Investigating the Perceptions of English Language Learners in Relation to Developing Learner Autonomy: A Case Study of Student Language Teachers in Kuwait

By

Anfal Mohammed Aljaser

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School of Education, The University of Sheffield

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Abstract

Developing Learner Autonomy depends on the learner's metacognitive awareness and beliefs about their own language learning experience. The SLTs' perceptions in this research were used to build up a reflective analysis of whether their past language learning experience is affecting their current learning and how it will affect their future teaching. This research managed to provide a valuable qualitative understanding for developing learner autonomy in the existing Kuwaiti public educational environment, based on exploring SLTs' perceptions. SLTs showed that, despite the limitations of the traditional educational environment, learner autonomy can still be developed.

A qualitative research methodology was selected using a single descriptive case study approach. Several data collection techniques were used including in-depth individual semi-structured interviews, reflective journals and a focus group discussion to support the individual methods. In total, fifty six SLTs from the English Language Department in the College of Basic Education took part in this research. A qualitative thematic data analysis approach including modified existing theories to suit the research investigation such as 'force field theory' and 'I-statement analysis' was used.

The research discovers that the Kuwaiti educational environment is not supportive of the development of learner autonomy; however, the SLTs have developed learner autonomy personally. The findings have been divided according to the four main research questions as follows. Findings of Research Question One indicated that the environment does not support the autonomous language learning. Findings of Research Question Two showed that the majority of SLTs have faced hindering forces during their language learning. This led to the findings of the third research question which presented the definition of 'authentic autonomy' where forty-four (78.5%) of SLTs expressed that they themselves had the biggest role in the development of their own language learning in the face of the hindering forces. Finally, the findings of the fourth question proposed partial autonomy as an autonomous context-based definition.

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my beloved family for their love and faith in me and their encouragement. I cannot forget to thank the one person in particular who opened this path for me, a person who supported and encouraged me from the beginning. I want to thank him for his presence, support, and continuous love. Dad, I love you.

Acknowledgment

First and foremost, my deepest thanks and gratitude goes to God for providing me the opportunity, means and determination to complete my PhD journey. Without His will and generosity, none of this or any other accomplishment would have been possible.

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Finally, I should not forget to thank all the students who accepted the invitation to be involved in this research and everyone who was involved in making this possible.

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Glossary

ELL	English Language Learning
ELT	English Language Teaching
SLT	Student Language Teacher
KU	Kuwait University

Chapter 1 Introduction

This chapter will present an overview of the background information of the current thesis starting with the context of the study and the educational background which will be discussed in 1.2. The problem statement will be argued in 1.3 to open the path for the discussion of the aims and objectives of the thesis in 1.4. The research questions will be then presented in detail in 1.5. In 1.6 the significance of the research will be discussed which will be followed by a brief outline of the six chapters of the thesis in 1.7. Finally, I will comment on the importance of my positionality as a previous SLT and as a researcher and how it shapes the current study.

1.1 Introduction

The development of learner autonomy in recent years can be seen by the growing appreciation that the subject is receiving from different educational systems around the world. It is becoming increasingly important as the need for lifelong learning gains more prominence, necessitating the development of knowledge and skills for effective and autonomous learning (Benson and Voller, 1997; Dam, 1995; Little, 1991). The growth of interest has varied, depending on the contexts, cultures, and different degrees of implementation. Studies about learner autonomy have been conducted around the world, and the idea of developing learner autonomy and teacher autonomy has also captured the interest of researchers, as recent evidence has shown (Ben Ghaith, 2013; Al Ghazali, 2007; Al Hilal, 2005) in the Middle East.

The development of the education system in any part of the world does not occur overnight. The links between the past and the present are sometimes very hard to

separate, because the present is a continuation and a result of the past and a sign for the future. Therefore, this research preferred to work with the SLTs rather than try to study the system or the curriculum. If the teacher is prepared, s/he will be able to deal with different circumstances and situations that they might face either in their ELL or future ELT.

1.2 Background and Context of Current Study

My research took place in the Kuwaiti educational environment and specifically in the English Department in the College of Basic Education. The reason behind the investigation of the current context will be discussed in more detail when I present my positionality in 1.8. The main reason is the relatability between my own experience and the participants' experiences in a similar educational context. In addition my future employment will be in the same context. This is argued to be a positive advantage in producing quality qualitative data resulting from being close to the participants (Marshall and Rossman, 2006).

In this part of the thesis I will present three layers of the contexts under investigation starting with the general background information of Kuwait, then the educational stages that the learning and teaching process went through during the years. The third layer will present the College of Basic Education as the main investigated environment where the SLTs were studying for their final year.

In the light of the rapid changes occurring in education and technology today, important questions are being raised in respect of the adequacy of current teaching and learning approaches to meet the demands of the ever-changing social and academic landscape. This is especially the case because "the ability to learn is more important in today's environment than [having] a set of knowledge" (Pemberton,

1996:1). Concepts that have aroused considerable interest and debate among educators in the quest for qualitative improvement in the teaching and learning environment have been the issues of teacher autonomy and learner autonomy. Holec argues:

> "Since its inception over three decades ago, the autonomy approach in language learning/teaching has fostered a powerful investigation drive that has led to the questioning and the revision of an ever increasing number of pedagogical tenets, assumptions and evidences at all levels of the learning/teaching process" (Holec, cited in Lamb and Reinders, 2008:3).

The ongoing investigation and interest has captured the attention of the world with a number of studies being undertaken in many countries; the following are some of the important studies: in Asia, such as in China (Jiang, 2013; Bailey, 2001; Wei, 2011; Littlewood, 1999 and 1996); Japan (Aliponga et al., 2011; Endo, 2011); Europe such as in Denmark (Dam, 2011), Turkey (Arikan, 2011; Bayat, 2011; Dislen, 2011; Tutuis, 2011; Balcikanli, 2010 and 2009; Sert, 2006); in Argentina (Porto, 2007); and the United Kingdom (Smith, 2000; Lamb and Reinders, 2008 which also includes other regions). The interest also found its way towards the Middle East and the Gulf countries, which share to a certain extent similar educational systems to the one in Kuwait (ALHilal, 2005); these include Oman (Borg and Al-Busaidi, 2012), Saudi Arabia (AL Asmari, 2013), the United Arab Emirates (Alghazali, 2010a and 2011b), and Egypt (Hozayen, 2011). There are numerous studies in Arabic on the subject of improving learning and teaching processes, although very few that discuss the learner autonomy approach in the Kuwaiti public educational context, which this research wanted to investigate. The following section will provide a brief overview

of the educational system in Kuwait and the College of Basic Education so as to provide background details of the environment in which the research took place.

1.2.1 State of Kuwait Profile Information

Kuwait is as an Islamic country in which almost all of the population are Muslims. Modern Standard Arabic is considered to be the official language used in the Kuwaiti context. Kuwaiti Arabic is Kuwait's colloquial dialect. Kuwaiti Arabic is a mixture of different dialects affected by the different nationalities living in the country. Arabic is used as the main language for teaching and learning in the public education system. English is considered to be the second most widely understood language in Kuwait. The English language is used and spoken by most Kuwaitis in schools, universities, at home, and in daily life. Figure 1.1 shows a profile map of the State of Kuwait, including the geographical location, population, and political status (Kuwait Ministry of Planning, 2012).

The State of Kuwait is a sheikhdom in the Arabian Gulf region. Located in the north-western corner of the Arabian Gulf

It is surrounded by the Arabian Gulf (East), the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (South and West), and Iraq (North and West).

