arises through meaningful use in the classroom (Cook, 2001: 215).

Role play required that the students make use of their language skills, often while engaged in problem solving. This was central to their roles as characters in the story which they themselves were creating and involved use of their imagination, which the students responded to positively ('*It was fun being comrades together on a team site*' – Cdt6, journal entry). Again, the imitation of – and, therefore, relevance to – the world outside the classroom ensured language learning through meaningful use (Kocher, 2007).

The role play and problem-solving activities in Storyline provided continual opportunities for conversational interaction, which 'facilitates acquisition because it connects input; internal learner capacities, particularly selective attention; and output in productive ways' (Long, 1996: 451-452). Here the role play activities played a key role. Taking, for example, the first role play activity – introducing themselves to each other 'in character' – it was observed that the students developed both their fluency and accuracy by listening and speaking to each other. Thus, the students were developing their language skills by making connections between input and output while using their internal learner capacities. Negotiation, as a way of modifying interaction, 'can help make input comprehensible to learners, help them modify their own output, and provide opportunities for them to access L2 form and meaning' (Pica, 1994: 520). Here a key role was played by the problem-solving activities, throughout which the students were

speaking English and, therefore, were required to negotiate meaning in order to successfully comprehend each other and solve the problem. An advantage of the role play and problem-solving activities in Storyline seems to be their meaningfulness and authenticity due to their focus on what is relevant to real-life contexts. In a military context, such activities have been found to be effective in language learning (Footitt and Kelly, 2012a; Kelly and Baker, 2013). In such activities the interactions are expected to assist language development better than assigned role plays or repetition of dialogues (Mackey, 1999; Nakahama, Tyler and Van Lier, 2001). Peacock (1997) found that learners' motivation increased when working with authentic materials, but that they found the authentic materials significantly less interesting than artificial ones. In my study, the students responded positively to the use of authentic materials. Their comments support the view that this was because the authentic materials were used in a way that was real for the learners (Widdowson, 1998) and relevant to their lives and future profession (Mathews-Aydinli, 2007).

### *5.2.2 Collaborative work and individual work*

*Collaborative work* had an overall positive student response and effect on language development. Richards and Rodgers (2014: 244-245) propose five key elements of successful collaborative work in language learning:

- Positive interdependence (success depends on all students working together)
- Group formation (the teacher forms groups that are heterogeneous in terms of past achievement and so on)
- Individual accountability (each student is responsible for his/her performance)
- Social skills (how the students interact with each other is important to success)
- Structuring and structures (student interaction must be organised/structured)

The collaborative work of the students in this study was reflected in the above elements, which were important to its success. Firstly, the students were required to work together in order to identify appropriate solutions to problems, meaning that they were dependent on each other. Secondly, the collaborative work involved either the whole group or pairs/trios selected by me as teacher always involving a mix of skills. Thirdly, each student – playing the role of his character – felt individually responsible for his



character and the success of the activity. Fourthly, in acting out their roles, the interaction achieved a simulated authenticity which aided the success of the interaction. Fifthly, the interaction was structured in terms of problem-solving tasks and character roles, which underpinned the collaborative work. Role play was an important aspect of the collaborative work, as it generates participation and requires students to pay attention to what is happening (Moskowitz, 1996). Moreover, in our simulated multicultural environment, it fostered the development of social skills, which are as crucial to the work of military linguists as are linguistic and cultural competences (Guo, 2015).

Group work plays an important role in aiding learner development (Ohta, 2000). In the focus group the students expressed the belief that they had worked successfully together and that collaborative work had played an important role in improving their language skills. The success of collaborative work depends on the ‘group interaction [which] ‘is promoted by placing the learners in a fictitious situation or environment with the outcome dependent on their collective communicative competence’ (Savignon, 1997). This is precisely what happened in the Storyline topic. Indeed, it is during collaborative work that much language learning is achieved, as described in Pica and Doughty (1985: 115):

[I]t has been shown that when non-native speakers engage in genuine communication with each other, as opposed to a native speaker interlocutor, they appear to experience a greater degree of involvement in their negotiation for message meaning (Varonis and Gass, 1985). Furthermore, when students engage independently in group discussion, they have been shown to use their second language for a wider range of rhetorical purposes than in discussion led by their teacher (Long, Adams, McLean and Castanos, 1976).

It did, however, become apparent that personal likes or dislikes of individuals could affect students’ perceptions of the enjoyment of collaborative work. There was some evidence of resentment by more proficient students having to work with less proficient peers (see the comments in interview by Cdt6 reported in subsection 4.2.4), but the collaborative work was successful in involving them all in using their language skills, challenging both the more and less proficient students to progress. Ahlquist (2011), too, found that the group support and practical work involved in Storyline was important for less proficient learners.

The mixed response to *individual work* was a question of learning style preferences with some learners preferring group work and others preferring to work alone (McDonough and Shaw, 1993). Individual work also allows for the individualisation of language learning, meaning ‘the organisation of learning and teaching in such a way as to allow the abilities, interests and needs of the individual learner to be enhanced as effectively as possible’ (Brumfit and Roberts, 1983: 193). Individual work was useful for providing students with time to think and reflect both before and after the activities. Although there is sometimes a conflict between autonomous, self-directed learning and teacher-directed learning (McDonough and Shaw, 1993), in the Storyline topic the research tasks were a combination of both: the tasks were set by me as the teacher, but the students were given the maximum degree of autonomy to carry them out.

For some, the individual work in Storyline did not generate a wholly positive response, being described as boring or difficult. Again this seems to be due partly to differences in learning style preferences and partly a question of language proficiency. Indeed, more proficient students are better equipped to take ownership of their learning, whereas less proficient students need more support (Ahlquist, 2011). The less proficient students found individual work more difficult than collaborative activities without the opportunities for peer support (Ohta, 2000; Swain and Lapkin, 2001; Samuda and Bygate, 2008). Individual work did, however, allow the learning to take place in context, which would have been difficult to achieve without research and reflection, and provided the key structure before activity required in TBLT (Willis, 1996; Ellis, 2003) and Storyline itself (Kocher, 2007). I shall now move on to other central features of Storyline that are closely interrelated.

### *5.2.3 Structure, variety of activities, not using a textbook and relevance to real life*

It was evident in the classroom that Storyline’s *structure* aided learning; Storyline provided a natural linear structure and meaningful context (Creswell, 1997; Letschert, 2006; Kocher, 2007) in which the language learning took place. I observed that the coherence of activities enabled students to apply their newly found knowledge and to

build upon it, repeating it and resulting in better performance of language skills. This is summed up well by Cdt1, who stated during the interview, *'I like that I learn something and then practise it again and again, and I become better and better.'* This tallies with Bogaert et al's (2006: 123) notion of narrative creating 'a meaningful framework increasing the functionality of the separate activities'. The structure was phased as in TBLT (Ellis, 2003), which allowed language development and consolidation of learning at key stages – the pre-task, during-task and post-task phases. The individual work, art work, reading of the short story and watching the documentary video, plus paired discussions, constituted pre-task activities (Willis, 1996) and provided the students with an opportunity to prepare to apply their knowledge. The structure provided for interaction primarily between the students themselves (Richards and Rodgers, 2014) and involved them as communicators being actively engaged in negotiating meaning (Larsen-Freeman and Anderson, 2011). After the conclusion of Storyline episodes and at the end of Storyline itself there was time for the students to reflect on the tasks (Ellis, 2003), and coming to the end of the story provided 'the natural conclusion of the task cycle' (Willis, 1996: 58). This had a positive impact on the students' language development.

