

**Exploring the Understanding and Practices of Learner
Autonomy by Students and EFL Teachers at Boys'
Secondary Schools in Oman**

دراسة فهم وتطبيقات التعلم المستقل لدى معلمي اللغة الانجليزية وطلاب
المرحلة الثانوية بنين في سلطنة عمان

By

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of the requirements for the degree of
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**Dr. John Mackenny
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Abstract

Assisting learners to become autonomous has become a globally desirable goal for any educational reform. Learner autonomy enables learners to attain long-term success in addition to sustaining the process of learning and teaching. It was first defined by Holec (1981) as the learners' ability to take charge of his own learning. In the Omani context, limited attention has been paid to this concept and its efficiency, and to its invaluable contributions to language learning and teaching.

The current study is an attempt to explore the understanding and practices of learner autonomy by students and EFL teachers at boys' secondary schools in Oman. To investigate relevant beliefs, challenges, and perceptions, a mixed methods strategy through using questionnaires, focus group interviews, and face-to-face interviews, was adopted. The study revealed that reading books, using mobile phones, and the spoken practice of English language were the most important independent strategies which promote learner autonomy. Demotivation and unawareness of the importance of learner autonomy were found to be the major challenges that teachers encounter in their teaching process. Finally, the present study showed diverse interesting results regarding the students' perceptions of LA.

ملخص الدراسة:

أصبح تنشئة الطلاب بأن يكونوا مستقلين في تعليمهم أمراً مرغوباً به عالمياً أي عملية اصلاح تربوي حيث أنه يمكن المتعلم من تحمل مسؤولية تعلمه وبذلك يصبح التعلم المستقل اسلوب حياه لديه. وعند النظر في النظام التربوي لسلطنة عمان يتبين أن هناك نوع من القصور في ماهية التعلم المستقل لدى كل من المعلمين والمتعلمين على السواء. لذلك فان هذه الدراسة تهدف الى الوقوف على فهم تطبيقات التعلم المستقل لدى كل من المعلم والطالب ولتحقيق هذا الهدف فقد استخدمت عدة طرق للحصول على المعلومات منها تنفيذ استبيان وعمل مقابلات خاصة فردية وجماعية, وقد أظهرت الدراسة أن الطالب العماني يؤمن بأن أهم ثلاثة وسائل تساعد الطالب على تحقيق التعلم المستقل في اللغة الانجليزية هي: القراءة,, استخدام الهاتف النقال, و الممارسة الكلامية للغة الانجليزية مع الغير. في المقابل فقد أظهرت الدراسة أن من أكبر العوائق في تحقيق التعلم المستقل هو عدم وجود تحفيز كاف لأهمية التعلم المستقل وبالتالي قلة الوعي لدى كل من المعلمين والمتعلمين بأهمية هذا النوع من التعلم.

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Chapter 1 - Introduction

This chapter introduces the concept of autonomous learning and describes its characteristics and other relevant features. It includes three sections; background of the study, purpose of the study, and significance of the study.

1. 1 Background of the study

Due to the fact that English is the second language for Omani people, it has been given a considerable amount of recognition and value by the authorities in Oman. English language has been adopted as an official and as a primary school subject in the Omani educational system ever since it was established. Therefore, the Ministry of Education has been issuing and adapting policies and regulations with the aim of sustaining the learning and teaching of English language. This trend is reflected and clearly manifested in the significant funds allocated for the development and implementation of the educational reforms. For instance, 'Basic Education System' has been implemented at the school level since 1998 (Al-Issa and Al-Bulush, 2011).

The new educational reform includes various educational aspects. The key and significant change that happened as a result of the reform is that the teaching of English language starts as of grade one, compared to grade four in the previous system. According to Brog (2006, p.11), "Basic education system reflects contemporary thinking in ELT by, for instance, emphasizing meaningful and purposeful language use, promoting self-assessment, and providing a variety of interactive and motivated language learning experiences". As such, it is expected through the new reform, a more active role will be assigned to students in the learning process. Additionally, more interaction between students and their teachers is also anticipated to occur in the classrooms. However, ELT in Oman in reality remains a bit far from achieving these goals and they only exist in the policy document.

Despite the tremendous efforts and the heavy investment on the domain of English language teaching and learning in Oman, the outcomes are still below the level of expectation. Goodliffe (2005) attributes this low achievement in English language to the overemphasis on the product rather than on the process of learning. Additionally, Mahmoud and Al-Mahrooqi (2012) contend that the demotivation and dominant role of teachers are the primary factors which hinder any progress and proficiency in English language.

The above-mentioned critique of ELT status in Oman, highlights many aspects to be examined and remedied during the course of learning English in the Omani schools. A major area in this regard is the underestimation of the students' ability to take more actual control over their own learning. This particular aspect is considered to be the focal point of this study of '-Learner Autonomy-'.

Although the term 'autonomy' has recently emerged as a result of the consistent innovation in the ELT landscape, Andreu (2007) asserts that it is not a new methodology, but it is an attitude adopted by the students in their learning. It is based on the promise that learner's responsibility is to be appreciated and developed. The main goal of Learner Autonomy (henceforth LA) is to bring students into focus and have them be responsible for their actions. In brief, no student can learn for somebody else.

Generally, students admire and appreciate being given the opportunity to select how and what they like to learn. For example, students find it interesting when they are given the chance to choose their topics of their presentations and the mode of delivery. Additionally, students tend to have different degrees of autonomy which need to be demonstrated. This tendency is in line with Smith's (2003) idea. He states that, "Instead of viewing learners as deficient in autonomy, they are already autonomous and already capable of exercising this capacity".

The interesting environment of English language learning and teaching in the Omani schools is another encouraging factor to undertake this study. For instance, the time allocated for learning English at school is limited to one lesson a day. This short time constitutes a key challenge to teachers and impedes their ability to achieve the set of objectives. Most of the teachers are fairly convinced that teaching should be student-centred, however, such a practice is only available in the policy document and not in reality. Teachers continue to assume dominant roles in the learning and teaching process. Hopefully, the present study contributes to raising awareness of the importance of implementing LA in the Omani schools. More options have recently been made available for language learners to implement in their learning process inside and outside the classroom walls. Equipping learners with the necessary research strategies has become essential rather than providing them with limited amount of knowledge in the classroom.

1.2 Purpose of the study

For many teachers, the term autonomy has been shaped by their experience. It also seems that many of them are not familiar with the concept of autonomous learning and many others have misconceptions of it. As a result, it is not likely for students to readily

perceive this concept. It is assumed that the first step towards promoting LA in EFL classes is to be aware of both teachers' and students' beliefs in this regard. This would help to discover the existing skills of both parties as well as other skills they need to develop. This would lead to a better implementation and attainment of LA. The results of this study can be utilized as a basis for further investigations of other contexts, where teachers and students have views towards their roles. The current research has specific aims which are represented in addressing the following issues:

- 1- To investigate the types of independent learning strategies students employ which contribute to their success in reaching advanced levels of competency in English language.
- 2- To find out the challenges which EFL teachers encounter in helping their students to become more autonomous.
- 3- To explore students' perceptions regarding LA.

1.3 Significance of the study

The current research is deemed to be necessary and ideal for the Omani educational field as its findings can positively contribute to the Omani literature of LA to enhance the quality of education in schools. It would raise the teachers', the students', the parents', and the syllabus designers' awareness of many critical issues regarding LA and how to foster it at schools. According to Little (2007), proficiency in language and the development of learner autonomy are interrelated. To be a good user of language, you need to be an autonomous learner (Nunan,1997).

Researchers have proved that students naturally tend to be autonomous learners and have different degrees of autonomy as they like to react, explore, and be involved and recognizes in the surrounding environment. Thus, training them gradually on the various aspects of LA can lead to better attainment. Most importantly, there will be situations where students encounter difficulty in the absence of teachers to guide and correct. In that case, LA enables students to cope with such critical situations.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

2. 1 Introduction

This chapter attempts to provide a systematic review of the literature on learner autonomy through discussing and elaborating its' fundamental issues which are to be found in the field of second language learning. This review firstly introduces some of the prevailing definitions of autonomy and its relevant social dimensions. Autonomy in language learning, teacher autonomy and learner autonomy, constraints on learner autonomy, and misconceptions about autonomous learning are also presented. Finally, there is a critical review of some studies on learner autonomy in the Omani context.

2. 2 What is learner autonomy?

There have been various approaches, techniques and methods to improve the process of English language teaching and learning situations, inside and outside the classroom. Most importantly, the focus shifted from teacher-centred approaches to learner-centred. This was partly due to the prevalence worldwide of the communicative approach in ELT. Jacobs and Farrell (2003) proposed that the notion of communicative language teaching has led to eight major shifts in approaches to language teaching and learning. One such shift was the emphasis on providing the learners with the opportunities to use the language in the various context of real-life. Another important shift which is the focus of this dissertation was to learner autonomy.

Learner autonomy has gained wide popularity in addition to being a point of interest in research carried out by educators and practitioners. Despite the different definitions given to learner autonomy, that of Holec (1981, p. 3) stands out as the most prevailing. He defined learner autonomy as the ability to take charge of one's own learning. However, there are also other widely accepted definitions made by researchers and practitioners such as Benson (2001), Little (1991) and Dam (1990).

According to Holec (1981), learners are to manage various aspects of their learning. Such aspects involve determining the objectives, defining the contents and progressions, selecting methods and techniques to be used, monitoring the procedures of acquisition, and evaluating what has been acquired.

Other pioneer researchers who contributed to the literature on autonomous learning are Benson and Little. Benson (2001, p.2) stated that learner autonomy is "the capacity

to take control of one's own learning". Similarly, Little (1991) added the dimension of the cognitive features of the autonomous learner. These factors include a capacity for detachment, critical reflection, decision-making, independent action, psychological relation to the process and content of his learning, and finally, transferring what he has learned to wider contexts. In short, Little (1991) believes that learner autonomy is not a single learner behaviour or a teaching method which can be easily described. Also, it cannot be equated to self-learning.

However, the above-mentioned definitions have been recently critiqued by Reinders (2010) for neglecting the role of consciousness in the process of learning. Reinders (2010) claims that once autonomy is considered to be a 'capacity' and an 'ability', the actual action of the individual learner tends to be neglected. He adds that having the ability or the capacity to do something is hardly useful without actual performance of that particular thing. Therefore, the ability and the capacity remain useless unless they are accompanied with performance.