The State of Kuwait is about (17,818 square kilometres) with a population of both Kuwaitis and non-Kuwaitis reaching 3,065,850 (Census Year 2011)

In June, 1961 Kuwait declared its independence from Britain and in July joined the Arab League.

Figure 1.1 State of Kuwait Profile Information

1.2.2 Educational Stages

His Highness the late Amir Sheikh Abdullah Al Salem Al Sabah received the blueprint of the constitution of the State of Kuwait in 1962 that included the article describing Kuwaiti public education as being compulsory, free, and a right for all Kuwaitis, as the following quotation shows:

> "Education is a right for Kuwaitis, guaranteed by the State in accordance with law and within the limits of public policy and morals. Education in its preliminary stages is compulsory and free in accordance with the law". Kuwait Constitution 1962, Article 40: Compulsory and Free Education. (Al-Diwan AlAmiri, 2013)

A teacher is capable of influencing and encouraging the learners, especially in the early stages of their educational lives. It is a profession that is highly respected in the Islamic religion. The Islamic religion regards teachers as messengers who show people in societies the purpose and way of life and living. In the beginning of the eighteenth century Kuwait was introduced to education. It was considered as private education, performed in places such as the "katateeb" and in "mosques". At that time education was limited to reading, writing, simple mathematics, and reciting and memorising the Quran. Education was offered so that individuals could meet the needs of the labour market, although education at first was limited to males only. At the beginning of the twentieth century females started to receive education too.

Formal education began when the Al Mubarakiya School, followed by the Al Ahmadi School, were established[1]. Both schools were financed by Kuwaiti merchants who were seeking to provide a more Western style of education to fulfil the demands of developments taking place around the world. The Kuwaiti

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[1] See Table 1.1: The Most Important Historical Milestones of the Kuwaiti Educational System

government started to take charge of the formal female education process in 1936 by promoting it to a fundamental right for all Kuwaitis. The Kuwaiti Constitution specifies in Article 40 that education is guaranteed and encouraged by the State, and it is available for all citizens. Thus schooling became compulsory in 1965.

General education for both female and male Kuwaiti learners during the four stages of their educational lives is free. The first three compulsory educational stages are the primary, intermediate, and secondary levels, in which the learner ranges from the ages of six to seventeen. The fourth stage is optional but still is free for the Kuwaiti learners, and this stage is represented in the universities and colleges where the learners are between the ages of 18 - 21. The schooling system in Kuwait is a yearly system in which the learner's progression depends on their final grades in the end-of-the-year assessment. Figure 1.2 below is a clarification of the Kuwaiti educational system and the learner's age at each level (Ministry of Education, 2012).
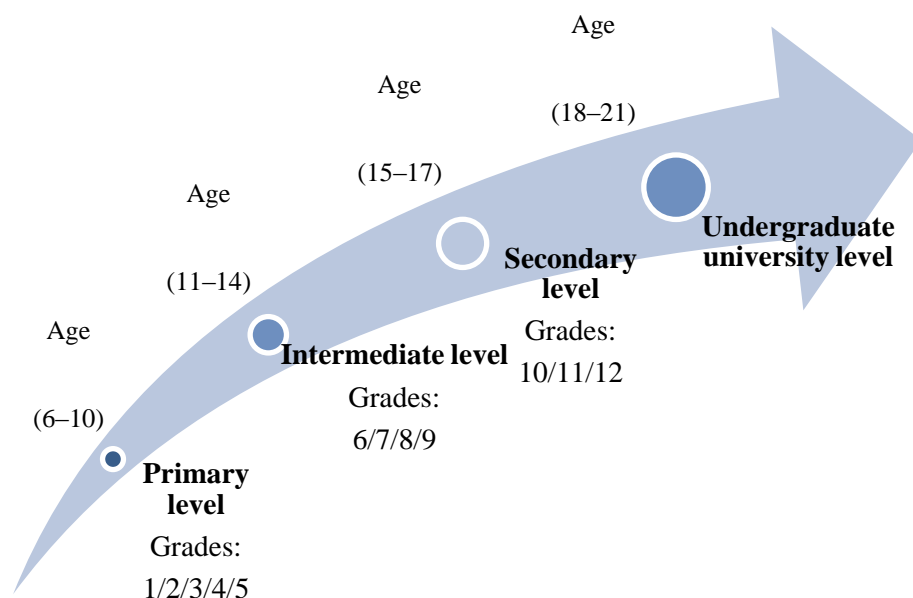
Figure 1.2 Kuwait Educational System

This research is investigating a government institution, the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training, particularly the College of Basic Education where almost all of the participants are graduates of public schools. As a result, it is worth mentioning that the annual statistics from the Ministry of Planning (2011) show that the majority of Kuwaitis (357,273 students) attend public schools from the primary to the secondary level. The eagerness to be educated is growing in the majority of Kuwaiti people, which has resulted in Kuwait giving a lot of attention to the educational system.

The educational systems of Kuwait are trying to compare and contrast different teaching and learning approaches and techniques to find the ones that best suit public education in the Kuwait context. Figure 1.3 (see below) shows the institutions responsible for the Higher Educational Services in Kuwait where two Higher Educational institutions responsible for teacher-training were established. The two educational institutions are Kuwait University (KU) and the College of Basic Education. Both train teachers to be able to teach at the kindergarten, primary, intermediate, and secondary levels.

The difference between the two institutions is that Kuwait University has colleges other than the education college such as the business school, engineering and arts school, while on the other hand the College of Basic Education only graduates teachers. The current research will only focus on the College of Basic Education as the field where it will take place. More detail is given in the following section.

Ministry of Education:

• Supervision of public and private sector education until the end of the secondary stage
• Supervision of scholarships granted to non-government officials

The main two teacher-training institutions in Kuwait.

Public Authority for Applied Education and Training

• Responsible for vocational education in the applied education institutes and training centres (including the College of Basic Education)

Kuwait University

• Responsible for higher education

Figure 1.3 Institutions Responsible for the Higher Educational Services in Kuwait

The most important historical milestones of the Kuwaiti educational system are summarised in Figure 1.4, including the opening of the first school for girls, and the first female Kuwaiti teacher qualified to teach in schools (Kuwait Ministry of Education, 2012).

The most important historical milestones of the Kuwaiti educational system	**18th Century** Teaching and learning in the mosque (Al Masjed)
	1887 Alkatateeb learning (Quran – Arabic – basic maths)
	1911 Al Mubarakiyah primary school (first formal school)
	1921 Al-Ahmadiyah School was founded
	1922 First formal public school
	1936 First school for girls
	1941 First student scholarship to Bahrain
	1942 First female teacher (Maryam Abdul malik Alsaleh)
	1943 First Islamic Studies Sschool
	1953 First secondary school (for boys)
	1954-1955 Intermediate school
	1955 First kindergarten
	1956 Alqabaliya School for girls
	1959 First secondary school for girls
	1965 Education made compulsory
	1966 Opening of Kuwait University
	1967 New law issued regulating private education (Arabic and foreign)
	1993 Shifting the teacher institute to the College of Basic Education
	2000 Opening of the private universities
	2002 Opening of the English major department in the College of Basic Education
	2004-2005 Educational ladder changes to 5 primary - 4 intermediate – 3 secondary

Figure 1.4 The Most Important Historical Milestones of the Kuwaiti Educational System

1.2.3 The Context of the Study: College of Basic Education

The Public Authority of Applied Education and Training was established in 1982 which aim to "provide the state with national, well-trained, technical manpower in a way that meets the needs for the development of the country" (College of Basic Education, 2009/10: 16). The College of Basic Education is one of The Public Authority of Applied Education and Training Colleges that take responsibility for the preparation of teachers, which will be the main focus of attention in this research.