The structure of Storyline allowed for the *variety of activities*, which was viewed by all the students as being useful in their language development; as in TBLT, the activities were done with purposeful communicative intent (Larsen-Freeman and Anderson, 2011). The variety of activities enabled different language skills to be worked on throughout the topic, yet also was key to examining different themes within the story. Harkness's (2007) assertion that Storyline is particularly able to aid interdisciplinary learning was shown to be true in the course of the Storyline topic, during which the students not only developed their language skills and vocabulary, but also increased their knowledge of a wide variety of themes such as the United Nations as a whole, individual UN contributing countries, UN team sites, the realities of serving abroad in a multi-national environment, officer responsibilities, how to deal with various incidents and so on. Ellis (2008: 671) notes that 'at the moment there are few general conclusions that can be drawn from the research on learning style', from which one might infer inadvisability in rigidly following one approach. The variety of activities employed within Storyline enabled individualisation of learning. The students had their own

preferences regarding activities, but positively contrasted the variety of activities in Storyline compared to the previous teaching approach (*'It's good that we don't do always the same things'* – Cdt2, interview). The various activities, combined with not being restricted to following a textbook, allowed the students – in taking ownership of their learning – to learn according to their own preferences and learning styles (Wrigley, 2007).

*Not using a textbook*, or using Storyline as a basis for learning opposed to the previous teacher-centred, textbook-based approach, was closely connected to the variety of activities. The variety of activities and absence of textbooks also contributed to the individualisation of the learning process, ensuring that the individual student is not 'suppressed by the built-in constraints of the group context' (Bowers, 1980: 80). Kramsch (1993) views the use of authentic materials rather than a textbook as advantageous since it results in students exploring their understanding and becoming conscious of their own knowledge. Although textbook dialogues, for example, have been improving over time, they nevertheless differ considerably from their authentic equivalents (Gilmore, 2004). Chan (2013) points to the lack of situational authenticity in language textbooks. These viewpoints are supported by the students, who saw not using a textbook an advantage in terms of allowing them to be creative and also regarding the authenticity of tasks (*'All the things are more real than in a textbook'* – Cdt6, interview), which were also viewed as more interesting than those in textbooks. Instead of using a textbook, students worked with authentic materials:

Communicative approaches... expose learners as much as possible to spoken or written texts that have not been fabricated for pedagogic purposes. It is hoped that, by making communication more authentic, learners will be able to better *understand* the speaking customs and ways of life of the target [environment] and thus behave more appropriately in native-speaker environments (Kramsch, 1993: 185) (*italics in original*).

Storyline provides a useful framework for using authentic materials (Ehlers et al, 2006; Kocher, 2007). Examples of authentic materials used in the Storyline topic are the short story about serving away from home and the documentary video, neither of which were created or adapted for language learners. Widdowson (1979) discusses authenticity in terms of learners using and interpreting materials in the way which was intended by the creators of the materials. In this case, the story and video were created for informational

and entertainment purposes and they were used and interpreted by the students in the same way, later serving as a point of discussion. As Kramsch (1993: 200) points out, textbooks provide rules, grammar and vocabulary, but ‘what learners really have to learn is how to put this knowledge to use in varying situational contexts for varying purposes, for the benefit of varying interlocutors...’ By using and interpreting authentic materials, the students were able to successfully apply their knowledge in the situational contexts in which they found themselves during the Storyline topic. Brownlow (2007: 39) writes how Storyline involves learners ‘develop[ing] their own ideas’ in the course of activities. In progressing through the Storyline, the use of authentic materials, as opposed to being restricted by a textbook, allowed the students to work out solutions to problems using gained knowledge and accumulating it.

Finally, *relevance to real life*, which was identified unanimously by the students as being both a useful and enjoyable feature of Storyline, has been observed to be an effective approach to learning in general (Creswell, 1997; Letschert, 2006), to language learning in particular (Widdowson, 1998; Mathews-Aydinli, 2007; Rivers, 2007; Larsen-Freeman and Anderson, 2011), and in a military context (Footitt and Kelly, 2012a; Kelly and Baker, 2013). All the language learning within the Storyline topic was relevant to real life; the materials used were authentic (Nunan, 2004) and were used in a way that was real for the students (Widdowson, 1998). The relevance to real life helped to motivate the students, who noted that the activities were realistic and useful in terms of their future service (*‘If I go to serve abroad, I feel more confident that my language is good enough, because I practised this already’* – Cdt7, interview). This is particularly important in foreign language training in the military (Kelly and Baker, 2013).

Throughout the Storyline topic, meaning and contextualisation were basic to learning (Finocchiaro and Brumfit, 1983). This created the necessary conditions for student motivation and effective language learning. Some features were more popular, or perceived as more useful, than others. It must be remembered, though, that the features of Storyline are not easily divorced from each other; they support each other and fit together to enable effective learning in a creative atmosphere of student ownership and teacher-student collaboration. Moreover, as mentioned in subsection 2.3.3, motivation arising from engagement in one task may carry the learner into the next (Van den

Branden, 2006; Ahlquist, 2011), even if that particular next task is less motivating for the learner.

Art work proved to be a more controversial feature of Storyline for the students and so requires a separate examination.

#### 5.2.4 *Art work*

*Art work* was a feature that attracted widely diverging responses. There is support in the literature for art work in language learning with school-age learners (Wright, 1989; Richardson, 1990; Shier, 1990; Wright, 2001). Moore, Koller and Kreie Arago (1994: 12) write that:

Shier (1990) maintains that art more actively engages students in their own learning processes on a personal, intellectual, and physical level. Bassano and Christison (1982) attribute this engagement to an emotional quality in art.

Wright (1989, 2001) states that art work raises learner motivation and also that it brings the language to life. Art work in Storyline proved to be very popular in foreign language classes with secondary school pupils (Ahlquist, 2011), yet turned out to be a controversial issue for my students. This was probably partly due to age differences, the students not having done anything like art work since leaving school, and also due to their differing perceptions of their personal ability in art. The main reason, however, was that some of the students failed to see its relevance to their language learning. The importance of students' perception of tasks being relevant and meaningful is noted in the foreign language teaching literature (Widdowson, 1998; Rivers, 2007; Larsen-Freeman and Anderson, 2011). Those who particularly enjoyed it did so because they had always liked art work (Cdt7) or because they discovered an unexpected ability in it (Cdt3). Art work was, however, acknowledged as more useful when more structured and when the students could see a practical benefit in doing it.

Storyline's features do not always seem like work and students do not necessarily realise the purpose behind the tasks while they are completing them. Brown (2009: 56) writes that 'student perceptions of what constitutes effective teaching practices and

teacher effectiveness might be altered if their teachers were to provide a short rationale for selected activities.’ Indeed, when provided with such a rationale and given an opportunity to reflect, the majority of the participants agreed that creating their characters enabled them to internalise feelings and emotions (Creswell, 1997). The frieze, which was created collaboratively and attracted a more positive response, was observed to motivate the students through providing them again with a certain ownership of the creative process, as discussed in Bell (2000). In spite of this, the students were ambivalent regarding using art work in possible future Storyline work, although the majority recognised some utility in it. This seems to be essentially a question of relative popularity of Storyline features, the most enjoyed of which were directly related to language use.