Sinclair (1999) is another researcher who defined autonomy. According to her, autonomy is the learner's capacity to make 'informed' decisions about his or her learning. She states that an autonomous learner should be able to provide reasons for his or her choices and justify other or alternative strategies that could have been used. In short, learners are aware or conscious about how, what, and why they are learning.

2.3 Why is learner autonomy important?

According to (Little, 2003 and Mc McCarthy, 1998), the key benefit of learner autonomy for learners is to equip them with high quality language learning experiences and to provide them with life-long learning skills. Most importantly, it creates democratic societies.

Based on the premise, "Learners have the power and right to learn for themselves", Smith (2008, p. 2), learner autonomy involves learners in the process of decision-making. This means that learners are encouraged to set goals, to select appropriate methods, and to evaluate and monitor the entire process of learning.

Being involved in the decision-making processes, learners can develop what is called "A personal agenda for learning", (Little, 1994 and Chan, 2003). Also, many researchers believe that once learners are involved in decision making, they become more enthusiastic and their learning experiences become more meaningful (Little, 1991 and Chan, 2003). Furthermore, another benefit of autonomous learning is that it helps learners to adjust their learning at their own pace as every learner can determine his or

her own methods of learning. Accordingly, motivation and awareness towards learning are increased and enhanced (Little, 2003 and McCarthy, 1998).

According to Harmer, (2001, p. 394), teachers are expected to find other alternatives for learning. This is due to the fact that teaching time in classroom is quite limited. Teachers, then, are bound to find ways of helping learners beyond the four walls of the classroom. This desire is achieved by, "giving students "An agency" (enabling them to be doers rather than the recipients of learning action)". Crabbe (1993) states that learners' learning become permanent and effective when they are given the opportunities to be responsible for their own learning.

Learner autonomy is highly significant due to other factors. For example, Sheerin, (1997, p. 63) asserts that efficient learning entails " Learning about oneself as a language learner and learning to function as a language user, independently of a teacher". This is due to the fact that learners may encounter cases where it is difficult to find a teacher who provides guidance and sound mentoring. Therefore, autonomous learning could be the solution for such a situation (Cotterall, 1995). Most importantly, Little (1991) claims that autonomous learning can be at any stage. He added that it is in children's nature to react, explore, and be involved in the surrounding environments.

2. 4 Connections between learner autonomy and teacher autonomy.

The social dimension of autonomy assumes that autonomy is developed through interdependence, dialogic and social interactions between learners and their instructors (Benson,2011 and Little,1995). Thus, the connection between learner autonomy and teacher autonomy has been established from this social view of autonomy. Hence, the role of the teacher to promote autonomy in learners is well recognized. Murray (2014, p.6) states that, "The exploration of learner autonomy as a phenomenon developing in contexts of learner interdependence and collaboration, dispelled notions of solitary learner learning without the help of the teacher".

In the field of language education, a number of definitions of teacher autonomy have been offered. However, every definition is different in some way from the other, due to the fact that teacher autonomy is a highly complex concept. So, there is no consensus towards a precise meaning of it or whether it is a pre-requisite to the development of learner autonomy.

In this context, teacher autonomy has also been defined in various sources of the literature. For instance, Thavenius (1999, cited in Benson (2011, p. 188) declares that the autonomous teachers are the one who are capable of reflecting on their role and who can subsequently adopt it. He adds that the autonomous teacher is independent

enough to make his learners become likewise. Moreover, Smith ,2003 and McGrath, 2000) stressed the fact that teachers are considered learners and then, it is their ongoing learning process of self-directed learning, which contributes to a great extent to their skills to develop autonomy in their students. In summary, the concept of teacher autonomy and learner autonomy are well connected.

As a practitioner, experience at school context has proven that learner autonomy does not exist in a vacuum. Teachers are main agents for supporting or hindering the development of autonomy in their students. Jimenez –Raya et al (2007) proposes that the teacher needs, in the first place to have personally experienced and practiced autonomy. Accordingly, this experience will allow him to support and adequately mentor his students.

2. 5 Promoting learner autonomy in the EFL classroom

There has been an abundance of approaches and methods to promote learner autonomy, since it has become a desirable goal. Recently, there is a shift in the field of ELT from learning to practice autonomy beyond classroom to practicing it in the classroom itself. Therefore, CALL (computer assisted language learning) or self-access centres which received much interest in the 1990s, have been perceived as less effective.

Several proponents of learner autonomy, such as Sinclair and Ellis (1984) and Nunan (1997) assume that the classroom is the place where learner autonomy commences. Also, it was suggested by Allwright (1988) that the learners' inquiries, questions and errors could be considered as autonomous classroom behaviours. Furthermore, in-class approaches to autonomous learning have been classified into curriculum- based, teacher-based, and learner-based.

Benson (2011) states that the main function of the curriculum-based approach is to promote autonomous learning through involving learners in the process of decision making at the curriculum level. This is achieved through encouraging learners to select contents and learning methods. An adoption of such a technique is believed to facilitate learners' adaptability, flexibility and modifiability. Lee (1998) and Cotterall (1995) think that such an approach encourages learners to make informed choices as learners are entitled to reflect on their learning experiences.

The transfer in the role of teachers is the main characteristic of the teacher-based approach. Teacher are no longer informers or knowledge keepers, but they are counsellors and facilitators. This change in roles ought to be a gradual process. Scharle and Szabo (2000) claim that there is a correlation between autonomy and learners'

responsibility. The latter can be developed through a three stages process. The first one is to raise learners' awareness through presenting new viewpoints and experiences. The second stage is to change attitudes. Here, learners are helped to develop habits and new roles. Therefore, this stage is crucial and requires a lot of patience and practice. Transferring roles is the last stage. Teachers are required to provide students with more freedom to enable them to accomplish tasks and make relevant decisions.

Bringing about psychological and behavioural changes is the main focus of the learner-based approach. Benson (2011) believes that these changes are vital for learners in order for them to take greater control over their learning. According to O'Malley and Chamot (1990), the aim of learner development is to provide learners with strategies to develop control over learning management such as social strategies, i.e., collaborative learning, metacognitive strategies, i.e., knowledge about learning and cognitive strategies. Also, it proposes methods to incorporate the above-mentioned elements into the language learning process.

Littlewood (1996, p. 434) identified three fields to develop learner autonomy. These fields are autonomy as a person, as a learner, and as a communicator. Additionally, confidence, motivation, knowledge and skills, are the four central components of autonomy to this framework. Furthermore, the domains or fields in the framework are broken down into six areas of autonomy which learners need to develop. These are communication strategies, linguistic creativity, independent work, learning strategies, expression of personal meaning and creation of personal learning contexts. On the basis of this framework, Littlewood (1996, p.432) suggested a "coordinated strategy" with some activities for teachers to help their students develop autonomy in these areas. For instance, in a non-threatening atmosphere, the relationship of tasks to learners' individual needs, and objectives are clarified. Also, the activities include familiarizing students with the skills and knowledge which are needed in carrying out tasks.

2. 6 Constraints on learner autonomy

Reinders (2010) states that autonomy development is a lengthy process and that its successful implementation depends considerably on the context. Also, it could either be constrained or facilitated by personal and environmental factors. Vieira (2003) believes that addressing constraints on the development of autonomy contributes positively to better understanding of the characteristics of the teaching and learning environment. Then, one can counteract dominant practices in this field.

There are various challenges that can hinder autonomous learning and its progress. Internal and contextual challenges are the main ones. The former is related to learning and the latter is concerned with learning, teaching and sociocultural context. For instance, Littlewood (1999) assumes that students' past experiences, educational traditions and culture, and the context where learning occurs are among the vital factors that can affect the development of autonomy. However, Chan (2001) regards political aspiration of the learner's society, cultural conventions, learner's attitude, and knowledge among the potential challenges that might hinder the development of autonomy.

Pedagogically, there are two main factors which play a fundamental role in the development of autonomous learning culture. These include the curriculum and the teaching methods. Also, a dominant role or function over learning is usually practiced by teachers who hold responsibility for choosing contents, delivery modes and evaluation. However, Boud (1981) asserted that such an over-dominance of role over learning may be understood through teacher's uncertainty or lack of confidence in the ability of their students to take control over their learning.

In the same line, Al Busaidi and Brog (2012) studied teachers' practice and beliefs with regard to learner autonomy at the language centre of Sultan Qaboos University in Oman. It was concluded that teachers were negative about the feasibility of involving students in their learning, especially in terms of taking part in the setting of assessment selection and learning goals. The result of this study was supported by a similar one which was conducted by Shahsavari (2014) in the Iranian context.

Furthermore, constraints on the development and implementation of autonomous learning was reported by a Portuguese practitioner. Vieira (2003, p.233) showed that, "amongst the main impediments to autonomy were the dominant institutional discourses and policies in Portugal which appear to encourage the development of autonomous learning, reflective teacher education and even school-university partnerships, there is still a long way to go before dominant educational practices address these goals".

Similar findings were revealed in the Japanese context. Smith (2003) showed that lack of autonomy on the part of stakeholders' and institution's requirements constituted an impediment to the freedom of teachers to innovate and develop autonomy.

2. 7 Misconceptions on autonomous learning

The term 'autonomy' in foreign language teaching has been used interchangeably with some other terms such as individualized learning, self-access learning, and independent

learning. The emergence of such misconceptions is due to the fact that there are some aspects in learner autonomy which are either differently interpreted or misunderstood.

When discussing autonomous learning, the most controversial aspect is the relationship between autonomy and individualization. Basically, no decision can be made whether these two terms are synonyms or not. For example, self-directed learning is a type of individualization, whereby learners determine their own needs and act accordingly. However, many authors have criticized individualization, which in their opinion is somehow a "programmed learning process". For instance, Benson (2001, p.11) claimed that learners were assumed to work in their own way and at their own pace through materials and activities prepared by teachers.

The main purpose of individualized instruction is to meet the needs of the individual learner. The teacher sets objectives, prepares materials and evaluates the learner's progress and ability to obtain the required skills. Thus, it is a learning process that is adapted to a particular learner. In contrast, the simplest definition of autonomy implies that learners take responsibility for and control of their own learning.