Student teachers study for four years, i.e. eight semesters, to become qualified to teach in kindergarten, primary, intermediate, and secondary schools. A high premium is placed on the student teacher's mastery of the appropriate competencies needed to be able to teach, as can be seen from the following aspirational statement: "It is expected that the student will acquire many of the professional techniques that they would gain during fieldwork training" (Translated from the College of Basic Education, 2007: 24).

This research focused on the female SLTs, specifically in the English Language Department. The reason for choosing only female students was a natural development that was predetermined by the research context, as there were no male students in the English Language Department. The reason for the lack of male participants does not imply that teaching is seen as mainly a career for women in Kuwait, but because there were not enough male students in the English department which was then closed through lack of applicants. The following Table (1.2) is an annual statistical abstract showing in numbers the admitted, registered, and graduated female SLTs from the College of Basic Education.

Female SLTs in the College of Basic Education	Total Counts
Newly admitted students	2,231
Registered students	8,733
Graduate students	1,480

Table 1.2 Annual Statistical Abstract of the Female SLTs in the College of Basic Education (2011/2012)

The English Language Department aims to achieve several objectives as listed in the Student Information Guide. The special objectives of the English Language Department are:

1. Preparing a teacher to be academically, educationally, and psychologically qualified to teach English as a foreign language, particularly in the primary stage.

2. Enhancing students' basic language skills (conversation, reading, and writing).

3. Building the scientific as well as the literary aspects of the English language.

4. Providing the student with knowledge of ELT methodology, theoretically and practically.

5. Training the student to teach English using different skills and modern approaches.

6. Providing the student with the educational and psychological knowledge required for building his/her personality as a teacher.

7. Introducing the students to the English culture, emphasising its significant role in ELT.

8. Training the students to use modern educational technologies for the major role played in the teaching process.

9. Recognising the importance of using up-to-date sources of information so as to enhance self-learning skills (College of Basic Education, 2009/10: 412).

The Guide for Applied Education and Field Training paints the ideal picture of what should occur during the SLTs' engagement with learners, when they are expected to be able to "respect the learners' individual abilities by listening to them and giving them the chance to express their opinions without being domineering. S/he is also expected to encourage their learners to seek information from other sources" (translated from the College of Basic Education, 2007: 24). These examples capture the official intent of the College of Basic Education to empower the learners to assume an active part in the learning process by developing self-learning skills as highlighted in Point 9 above. These ideals point to a desire to have autonomous learners who can articulate their own viewpoints. This research examines how far this is translated into their daily teaching transactions by investigating the SLTs' perceptions of their ELL and learning how to teach during their educational life especially in the College of Basic Education.

To assist the SLTs to develop the learning of the target language (EL) with respect to their own language learning and future language-teaching career, essential changes are encouraged to take place as mentioned in the 10th aim for the College of Basic Education shown below:

1. The most important characteristics of the SLTs in the English language programme are twofold. The first of these is that, with regard to education, the SLTs have to recognise that there are a variety of theories, methods, and approaches of teaching English at a school level, with principal focus being put on the communicative approach (College of Basic Education, 2009/10: 414). The second relates to general knowledge, in which SLTs should have full use of different information sources and reasonable general knowledge that conforms to their academic and professional status (College of Basic Education, 2009/10: 415).

The possibility of transforming the traditional teacher-centred classroom into a student-centred one in higher education is something that the SLTs are encouraged and motivated to try in their future classrooms. In order for them to become more self-reliant as learners and future teachers in learning and teaching the language, the SLTs have to critically reflect on their own language learning process first. This might result in their understanding that the learning process is a lifelong process, and not just something to be memorised to be examined on. As is stressed by Spratt et al.: "a motivated student would have a greater interest in what was to be learnt and thus be more ready and able to take on responsibilities in the language learning process" (Spratt et al., cited in Cam Le, 2005: 6).

Within the context in which English is taught as a foreign language, as it is in Kuwait, and with a desire for change, it needs to be borne in mind that the educational context has a large effect on the learners' learning process. The passive role that the language learners might adopt "is more likely to be a consequence of the educational contexts that have been or are now provided for them, than of any inherent dispositions of the students themselves" (Cam Le, 2005: 3). Educational

contexts are thus encouraged by researchers to consider the possibility of promoting learner autonomy, which might give the language learners an active role in their learning process.

The desire to shift from teacher-centred to student-centred learning has a number of merits, given the existing flaws in the traditional teaching methods used in the Kuwaiti educational system as will be discussed in the problem statement of this study (section 1.3). If the Kuwaiti Educational Ministry is to encourage taking the initiative and following different learning processes in teaching, it would appear natural that learners must be able to manage their own language learning process in order to develop a lifelong learning approach. This will help both the learner and the teacher find and experience different methods of language learning that suit their needs and abilities. Such opportunities could help increase language learning both inside and outside the classroom. Enhancing language learning through reflective thinking by the use of different autonomous learning methods is the ultimate goal of this research. Promoting autonomous learning might encourage SLTs and their future learners to find stimulation in learning a language autonomously.

From my previous experience as a learner and teacher in public schools, the learners in the Kuwaiti educational system currently have limited exposure to autonomous learning, as it is not something normally practised. However, this does not mean that they could not have practised it without knowing that they did. Generally from my own experience learners tend to see education as something that should be transmitted to them by the teacher rather than as something for them to discover on their own. So, having been taught themselves in a traditional way for a long time, the language learners tend to accept the teacher as having full control of the learning process. This gives them little experience of being able to make choices or take

control over their own learning, because they are expecting to continually get directions over their learning process.

Nonetheless, the Kuwaiti Ministry of Education is making efforts to keep abreast with changing times in terms of pedagogic goals by consciously seeking newer ways of making language teaching and learning more productive (Al-Mutawa, 2003). To this end, it has started to change the system by fostering communicative language teaching, aiming to transform the focus from the teacher to the learner. The extent to which these objectives are being achieved in the teaching and learning situation is one of the aspects that this research has sought to unravel from the perspectives of the SLTs.

SLTs are encouraged to combine their theoretical knowledge with their practical skills, their understanding with their competence, to be able to develop themselves and become equipped to facilitate their lifelong learning to achieve a high standard. Goals and aims are set for the learning and teaching process to achieve good ELL and ELT because the result of any school or learning process depends on the teaching skills that are used. So, a teacher with well-developed language teaching skills will be able to help in getting better educational outcomes from the Kuwaiti schools. This brings us to the main reason why this research has chosen to work with and study the SLTs and not their educators, the curriculum, or the educational policy, because to me the starting point of the learning process is the teacher; this will be discussed further in the following sections.

1.3 Problem Statement

In Kuwait, it is becoming increasingly difficult to ignore the fact that the educational environment, including the educators, is lacking the necessary components of a student centred classroom. And since the ELL is only taught once a day in the Kuwaiti early public educational system, the learners need to be motivated and encouraged by a variety of teaching and learning methods in addition to it taking place in a well-equipped educational environment. The language learning atmosphere in the Kuwaiti context is currently somewhat discouraging for the students because ELL is seen as an obligatory task. A major problem with the public educational system is that it focuses on teaching the learners language learning skills that are related to learning for the purpose of passing examinations, disregarding the development for lifelong learning element.

The result is that most of the students in Kuwaiti public schools score good grades in the English language examinations, but lack the ability to use the language in their daily lives (Al Othman and Shuqair, 2013). It has been noticeable that the education system in Kuwait needs to make extensive improvements regarding the preparation of learners to becoming partially self-reliant in their own ELL (Al-Hilal in 2005). It has been highlighted that the rapid changes in technology and easy access to information are having a serious effect on how the SLTs evaluate the effectiveness of their own current context, which lacks the major components of a supportive learning environment (Ben Ghaith, 2013).