Allen (1990) states that language learning comes naturally when students do activities in which they find meaning and purpose, which they ultimately did not perceive greatly in art work. The students responded most positively to the opportunities afforded during the Storyline topic to use and develop their language skills in ways that they had not been able to do prior to Storyline. This was most aptly reflected in the focus group comments by Cdt7, reported in subsection 4.2.5: *‘I liked the art work, but I don’t mind if we don’t do it next time. It’s more important to use our English.’* After my explanation of why Storyline involves art work, the students seemed satisfied that it had its uses, apart from Cdt5 who seemed unconvinced. Nevertheless, they expressed ambivalence as to doing art work in the future. In short, the group’s perception of effective teaching and learning was shaped by their earlier lack of opportunity to use their language skills, which was their main concern. Their response, therefore, was more positive to those features of Storyline which they perceived as having a direct positive impact on their language skills development. This will be addressed further in the conclusion.

### 5.2.5 Summary

Overall, we see a mostly positive response to virtually all the features of Storyline. The most positive student response was to Storyline’s relevance to real life and the activities

involving interaction and making use of productive language skills. Some of the features' links to language skills are more explicit than others, but all are designed to make a contribution directly or indirectly to the development of language skills, whether by encouraging students to take responsibility for their learning or by inspiring them to think creatively.

The research therefore indicates that authentic tasks involving problem solving, using imagination and role play are conducive to military linguist cadets' language learning, which confirms previous findings (see, for example, Footitt and Kelly, 2012a; Kelly and Baker, 2013) and thus contributes to knowledge on foreign language learning for military personnel in general. The study also confirms reports in the foreign language learning literature (McDonough and Shaw, 1993) that learners' preferences for either collaborative or individual work, and also for other Storyline features such as art work, are based on personal learning styles. The study found that Storyline's structure, involving a variety of activities without reliance on textbooks and being perceived as more relevant to real life, was conducive to language learning. Additionally, with particular relevance to art work, the study found that the military linguist cadets' response was more positive to those features of Storyline which they perceived as having a direct positive impact on their language skills development. I shall now proceed to the next section for a discussion of the students' language skills development during Storyline.

### **5.3 Storyline and language development**

The students' perception of their language skills development in the course of Storyline was positive overall and seems to be connected with their being able to use the language functionally. Byram (1997) remarks on the inextricable link between ability to function effectively in a language and intercultural communicative competence. This requires effective approaches to 'culture learning' (Johnstone Young and Sachdev, 2011: 81). The intercultural context in which the Storyline topic was situated aided the development of not only language skills *per se*, but also intercultural communicative competence. Central to the development of intercultural communicative competence is



the ability to interact in the target environment (Sinicrope, Norris and Watanabe, 2012). This occurred through the learners taking on the roles of military officers in an intercultural environment. When using their language skills to communicate and build relations with each other, solve problems and achieve results, they were developing the intercultural competence which ‘informs their language choices in communication’ (Kramsch 2009: 244). Indeed, throughout the Storyline project, the students were observed (see subsection 4.3.2) to be jointly “scaffolding” each other’s language production – providing prompts, directions, reminders, evaluations and corrections, plus additional contributions (Samuda and Bygate, 2008: 118). This scaffolding occurred through co-construction, other-correction and continuers, as opposed to comprehension checks, confirmation checks and clarification checks, which concurs with the findings of Foster and Ohta (2005). The utility of such collaborative talk in task-based teaching in terms of ‘providing support, structure and focus’ (ibid.) is noted in empirical research (Ohta, 2000; Swain and Lapkin, 2001). This provided the less proficient students with a useful source of support on the part of their more proficient peers. In solving problems and working together, the created ‘reality’ allowed all the learners to participate (Ehlers et al, 2006) and improve their language skills. Although the Storyline classroom was an artificial environment rather than an authentic intercultural situation, the observed internalisation by the learners of their roles made the context perhaps as real as practicable in a classroom situation. I shall now discuss the individual language skills – listening, speaking, reading and writing. First I shall review the receptive skills (listening and reading), before moving on the productive skills (speaking and writing).

### *5.3.1 Listening and reading skills*

The findings show an improvement in all the students’ listening skills during Storyline. The improvement in listening skills occurred through the constant use of collaborative work, role plays and problem-solving tasks, the successful completion of which required participants to negotiate meaning (Larsen-Freeman and Anderson, 2011) and so not only be fluent speakers, but also listen to their interlocutors. While listening, students are involved in one or more of ‘guessing, anticipating, checking, interpreting, interacting and organising’ (McDonough and Shaw, 1993: 128). All listening was

directly related to the Storyline topic, irrespective of whether it involved the students watching the short documentary film or listening to each other. Although the group was mostly made up of natural ‘talkers’, easily prone to becoming distracted when listening to others, it seems that the interesting and relevant nature of the activities, plus their close involvement at all stages of the Storyline topic, served to keep their attention. In Storyline, the majority of speech was interactional (collaborative) in that all the learners played a part in developing it (Rost, 1990). This negotiation of meaning that takes place in interactional speech had the effect of both keeping the students’ interest and attention, and thus enabled more effective learning. Where the speech was not interactional, for example, when listening to the speech in the documentary video, the students’ interest and attention was maintained due to the authentic and meaningful nature of the materials (Widdowson, 1998).

The students’ reading skills also improved in the course of Storyline as indicated by their understanding of the rich vocabulary and complex grammar of the short story (see subsection 4.3.2). They had also, of course, used their reading skills when doing their initial homework task, which some found more interesting than others. Those reading materials provided meaning and contextualisation to the learning process (Finocchiaro and Brumfit, 1983). When the reading was more closely related to their situation, such as reading the short story about serving away from home, the students’ response was positive and their interest was evident. They enjoyed the reading tasks more than before Storyline because they seemed more relevant and the texts were authentic (Widdowson, 1998).

The students did not perceive an improvement in their reading skills to the same extent as the other language skills. This was most likely due to two factors: firstly, reading skills were rated by the students themselves as their strongest language skill prior to the beginning of Storyline and, indeed, the previous teaching methods did have a certain focus on this aspect of language learning; secondly, Storyline emphasises oral communication over the written word. Nevertheless, the students’ reading skills did indeed improve over the course of the Storyline topic (*‘I tried to read more because it became interesting. Now I can read better’* – Cdt4, interview). The relevance to them of the reading tasks played a significant role here; their interest in reading the short story

about serving away from home was evident, and the task received a positive response (*'My reading ability was good before and still it is good, but the texts are more interesting and I like it'* – Cdt6, interview). Here again, the use of authentic and meaningful materials for reading was conducive to learning (Nunan, 2004).

### *5.3.2 Speaking and writing skills*

The centrality of tasks to Storyline is a particular advantage since language development is facilitated by 'learner participation in interaction that offers opportunities for the negotiation of meaning to take place' (Mackey, 1999: 583-584). Such interaction may be developed effectively through the use of tasks (Samuda and Bygate, 2008: 161). In the task-based interaction there was no limitation of language use, a concern of Seedhouse (1999) as discussed in subsection 2.3.1. As noted by Creswell (1997) Storyline allows for open tasks with divergent goals and so the students were asked to:

...perform open tasks with divergent goals and [were] given the opportunity to plan their performance beforehand' which resulted in 'richer varieties of communication characterised by more complex language use (Ellis, 2003: 254).