Working in isolation is another common misconception on learner autonomy. Some researchers began to use the term independence as a synonym for autonomy. However, autonomy learning does not necessary imply isolation as a requisite for learning. In order to develop autonomous learning, there should be independence and collaboration. According to Benson (2001, p.14), and in a clarification of the conflict between the definitions of interdependence, independence and dependence, he states that, "In recent years, a number of researchers, in the UK especially, have preferred the term independence to autonomy, creating two terms for what is essentially the same concept. When independence is used as a synonym for autonomy, its opposite is dependence, which implies excessive reliance on the direction of the teachers or teaching materials. One problem of using this term, however, it can also be understood as the opposite of interdependence, which implies working together with teachers and other learners towards shared goals".

Furthermore, there are some other conceptual and terminological confusion about the term 'autonomy'. This is due to the fact that there are many synonyms for this term that are often used interchangeably. Self-access learning, self-regulated learning, self-instruction, independent learning, self-directed learning, distance learning and flexible learning are some examples of these synonyms.

Self-access learning simply occurs in a self-access centre where learners can find different types of educational resources and settings, such as activities, materials and

computers. Here, learners can get help from a counsellor or a supervisor. However, learner autonomy cannot be restricted to learning in such special-designed places.

Self-directed learning and self-regulated learning share similar processes through which students convert their mental abilities into academic skills. On the other hand, the learning environment of learner autonomy is not restricted to a particular skill or ability. Another similarity between self-directed learning and autonomous learning is that students are independent in making their own relevant decisions.

Another term which can be used alternately with autonomy is self-instruction. Little (1991) states that self-instruction refers to learning without a teacher. Dickinson (1987), also, defines it as learning without the direct control of a teacher. However, the total absence of the teacher in self-instruction contradicts with the term learner autonomy. Additionally, home-study courses and materials produced by others can be used as self-instruction materials. On the contrary, autonomous learners hold their own responsibility for goal-setting, selection of materials and assessment.

Flexible learning and distance learning are two terms which may also be confounded with autonomy. The former refers to a type of learning in which the teacher provides activities and materials for his students. Both teachers and learners have a flexibility not to follow a course book which is consistent with the syllabus. Also, students are allowed to select activities with teachers and discuss objectives of their learning. As such, involving students in what or when to do things is a trend that comes in line with autonomy. However, this does not mean that these two terms are synonymous. The latter which is distance learning, on the other hand, indicates a way of learning through an access like a computer, where a classroom atmosphere is absent and it is normally realized with the help of a teacher. Therefore, it is quite different from autonomy.

2. 8 Autonomy in non-Western contexts

Benson (2011) claims that autonomy is a western concept, therefore it is grounded in western discourses. Also, Crookal (1995) and Pennycook (1997) asserts that autonomy may conflict with traditions in non-western education, due to the fact that autonomy is originally rooted in western culture. As English language has become a world language however, the literature contains a great deal of debate and discussion on the appropriateness of autonomy to non-western cultures. The conflict has been centred on the different roles which have been assigned to teachers and learners in the new approach and its difficulty for teachers and learners in non-Western contexts.

A great deal of literature recently proposes that the notion of learner autonomy is fairly universal. Adamson and Sert (2012, p.23), announces that the ideology of labelling

learner autonomy as a western concept is claimed as being "potentially insensitive and racist" towards non-Western learners who are perceived as passive, ineffective learners. Similarly, Holliday (2003, cited in Benson, 2011) and Littlewood (2000) argue that this stereotype is incorrect and assert that though non-Western learners are influenced by exam oriented and teacher-led learning experiences, they have strategies of autonomous learning. Additionally, Littlewood (1999, p.88) states that, " at the individual level, there are no intrinsic differences that make students in one group either less or more, capable of developing whatever forms of autonomy are seen as appropriate to language learning".

In the Islamic world in general and the Arabic culture in particular, Rayan (2012) states that, the notion of autonomy and rights are greatly rooted in the holy book of the Quran and its teachings and lessons. Therefore, whatever version or shape autonomy holds, it abides by a basic human right that is guaranteed by Islamic law to all individuals. Moreover, the educational system in Islam encourages and recognizes creativity and critical thinking. There is a growing number of Arab, empirical studies which show and prove that learners do value and make good practices of autonomy as they direct and take control of their own learning. Then, it has become invalid to inquire whether autonomy is applicable or not to the Arabic culture.

2. 9 Research studies on autonomy in Oman

Al-Saadi (2011) asserts that language learner autonomy in the Gulf region in general and Oman in particular is quite new and therefore, it has not been thoroughly researched yet. In a few words, exploration of learner autonomy is seriously missing in the Omani context. As a result, no empirical studies about students have been completed yet, Al-Issa and Al-Bulushi (2011). Borg and Al-Busaidi (2012) and Shamsavari (2014) claim that "While learner autonomy might be seen by some teachers as desirable in language learning, it remains unfeasible and unrealizable by the large majority". Moreover, the handful studies that have been published in the Omani context on learner autonomy are either non-empirical or conducted from the perspective of teachers.

For example, Borg and Al-Busaidi (2012) examined the English language teachers' practices and beliefs regarding learner autonomy in the language centre of Sultan Qaboos University. They investigated teachers' perceptions about involving students in selecting methods of assessment and setting learning goals. Then, Al-Busaidi and Al-Mamari (2014) used the same sample from the previous study by Borg and Al-Busaidi (2012) to examine the English language teachers' definitions of autonomous learning. The findings indicated that teachers defined autonomous learning from different perspectives. For instance, some of them reflected their previous experiences about

this concept. Other definitions were affected by the classroom experiences of the teachers. Also, there were some definitions which were influenced by the teachers' reading on autonomous learning.

At the school level, English language teachers' perceptions and beliefs were surveyed by Al-Shaqsi (2009). The findings showed that teachers misinterpreted the definition of learner autonomy. They defined it in terms of self-evaluation, learning independently, cooperating and taking responsibility. Generally, these teachers were optimistic that their students would show autonomous behaviours.

Al-Kalbani (2011) and Asante and Al-Mahrooqi (2012) conducted non-empirical studies on autonomous learning. Based on the ongoing debate about autonomous learning and its appropriateness or inappropriateness to a particular context and different cultures, Al-Kalbani (2011) argues for the importance of setting up possible definitions of learner autonomy and what that entails in a given teaching and learning culture or context. She, also, claims that once teachers are not autonomous learners, no serious or actual effort is made to develop the skills of autonomous learning in the students. Asante and Al-Mahrooqi (2012, p. 4) propose methods of developing autonomous learning among Omani learners by cultivating a reading culture. They assert that, "Omani students, for example, are often accustomed to near-total dependence on the class teacher for their learning and are thus prone to shying away from the independent reading of prescribed texts. This is helped by absence of a reading habit in the entire families".

When taking a closer look at the above sample studies, some observations can be noticed. First, the studies are considered unique due to the fact that they are amongst the few in the field of learner autonomy in the Omani context. However, it can be observed that nearly all of these studies were conducted based on teachers' points of views and the learners' voices were almost missing.

It is quite interesting to observe that the concept of "independent learning" and autonomous learning are used interchangeably in these studies. However, the literature on autonomous learning differentiates between the two concepts according to the manner in which each type of learning is performed. For example, Lamb (2005) asserts that independent learning requires a learner to be working independently of the teacher and on his own, as it is the case in a self-access lab or at home. On the other hand, learner autonomy focuses on the way in which such an independence can be materialized. In other words, autonomy looks into the willingness and aptitude that the learner needs to learn autonomously.

Chapter 3- Methodology

In this study, a mixed methods approach was used. According to Creswell and Plano Clark (2007), mixed methods research involves the use of both qualitative and quantitative forms in tandem. A questionnaire (quantitative data) and interviews (qualitative data) were combined side by side to reinforce each other and so to ensure greater validity and reliability. A questionnaire and interviews were designed, piloted and then administered to teacher and student participants. The data from questionnaires is classified as quantitative data whereas interviews yield qualitative data. Thus, a mixed methods approach was selected in the present study as the overall strength of a research is greater than if it were based only on either quantitative or qualitative approach. Additionally, the combination of both approaches grants an expanded comprehension of research problem (Creswell, 2007).

3. 1 Participants

The participants in this study were divided into two groups comprising EFL teachers and students. To ensure more reliability to the study, the researcher sought to use as large a number of suitable participants as was obtainable in his catchment area. Therefore, four, secondary boys' schools were selected in the Omani city of Sohar.

Due to the fact that achieving autonomy requires participants with special qualities whose performance will be associated with more independence, the selection of teachers was limited to those recommended by their supervisors. The number of candidates was encouraging at first, however only eleven of them agreed to be interviewed and signed the consent form (see appendix 2). On the other hand, the second group of participants consisted of high achievers students. The current study, as mentioned above, made an attempt to choose only those learners with high proficiency level in English language. As we discussed earlier in the literature review that learner autonomy involves those who are motivated, responsible, self-confident, and willing. High achievers tend to have similar qualities to autonomous learners. To achieve this, the target sample was also recommended by both the senior EL teacher and the class EL teacher.

3. 2 Instruments

It was not possible to find a readymade instrument in the literature of student autonomy for the investigation for such a study. The researcher, therefore, developed his own instrument. A questionnaire and structured interviews were designed for collecting data in the study.

3. 2. 1 The Questionnaire

Although questionnaires are often conceived as an easy-option instrument for collecting data, they offer various advantages in research when compared with other instruments. For instance, they can be implemented comparatively economically, can be analyzed fast, and can reach a large number of participants in different areas, (Dornyei and Taguchi (2010). However, such merits become futile when the questionnaire is not well-designed. Considering such criterion, the main aim of this study was to ask questions which focus closely on the target research questions and elicit the richest information possible to answer these questions. The current study did make a good use of some existing questionnaire in the literature, such as the one which was designed by Brog & Al-Busaidi (2012). Furthermore, the current questionnaire was designed for students only. It consisted of 14 Likert-scale statements on a five-point scale of agreement (see appendix 1). The purpose of the questionnaire was to explore the students' beliefs, practices, as well as the feasibility of LA in the Omani schools. Below is a copy of the questionnaire.