Having discussed above the possible hindering forces of the development of SLTs' learner autonomy I will now argue why I choose to take an interest in learner autonomy as a potential concept that will develop the language learning process. Shaw argues the importance of autonomy in developing the learning and teaching

process: "Autonomy has increasingly come to be accepted as a universal moral good, incorporated in national curricular guidelines, and accepted widely and uncritically as what we should be doing" (Shaw, 2008: 188).

My main interest in exploring language learner autonomy is that I believe it depends on the learner's metacognitive awareness and beliefs about their own language learning experience. The SLTs' reflections of their own language learning process during their educational stages (past) could affect how they perceive their current and future language learning. Because most of the SLTs are an outcome of the previously mentioned context, there is a need to focus on exploring how to overcome their traditional learning experience through the possibility of the idea of fostering learner autonomy in the current educational environment (College of Basic Education). It is expected that learner autonomy might be a valuable concept to develop and improve the learning and teaching processes. When it comes to applying learner autonomy, each context might approach this concept of change from a different perspective that suits the existing educational environment.

Focusing on where this research is taking place, most studies in the Kuwaiti context are about language learning; however, far too little attention has been paid to the perceptions of the SLTs concerning their ELL. These studies have produced some evidence of the existence of learner autonomy in language learning (Al-Hilal in 2005), but there are still insufficient studies about the perceptions of SLTs in the College of Basic Education regarding their ELL for the purpose of developing learner autonomy there. The controversy about applying learner autonomy to collectivist contexts will be tested by conducting this research in the Kuwaiti public educational context. Investigating the SLTs' perceptions and reflections might help in giving an idea about the forces that they are facing during their educational life

and what are they doing to overcome those forces. This will help in showing to what extent the SLTs are autonomous when it comes to not only their own ELL but also how they will develop their learning and future teaching. The following section will explain the aims and objectives of the current study to answer this challenging question.

1.4 Research Aims and Objectives

Before presenting the research questions in the next section I will first discuss the aims of the research in addition to the research objective in the attempt to clarify in more detail the purpose of conducting this research. It is important to emphasise that the SLTs' autonomous learning is investigated in relation to their language learning.

1.4.1 Research Aims

The aim of this research is to investigate the existence of student language teachers' (SLTs') learner autonomy in English language learning (ELL), by exploring their perceptions of previous and current educational lives and the effect on their prospective learning and teaching.

It also seeks to examine the introducing of learner autonomy within the existing educational system in the Kuwaiti context, particularly on the English Language Department in the College of Basic Education.

1.4.2 Objectives of the Research

1. The objectives of this research are as follows:

2. To explore current perceptions of SLTs in the College of Basic Education regarding their own ELL in relation to learner autonomy during their educational life (past – current – future).

3. To explore the forces that influence the SLTs becoming autonomous learners.

4. To explore the potential for learner autonomy as a concept that could lead to qualitative improvement in the training and practice of SLTs in the College of Basic Education in Kuwait.

5. To facilitate critical reflection on practices by SLTs so as to contribute to qualitative improvement in the development of the SLTs as learners and teachers of the English language.

1.5 Research Questions

As it will be discussed in more details in section 1.8, my previous experience has led me to develop an interest in the concept of learner autonomy in addition to the major gap found in the literature related to learner autonomy in the Kuwaiti context. To exploring learner autonomy in the Kuwaiti educational system, certain topics should be argued and investigated. The research questions are divided into four parts, with each part exploring an aspect of the SLTs' ELL and ELT processes. The following sets out the research questions and the justification behind each one.

Research Question One: Exploring SLTs' perceptions of learner autonomy

What are the perceptions of SLTs about their own ELL and teaching experiences in the Kuwaiti public educational context, with special reference to the place of learner autonomy?

First the research attempted to explore the SLTs' perceptions of learner autonomy by investigating their perceptions about their own experiences in ELL in the Kuwaiti public educational context in relation to learner autonomy. This is based on the

SLTs' personal experiences in learning the English language during the two main phases of their educational life: the past phase through primary, intermediate, and secondary school levels; and the current phase at the College of Basic Education, where they are learning the English language and how to teach it. The examination also wanted to see how they intend to learn and teach the English language in their future English language classrooms when they graduate.

Research Question Two: Understanding the development of learner autonomy

What factors encourage or hinder the SLTs in the development of their own learner autonomy?

This research question focused on understanding the development of learner autonomy by investigating the forces both hindering and driving the SLTs' language learning and future teaching processes; their personal previous, current, and possible future perceptions, and how they dealt and will deal with forces and difficulties in their educational life in relation to learner autonomy.

Research Question Three: The practical aspects of learner autonomyWhat practical and appropriate aspects should be used to enhance the SLTs' own learner autonomy?

The research then sought to explore the practical aspects of learner autonomy revealed by the SLTs in terms of what they have been doing to develop their ELL over the years.

Research Question Four: Reflection and future vision

How will the SLTs' reflections on ELL in their previous and current educational life affect their perceptions about the future development of their own ELL and ELT in relation to learner autonomy?

This question sought to link the outcome of the previous questions to gain a complete view that looked into the relationship between the SLTs' perceptions of the previous two phases of their educational life and the future phase. I also wanted to investigate their reflection and future vision, seeing how previous perceptions could and did influence the future vision. From the SLTs' point of view, by what means could their perceptions about their ELL and ELT change in the future depending on previous experiences and knowledge?

1.6 Significance of the Research

The significant contribution of this research is that it can draw out important findings for the field of applied linguistics in addition to the area of autonomous language learning. After having the chance to search and investigate the topic in relation to the Kuwaiti context it was clear that this research could be one of the first studies to be undertaken on the subject of SLTs' perception about learner autonomy in the Kuwaiti public educational context. Therefore, this research was conducted to fill the gap found in the literature related to the students' language learning and teaching processes. This research focused on investigating important areas in different stages of the SLTs' educational lives, including the past, the current position, and the future to create an in-depth knowledge of the relationship between the three areas, in relation to shaping the SLTs' perceptions about their own language learning and teaching.

This research and its results can help in improving ELL in the Kuwaiti public educational environment, which has some weaknesses according to previous studies and current SLTs' perceptions that need to be examined. Doing so will help in raising knowledge about fostering learner autonomy to develop the learner's

language learning. The research will propose recommendations resulting from the findings that will help in developing the Kuwaiti public educational policy, standards, and guidelines that can be used to promote and enhance the educational system by fostering learner autonomy.

The findings of this research will offer a deeper insight into the three areas of the students' educational lives (past, current, and future), which will give us a holistic view of how the SLTs in the Kuwaiti public context might promote language learning in relation to learner autonomy. That might help the academic community to become aware of the possibility of fostering learner autonomy to assist the Higher Education authorities in their strategic planning regarding teaching and learning in public Higher Educational institutions. Additionally, the research findings will help provide guidelines and recommendations for potentially introducing learner autonomy to the SLTs in the College of Basic Education during their four-year study course, to be able to graduate and then teach the language to their future learners in public schools.

The outcome can also help ongoing and future researchers by being one of the bases for their studies about SLTs in the Kuwaiti public educational environment, as well as in similar educational contexts, i.e. in Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf (GCC) and other Arab countries. Studies that focus on shifting from a traditional learning and teaching atmosphere to a more efficient collaborative learning environment (Ben Ghait in 2013) can also benefit from the current research findings in relation to current students' learning activities and needs. Furthermore, this research has developed a possible data-analysis procedure that has investigated the language learners' educational background, driving and hindering forces, aspects of autonomous language learning, and the learners' reflection and future vision that

might help other researchers to identify an overview of the learners' perceptions concerning their autonomous language learning and teaching.