The improvement in the students' language production was evident and concerned both speaking and writing. The students' active vocabulary became richer and their growing confidence in using specialist terms and word collocations was noted (see subsection 4.3.2). In terms of grammar, there were improvements in their correct use of past and present tenses, the subjunctive mood, use of modal verbs, active and passive voice, and imperatives (see also subsection 4.3.2).

The improvement in the students' speaking skills was the most noticeable among all the language skills in the course of Storyline, in which the activities were designed with a communicative intent (Larsen-Freeman and Anderson, 2011). Problem solving and role plays both serve a communicative purpose (McDonough and Shaw, 1993) and so may be used to good effect in the developing of speaking skills. Role-playing tasks provide a context in which progression towards linguistic competence can take place (Littlewood, 1981). Littlewood (1981: 120) distinguishes between 'functional communicative activities' (for example, problem solving) and 'social interaction activities' (for

example, role play). Storyline, which requires learners to take on the roles of characters in the story and work out solutions to problems, successfully combines both, enhancing its effectiveness in getting students to communicate. In taking on the roles of characters, the participants seemed less concerned about making mistakes in front of their peers. In tackling the problem-solving tasks, the participants were eager to find solutions and were motivated to use their speaking skills to the fullest extent in order to do so.

Planning speech has a positive impact on complexity (Yuan and Ellis, 2003) and the Storyline structure gave ample opportunities for planning and preparing speech, such as when speaking initially in pairs before group discussions. Wendel (1997, cited in Ellis, 2003: 132) found that planning led to learners using ‘more complex grammatical structures but not more lexically rich language’, whereas in the course of the Storyline topic the students’ speech gradually became both more grammatically complex and lexically richer. As reported in subsection 4.2.2, the students began to put noticeably greater effort into the writing tasks during Storyline as opposed to previously, when they had often not even bothered to re-read what they had written in order to check for mistakes. During Storyline it became obvious that they had re-checked their work and often found and corrected errors themselves before handing in homework. This could be due to the students’ motivation to make their characters speak as well as possible (*‘I try to make my character’s English as good as possible’* – Cdt3, interview) and desire to impress their audience (Kocher, 1997).

Foster and Skehan (1999) found that complexity and fluency were aided most by individual learner planning. In the course of the study, however, it was my observation that although individual learner planning led to complex speech, greater fluency for the less proficient students resulted from paired learner planning. This suggests the relevance of opportunity for scaffolding in pairs, where other-correction plays a significant role (Foster and Ohta, 2005), for example, in the comments by Cdt4 on collaborative and individual work in subsection 4.2.4. In the course of Storyline, the students made an effort to speak fluently and by the end of the Storyline topic they were all involving themselves actively in the speaking tasks. The more proficient students found this easier than the less proficient, but the latter seemed to become more interested in participating actively and after the first classes ceased to require any

prompting. The more the students spoke, the more they realised that – despite mistakes – they could make themselves understood and successfully negotiate meaning which, in turn, raised their motivation to speak and their fluency improved through practice (Kocher, 2007). Furthermore, the combination of role playing and problem solving brings together two important aspects of speaking skills – working with literal and functional meanings and social meanings (Littlewood, 1992), which assisted the students’ development of their speaking skills. Communicating meaningful things and feeling closely involved in the story (see the student response to Storyline as reported in in subsection 4.1.4) boosted the participants’ motivation (Bell, 2000; Ehlers et al, 2006; Kocher, 2007).

The students’ writing skills improved significantly during Storyline. The writing tasks were presented in such a way as to motivate the learners (Dörnyei, 2001), meaning that the students saw the relevance of the writing tasks to real life, which raised their interest in carrying out the tasks and boosted their motivation to complete the tasks as well as they could (Ehlers, 2006; Kocher, 2007). This was indeed the case with the less proficient Cdt4 who said in interview: *‘Before, I didn’t like writing, but now I do because it’s useful and interesting.’* Such comments suggest that, by using their imagination, the students made the language real (Howatt with Widdowson, 2004). It should be noted that some of the writing activities, for example, the email to family, had a functional communicative purpose as well as a social interaction purpose (Littlewood, 1981), which required the student to consider not only what to write, but also how to write it. Such writing is a reflection of real-life communication and requires students to use their knowledge and take account of the social situation when conveying their meaning (Larsen-Freeman and Anderson, 2011).

Storyline, being a particular form of TBLT, itself a ‘strong’ version of CLT, involves learning the language through using it (Howatt, 1984). A disadvantage of such a form of learning can be that the students do not necessarily perceive their development of certain language skills. Brown (2009) discovered that the students in his study preferred a grammar-based approach to the communicative classroom preferred by their teachers. Indeed, in the course of the interviews (subsection 4.3.4) and focus group (subsection 4.3.5) – after the conclusion of the Storyline topic – it emerged that the students felt that

more explicit attention could have been paid to learning grammar, specifically, that grammar could be better taught through teacher-led form-focused instruction. This had not been brought to my attention either in the classroom in the course of the study or via the student journals, yet I discovered that this was a point on which all the students agreed. In communicative approaches to foreign language teaching fluency often comes at the expense of accuracy (Harmer, 2007), yet fluency and accuracy are both important goals to pursue in the communicative classroom (Brown, 2006). Paying attention to forms can improve the effectiveness of communicative approaches (Savignon, 1972). Explicit grammar instruction is supported by Doughty (1991) and Van Patten and Cadierno (1993), who found that processing instruction – explicit explanation followed by opportunities for input – enabled students to make significant gains in both comprehension and production. Grammar instruction can be used as part of a communicative approach to aid understanding of certain forms (Terrell, 1991). In examining 23 and 49 studies respectively on form-focused instruction, Spada (1997) and Norris and Ortega (2000) concluded that explicit form-focused instruction is effective and that the effects are durable. Based, therefore, on the available literature and the students' expressed desires, it seems that the effectiveness of foreign language learning in Storyline for military linguist cadets could be enhanced by adapting Storyline to include teacher-led explicit form-focused instruction as part of the pre-task phase.

### *5.3.3 Summary*

In this study, although the students responded positively to the communicative classroom established by Storyline, they felt that more explicit teaching of grammar would have been beneficial. Notwithstanding, it must be noted that significant improvements were observed in the accuracy of students' English. The students' desire for accuracy, as well as fluency, in language was noticeable throughout the Storyline topic. This seems to be due to their ownership of learning, a key element of Storyline, thanks to which they are motivated to take responsibility for their language development (Kocher, 2007). Nonetheless, despite the students' improvement in appropriate grammar production, it seems that their grammar comprehension could have

been enhanced through more explicit grammar instruction. As discussed in the previous subsection, explicit form-focused instruction is supported in the literature and adapting Storyline to include such an element would not be impractical. This is a useful point for Storyline practitioners in foreign language teaching and constitutes an original contribution to knowledge on Storyline's application to language learning. Explicit form-focused instruction as part of the pre-task phase would provide a foundation upon which to build during other activities.

Thus, in the course of the study, the students and I noticed a positive impact on their language skills and intercultural communicative competence, the development of which is widely acknowledged as the goal in foreign language teaching (Byram, 1997, 2009; Harmer, 2007; Rivers, 2007; Larsen-Freeman and Anderson, 2011; Yang and Fleming, 2013; Richards and Rodgers, 2014), and which is the primary consideration for military linguists (Footitt and Kelly, 2012a; Kelly and Baker, 2013). This was due to increased motivation to learn and greater opportunities to develop the requisite skills in a way that the students found interesting, fun and meaningful. In the first empirical study involving Storyline and military linguist cadets, therefore, Storyline was found to have a positive impact on developing military linguist cadets' English language skills.