3. 2. 1 a- Piloting

Piloting is a key tool to guarantee that mistakes can be remedied at little cost. The pilot questionnaire was completed by 10 outstanding students. It was thought that students would need 5 minutes only to complete the task, but they needed more than 10 minutes on average. Basically, it was important to count the exact time students needed as students had had lessons and did not wish to spend much time outside their classes. In addition, most students showed uncertainty in relation to items 8 and 10. Therefore, these items were paraphrased in order to make them more comprehensible.

3. 2. 2 interviews

The second phase of the study was dedicated to the interviews with the outstanding students (focus group) and the recommended teachers (see section on participants). The interviews enabled the researcher to explore more information and ideas which can

lead to a better understanding of the topic examined (Wanger, 2010). The current study adopted two types of interviews. They were face-to-face interviews with the elite EFL teachers and focus group interviews with outstanding students.

The teachers' interviews were conducted in English and lasted for 15 minutes on average for each interview. In order to ensure confidentiality and allow for more privacy, it was decided to conduct one-on-one interviews. The participants were asked to explain and clarify their answers through giving reasons and providing examples. Also, they were asked to talk about the challenges they encountered in this regard and to propose some solutions (see appendix 3).

On the other hand, the focus group interviews with students (see appendix 4) were conducted in the students' mother tongue. This made them more comfortable to clearly and easily express their ideas. Creswell (2009, p. 179) explained that one benefit of focus groups is the fact that the participants can provide historical information. In current study, students in the focus group interviews narrated interesting stories about their experiences in learning English and the strategies they adopted as to be distinguished learners of English. In total, seven interviews were conducted in schools in a 3-week period. Each interview lasted for thirty minutes. All interviews were audio recorded and the researcher took notes.

3. 2. 3 Analytical considerations

Ethics, validity, and reliability were three major aspects that have been considered during the process of this study.

3. 2. 3 a. Ethics

Prior to conducting the study, consent was sought from the headmasters of the schools, as well as the senior English teachers. Participation was voluntary and the participants were provided with sufficient information about the study and its' objectives, so they could decide whether to take part or not. Then, those who were interested were asked to sign consent forms (see appendix 2). The data collected were confidentially treated so that the identities of respondents were protected. Finally, the researcher promised that he would share the findings of the study through his email with those who are interested as soon as the findings have become available.

3.2. 3 b. Validity

Validity simply seeks to answer the following question: Are the results genuine? In other words, it refers to how well the instruments measure what they are intended to

measure. Thus, it is the most important criterion of the correctness and the soundness of any study. In the current study, the researcher from the start selected the interview and the questionnaire as instruments because of their suitability to the topic and the nature of the research. In order to ensure validity, the researcher opted for a pilot study by administering trial questionnaire and interviews on a small number of participants who did not belong to the study. Piloting this study extracted valuable feedback on the time management and the modification of some statements which students felt ambiguous (see the piloting section). Another point worth mentioning is the fact that the conditions in which the interviews and questionnaire took place was smooth , comfortable, and anxiety free for the participants. Furthermore, the prudent management and control of all these circumstances possibly contributed to enhancement of the research validity.

3.2. 3 c. Reliability

Reliability refers to the repeatability of results. It seems reasonable to believe that the study would yield the same findings if it were carried out a second time. The current study seems to be highly reliable. This can be observed from the consistent results which were perceived from the different participants. Both teachers and students were comparable; they were more or less similar.

Chapter 4- Results

This chapter presents the main findings of the teachers' and students' interviews, as well as the students' questionnaire.

4. 1 Strategies employed by students in autonomous language learning

The focus group interviews with the outstanding students revealed many interesting autonomous techniques, which these students had employed and found to be valuable throughout the process of learning English. The strategies they used were reading books, using the dictionary, watching films, using mobile phone, practicing speaking English with others in different places, playing computer games, taking extra English language lessons, travelling abroad, studying English vocabulary, listening to music, and participating in English language competitions.

The second step was to ask students to rank the strategies in order of importance in their own point of view. The results were as follows:

Group 1 (Abdullah bin Bashir school): 1- practising speaking the language.

2- reading books.

3- using mobile phones.

Group 2 (Masaud bin Ramadhan school 1): 1- practising speaking the language

2- reading books.

3- using mobile phones.

Group 3 (Masaud bin Ramaddhan school 2): 1- Using mobile phones.

2- Practising speaking the language.

3- reading books.

Group 4 (Sohar school 1):

1- Reading books.

2- Practising speaking the language.

3- Using mobile phones.

Group 5 (Sohar school 2):

- 1- Reading books.
- 2- Practising speaking the language.
- 3- Using mobile phones.

Group 6 (Naeem bin Masaud 1):

- 1- Reading books
- 2- Using mobile phones.
- 3- Practising speaking the language.

Group 7 (Naeem bin Masaud 2):

- 1- Reading.
- 2- Using mobile phones.
- 3- Practising speaking the language.

As can be observed, there was a unanimous resolution among the outstanding students that reading books, using the mobile phone, and practicing speaking the language, were the three most useful autonomous techniques that improved their English language. Although these were not necessary listed in the same order.

4. 2 Students' perceptions regarding learner autonomy

There are various ways of answering this inquiry. One is to consider the students questionnaire responses and compare them with the teachers' interviews. In the questionnaire, participants were asked to show their level of agreements or disagreements in order to measure their perspectives and attitudes towards given statements about learner autonomy. Their responses in this regard were as follows:

Statement	Agree	strongly agree	Unsure	disagree	strongly disagree
1. I always do my English language homework .	45%	42%	9%	3%	1%

2. Activities and tasks that require students to use the internet foster learner autonomy.	35%	47%	14%	2%	1%
3. Motivated English language students are more likely to develop autonomous learning than students who are not motivated or interested.	30%	55%	10%	3%	2%
4. I appreciate English language teachers who urge and encourage us to search for information and activities outside the textbook.	41%	43%	12%	2%	2%
5. Learner autonomy plays an important role in learning English language as it allows students to learn more effectively compared with other strategies of learning English.	38%	49%	11%	0%	1%
6. Group work promotes learner autonomy.	24%	26%	23%	19%	8%
7. English language teachers have a basic role in fostering learner autonomy.	34%	36%	22%	7%	1%
8. To be autonomous, students need to develop the ability to evaluate their own learning.	33%	41%	18%	9%	0%
9. Learner autonomy is fostered when students are given the opportunity to choose the activities they would like to do.	32%	48%	19%	1%	0%
10. Learner autonomy is fostered when students have the freedom to decide their learning assessment.	34%	37%	24%	3%	1%
11. Independent study in the library is an effective activity that develops learner autonomy.	32%	41%	18%	4%	5%

12	Individuals that lack autonomy tend not to be good language learners.	36%	22%	25%	10%	7%
13.	Learner autonomy can develop more effectively through learning outside the classroom.	21%	43%	24%	8%	4%
14.	English language teachers provide strategies and methods to become autonomous learners.	32%	29%	19%	14%	7%

(table 1)

As can be seen from the table, the questionnaire results revealed diverse findings regarding the students' perceptions about learner autonomy. For instance, 85% of the students agree that motivation plays a pivotal role in developing learner autonomy among students, while 10% of them are unsure, and 5% disagree with this statement. The idea that LA is one of the most effective strategies in learning English was found to be the most-agreed upon item. 87% of the participants favour LA strategy more than all the others.

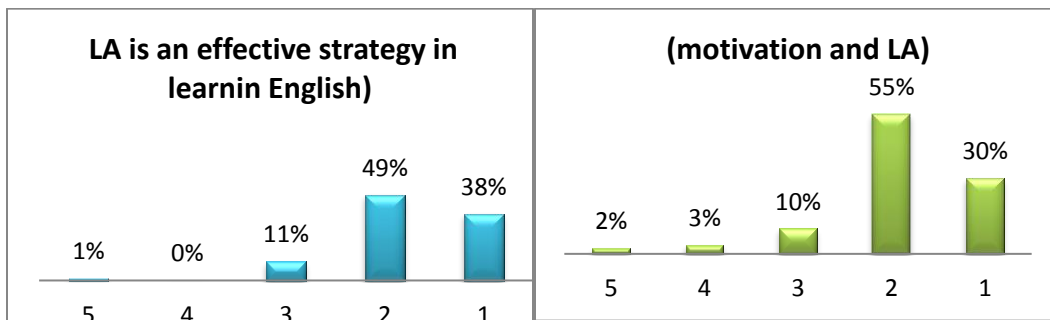


Figure: 1

Figure: 2

(1- Agree 2- Strongly agree 3- unsure 4- disagree 5- strongly disagree)

Moreover, 73% of the participants believe that the school library plays an essential role in developing LA, while 18% of them are unsure, and 9% reject this idea. Quite similarly, 64% of students favour the idea that LA can be developed best outside the classroom walls, while 24% of them are not sure, and 12% disagree with this notion. Finally, it is noteworthy that half of the participants, that is 50% think that group work promotes LA, and nearly 30% of them disagree with the idea. This was found to be the most-disagreed upon item in this questionnaire.

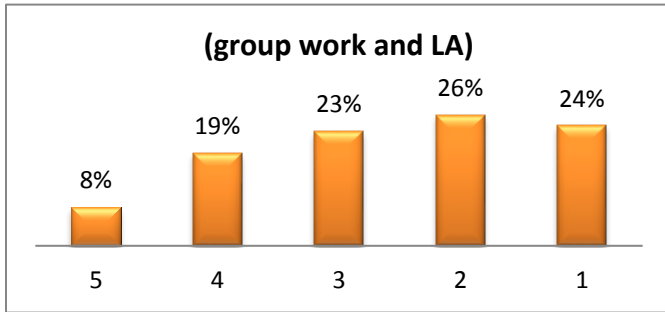


Figure: 3

(1- Agree 2- strongly agree 3- unsure 4- disagree 5-strongly disagree)

Furthermore, it is obvious from the table that the participants are in agreement with items : 8,9,10 in the questionnaire (see table 1).