1.7 The Outline of the Thesis

The thesis contains six chapters as explained below:

Chapter 1: Introduction. This chapter has begun with an introduction to the context of this research. This included a brief outline of the Kuwaiti educational system followed by an introduction to the context, specifically of the College of Basic Education, in which this research took place. Then this chapter looked into the research problem statements, which lead to the research aims and objectives. The research questions and the significance of the study were later discussed. The chapter will also present my positionality in the coming section, which will highlight my background as a researcher, and articulating how and why I chose this research topic.

Chapter 2: Literature Review. This chapter will review key areas of the relevant literature, which is discussed under four main sections. The first section centres on learner autonomy in language learning, consisting of understanding learner autonomy, the link between teacher autonomy and learner autonomy, the teacher's role in the traditional English language classroom (misunderstanding the role – the shift in roles), and learner autonomy aspects. The second section focuses on misconceptions about learner autonomy, which will discuss the sociocultural implications of learner autonomy, followed by a diagnostic view of autonomy learning in the State of Kuwait. Next comes a discussion of SLTs' perceptions of learner autonomy, including the shift in roles focusing on the learner's role in the traditional English language classroom and aspects of learner autonomy. The final two sections discuss fostering learner autonomy in relation to the methods of

preparing SLTs to foster learner autonomy and the factors affecting the development of learner autonomy. The chapter will end by discussing reflection and learner autonomy. All the above sections of the literature review were planned in relation to the research questions to help in identifying the major points raised in the field of learner autonomy. The literature review is also constructed in a similar method to the research questions which could also help in the discussion of the findings.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology. This chapter presents a discussion of the research design and the methods used to answer the research questions. The chapter begins with an overall explanation about social science research, with the epistemological and ontological assumptions of the research. The next section clarifies the use of triangulation of the qualitative methods, using a case study. Details of the sampling, the methods used, including interviews, reflective journals, focus group discussion, and field notes will then be presented. The final sections will highlight in detail the ethical considerations and the data-collection process.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis Methodology The chapter will also clarify theoretical approaches used to present the collected data including the transcribing of the data and the process of manual analysis to produce the themes and codes. This is divided into four units, including exploring SLTs' perceptions of learner autonomy, understanding the development of learner autonomy (Force Field Analysis), the practical aspects of learner autonomy, and reflection and future vision (the I-statement).

Chapter 5: Findings and Discussion. This chapter presents the main findings obtained from the data with a discussion that is developed in relation to the relevant literature. The sections will be organised as follows: the first section explores SLTs' perceptions of learner autonomy at three academic stages, the past, present, and

future. The second section discusses an understanding of the development of learner autonomy that covers the driving and restraining forces. Then the practical aspects of learner autonomy are divided into personal and organisational perspectives. The final section presents SLTs' reflection and future vision, using I-statement analysis.

Chapter 6: Conclusions. This chapter will give a holistic picture of the research, summarising the main findings, strengths and weaknesses, recommendations, opportunities for future research, and the closing statement.

1.8 Positionality

It is important to discuss my positionality, as it plays an important role in the foundation and direction of this research. The importance of an understanding of positionality has been strongly argued by Mills et al. (2010: 886) who state: "It is vital to understand the positionality of the researcher and research participant involved, because it will affect the outcome of the case study". The research examined a critical topic that is similar in large measure to my own real and lived experiences. The background of the participants in the current research is not only related to my personal experiences as a student in public schools, but also related to my reflections on the way I learned, was taught, and was trained to teach the English language in Kuwait University (KU) teacher-training workshops, as well as the experiences I encountered during the practice of teaching and learning in the field as a teacher.

Prior to embarking on this research, I had the opportunity to study in two different educational systems in two different countries: the United Kingdom (from 1992 to 1994 and 2007 to the present); and Kuwait (from mid-1994 to 2005), which made me familiar with the characteristics of the learning and teaching approaches in use in

both countries. After returning to Kuwait in 1994, I gained admission into a public intermediate school at the age of twelve. Although I did not know a lot about learning and teaching approaches at that age, I still managed to notice a difference in the way I was being taught. In Kuwait the teacher would read out texts or provide students with additional information to be written down and memorised for examinations. The information was mainly spoon-fed to us, and the question of self-reliance and its prospective contribution to better learning was rarely used by the teachers in my school. Ultimately, we were not taught lifelong learning to support us in our future Higher Education, such as a university level in which learners are expected to be self-reliant to a certain degree, in order to draw maximum benefit from the university experience.

After graduating from KU, I began teaching as an English language-teacher in a primary public school. In the two years (2005 - 2007) of my teaching, I encountered significant difficulty in encouraging my learners to partially rely on themselves in learning the language both inside and outside the English language classroom. I realised that there was something missing that needed to be researched, although at the time I could not put a finger on "learner autonomy" as being the central problem. The apparent confusion in practice kept me looking for possible answers. That quest led me to read and research widely on various ways of improving my teaching and learning experience, but I still had many unresolved questions to answer.

As a result of the continual search in literature and practice, I arrived at a tentative position where the practice of teaching and learning could be integrated in a more structured way with the teacher being a key player, by virtue of their professional training and being well positioned to guide students' learning. A critical lens that was emerging was one which posited that if the teachers were equipped with the right

experiences of self-reliant, critical thinking and reflection and if they were given the space to facilitate and guide their students in a way they deemed appropriate, they would be capable of making the most of their environment so as to develop their students' language learning abilities. To be able to bring about this change, I felt it was ideal for me to investigate this issue further and an opportunity presented itself when my proposal for further research in this area was accepted by The Public Authority of Applied Education and Training.

In that I have an independent personality, I have tried and succeeded to a certain extent to become an autonomous learner, but I did not realise until recently that I was practising it only to a certain extent and that I was practising it personally and for personal reasons—not related to my ELL in school. So as a recent newcomer to the concept of learner autonomy and getting to know more about it, I have to say that I was not really encouraged to experience it, either as a learner in any of the learning modules or as an English teacher in public schools.

If I look back at my initial learning and teaching experiences, having been taught in a traditional way, I was not encouraged to exercise the basic principles of learner autonomy at any level of my educational life. As for my teaching experience, as mentioned above I have tried to make my students become the centre of the class, but still felt that I did not give them enough opportunity to exercise their autonomy. So, having the chance to learn autonomously during my Higher Education stages, I was intrigued by it, because it was something that was missing for me and I wanted to learn about it to fill a gap.

So, the reason I chose to work with SLTs in this research is because I believe that it would be really helpful if they had the chance to personally experience learner autonomy and teacher autonomy themselves. For them, being at this Higher

Educational level, it would be a great opportunity for them to be prepared as autonomous learners and as future autonomous teachers. Reading the conceptual literature is different from having first-hand experience. They should be given the chance to become responsible for their own language learning and development through a reasonable amount of guidance and fostering from educators.

For me personally, having had the chance to experience autonomous learning at a postgraduate level, I began to appreciate every step I took, knowing that I did it by myself. I love and appreciate all the work I do and feel proud that I have set the goals, planned it, sought guidance from my peers and educators, and have reflected on it. Looking back at my educational life, I would say that it would have been helpful if I had been encouraged to think critically, to reflect on my learning using reflective diaries, and to have had a role in my own learning process.

1.9 Summary

This chapter presented the holistic view of the background of the context in which this research takes place. It also highlighted the reasons why this research is taking place by raising the problem statement and the aim of the research. The research questions were discussed in detail to give an idea of the areas investigated in the SLTs' language learning. The contribution of this research was also presented in addition to my positionality which explains the main reason behind conducting this research. Having the chance to discuss the above will help in understanding the choices of the literature topics raised in the next chapter.