## **CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSIONS**

### **6.0 Introduction**

In this final chapter I shall reflect on Storyline as a foreign language teaching method for military linguist cadets in Russia. I shall finish with a consideration of how this research may be disseminated and the possibilities for further research in this field.

### **6.1 The findings and reflections on Storyline**

The study examined the impact of the Storyline method on the foreign language classroom in the context of a group of military linguist cadets in Russia. The first research question asked how military linguist cadets respond to Storyline as a foreign language teaching method. The findings from the various data collection methods employed in the study show a positive student response to Storyline. There were improvements in student satisfaction with teaching, in student motivation, and in satisfaction with progress. This would seem to support the use of Storyline as a foreign language teaching method.

Motivation, as stated in subsection 2.3.3, is a key factor in language learning and is recognised as promoting effective acquisition (Dörnyei, 1998, 2001; Rivers, 2007). The creating of characters, Storyline's defining feature (Harkness, 2007), allowed the students to internalise their feelings and emotions, resulting in a deeper and more meaningful learning experience – as discussed in subsections 2.2.2 and 2.3.3 – as the students became the characters that they had created (Bell, 2000). It was this involvement of students in their learning, combined with giving them ownership of the learning process in terms of creating and developing the Storyline, that raised motivation and improved the effectiveness of learning (Kocher, 2007). Student creativity and ownership of learning is fundamental to Storyline (Bell, 2000). Hofmann (2007: 74), discussing this, writes:



It has been suggested this potential comes from the coupling of imagination and multiple perspectives with the ‘facts’: from inviting the [learners] to study the phenomena at hand from the perspectives of their characters, to take their own perspective on these phenomena, and even ‘step inside’ and ‘live through’ them.

The importance of Storyline’s *Principle of Ownership* (Creswell, 1997) is highlighted by the student comments on motivation, for example, that their motivation was due to increased ownership of their learning in terms of creativity and control of the learning process. Hofmann (2007) asserts that learner ownership of learning is enhanced through engagement in meaningful activities. The participants found that the structure of their learning was useful and meaningful, as provided for in Storyline’s *Principle of Story* (Creswell, 1997; Kocher, 2007). There was evidence throughout the Storyline of reflective learning, sparked by the learners’ own curiosity (Falkenberg, 2007: 52). The key questions employed in each Storyline episode (Creswell, 1997; Harkness, 2007) generated lively discussion among the students, which was important for language skills, and also made effective use of Storyline’s *Principle of Structure before Activity*, which enabled future learning to be focused on what the students needed to cover. The research tasks, watching of the documentary film and reading of the short story – all connected to Storyline’s *Principle of Context* – were found to be useful in allowing the students to build on their pre-existing concepts as per the *Principle of Structure before Activity*, before expanding upon their knowledge and implementing new knowledge in practice. Storyline’s *Principle of the Teacher’s Rope* was found to influence the effectiveness of the teaching and learning process, for example, in determining the amount of time to be spent on certain activities and the detail of instructions to be given in advance. The *Principle of Anticipation* maintained the students’ interest throughout Storyline, which also impacted on student motivation and the observed effort that they put into their work.

The episodes and key questions, important parts of the planning format (Harkness, 2007), provided the necessary structure and context for the learning, building on the students’ existing knowledge and developing it. They correspond to the task structure in TBLT, which is considered an effective framework for learning (Willis, 1996; Ellis, 2003). Having taken on their characters’ roles, the students engage in role-playing and

problem-solving tasks, which were found to be particularly popular features of Storyline because they were fun (*'I really enjoyed talking about incidents and solving them'* – Cdt6, journal), authentic (*'I felt like I was a real officer in a real situation'* – Cdt2, interview) and viewed as meaningful and relevant to real life (*'I can see myself doing these things and solving these problems in my future profession'* – Cdt1, focus group). The incidents central to any Storyline topic allowed the students to use and further develop their knowledge (Creswell, J., 2007), including their language skills. The class organisation allowed for effective, collaborative work and provided opportunities for reflective thinking and support for less proficient learners (Foster and Ohta, 2005; Ahlquist, 2011). The conclusion to the Storyline topic, in terms of both the review and the celebration, did indeed provide opportunities to reflect what was learned and accomplished, and whether the pedagogic outcomes were met (Willis, 1996).

The second research question concerned the student response to the individual features of Storyline. It should be noted that, irrespective of data collection method, negative responses from students are limited to specific features/occurrences. Overall, the responses are positive. It must be said, however, that although individual features of Storyline were identified for the purposes of the study, it is problematic to divorce them from each other. Storyline is the sum of its individual features and, though some were responded to more positively than others, each feature with its own special purpose combines with the others to create this method. The creating of characters was, however, a controversial topic for the participants in terms of the art work involved, which the students did not perceive as useful in their language learning. Nevertheless, the frieze which was created by the students was not only useful in terms of providing the students with ownership of the creative process (Creswell, 1997), but also in terms of establishing an atmosphere of collaboration and giving a context to the learning. Such controversy could have been resolved earlier by providing a rationale to students for the activities (Brown, 2009). This might be particularly advisable when employing Storyline in work with young adults, who are more likely than younger learners to question the purpose of activities (Ahlquist, 2011). Moreover, it must be borne in mind that military linguist cadets tend to be focused on language learning for future professional needs and, as the study has shown, respond best to that which they perceive as being directly related to their future professional language use. Future

investigation is therefore required to assess whether either more explanation ought to be given to students or whether modifications to the art work in Storyline are desirable when working with military linguist cadets.

The third research question related to the effect (if any) Storyline has on military linguist cadets' language development. The study found that Storyline had a positive impact on all four language skills, with improvements in student satisfaction for listening, speaking, reading, and writing. This is supported by my observations that the students' language skills, particularly the productive skills, significantly improved over the course of Storyline. Moreover, their language became more grammatically complex and lexically richer. Confidence in their abilities grew. This was especially apparent for the less proficient students. In the interviews and focus group it emerged that the students considered that the Storyline features – in particular, the role-playing and problem-solving tasks along with using imagination and relevance to real life – had a positive impact on their language development resulting in a noticeable improvement in English language skills. The structure of Storyline, having much in common with that of TBLT (Ellis, 2003; Kocher, 2007), provided opportunities to consolidate knowledge, apply and build on it during tasks, and reflect on learning after having completed the tasks.

Individual work in Storyline, such as doing research, helped students to consolidate their knowledge and plan their language activities, as did working in pairs. Collaborative work, ranging from pair work to group work, allowed the students to apply and build on their knowledge while performing the various Storyline tasks. This was also a useful source of support for the less proficient students. Finally, both collaborative work and individual work provided further opportunities for the students to consolidate and reflect on their learning. The Storyline structure goes much further than TBLT in terms of making learning closer to real life. During the Storyline topic, instead of (only) completing tasks, the students created their own characters, took on their roles and approached the tasks 'in character', which increased their feelings of involvement (Bell, 2000), enhanced the motivating nature of the tasks (Dörnyei, 2001) and made the tasks more authentic and meaningful (Larsen-Freeman and Anderson, 2011) and the language more real for them (Widdowson, 1998). In essence, the

relevance to real life of the learning activities was apparent to the students and this made the learning more effective (Rivers, 2007). Inclusion of explicit form-focused instruction, as supported in the literature (Spada, 1997; Norris and Ortega, 2000) and preferred by the learners themselves (see subsections 4.3.4 and 4.3.5), could further enhance the effectiveness of Storyline as a method for teaching military linguist cadets.