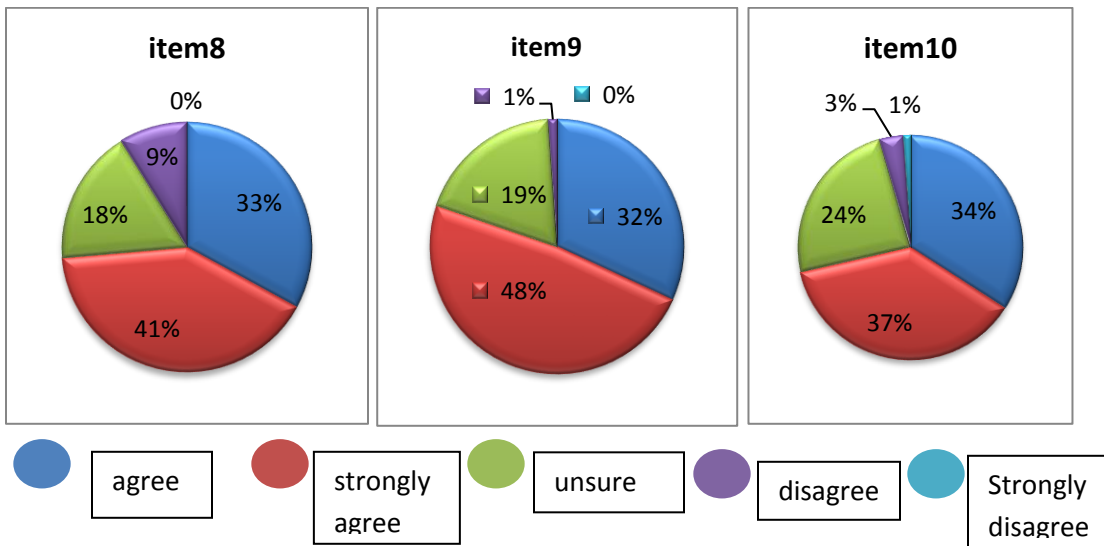


Figure : 4 (student evaluate their own learning)

Figure : 5 (students select their activities)

Figure : 6 (students decide their learning assessment)

A close investigation of these items reveals that the desirability and feasibility of LA among students is quite high. For example, 80% of the participants are positive that LA can be fostered when students are given the opportunity to choose the tasks and activities they would like to do. Also, this was found to be one of the less-disagreed upon item in this questionnaire. In addition, statistics show similarity among students regarding the notion of self-evaluation and assessment. Approximately, above 70% of

students favour the idea of evaluating ones' own learning and deciding ones' own learning assessment.

In the questionnaire, the researcher asked students about their teachers' role in LA. The findings here were interesting. For instance, the majority of students, 84% of them, appreciate ELT who urge and encourage them to search for information outside the textbook, while 4% disagree, and 12% of them are unsure. Also, 70% of participants believe that ELT has a basic role in fostering LA, while only 8% do not think so. Meanwhile, 61% of students claim that their teachers provide them with strategies to become autonomous learners, while 18% of them were unsure, and 9% disagree. Moreover, findings revealed that 82% of students are interested in using the internet as an autonomous technique to do their homework and tasks, while 3% of them disagree with that.

4. 3 Challenges that teachers encounter in helping their students to become more autonomous

The third research question aimed at finding out the challenges which teachers face to help their students to be more autonomous. Findings from the teachers' interviews revealed that the majority of teachers believe that their common challenge in this regard was students' demotivation towards learning English. Here are examples of how they explained their views:

- . Many students are not interested in learning. They come from different areas with multi cultures. Some of them are prone to sleep in class, do not bring their items, do not want to participate in class discussion.
- . Many students are demotivated. They are simply careless and do not want to depend on themselves. They prefer to be 'spoonfed' by teachers.
- . Sometimes, I come to class and hear some students saying, "I do not understand English, so I do not want to study it". So, how can I expect such students to be autonomous?.
- . Many students are weak. They need more motivation and support from their parents and teachers as well.

The second largest challenge which teachers encounter in fostering LA among their students is lack of resources. One teacher explains, "Most students do not read and have no books at home due to the bitter fact that we do not have libraries. Also, many students do not have access to the internet. They depend on the school to provide

them with such resources. However, we have one modest LRC (language resource centre) and it is not available most of the time due to the large number of students at schools". Another teacher adds, "Facilities like computer, audio, and visual labs are considered valuable resources which attract students to learn. Unfortunately, we do not have them".

The third challenge which students face in helping their students to be more autonomous is the syllabus. These problems according to many teachers are as follows:

- . The syllabus deals with all levels similarly. So, the tasks are designed for all students and do not deal with each level differently.
- . There is no freedom in the syllabus for students to think. Students are under the pressure of exams.
- . We have different levels in the same class. All tasks are compulsory for all of them. Students are not given the chance to select what they think suitable to them. This is simply the problem, same tasks for everyone.
- . The syllabus simply does not help LA. There should not be one syllabus for all levels of students. As a solution for this issue, special tasks should be designated for different levels.

Finally, what is noteworthy in the questionnaire is that item 12 was found to be the most-unsure one. This item states that individuals who lack autonomy tend not to be good language learners. This statement is well in line with the challenges that teachers face in their struggle to foster their students' autonomy. In the interviews, many teachers raised the point that a large number of students are unaware of the importance of learner autonomy. One of them explains that, "We need to raise awareness of this concept (learner autonomy) among students and teachers as well". Another one states that, "Students should be trained about learner autonomy right from the beginning. I mean, it is to be applied from primary school. Thus, students would be used to it. So, there is a need to start such a strategy with very young students, otherwise it will be a late stage when we start it in secondary school ". "Students' parents should be aware of their roles towards their sons and daughters. Autonomous learning is a collective responsibility to be shared by various stakeholders. Students alone cannot achieve it well otherwise they may misuse or underestimate it. Parents, students, and teachers should cooperate together to achieve this autonomy", one experienced teacher added. Another teacher stated that, "There is an unawareness of LA from early stages. Students do not benefit much from this strategy when it is adopted late".

Chapter 5- Discussion:

This mixed-method study investigated and explored the understanding and practices of learner autonomy by secondary students at boys' schools as well as the practices of EFL teachers. There are certain points which can be inferred and regarded as pertinent to the results of the study. Issues related to using mobile phones in schools, reading books, the spoken practice of English language, students' motivation towards learning English, group work, and the teachers, the students and the syllabus roles in LA are the main findings obtained from this study, which are discussed in details in this chapter.

5. 1 The first research question.

The first research question examined the types of learning strategies employed by outstanding students and considered by them as factors contributing to their success in reaching advanced levels of competency in English language. Quite interesting, results were elicited from the interviews with the focus groups. In spite of the fact that the participating groups were from different schools in different areas, the study findings were quite consistent. Such a fact has increased the study's reliability. The participants agreed that the three most effective autonomous learning strategies in learning English are reading books, using mobile phones, and the spoken practice of the English language.

The obtained results were found to be consistent with the results of other studies conducted in other cultures in regard to second language acquisition. Unquestionably, reading books, use of mobile phones, and the spoken practice of the target language are three main factors which fosters acquisition of a second language. These factors are the target of many educational systems around the globe. However, when the educational system in Oman is compared with that in more advanced countries, significant differences are recognized. For example, people worldwide read a great deal and they can be noticed reading all the time in different places. Recent article in Alkhaleej newspaper (2016) has shown that each European individual reads at least 35 books a year, whereas the Arab individual reads one book as a maximum. This trend in reading provides evidence that Arab people are not good readers.

The use of mobile phones in education has proved its' efficiency in motivating learners of English language to become good readers. However, the use of these devices as an educational tool in our country is considered a controversial issue. Some parents allow their children to use these devices while others consider them as something to be banned from schools. Along with mobile phones, the practice of spoken English has

proved to be of a unique benefit in consolidating the language being studied. Here is more discussion based on the factors outlined above.

5. 1 a. Reading and LA

In the present study, the majority of participants believed that reading is the most effective factor that promotes learner autonomy. It is worth noting that, although reading books was unanimously given the priority as an efficient strategy to foster LA, participants failed to provide the researchers with names of books that they read. Instead, they talked about many newspapers, magazines and stories. Other participants stated that they have the habit of reading anything they come across like leaflets and advertisement. Then, they use the dictionary to look these words up.

These striking results refute the prevailing notion that exists in Oman regarding the underestimation of reading among Omani students. Also, these results can simply be interpreted to the effect that Omani students have a positive attitude towards reading. Such approach should be encouraged (see researcher's recommendations).

As a practitioner, the researcher shares the same idea with students about the importance of reading as a crucial skill in second language acquisition. During a professional development programme, the researcher attended a seminar which was conducted by a British instructor. This instructor started his speech with this question to the audience, "What is the most important skill in learning English?". Teachers started discussing the simple question. Then, some of them answered, "The most important skill is writing". There were others who answered, "speaking is the most important skill". At this point, there was a loud murmuring that could be heard in the room. The professor interfered by saying, "The most important skill in English is reading". Then, he raised another question, "What is the second most important skill in English language?". After a short argument, the professor interfered again and said, "The second most important skill in English is also reading". A similar scene was evoked during the focus group interviews.

Nowadays, there has been an increased recognition towards the importance of reading as an effective strategy in second language acquisition. Basically, Muslims had been encouraged to read a long time ago. In the holly book of the Quran, the first verse is "Iqra", which means "read". This verse contains an implied and obvious invitation for everyone to read.

Although there is a group of people who have recognized the importance of reading in their lives in general and in learning English in particular, they lack the knowledge to utilize this attitude in practice. Recently, I have met a friend who is an English teacher.

We were discussing the importance of reading books as an autonomous strategy to foster learning English. My friend expressed his confusion in regard to persuading his own children about the importance of being good readers. Finally, he decided to use motivation as a tool to encourage his students to read. He announced valuable gifts for any child who would finish reading books. The more they read, the more gifts they would gain. The plan succeeded and children started to love reading books. It is a great personal experience that one should try. However, it is worth mentioning that giving prizes or gifts might not be the best way to motivate learners. Students should learn because they love the subject or want to study. Also, they should read for love of reading or learn for entertainment. This is intrinsic motivation that educators should not neglect.

The government and the Ministry of Education in Oman have a focal role to play to encourage people to read (see researcher's recommendations). The responsibility of providing a supportive environment for learners is supposed to be vested in both the government and the Ministry of Education. When people get used to autonomous learning, this trend over the time will become a habit that sustains their learning process, as well as their achievement. In Madrid, Spain, when the researcher accidentally stood in front of a huge building. At first glance, he thought it was a shopping mall. The researcher decided to go shopping and entered the place. Then, he realized it was a library. It was the biggest library he had ever seen. It was crowded and it was hard to find a parking space for vehicles. It had many departments and sections of science and art. There was a dedicated floor for children to read books. Such a project can motivate people to become good readers.