'Autonomous learning is not an absolute standard to be met, but a goal to be pursued...' Boud (1981: 23)

Chapter 2 Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

Building on the previous chapter where the background information of the research context was discussed in addition to the aim of conducting this study, the literature review will be presented to support the questions raised. The interest in studying language learner autonomy was a result of personal and professional experiences that I have been through as mentioned earlier in 1.8. The research mission is to explore the SLTs' perception of learner autonomy in relation to language learning. In order to be able to argue the aim of the research the following literature review will be presented.

The overall goal is to raise awareness of the benefits of learner autonomy in language learning for the purpose of searching for an alternative solution to learning and teaching the English language in the Kuwaiti public educational environment to foster lifelong learning. SLTs in the College of Basic Education need to be encouraged to experience reflection, critical thinking, and personal independence as an important step for them to develop their autonomous language learning. The need for a supportive educational environment that could help in developing learner autonomy in the Kuwaiti public education sector is one of the reasons this research was conducted.

This chapter is divided into six major themes, starting with presenting and discussing the learner autonomy concept from the point of view of language learning. The aim is to comprehend the concept of learner autonomy by knowing the relationship between learner autonomy and teacher autonomy. In addition, while there are

significant arguments that support the concept of learner autonomy, on the other hand there are some important criticisms related to the concept that will also be addressed, e.g. understanding the shift in roles of both the learner and the teacher to be able to fully understand how each individual acts in the autonomous language-learner process. This will lead to discussing the misconceptions about the learner autonomy concept when it comes to a specific context; a diagnostic view of autonomous learning in the State of Kuwait public education will then be presented.

The literature about the SLTs' perceptions and attitudes will then be presented in relation to their motivation to learn the language autonomously. After the SLTs' perceptions are known, the process of how to foster and develop learner autonomy will be discussed. In addition, how to prepare the SLTs to foster learner autonomy, together with the hindering and driving factors that influence the development of learner autonomy, will then be presented. Finally, the role of reflection and critical thinking in relation to the learner's future vision of learner autonomy will be discussed.

2.2 Learner Autonomy in Language Learning

A literature review of the field of learner autonomy is the essence of the current research interest. This section will thus start with a brief background to the development of the concept of learner autonomy. The definition stages of the concept will be discussed theoretically within the field of English language learning. Looking at the SLTs' perceptions of their language learning process means that the practical side of learner autonomy will be discussed in relation to fostering the concept. The main reason for the literature review is to gain general knowledge of the related research that took place in the same field in order to fill the gap (1.3).

The importance of learner autonomy has been argued to be an essential requirement in the process of language learning and teaching (Lamb and Reinders, 2007 and 2006; Benson, 2007, 2001; Little, 2007, 2004 and 1991; Palfreyman and Smith, 2003; Smith, 2000; Dam, 1995; Dickinson, 1992 and 1987). In the literature it is generally agreed that learner autonomy refers to the learners taking charge of their own learning, as argued by Holec in his definition of autonomy in the field of language learning (Schmenk, 2005). The concept of learner autonomy in language learning was first defined by Holec (1981). The debate about this concept started when Holec presented a well-known definition (1.2) for this concept in 1981 where he argued that the autonomous learners are the ones with the ability to take charge of their own directed learning (Varol and Yilmaz, 2010: 238; Cotterall, 2000: 109).

Autonomy could mean different things to different people. The meanings differ, depending on the level to which the learners are willing to take control of their own learning; they also differ depending on the tools they use to overcome the learning obstacles, and the educational environment in which the learning takes place. In a book that argues the subject of learner autonomy quite extensively (Barfield and Brown, 2007), the conception of learner autonomy has been posited as having a number of strands. The first of these strands conceptualises learner autonomy as self-directed learning. The second variant, put forth by Benson (1997) (in Barfield and Brown, 2007) perceives autonomy as an individual capability, accomplishment, or trait that manifests itself as a goal that can empower learners in other aspects of their lives. With the increasing interest in learner autonomy in language learning in the last three decades, many discussions have taken place about the importance of learner autonomy in language-teaching and learning (Benson and Voller, 1997; Dam, 1995; Little, 1991). Benson (2007: 34) argues that the "overriding concern to

produce evidence for the effectiveness of initiatives designed to help learners become more autonomous" is the reason for the continuous need for the development of learner autonomy. Richards and Schmidt (2002) defined learner autonomy as the learners being able to take responsibility for how, when, and where they are learning, supporting Benson and Lor (1998: 3) who argue that the learners have "control over learning, which comprises active involvement in the learning process, responsibility for its control over factors such as time frequency, pace, settings, methods of learning, and critical awareness of purposes and goals".

The third variant raised by Benson (1997) sees autonomy as being co-constructed by the learners and teachers in the process and content of learning. In becoming an autonomous learner the learner should have the ability to take responsibility for his/her learning, by reflecting upon and evaluating their own learning process and being able to understand that they have a number of choices in achieving their learning goals. Having the chance to look at what suits their own needs does not mean that they have to go through the learning process alone. Autonomous learning involves the teacher in the learning process playing a supportive role as Little (1991) points out, by raising the learners' awareness, critical reflection, decision-making as well as independent actions. While the three strands cited above are important, nonetheless sight should not be lost of a fourth dimension that Toohey (2007) mentions, which emphasises the context in which the teaching and learning process takes place. The learners should be encouraged to express their perceptions about their language learning and the context they are in. The students should be encouraged to find their voices and identities (Riley, 2003), in the context in which they are learning the language (Little, 2004). All these conceptions are useful in enlightening practitioners about the possibilities that can result from adopting an

autonomous disposition to the teaching and learning experience, resulting in more satisfying learning states.

It is accepted that a general definition of learner autonomy is the ability to take control over one's learning process, as defined by the majority of researchers. The process of taking control is determined by the learners themselves and the environment they are in, because developing learner autonomy depends on the learner's metacognitive awareness and beliefs about their own language learning experience. As a researcher, it is essential for me to determine my own perception; how I see this research to be going. I have to state that to me, learner autonomy could not be taught or learned in the sense of formal learning; rather it can be facilitated for the learners who in return will choose to become either active or reactive (Benson, 2011). In the context that this research is going to take place (Kuwaiti College of Basic Education- English Language Department) most of the learners are an outcome of public schools where the main language used in teaching and learning is Arabic except in one class per day when they practise the English language. Because of that it is crucial that the learners are stimulated, motivated, and challenged in a different way for them to become autonomous language-learners. They need to be motivated to take control to choose, to experiment, to fail, and then to succeed in knowing what methods, strategies, and tools best suit their learning abilities, limitations, and circumstances. All the previous features are needed in the learner's educational life in order to succeed, but in this research specifically, because learning the English language and learning how to learn and teach it as a foreign language is the focal point,   looking for "educational initiatives that are designed to stimulate or support the development of autonomy among learners" (Benson, 2011: 124) is highlighted. Those initiatives are generated from the SLTs' perspectives of their language

learning during the phases of their educational life so that it can be used to help in fostering the learner autonomy rather than teaching or forcing it.

2.3 Misconceptions about Learner Autonomy

In an attempt to map out the field of learner autonomy, criticisms of the concept will be discussed. A critical approach to learner autonomy requires a combination of valid and helpful aspects of autonomy in the learning process, specifically language learning in this research. Although there are powerful and convincing arguments presented in the educational field that are in favour of learner autonomy, still there are other arguments that criticise the concept. While governments and teachers in educational institutions may devise strategies and policies intended to support autonomous learning in theory, opposing beliefs and misunderstandings can discourage the best efforts of teachers and learners in practice.