The three research questions lead us to the aim of the research, which was to investigate whether Storyline is an effective English language teaching method for military linguist cadets in Russia. In evaluating the appropriateness of Storyline as a foreign language teaching method for military linguist cadets in Russia, as previously noted in section 1.2, in spite of attempts to update teaching methods since the last years of the Soviet Union (Monk, 1986), the foreign language teaching traditions in Russia remain to a considerable extent teacher-centred (Ter-Minasova, 2005, 2006; Gural and Mitchell, 2008). In subsection 2.1.4 I stated that an effective approach to the foreign language teaching of military linguist cadets in Russia would not only enable the development of language skills, but would also not offend the institutional hierarchy of military life. Yet far from offending against educational traditions based on a teacher-centred approach, a risk inherent to the communicative approach (Harmer, 2007), Storyline allowed the participants to create a parallel invented world – through creating their own story and using their imagination – thereby avoiding the potentially problematic issues of the military hierarchical chain of command discussed in Baigorri-Jalón (2011).

Some initial support was needed from me to help the students adjust to the new approach to teaching (Humphreys and Wyatt, 2014). With my awareness of the teaching context, potential cultural clashes (see Simpson, 2008) were mediated and Storyline was successfully applied to the specific context of my institution as per Carless (2004). This was made easier by the fact that a task- and scenario-based approach is often used in military contexts for training in areas unrelated to language and so students are able to quickly adjust to its application in foreign language learning (Footitt and Kelly (2012a). Indeed, the classroom atmosphere was akin to the more collaborative relationship between a senior officer and junior officers, as opposed to a more ‘hierarchical’ relationship such as, for example, between an officer and soldiers. Storyline ultimately resulted in all of us feeling more involved in the teaching and learning process.

Storyline was, therefore, culturally appropriate (Harmer, 2007) and contextually appropriate (Footitt and Kelly, 2012a; Kelly and Baker, 2013).

To conclude, Storyline's emphasis on the central role of the characters, requiring the learners to use their imagination, made the experience more real and motivating for the students (see, for example, the comments by Cdt2 in subsection 4.2.4). By taking on the roles of characters, the authenticity of learning was enhanced, with students taking on roles relevant to their future professional life. Moreover, the students were able to see the relevance of the tasks in which they were engaged to their future military service (see, for example, the comments by Cdt1 in subsection 4.2.5), the importance of which is discussed in Kelly and Baker (2013), and performed accordingly with maximum effort. Problem-solving tasks were especially suited to the teaching of military linguist cadets, given their widespread use in non-language military training. They were observed to be effective in terms of developing language skills, as noted in the British Army's experience (Footitt and Kelly, 2012a). Moreover, the problem-solving tasks in Storyline were particularly enjoyed by all the students, who recognise their relevance to real life (as per Cdt1's comments in subsection 4.2.4) and their importance for language skills development (Cdt6's comments in subsection 4.3.2). For a military linguist these are equally important goals. Moreover, Storyline provided a means of achieving both language skills development and also reflective thinking on how to respond to different problems in a variety of circumstances (Kelly and Baker, 2013). The effectiveness of Storyline could be enhanced through explicit form-focused instruction, the inclusion of which requires further research as does the role of art work. Thus, the study supports the effectiveness and appropriateness of Storyline as a foreign language teaching method for military linguist cadets and generates evidence-based suggestions for possible modifications, which constitutes the original contribution to knowledge and practice required in doctoral research. In order to allow generalisations to be made, this requires further evaluation in other training facilities for military linguist cadets, in Russia and internationally.

## 6.2 Evaluation of the study

In such a small-scale study one must be cautious about making any generalisations based on such a small number of participants. The absence of a control group forces us to rely exclusively on the responses of one group of students and the observations of their teacher. In addition, the study involved descriptive statistics from the pre- and post-Storyline questionnaires supporting the qualitative data obtained (Stringer, 2008). Such data in such a small sample must be viewed with particular caution. This is, however, somewhat mitigated by the employment of triangulation in the data collection process and by providing opportunities via the interviews and focus groups for the participants to validate the findings by confirming that they were correctly understood and interpreted (Burns, 2010; Yin, 2013; Stringer, 2014).

Being a participant observer, I can make no claims to being objective, although I have made every attempt to be so to the extent possible in such a context by, for example, taking steps to ensure that no student felt coerced into responding in any particular way during the data collection and, indeed, throughout the Storyline topic. It is possible, of course, that my students wanted – even subconsciously – to please their teacher by providing answers they thought I wanted. Given the very direct responses received, however, this might be considered unlikely. The fact that they remained very engaged throughout the Storyline topic supports this. It is also possible that the very fact of trying a new teaching approach may have affected their responses (see the ‘Hawthorne effect’ in Cohen et al, 2011: 314). It ought to be noted, though, that the participants’ responses seemed to become more positive as the Storyline topic continued and that they were reluctant to see it come to an end. Ultimately, the students were provided throughout with ownership of their learning and multiple opportunities to voice their perspectives, thereby enhancing the study’s trustworthiness (Efron and Ravid, 2014).

In acknowledging the limitations of the study, I make no attempt to generalise the findings to other contexts; I accept that all contexts are unique in their own ways. I state that the findings of the study and any conclusions which may be drawn are applicable only to the specific context of my research. Discussing generalisability, Cohen et al (2011: 186) maintain that, ‘[I]t is possible to assess the typicality of a situation – the

participants and settings, to identify possible comparison groups, and to indicate how data might translate into different settings and cultures.’ In this sense, further research on using Storyline in the foreign language teaching of military linguist cadets throughout Russia and internationally may allow generalisations to be made.

### **6.3 Implications for policy and practice**

The importance of language teaching and learning in the military has long been acknowledged: ‘Knowledge of languages in the military should be considered as important as the “development of a weapon, as important as the training of a man to fight in hand-to-hand combat”’ (American Congressman Leon Panetta in 1980, cited in Müller, 1981). In today’s climate of increased multinational military deployment and calls for greater interoperability, ‘language, regional and cultural skills are enduring warfighting competencies that are critical to mission readiness in today’s dynamic global environment’ (US Secretary of Defence Leon Panetta in 2011, cited in Luzer, 2011). The search for an effective method for teaching foreign languages to military personnel has led from grammar-translation through audiolingualism to the communicative approach-inspired TBLT. Storyline goes beyond this by involving students not only cognitively but emotionally, through providing ownership of learning and creating an atmosphere of anticipation, both of which have a positive impact on a learner’s motivation (Bell, 2000). In the course of the study it was found that the students responded positively to Storyline as a foreign language teaching method. It was found that Storyline had a positive effect on the students’ language development and motivation resulting in an improvement in their English language skills and their developing of intercultural communicative competence, but that the effectiveness of language learning could be improved by including explicit form-focused instruction in the pre-task phase. More research is required on the use of art work in teaching military linguist cadets.