In brief, the focus group interviews revealed that Omani students realize the importance of reading books and its fundamental role in developing other skills. They emphasized many advantages for reading books such as expanding vocabulary and improving spelling. Additionally, they showed that when readers see the words in use, this leads to a better understanding of the actual meaning of the words and their use in the various contexts. Most importantly, participants pointed out that speakers and writers of languages are supported and consolidated by being a good reader. This means that the amount of reading that one is exposed to, enables them to distinguish good speakers or writers from the modest ones.

5. 1 b. Using mobile phones and LA

A large number of students advocated the idea of using mobile phones as a unique, autonomous, modern strategy that fosters learning English. During the interviews, many participants were interested in telling the researcher about their experiences with

mobile phones in learning English. For example, one student explained, " I spend hours on my mobile phone watching different programs on YouTube. Every time our teacher gives us something new, I got the habit of looking up for more information about it in the internet. I have been enjoying it and feel myself a distinguished student inside and outside school". Another one said, "When my father bought me a new mobile phone, I at once converted it into English. I had a problem to get accustomed to the new strategy at the beginning, but the dictionary helped me a lot. My English has improved remarkably with the help of my new device".

It is worth mentioning the fact that the strategy of changing the language of the mobile phone into English has become popular among Omani students. It is believed that much vocabulary can be learned this way. The researcher kept hearing similar experience from different groups. One can conclude that such a strategy is reliable and is worth trying.

Another popular strategy among Omani students is watching English movies on their mobile phone. Although the internet is costly in Oman, many students have adopted the habit of using their mobiles to watch English films. One participant said, "I enjoy watching new English movies on my phone. I choose films with Arabic subtitles. I have learned many new words and useful phrases. Also, I have noticed that my listening skill has improved".

Furthermore, all groups in the interview were supportive of the idea of using social network services , such as WhatsApp as means to improve and develop learners' independence. The participants spoke about the advantages of downloading some educational software applications that foster learning of English language. Many students pointed that their favourite computer programme is "WhatsApp" as they use it on a daily basis to communicate in the target language with their peers and friends.

The above-mentioned experiences in various uses of mobile phones deserve receiving further investigations. They have shown the demand for using these electronic gadgets as good tools to promote LA and consequently improve SLA. Therefore, researchers' and educators' attention has been drawn to the possible potential contribution that mobile phones can play in education in general and language development in particular. Basically, many EFL teachers have been calling for adoption of such a strategy due to its great educational values. Goundar (2011) claims that by the time mobile phones become accessible to all people, there is a need to consider using them for education.

The widespread use of mobile phones has drawn educators' interest to the obvious inquiry; How can mobile phones promote SL learning? Are there any negative consequences on students resulting from their use of these devices?

Basically, many educators are reluctant about allowing children to use mobile phones. For example, many parents are afraid of inappropriate uses of these devices which lead to many negative results, and social consequences. Teachers share the same fears with parents as many of them believe that they may lose control of the class. The Ministry of education is uncertain about how to manage in between. This scenario was obvious five years ago when the Ministry of Education in Oman decided to allow students to use their mobile phones in schools. Very soon, there were condemnation campaigns against this decision by many other educators and practitioners. On second thought, the Ministry decided to reverse this decision and ban the usage of mobile phones in schools.

In our society, parents are uncertain whether they should or not allow their children to use mobile phones. However, the majority of them prefer not to go through such a risky experience. So, they refuse to give their children mobiles. On the other hand, there are other parents who give their children these devices and find them convenient. Thus, there are many advocators and opponents of using mobile phones in education.

Recent potential interest for using mobile phones to support autonomous learning has been driven by the fact that these devices are portable, readily available (24 hours a day), in addition to their affordable prices. Al-Amri and Kamla (2011) have documented that 98.9 % of Sultan Qaboos University students own mobile phones. In brief, there is a dramatic increase in mobile phone holders among students.

There are pedagogical factors to consider using mobile phone as a useful autonomous strategy in SL learning. Most importantly, mobile phones in the present time have become an internationally recognized medium of social communication. As such, they provide for real or authentic communication and encourage collaboration among students. Consequently, using mobile phones is considered an effective method to favour situated learning. Larva and Wenger (1991) state that when information is put to immediate use and is contextually relevant, learning is likely to exist. For instance, English language learners depend on mobile phones in multi purposes such as using the dictionary, watching movies, sending and receiving emails, and discussing plans with English speaking friends. Such activities can be achieved anywhere and anytime. Therefore, using mobile phones minimizes the separation between the outside world and the classroom. Applied linguistics does not depend on theories only to explain language learning and acquisition, however, it is obvious that more time on tasks and more exposure to the target language are more likely to lead to successful acquisition.

There are other positive contributions of mobile phones in the field of SLA. First, learning through them encourages shy and reluctant students as they reduce the level of formality in the learning experience. In educational research conducted by Wang, Shen, Novak, and Pan (2009) regarding the use of text messages through mobile phones, it was revealed that this technology had the power to shift passive learners into active ones. Additionally, Mcned and Hooft (2006, p.1) concluded that using mobile phones as an autonomous technique to learn English could make learning more fun and meaningful. As a result, students' self-confidence is fostered and consequently their participation and involvement in the school would increase.

In a study conducted by Mathew and Al enazi (2016) from Al Jouf University in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, it was concluded that using mobile phone in learning English can enhance students communication skills and make them independent of the teacher. For example, mobile phones can be utilized to record students' voices which results in improvement of their pronunciation. Therefore, using mobile phones as an autonomous strategy can develop students' communicative skills.

On the other hand, there are opponents of using mobile phones in the educational settings. In spite of the global increasing popularity of mobile phones, many educators feel reluctant to allow students to use these devices. For instance, using mobile phones is not permitted in the Omani schools; and any student caught in possession of a mobile phone inside the school will be severely punished. Also, a large number of teachers assumes that using mobile phones interrupts teaching and causes more distractions to the learning process. It is believed that students would spend much time browsing non-academic websites and chatting with friends on social network sites. In turn, their performance would be negatively affected. Katz (2008, p. 92) claims that the negative reaction towards using mobile phones in school is due to the fact that the mobile phone is "a source of irritation, delinquency and even crime".

A critical evaluation of both parties can infer that the advantages of using mobile phone as an autonomous strategy to learn English surpass its disadvantages. One should confess the fact that these devices have been increasingly accessible to all in society, including students and their appropriate usage of it can lead to lifelong learning skills. As the case with every device, using mobile phones in education is a two-edged weapon. Imposing a ban on using these devices, as in Oman, is not a good decision. Although these gadgets have got the potential to attract students towards non-academic issues, they also have the influence to attract them towards the academic ones. In short, researchers, teachers, and educational software companies can play a significant role in this regard (see my recommendations).

5. 1 c. LA and the spoken practice of the target language

No one can deny the importance of speaking practice of the target language. Simply, it consolidates what has been studied and puts it into practice. Many students in the interviews indicated the importance of practicing the target language with their friends as they feel more secure in this way. Also, they discussed that the main challenge that many learners of English encounter is being shy to practice the target language. They are afraid of making mistakes in front of other, so they quit easily.

Such an issue has drawn the researcher's memory back to when he was at university in his first year. He was fully convinced that the spoken practices of the target language are the key learning factor. This is why he kept practicing freely everywhere. For example, the researcher and his friends entered a restaurant one day. The waiter in the restaurant prepared the table for them and gave them the menu. Spontaneously, the researcher started to smell the spoon in front of him. He got angry as it was smelly. He directly called the waiter and said to him, "Smile the spoon". The waiter asked him to repeat what he has just said and once again he said, "smile the spoon". Then, his friend whispered to him, "Smell the spoon". Although the researcher really knew the difference between "smile" and "smell", he was lacking the environment to practice such language. Finally, the waiter got the message and changed the spoon for him. When speaking about the importance of the spoken practice, such a story remains fresh in his mind.

The best lesson to learn from the above real story is the importance of the speaking practice to develop one's language. Also, it showed that every learner should have the courage to practice the target language and never be afraid of making mistakes. Mistakes are common and very often people learn good lessons from their mistakes. In addition, the story highlighted the importance of group work to foster learner autonomy. This issue about group work will be discussed in details hereafter.

5. 2 The second and third research questions.

The second and third research question in the study sought to find out teachers' and students' perceptions towards LA. The results revealed diversity of interesting information as follows:

5. 2 a. Students motivation and LA

The majority of students, that is 85%, agreed that motivated English language students are more likely to develop autonomous learning than those who are not motivated. As a matter of fact, motivation is a major factor for better achievement in SLA. Gardner

(1985, p.10) defined motivation as, "The combination of effort plus desire to achieve the goal of learning the language plus favourable attitudes toward learning the language". Although the Omani students appeared greatly motivated to learn English in the questionnaire, a large number of teachers in the interviews complained that most of the students are demotivated towards learning English. So, there is a gap between the two parties regarding the term 'motivation'.

Rost (2006) states that motivation is the 'neglected heart' of language teaching. Many practitioners tend to forget that all tasks and activities which they provide to students are filtered through their motivation. If students are not motivated, learning can hardly occur and the classroom participation becomes pulseless. So, motivation has a tremendous influence in language development. In order to bolster any strategy, including LA, there is a need to develop and innovate activities which help students feel more enthusiastic and motivated to learn. For instance, the students ultimate goal in being autonomous is to be involved in communication with friends and the society. It is likely that their motivation to learn is fostered or sustained when students feel how their learning in class is connected to this goal. Then, there will be an incentive for achieving the target goal.

According to Dornyei (2009), there are three main motivational principles. They are offering rewards and punishment , motivation should be maintained, and motivation strategy is after quality. These principles should be considered as the basis for any relevant application.

The first principle involves tangible motivation like offering rewards or punishment. There are teachers who think that rewards and punishment are the only source of motivation. However, there are many other motivational strategies that teachers can adopt. In fact, adoption of rewards and punishment is considered undesirable tools of motivation by educational psychologists. This method of "carrot and stick" may work in the short run only and may be suitable for very young children, but it may not lead to long term commitments.