The learner's ability to choose appropriate learning objectives and their attempt to pursue them autonomously with the proper support are considered important features of the autonomous language-learner. However, some researchers perceive autonomy as an unsatisfactory educational goal and giving the learners control over their learning is considered as a kind of neglect of duty towards the learners on the teacher's side (Hand, 2006). Students' taking control of their learning is one of the essential principles of autonomy and the use of educational methods such as technology is usually believed to enhance and support autonomous learning (Schmenk, 2005; Little, 1996). The teacher's role in the learner autonomy is important and the attempt to modify the learning process by replacing the teacher's role with electronic resources (Milton, 1997) is also understood to be unsatisfactory, which in return is seen as a limiting rather than an enhancing step in the learning

experience. The professional support provided by the teachers will always be needed by the learners, whether they are autonomous or not because the role of the teacher in learner autonomy in facilitating the learning process does not necessarily mean overthrowing the student's autonomy (Pennycook, 1997).

Although Hand (2006) did not discuss language-teaching specifically, he talked about education in general and criticised autonomy as being a goal for education. Firstly, he supported his argument by claiming that learners are able and willing to take appropriate action in pursuit of their aims; although being autonomous in the sense of being free to exercise choice, which is desirable, is not always the case in education because it is always related to circumstances and limitations. Then Hand argues about whether it would be a wise move to encourage learners to develop the habit of depending on their own judgement rather than that of the experts and also to oppose authority, especially in the beginners' level of education. The thought of resisting the concept of autonomy comes more from concerns over withdrawing the role of the teachers as supports to the learning process than from concerns about learner independence. Because Hand (2006) for example argues that, professionally speaking, though learners differ in their level of autonomy and their need for support, teachers failing to support the learners in the learning process are seen as negligent.

Learner autonomy is not a method of learning in isolation (Benson and Voller, 1997; Boud, 1987; Page, 1992; Little, 1991). Rather it is the learner taking charge of aspects of their learning process in parallel with the teacher. This takes us to the main reason why I conducted this research with the SLTs. It is a priority in this research that the SLTs' willingness and readiness to take charge is considered as a first step but there are other elements that should be considered, especially in the context in which this research is conducted, such as the pedagogy and the environment. Learner

autonomy is not simply about being alone. The SLTs should be able to understand and accept the need to become autonomous learners, critically reflecting on their learning and taking responsibility for decision-making. Acting alone in taking actions that best suit their own needs and abilities, the teacher should always be there, taking the role of a facilitator supporting and directing their learning process as argued by Al Othman and Shuqair (2013: 125); teachers modifying their "perception of learning tasks, instructional methods, and motivation may all lead to [a] more encouraging, interesting, and accommodating classroom environment, which seems to promote success in second language learning".

2.3.1 Sociocultural Implications of Learner Autonomy

The different variations and definitions mentioned above reflect upon and support the view that learner autonomy is considered to be a developmental trend. Every learning process that takes places in or outside of the educational environment is developing because of a specific personal goal. The learning experiences are modified by the learners themselves, depending on their political belief, language learning philosophy, their use of technology, and personal learning objectives. Modern-day literature such as that of Smith and Ushioda (2009) has emphasised the importance of learner autonomy. They argued that this concept needs to be 'localised' and researched in certain social contexts. They continued to explain that different practices of fostering this concept should be studied and presented because different individuals in different socio-cultural situations perceive the concept of learner autonomy differently.

Hofstede (1986) in his model of cultural differences argued the dimensions of individualism versus collectivism cultures. He defined the first as cultures that "assume that any person looks primarily after his/her own interest and the interest of

his/her immediate family (husband, wife and children)" (Hofstede, 1986: 307). On the other hand, the collectivist cultures understand the current research environment as one in which "any person through birth and possible later events belongs to one or more tight 'in-groups', from which he/she cannot detach him/herself". Hofstede also added that the individual in a collectivist culture tends to protect "the interest of its members (family, clan, or organization), but in turn expects their permanent loyalty" (Hofstede, 1986: 307), which relates to tribal traditions practiced in the Kuwaiti culture. Hofstede concluded that the collectivist society is more of a tightly integrated group, while the individualist society is rather loosely integrated.

From a broader view, learner autonomy has been defined as "the ability to take charge of one's learning" (Holec, 1981, cited in Benson and Voller, 1997: 1). Nonetheless, an important observation to bear in mind in any discussion of individual autonomy is the importance of the context in which the learning takes place, a point very well presented by Toohey (2007). He raises the important point that learner autonomy brings to mind the socially situated agency where learners and teachers are located in communities that both constrain and enable their access to desirable identities, resources, and practices. Other studies argue that some forms of autonomy may be educationally objectionable in certain specifically collectivist cultures. "Autonomy in language learning is sometimes presented as a western concept unsuited to contexts, such as those in east Asia, which have different educational traditions" (Littlewood, 1999: 71).

Hofstede (1986) argued this point by comparing the differences in Teacher/Student and Student/Student interaction related to both the individualism and the collectivism cultures. Table 2.1 presents an adapted version of Hofstede's comparison. Although not all the points mentioned by Hofstede (1986) in the table represent the Kuwaiti

educational system and culture nowadays, still the traces of a collectivist environment show. The traditional educational environment still dominates the public sector. Although I agree with some of the characteristics pointed out by Hofstede when describing the collectivist culture, on the other hand I see that the Kuwaiti context can also be seen described by some of the individualist characteristics, if not all. The problem is that although the Kuwaiti environment in my opinion has the good characteristics of the individualist culture, it still hangs on to the bad traditional collectivist aspects, mainly when it comes to education.

Differences in Teacher/Student and Student/Student Interaction Related to the Individualism versus Collectivism Dimension		
Points of comparison	**Collectivist societies**	**Individualist societies**
Learning level	-The young should learn -Adults don't	- Permanent education
Learning expectation	Learn how to do	Learn how to learn
In classroom student – teacher communication	Only answer when called personally by the teacher	General invitation from the teacher to speak when they want to
In classroom student – student communication	Small groups	Large groups
Learning strategies	Formal harmony in learning situation at all times	Educational confrontation and conflict can be practised
Educational purposes	Education is a way of gaining prestige in one's social environment and of joining a higher status group ("a ticket to ride")	Education is a way of improving one's economic worth and self-respect based on ability and competence
Teachers' treatments	Expected to give preferential treatment to some students (e.g. based on ethnic affiliation or on recommendation by an influential person)	Teachers are expected to be strictly impartial

Table 2.1 Differences in Teacher/Student and Student/Student Interaction Related to the Individualism versus Collectivism Dimension adapted from (Hofstede, 1986)

The traditional rote learning and teaching methods have naturally been taught to language-learners in the Middle East. Because of the set curriculum, time limits, and deadlines, the teachers do not have enough space to develop their learners' learning experience. Nevertheless, the educational system in Kuwait is trying to apply improvements and modifications to how the English language is taught in the public sector. Al-Hazmi (2003) argues that the philosophy of learning the English language in the Middle East is in need of change. It is necessary that more modern techniques should be applied to overcome the obstacles that face the learning and teaching process, such as the out-of-date curricula, unqualified teachers or support team, traditional teaching and learning methods that develop underachievement, dependence, and relying on memorisation resulting in learners that lack motivation and general knowledge.