Approval has been granted for Storyline to be incorporated into the teaching and learning process for military linguist cadets at Tomsk State University’s Institute of Military Education. Storyline is due to be showcased at the 26<sup>th</sup> international academic

conference, *Yazik i kultura* (Language and Culture), to be held at National Research Tomsk State University in October 2015. Storyline workshops are to be organised for foreign language instructors. Further academic research is planned on using Storyline for the teaching of key foreign languages to non-linguist military personnel. Subject to funding, there are plans to research the effectiveness of trialling Storyline as a foreign language teaching method in mock combat situations as part of regular field exercises, further integrating the foreign language classroom into military training. Finally, a book on Storyline as a foreign language teaching method for military linguists is due to be published in 2016 by Tomsk State University Press, which will be available for use by all those involved in the foreign language teaching of military linguist cadets in Russia.



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# APPENDICES

## Appendix A

### Participant Consent Form

You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by Peter Mitchell, a doctoral student at the University of Derby, United Kingdom, which will form part of a doctoral dissertation. Your participation is entirely voluntary. Please read the following information and ask questions if you do not understand something, before you decide whether or not to participate.

#### Purpose of Study

The purpose of the study is to evaluate different teaching and learning methods.

#### What you will be asked to do

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to do the following:

- \*Attend all classes as normal
- \*Answer questionnaires at the beginning and end of the study
- \*Take part in a one-on-one interview with the researcher at the end of the study
- \*Take part in a focus group with the researcher and other participants at the end of the study

#### Potential risks and benefits to participants and/or to others

No risks are envisaged. It is hoped that, by taking part in this study and evaluating the teaching methods, you will play an important role in making the teaching and learning of English as a foreign language at the Faculty of Foreign Languages as good as possible.

#### Confidentiality

Any information obtained in connection with this study that may identify you will be kept strictly confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law.

#### Participation and withdrawal

You can choose whether or not to participate in this study. If you choose to participate, you may withdraw at any time before the end of data collection without any kind of consequences or loss of benefits. You may also refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer. The researcher may withdraw you from this study in certain circumstances, e.g. insufficient attendance of classes, etc.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact Peter Mitchell on +7 961 890 01 75 or peter\_mitchell@mail.ru

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I understand the procedures described above. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

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Printed Name of Participant

---

Signature of Participant

---

Date

## Appendix B

### Pre-Storyline Questionnaire

Participant Number: \_\_\_\_\_

This questionnaire asks you for your opinion on aspects of your English classes. Please answer the questions freely. Nothing in your answers will affect your grades or future studies. It is important to know exactly what students think so that we can make the teaching and learning process as good as possible.

Please state the extent to which you agree with the following statements. The scale is 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 where 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree.

- |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. I am satisfied with how English is taught.                   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. I am motivated to learn English in class.                    | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. I am satisfied with my overall progress in English in class. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4. My classes help me improve my listening skills.              | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5. My classes help me improve my speaking skills.               | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 6. My classes help me improve my reading skills.                | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 7. My classes help me improve my writing skills.                | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Thank you completing this questionnaire!

## Appendix C

### Post-Storyline Questionnaire

Participant Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Please answer the questions freely. Nothing in your answers will affect your grades or future studies. It is important to know exactly what students think so that we can make the teaching and learning process as good as possible.

Please state the extent to which you agree with the following statements. The scale is 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 where 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree.

- |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. I am satisfied with how English is taught using Storyline.   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. Storyline has improved my motivation to learn English.       | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. I am satisfied with my progress in English during Storyline. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4. Storyline has improved my listening comprehension skills.    | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5. Storyline has improved my speaking skills.                   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 6. Storyline has improved my reading comprehension skills.      | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 7. Storyline has improved my writing skills.                    | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

8. Below are some of the things you did during Storyline. Please underline all the ones that you think helped your English to improve:

- |                        |                                     |                     |
|------------------------|-------------------------------------|---------------------|
| Working in groups      | Doing different activities in class | Working on your own |
| Using your imagination | Not learning with a textbook        | Art work            |
| Speaking in English    | Listening to your groupmates        | Reading in English  |
| Writing in English     | Solving problems                    | Role play           |

9. What were the things listed above that you particularly enjoyed (irrespective of your answers to question 8)?

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Please turn over



## Appendix D

### Excerpt from teacher's diary

<u>Storyline Class 3</u>	<u>Subcode</u>	<u>Code</u>	
<i>We started with a discussion of the key questions. Very positive atmosphere, <b>all students engaged and everyone speaking English to the best of their abilities</b>. The group quickly decided on Western Sahara as the team site location, an area they were familiar with after reading a text about it last semester. Cdt1 was selected unanimously to be the team site commander. <b>Discussion</b> of positions for the remaining students involved <b>everyone's active participation</b> and I allowed it to continue for longer than planned. Cdt2 was much <b>more active</b> than during the previous classes and Cdt4 began to <b>participate more fully</b>. The discussion became a little heated, with Cdt2 <b>unhappy</b> about his character not becoming the recreation and welfare officer, but Cdt1 <b>dealt with the disagreements well</b> (all the students were <b>speaking in character</b>) and I didn't need to intervene. Discussion of an SOP [standard operating procedure] went well. A <b>positive group response</b> was noted for 'using imagination', 'speaking in English', 'listening to English', 'role play' and 'problem solving'. With the exception of Cdt2's initial reaction to not getting the position he wanted, there was a positive response to 'collaborative work'. I spoke with Cdt2 after the class and we agreed that his character wouldn't let such a decision affect his future work. He seemed to be happier, but I'll keep an eye on his subsequent participation.</i>	<i>Engagement</i>	<i>Pos, LU</i>	
	<i>Motivation</i>	<i>Pos</i>	
			<i>LU</i>
	<i>Engagement</i>	<i>Pos</i>	
	<i>Engagement</i>	<i>Pos</i>	
	<i>Engagement</i>	<i>Pos</i>	
	<i>No enjoyment</i>	<i>Neg</i>	
	<i>ICC</i>	<i>Pos</i>	
	<i>Engagement</i>	<i>Pos, LU</i>	
	<i>Motivation</i>	<i>Pos</i>	



## Appendix E

### Excerpt from student journal

#### Storyline Class 3 (Cdt1)

	<u>Subcode</u>	<u>Code</u>
<i>Today in class we chose our team site to be in Western Sahara part of MINURSO. My comrades chose me to be team site commander which is big responsibility, but <b>I think I am good enough</b>. We solved questions of who is to take what position and <b>I solved a disagreement</b> between [Cdt2] and [Cdt3]. We also solved questions of the SOP.</i>	Motivation Engagement, ICC	Pos Pos
<i><b>I will do my best</b> to make right decisions and discharge my duties.</i>	Motivation	Pos
<i><b>This class gave me</b> not only language skills but also <b>skills</b> for my position as a commander, <b>now I know how to behave</b> in different situations. Most of all, <b>I enjoyed</b> managing. <b>I like</b> difficult situations where <b>I have to use my commander skills</b>. It was not easy to decide who will occupy this or that position, because some cadets wanted to choose for themselves. For example, there was an episode between [Cdt3] and [Cdt2]. [Cdt3] was eager to take the position of recreation and welfare officer as well as [Cdt2]. I had to make the right decision and <b>I wanted nobody to be offended</b>. Eventually, I appointed [Cdt3] to this position, [Cdt2] was not happy about it, it was impossible to please them both, but <b>in some time I'll get used to it</b>.</i>	Relevance ICC Motivation Relevance	Pos Pos Pos Pos
<i><b>I think that a real commander</b> must have such qualities as:</i>	ICC	Pos
<i><b>responsibility, strictness, he has to make right decisions very quickly, and everyone should be equal for him</b>. During our lesson I kept these things in my mind and <b>I'm sure I did everything right</b>.</i>	Relevance Relevance ICC	Pos Pos Pos
<i><b>I liked</b> my position as a commander very much and I got a lot of <b>useful skills</b> from our class.</i>	Motivation Relevance	Pos Pos
<i>Speaking about the language use, well, this English class made me <b>use a lot of different words</b>, especially from military vocabulary. It is a good opportunity to remember the words that you've learned because <b>it is like the real situation</b>. So, such classes help me a lot. I liked that we <b>spoke in English all the time and everything seemed like the real life</b> so it was <b>interesting</b>.</i>	Engagement Relevance ICC, Relevance Motivation	LU Pos LU, Pos Pos

## **Appendix F**

### **Interview Schedule**

#### **Introduction**

Hello, during the interview I would like to discuss your experience of learning English using Storyline. Please speak freely and remember that nothing in your answers will affect your grades or future studies. It is important to know exactly what students think so that we can make the teaching and learning process as good as possible. Are you ready to start?