The second motivational principle is that generating students' motivation has to be maintained. This means that any motivational practice should be an ongoing activity. It is inappropriate to apply it in a lesson and forget it the other lessons. Also, it is improper to apply it in one task and leave it in others. Students are smart enough to realize this hesitation.

The third principle is that the motivational strategies depend on quality and not quantity. Some teachers are knowledgeable and are familiar with many strategies in

motivation, but they fail to activate them appropriately as they want to apply as many as possible. However, there are many other motivated teachers who depend only on a handful of strategies.

In general, the majority of teachers admit that there is a necessity for motivation to excel autonomy. Meanwhile, they admit that motivation is one of the most serious sources of difficulty (Dornyei,2001). Some teachers are locked in a dual trying to get an answer to the question: How can I manage the content of the lesson with motivation? Indeed, such a question is not easy to answer. It is not the students who want to be demotivated. Meanwhile, teachers have a syllabus to cover and finish on time. Many teachers tend to hurry the process of teaching, so they can finish what they are supposed to cover. They think that there is no time to apply 'motivation'. However, there is no right answer to the inquiry of how to motivate students. Possibly, the closest answer is to have enough flexibility, open teachers who are willing to enhance change and knowledgeable enough to find out the needs of their students.

Autonomous learning is a goal perceived as linked, to motivation (Brown, 2001), to selection of materials (Nunan,1997), and to task motivation (Farrell &Lee,2003). When students feel that they achieve well, their self-efficacies are sustained and as a result, they are motivated and become enthusiastic to perform more or even better. Cheah (2003), adds that the careful selection of tasks and materials is vital for motivating students. Dornyei, (2003, p.4) identified that what makes significant difference in students' motivation towards learning is presenting quality activities for students and choosing content carefully.

5. 2 b. Group work

The questionnaire findings revealed that students underestimated the vital value of group work in the development of LA. In the questionnaire, 50% of students were not with the idea that group work fosters LA. As a matter of fact, group work has got a powerful influence over all members and it can override the students' individual preferences. Jack C Richards (2000, p.108) thinks that cooperative learning (CL) increases students learning. He identifies four distinguished features about CL as follows:

- 1- CL is less threatening for many students.
- 2- Participation in classroom is increased.
- 3- Competitiveness among students is reduced.

4- Teacher's dominance is reduced in the classroom.

Students can get many benefits out of CL which can help them to promote their autonomy. For instance, during the focus group interviews, it was obvious that students were interested in hearing their individual autonomous experience in learning English. Likely, every one of them will try to adopt and develop other autonomous strategies, in addition to the others that are already available with them. Therefore, autonomous learning does not mean learning in isolation only, but also CL can play a significant role. Little (1996) indicates that SLA requires interaction. In short, autonomous learning is not only individual, but it is also social.

In a group work environment, students cooperate together and such gathering can form a supportive community. When applied properly, this leads to a high-performance level of learning for all members. Another merit of CL is that it develops the critical thinking skills of students. Also, being in group work can improve the students interest in the subject matter. Once students get a positive attitude towards the subject matter, their self-confidence and self-esteem are enhanced. Then, students' retention of information is highly improved.

Teamwork, or group work, or cooperative work can be an efficient remedy for insecure, shy, or even uninterested students. During teamwork, each individual realizes that he can get assistance in making his contributions appropriate and relevant. Consequently, this can motivate him to try, participate, and be an active member.

Learner autonomy is fostered in a cooperative learning environment. Instead of leaving all the responsibility to the teacher, students in a cooperative learning environment accept and share responsibilities for their own learning. In such an environment, students are given more opportunities to depend on themselves and adapt the process of their learning. Also, they are taught to assist each other and take different roles in their groups. In their shared learning activities, students have more freedom to discuss and manipulate problems. Then, students will manage to evaluate their strengths and weaknesses with the help of the group members. Finally, students will develop more learning skills. Students in groupwork environment become autonomous learners gradually.

When discussing group work, we need not neglect the focal role of a teacher in helping students to be more autonomous through these types of working activities. The underestimation that students showed in the questionnaire towards working in groups should be further investigated due to its importance. Many educators blame teachers for being reluctant to apply group work. They consider this strategy as a threatening

experience and require many methods of classroom management. Although there are many challenges in conducting group work, teachers need not neglect its potential power.

5. 2 c. The syllabus and LA

The findings in the interviews showed diverse opinions about the syllabus and whether it promotes LA or not. Many teachers in the interview indicated that the syllabus in the Omani schools does not help students to be autonomous. All information is available and attached with the textbooks and students do not need to look for information from other sources like the library or the internet. On the other hand, there were a number of teachers who claimed that there are a few autonomous activities in the syllabus, but they are not enough. However, the questionnaire findings revealed that 84% of students are interested in searching for information beyond their textbooks.

Being an autonomous learner is highly affected by the pressure of covering the syllabus. It is important for the teacher in the Omani schools to cover the whole syllabus from cover to cover. Otherwise, he will be blamed for not covering what he is supposed to teach. Therefore, teachers are bound to follow the scheme of work. On the other hand, students are under pressure of exams. They are required to focus on exams and should pass with high grades. The pressure of covering the syllabus is another challenge for both teachers and students to promote learner autonomy.

As a practitioner in the Omani context, some teachers' vision in the interviews were congruent with mine in regard to the inadequacy of the syllabus to develop LA. During the interview, teachers attributed this inadequacy to many reasons such as lack of resources and unawareness of the importance of LA on the part of both some teachers and students.

Shortage of resources is a real challenge which negatively affects LA and an appropriate achievement of the syllabus goals. For instance, each school in Oman consists of 800 students, on average. The majority of schools have one computer laboratory and one modest library, whereas some schools are without any. Those schools that have computer labs have some regulations that teachers should follow such as early booking. Teachers need to book the lab one or two days in advance as the labs are usually busy. Most unfortunately, when students are asked to search for a piece of information using the net, students and teachers suffer because the internet connection is often weak. The same scenario is replicated at the school libraries. Therefore, students are not interested in looking for information outside the textbook and teachers have avoided giving students activities that require using the net or the library.

Another challenge which has weakened the achievement of the syllabus goals is the unawareness of teachers and students about the importance of LA. Although there are tasks in the syllabus which encourage students to be autonomous, some teachers simply skip them as they feel that they are not important and most of these activities are not included in exams. They are just extra activities for entertainment. Consequently, the majority of students do not pay attention to them.

Furthermore, there is a popular saying, "You cannot give, what you lack or do not own". Likely, teachers who are not autonomous can hardly develop this strategy in their students. Therefore, there is a gap that should be bridged, due to the dramatic role the teacher can play in fostering LA (see my recommendations).

Along the same line, many students are unaware of the importance of LA in developing their second language. Instead, they depend on the teacher to provide them with everything. Although the tendency of the Omani schools to change the process of learning from teacher-centred to student-centred, the majority of students are highly dependent on the teacher and the notion of "learning as students-centred" is just a hope. Hence, there is a need for actual plans to minimize such dependence. Also, it is necessary to provide student with effective skills to raise their awareness of LA. However, it must be a gradual process (see my recommendations). Barbara (2007, p.23) states that, "If autonomy is to be understood as a solution to effective learning, one can consider the constraints and work out solutions, namely there are several degrees for autonomy and that it can be gradually introduced in the syllabus in order to achieve change, but we do not have recipes, we only have strategies to try to foster autonomy.

6. Conclusion

This chapter consists of five parts. It begins with the drawing of some conclusions. Then, it discusses some contributions that the research has made to the field of learner autonomy. The limitations of the study are then presented. Finally, some specific recommendations and suggestions for further study in the field are provided.

6. 1 Conclusion

Learner autonomy has been attracting the attention of researchers and practitioners in the field of ELT worldwide. This is due to its potential and the supportive role it can offer to language learning. Following in the steps of many advanced educational systems, the Ministry of Education in Oman has adopted LA as a new strategy in the hope that it can enhance the quality of education. As a matter of fact, the Chinese proverb which says, "Do not feed me a fish, but teach me how to catch it", can

summarize the main goal of learner autonomy. It simply creates independent learners who are capable of taking lifelong responsibility for their own learning.

The current mixed methods study attempted to explore the understanding and practice of learner autonomy by students and English language teachers at secondary boys' schools in Oman. It specifically investigated the types of autonomous language learning strategies employed by secondary boys' school students and elicited their perception towards LA. Also, it sought to explore the challenges that English language teachers encounter in helping their students to be more autonomous in the process of learning English. These three inquiries were the key focus of the present study.

The study revealed that reading books, using mobile phones and practicing speaking everywhere possible are the most important techniques which foster SLA. Also, it showed that teachers in the Omani schools encountered many challenges when applying autonomous learning activities such as: students' demotivation, a weak syllabus, and students' lack of awareness about LA. Additionally, the present study concluded that students underestimated the potential of group work in LA. The students also thought that English language teachers have a basic role in promoting learner autonomy.

Learner autonomy has also become a desirable goal for the Omani schools. By highlighting this issue, this dissertation will contribute to the research publications on recent developments in English language teaching in Oman. It will also assist teachers, researchers, and syllabus designers to realize the potential benefits of learner autonomy as a prerequisite in all careers worldwide. Confining learning to classrooms and textbooks no longer meets the need of the modern world. Also, assigning the sole teaching responsibility to the teacher is insufficient and does not satisfy today's educational needs. In brief, students today are required to develop autonomous learning in which they are responsible for their learning ,and recognize the saying,' You can lead the horse to the water, but you cannot make it drink". Along the same lines, teachers need to develop a degree of autonomy that creates a supportive environment to promote LA.

The benefits of LA can be achieved in the Omani schools provided that we change and challenge our practices and beliefs about the process of teaching and learning . We need to be open to new ideas and practices. For example, using mobile phones proved to be an effective autonomous strategy which fosters second language learning, as it makes learning more relevant and meaningful to students. Therefore, the regulations of imposing a ban on mobile phones should be seriously reconsidered. Although the traditional role of the teacher as the main source of information has been nominally

substituted by student-centred learning, nothing much has changed in reality. Student-centred learning exists in policy documents only. Teachers practices and beliefs about second language learning in general and learner autonomy in particular should be developed and put in action and not in the policy documents.

Finally, it is the responsibility of the syllabus designers, researchers, and decision makers to realize that language learning and acquisition are a complex process. Learner autonomy could be one solution towards advanced teaching and learning. However, the solution cannot be easily realized and it is unlikely to be found in the short term. Instead, it requires a gradual plan that begins early enough to give voice to the voiceless.

