# Abstract

Technology has altered foreign language learning with more and more students adopting electronic lesson delivery (e-learning), via Skype or other Internet telephonic platforms in informal environments. However, Community of Inquiry. Social Learning Theory , the idea of ‘flow’, motivational currents and socio-cultural identity suggest that successful learning extends beyond technology platforms to a complex interactive dynamic, involving cognitive, social and emotional dimensions. Seeking to unpack the emotional dimension of learning, the research investigates whether Emotional Attachment (EA) of learners to instructors or programmes could accelerate and deepen informal e-language learning. Formally, its main research question is: “To what extent and how can emotional attachment be harnessed to enhance second language learning in informal online settings?’

To structure the investigation, the study adopts mixed research methods with a sequential explanatory design. To this end, the academic and industry EA literature is reviewed to clarify EA and other educational terms but also to generate a draft explanatory framework. Emotional Attachment involves an enduring bond of attachment and affection with substantial motivational intensity. EA is a prominent concept in child development psychology or marketing fields. Unlike Emotional Presence, EA is a fleeting internal state which can motivate learning and catalyse states of flow so that students are challenged but yet immersed in learning tasks. EA has three main aspects, reflected by various indicators:

* Affection (affectionate, friendly, loved, peaceful)
* Connection (connected, bonded, attached)
* Passion (passionate, delighted, captivated)

In operational phase of research, an online questionnaire is structured around these EA indicators and their potential links with ‘flow’. Web searches are used to develop a sample frame of current salient online English language instructors (e.g. from First Tutors). Using it, a randomised sample of over 100 current instructors and language learners is sent the survey instrument by email. Survey responses are input into a statistical database (SPSS), cleaned and analysed. Analysis includes descriptive statistics about the perceived importance of EA for different respondents, its relationship with Teaching Presence and the association between its various indicators and the notion of flow. To build on the initial quantitative analysis, the research subsequently interviews 30 academic educational experts, practitioners and some students via Skype. The interviews give respondents freedom to express their views around the notions of EA and flow. Once the interviews are transcribed, NVivo software is used to collate and categorise emergent (inductive) themes to gain a nuanced, constructivist understanding of the role of EA in catalysing and maintaining flow in language learning. The practitioner and learner survey and subsequent interviews provides a theoretically sound but practical approach to find out what role emotions play in catalysing and stabilising flow to improve second language learning in informal e-learning environments.