#### **QUESTIONS**

Questions relating to the participants' responses in the pre- and post-Storyline questionnaires will first be asked.

Has your motivation to study English changed during Storyline?

What can you say about your progress in English during Storyline?

What can you tell me about the learning process during Storyline compared to before?

Which way of learning do you prefer and why?

What activities in Storyline classes do you think helped your English to improve?

What activities in Storyline classes do you think did not help your English to improve?

What did you like doing most during the Storyline classes?

What did you do not like doing during the Storyline classes?

If you could change anything in the Storyline classes, what would you change?

Would you prefer to continue using Storyline in classes or not?

Is there anything that we have not discussed that you would like to speak about?

#### **PROMPT QUESTIONS (if required)**

Can you explain that a bit more?

Can you tell me anything else?

Can you provide some examples?

#### **End of Interview**

Thank you very much for taking part. Your views are very important in helping us to make the teaching and learning process as good as possible.

## Appendix G

### Excerpt from interview transcript

	<u>Subcode</u>	<u>Code</u>
PM: What did you like doing most during the Storyline classes?		
Cdt2: I <b>liked to talk</b> about incidents and how we can to solve them, and to be <b>like a real officer</b> .	Enjoyment Relevance	Pos, LU Pos
PM: Can you explain what you liked about that a bit more?		
Cdt2: I <b>felt like I was a real officer in a real situation</b> . In this situations you imagine what to do for solving an incident and you <b>create your own inspiration</b> .	Relevance  Motivation	Pos  Pos
PM: Can you provide some examples?		
Cdt2: For example, when we <b>talked about relationships with local community, building relationships</b> . It made me to think and to talk <b>about ideas</b> for solving this problem.	ICC Engagement	LU Pos
PM: Is there anything else you'd like to tell me about regarding what you liked doing during the Storyline classes?		
Cdt2: No, but it was fun for me.	Enjoyment	Pos
PM: What did you do not like doing during the Storyline classes?		
Cdt2: Most of everything, the art work was <b>not so interesting for me</b> .	No enjoyment	Neg
PM: The art work. Why? Can you explain that more?		
Cdt2: I didn't understand what for we did it, how it helps English.	No relevance	Neg
PM: Is there anything else about the art work you didn't like?		
Cdt2: I think no.		
PM: That's a good point and we'll talk about the art work with the whole class. Can you tell me anything else you didn't like doing during the Storyline classes?		
Cdt2: I think anything else was alright.		
PM: You wrote in your journal that you found the first homework 'boring'. Can you explain that a bit more?		
Cdt2: Oh, it's <b>not so interesting</b> for me to read so much and write so much. It's <b>more interesting</b> in the class when we talk and solve incidents and this.	No enjoyment Enjoyment	Neg Pos
PM: You didn't like the reading and writing tasks?		
Cdt2: I liked them not so much as others. I <b>don't like writing</b> in English and in Russian too.	No enjoyment	Neg
PM: Do you think the reading and writing tasks helped your English?		
Cdt2: <b>Yes, of course</b> . But I like the other tasks more. It's <b>more interesting</b> .	Motivation	Pos
PM: I see. Is there anything else that you didn't like doing in Storyline?		
Cdt2: No, that's all.		

## **Appendix H**

### **Focus Group Schedule**

#### **Introduction**

Greet the participants and explain that we will begin by reviewing responses from the pre-Storyline questionnaires.

After reviewing the various responses, ask the participants to discuss them. As moderator, try to allow the discussion to take place with as little personal involvement as possible. If required, I might involve myself only in order to pose questions regarding issues that may have been overlooked or that emerge during the discussion.

After discussing the pre-Storyline questionnaires, review responses from the post-Storyline questionnaires and from the semi-structured interviews.

As above, try to allow the discussion to take place with as little interference as possible. If required, I might involve myself only in order to pose questions regarding issues that may have been overlooked or that emerge during the discussion.

At the end, ask if there is anything else anyone would like to add or state, which might then be discussed.

Thank the participants for taking part.

## Appendix I

### Excerpt from focus group transcript

	<u>Subcode</u>	<u>Code</u>
PM: <i>I'd like you to give your views on Storyline's relevance to real life. What can you say about this?</i>		
Cdt1: <i>I think Storyline was very useful for the real life. I think <b>I liked it because it was like the real life</b> especially the problems. <b>I can see myself doing these things and solving these problems</b> in my future profession.</i>	Enjoyment Relevance	Pos Pos
Cdt6: <i>Yes, and <b>for me too this was maybe the best thing.</b></i>	Relevance	Pos
Cdt5: <i>Me too. It made <b>learning fun.</b></i>	Enjoyment	Pos
PM: <i>Would anyone else like to say something?</i>		
Cdt7: <i><b>I enjoyed it</b> also. I think to think about such things – I mean these problems – <b>like in real life can make us to be more professional.</b> After the graduation we will be the military interpreters and officers in one person. And for our <b>language skills and professional knowledge</b> this is useful. <b>It's fun also. I liked it.</b></i>	Enjoyment Relevance	Pos Pos
Cdt1: <i><b>It made me want to learn more vocabulary</b> too for using in our problem solving.</i>	Relevance Enjoyment Motivation	Pos, LU Pos Pos
Cdt6: <i><b>Me too, I was trying</b> to complicate my words for our talking. <b>In the real life it's good</b> to use different words for some situations.</i>	Engagement Relevance	Pos Pos, LU
PM: <i>What do you mean?</i>		
Cdt6: <i>I mean for example for <b>a situation with civilian population</b> it's important to choose right word so they understand correctly and <b>to know different words if they speak for example English not so well.</b> Because <b>in real life</b> people use many different words and it's important to know them all – you don't know before what words they could use. If they say a word in English and you don't know this word then there could be misunderstanding.</i>	ICC  Relevance Relevance	Pos  Pos, LU Pos
PM: <i>So Storyline's relevance to real life is something you enjoy and think is useful for language learning?</i>		
Cdt6: <i><b>Yes!</b> (emphatically)</i>	Motivation	Pos, LU
Cdt1: <i><b>Yes, it's good for both.</b></i>	Motivation	Pos, LU
Cdt2: <i>It makes the class <b>more fun.</b></i>	Enjoyment	Pos
Cdt6: <i>And <b>more useful!</b> (emphatically)</i>	Relevance	Pos
PM: <i>And do the others agree?</i>		
Cdt4: <i><b>Yes, I agree.</b></i>	Motivation	Pos
Cdt3: <i><b>Yes and me.</b></i>	Motivation	Pos