6. 2 Contributions of the study

The present study has addressed some aspects related to autonomous learning with reference to the Omani context. There are some results which have not been explored before in the Omani schools. Therefore, it is useful for the educators and decision makers to recognize and acknowledge the areas which require more focus. Such strategies should be a priority for any future plans and should, if accepted, be urgently implemented in the educational system. For example, autonomous learning activities should be incorporated in the syllabus and they should be made explicit agendas in both short and long term plans. Furthermore, research in learner autonomy is necessary and nationally demanded.

What is more, the study makes an original contribution due to the fact that few studies can be found to have addressed similar issues related to LA nationally or internationally. It is obvious in the study that there were teachers and students who hardly know about this strategy and lack motivation and awareness of it. Shedding light on similar strategies would encourage and raise people's curiosity to investigate and explore it.

In the interviews, students pointed to key issues which need to be given immediate attention from the relevant authority if they really want to tackle these issues seriously. The first, key issue is related to extensive reading and how it can be made a lifelong habit. Through reading, I believe the concerned authority would, "kill many birds with

one stone”, due to the focal role that it plays in adapting learners’ behaviours and beliefs. Another issue is concerned with the ban which was imposed on using mobile phones in learning English during school time. The consistency of ignoring such a popular, valuable, and accessible learning device needs to be reconsidered. The banning of this device will solve nothing regarding the fear of misuses by students as they will use it in some way or another. Instead, a policy guide and ground rules which organize proper uses are essentially required.

Another contribution which can be drawn from the results of the current study is the importance of supportive environments where students can feel motivated and abreast of contents of the subject being studied and learned. The desired motivation would exist in reality and not at the theoretical level when we consider some teaching and learning boundaries such as the syllabus, the classroom, the assessment, and the surrounded society. In the potential environment, students should be considered as an active component in the process of decision making and planning for their learning. However, this responsibility should gradually be vested in the students and teachers should come to recognize students’ new role.

6. 3 Limitations

The researcher recognizes that this research has limitations. First, this study is limited in scope. It explores learner autonomy in a small number of school teachers and students. It was confined to male participants. The researcher could have included a larger number of participants from both genders, male and female , so as to make the findings more generalizable . Therefore, it would have been more reliable to have different views from both genders. It cannot be claimed that the results are consistent with all school teachers and students in secondary schools. The researcher also acknowledges that he had to rely on the teachers' reports about their perceptions of learner autonomy as he did not observe their classroom practices. Additionally, it must be acknowledged that curriculum designers should have been included in the present study to discover their views about LA and how it is applied in the curriculum. This would help to compare between the different views.

5. 4 Recommendations

There are some specific recommendations which can be provided in the present research as follows:

. There should be scheduled open discussions and meetings between teachers and students to find out their needs, preference, goals, and expectations. Such gatherings

would, consolidate the teacher-student relations, prepare them for the future, and raise their self-esteem.

. The concerned authority should develop clear, short and long term plans regarding the encouragement of reading in the local communities. More libraries should be established and have specific objectives. Also, access to reference materials should be made easy. Mobile libraries and second hand books fares are modern ways of marketing for such project. Books should be everywhere for people to read and competitions should be considered to motivate people in general, and young children in particular.

. It is necessary to integrate mobile phone applications into the course contents and materials. Out-of-class activities should additionally be integrated into the plans of language programmes and considered as a potential type of learning.

. To promote the trend of learner autonomy among students, teachers themselves need to have a degree of autonomy. Professional training workshops on how to be autonomous can raise and improve teachers' awareness. Also, it will be an effective channel to update teachers with the latest information in the field. Computer software technicians and syllabus designers can organize and manage such workshops .

. Each school should be equipped with self-access centres. Such centres are an ideal environment to motivate students to be autonomous learners.

. Demotivated students should receive proper counselling at school with the help of their parents. Specific learning activities and developing in students the notion of negotiations about their learning are possibly the most effective solutions to overcome their negative attitude.

. It is obvious that Omani teachers and students depend and rely heavily on the textbooks. Therefore, they play a key role in the desired development of teaching and learning. Decision makers and syllabus designers should initiate programmes which can assist teachers to be autonomously oriented in their teaching style and therefore teach for autonomy. This approach requires a gradual and smooth transition, which is likely to be a long-term plan. At the beginning, a guided autonomy syllabus seems to be ideal. Autonomous skills should be gradually and carefully introduced taking into consideration the different levels and ages of students. Additionally, the researcher proposes that the first chapter in all textbooks which are relevant to students learning begin with activities about learner autonomy development. Most importantly, orientation courses for students need to be introduced once they enter the secondary

level. These courses would teach students what to learn and how to learn in the new stage.

. Students should be placed in classes based on their levels of competency in English as well as their ages.

6. 5 Suggestion for further research

This research on LA in the Omani context has evoked some issues which remain open to further research and various interpretations as follows:

- Due to the large number of demotivated students as teachers in this study claimed, further research is needed to explore what language learning programmes are necessary for students to reach the expected level of motivation.
- Further research is also needed to explore the effectiveness of activities which are done out of school to foster students' autonomy.
- More research is also needed to further investigate the effectiveness of integrating English language learning activities with mobile phones technology in and out of EFL classrooms.

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Appendix 1:**The Questionnaire (in Arabic).**

✓ الرجاء اختيار ما تراه مناسب من العبارات التالية بتظليل الدائرة أو وضع علامة

غير موافق بشدة	غير موافق	غير متأكد	موافق بشدة	موافق	
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	1 أقوم بأداء واجباتي المدرسية باستمرار.
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	2 الانشطة والواجبات المنزلية التي تتطلب استخدام الانترنت تعزز فكرة التعلم المستقل.
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	3 الطلاب الذين يمتلكون الدافعية الاكبر لتعلم اللغة الانجليزية يكونون في وضع أفضل لفكرة التعلم المستقل من الطلاب ذو الدافعية الاقل.
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	4 يعجبني المعلم الذي يطلب منا البحث والنظر عن مواضيع وأنشطة من خارج الدرس.
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	5 للتعلم المستقل دور فعال وايجابي في اعطاء الطالب الفرصة للإكمال التمارين والانشطة بصورة فردية.
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	6 العمل بنظام المجموعات يدعم ويعزز من التعلم المستقل.
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	7 للمعلم دور أساسي في تطوير التعلم المستقل.
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	8 التعلم المستقل يتطلب أن يقيم كل متعلم نفسه ومهاراته.
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	9 اعطاء الطلاب فرصة المشاركة في نوعية الأنشطة والمواضيع التي سوف يدرسونها تساهم في دعم وتطوير فكرة التعلم المستقل وتجعل التعلم أكثر جاذبية.
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	10 التعلم المستقل يكون أكثر فاعلية عند اعطاء الطالب الحرية في تحديد نوعية التقييم الذي يرغبون به.

<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	المكتبة لها دور جوهري في تنمية التعلم المستقل.	11
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	عدم الاهتمام بالتعلم المستقل قد يؤثر سلباً على مدى تعلمك للغة الانجليزية.	12
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	التعلم المستقل خارج الفصل الدراسي أكثر فعالية من داخله.	13
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	يعطينا المعلم بعض الطرق والتقنيات للتعلم المستقل.	14

نهاية الاستبانة

The Questionnaire (in English)

Please, give your opinion about the statements below by ticking or highlighting one answer for each.

Statement	Strongly agree	Agree	unsure	disagree	Strongly disagree
1 I always do my English language homework .	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2. Homework and tasks that require students to use the internet foster learner autonomy.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3 Motivated English language students are more likely to develop autonomous learning than students who are not motivated or interested.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

4. I appreciate English language teachers who urge and encourage us to search for information and activities outside the textbook.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
5. Learner autonomy plays an important role in learning English language as it allows students to learn more effectively compared with other strategies of learning English.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
6. Group work promotes learner autonomy.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
7. English language teachers have a basic role in fostering learner autonomy.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
8. To be autonomous, students need to develop the ability to evaluate their own learning.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
9. Learner autonomy is fostered when students are given the opportunity to choose the activities they would like to do.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
10. Learner autonomy is fostered when students have the freedom to decide their learning assessment.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

11. Independent study in the library is an effective activity that develops learner autonomy.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
12. Individuals that lack autonomy tend not to be good language learners.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
13. Learner autonomy can develop more effectively through learning outside the classroom.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
14. My English language teachers provide us with strategies and methods to become autonomous learners.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

The End

Thank you

Appendix 2

Consent Form

The researcher is conducting a study on Learner Autonomy as a part of his master degree in education . This will involve exploring teachers' and students' understanding and practices related to this area in the English language subject.

If you consent to participate in this study, you will be asked to be interviewed by the researcher. The interview of up to half an hour will be conducted in October and November,2016, at a time convenient to you. No special preparation is required for the interview. Each interview is going to be audio-recorded and in during, the researcher will take notes. These recordings and the notes taken by the researcher will be kept totally confidential. Your participation in this research will have no effect whatsoever on the MA. Anonymity will also be insured. Your participation in the research will not be made public. When the research is written up the researcher will ensure that you are not able to be identified as no reference to personal names will be used. In addition, the researcher only will have access to the data collected for the project. Confidentiality will be maintained at all times. Any data used in reports or publications about the project will be for illustration purposes only. The researcher invites you to share the finding of the study with him by contacting him on this email: waheed.almuqbali81@moe.om.

Participant's consent; the participant has been given a signed copy of this form to keep.

I agree to participate in this research.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix 3:

Teacher's interview

- 1- What do you know about learner autonomy?
- 2- Do you apply it on your students? Explain.
- 3- Does the syllabus encourage autonomous learning? Give examples.
- 4- What are the challenges in implementing and fostering learner autonomy at cycle 3 schools in the English course ?
- 5- What are the solutions which can be adopted to overcome these challenges?

Appendix 4:

students' interview

- 1- How much time do you specify for learning English daily?
- 2- As good students, what are the methods and strategies that you adopt to study English outside the classroom? Can you order them in term of their importance?
- 3- Does your teacher provide you with some methods, pieces of advice, or strategies on learner autonomy?
- 4- Do you have any suggestions in regard to fostering learner autonomy among students in English language subject?