The Kuwaiti educational system has shifted from a teacher-centred to student-centred approach in the public schools' curricula. It is also keen to move towards developing a more autonomous learning educational environment in theory. This transformation is intended to develop learner autonomy in English-learning as a foreign language in addition to transforming the teachers' role to be able to adjust to their role as autonomous language-teachers. When it comes to autonomy in language learning, there are assumptions about how different cultures affect the autonomy of their members. Riley (1988) questioned how learners from different cultures face difficulties in accepting autonomous learning. Riley linked the learners' readiness to accept autonomy to their ethnic background. Western educators are categorised as fostering individualism, critical thinking, and reflective thinking. Individualist and collectivist' cultures are equal but different. Pennycook (1997) argues that different

kinds of autonomy can differ from one culture to another. What Western cultures see as an autonomy aspect is not necessarily the same in other cultures, and vice versa.

Although the concept of learner autonomy started from the Western culture, a lot of attempts are made in the far eastern cultures and initial studies have been made in the Middle East, especially in Kuwait (Alhilal, 2005). Asian cultures are considered as collectivist, depending on memorisation and preserving knowledge. Cultural considerations were taken into consideration when autonomous learning was introduced in the United Arab Emirates by Pennycook (1997) indicating that cultural beliefs can affect the learner's willingness or lack of willingness to adopt learner autonomy. In order to prompt learner autonomy, the language-learner's political and cultural issues should be taken into consideration.

Learner autonomy is an individualist concept (Riley, 1988), but at the same time it promotes group work. Jones (1995) argues that autonomy is not the goal behind the self-access centre in collectivist Asian cultures, but rather it is the autonomous learning style that the learners learn through group activities that might lead to full or partial autonomy. Benson (1996) supports this by emphasising that learner autonomy is more a matter of decision-making than it is an individual choice. So when we come to talk about the Kuwaiti collectivist culture (see Figure 2.1) then we can say that it has the 'group work' factor but lacks the individuality one (Alhilal, 2005). If learner autonomy is an individualist concept, then does this mean that the culture does not matter? Can the learner learn whether the environment is autonomous or not? Pennycook (1997) argues that the culture does not matter and that learner autonomy can be practiced in the Middle East and other collectivist cultures, but each in their own way and what suits them. Both consider that learner autonomy already exists and can be fostered, but how can we develop it more? (Alhilal, 2005).
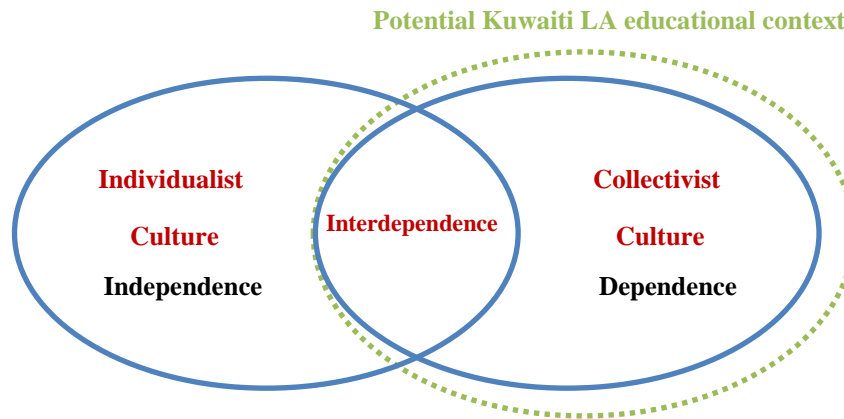
Figure 2.1 The Kuwaiti Educational System in Relation to the Culture Influence

It is an important and complex process to understand how different cultures adopt autonomy in learning a language. Deciding the curriculum can be considered as cultural domination. Fostering autonomy in educational institutions does not mean excluding the teachers' role as mentioned earlier. In addition, it is important to understand that autonomy is not universal, which means that it cannot always be generalised, depending on factors that differ from one culture to another or one individual to another. Even in a non-autonomous educational environment there can be seen an unexpected place for developing autonomy.

Mynard (2006) attempted to test her developing of autonomous learning approaches that she developed from her work in the United Arab Emirates to see if they would work somewhere else, like Japan. This was not an attempt to generalise her findings but rather to compare the two cultures in adopting the same approaches. What was interesting about the learners in both cultures was that they had similar collectivist cultural background characteristics such as being passive learners until college, low English level, age, gender, few native speaker English teachers, reluctance to question the teacher, not expressing their opinions, not being able to evaluate and reflect upon their performance, not knowing their difficulties and how to improve

them, a lack of feedback from the teachers, and non-autonomous background education.

As a result of Mynard's comparison, both groups of learners from the United Arab Emirates and Japan showed improvement in their metacognitive awareness. Both groups showed the ability to take charge of their learning, even if it was for a short time by using online information resources. The learners were able to make decisions about how and what they wanted to contribute to the online discussions. They were able to overcome the obstacles that were forced on them by the traditional learning environments with the help of online resources (Mynard, 2006). So does that mean that the learners are passive or partially active autonomous learners who are in need of a facilitator, a counsellor, or more of the resource instead of a traditional teacher (Voller, 1997), or was it the resources and their non-traditional methods such as online learning that were the affective learning tools? Or was it both?

In saying this shows that collective and individual cultures have an influence on the fostering and developing of learner autonomy; the question is: To what extent? Learner autonomy is about having sufficient freedom to choose from. So learner autonomy will therefore not be suitable for every culture unless it is told how to develop learner autonomy or interpret it. Each culture has a unique character with learners having different backgrounds, and in order to achieve autonomy the learners and teachers have to work together. In conclusion, if both learners and cultures do not show signs of learner autonomy, this does not always mean that it does not exist. Rather it could be there, but is not recognisable by outside observers; all it needs to develop is an appropriate environment.

Collaboration and interaction between the learners, teachers and peers is a crucial factor when fostering learner autonomy; as Little argues: 'learner autonomy is the product of interdependence rather than independence' (1994:435). The current study contributes to the literature by examining SLTs' collaborative learning and how to promote it to achieve learning autonomy in language learning. SLTs' perceptions of autonomous collaborative learning are based largely on their being able to practice it in the language learning environment. The degree to which the SLTs are willing to initiate such learning is by learning how to develop as autonomous learners first as well as collaborating with others such as their peers or teachers.

The framework of autonomy is divided into characteristics in relation to the learner, the learner's ability and their willingness. Littlewood's definition of learner autonomy is "the ability to engage in independent work and the ability to use appropriate learning strategies, both inside and outside the classroom" (1996:431). Littlewood's framework divides the learner's ability into knowledge and skills, whereas their willingness, motivation and confidence are all considered as external and internal forces that play a large part in the learner's ability to develop autonomous learning. Pemberton (1996) emphasised that the learning process does not necessarily happen in a vacuum, while on the other hand self-directed learning does not always mean learning on one's own. Oxford (1997) argues that the sociocultural interactive characteristics of a learner are the ability to learn with and from others, seeking knowledge from others, managing social relationships, and dealing with cultural changes and sociocultural identities.

Learners need to interact, negotiate, and collaborate with their peers to be able to develop as autonomous learners. Promoting learner autonomy in a traditional environment such as Kuwait where this research was conducted depends to a great

extent on peer support as a factor of fostering and development. Dam argues that peer support for learner autonomy is a "capacity and willingness to act independently and in cooperation with others, as a socially responsible person" (1995:1). Being able to learn in a collaborative learning environment can expose SLTs to valuable contributions from others such as their peers both inside and outside of the classroom context. This will also help to provide the learners with enriched learning outputs, and offer more opportunities for practicing the learning process in addition to gaining genuine and effective feedback from their teachers and peers (Oxford, 1997 and Ortega, 2007).

Benson (1996) argues that learner autonomy and self-directed learning have been linked more and more to social and collaborative learning. The learners in this research have learnt their English language in traditional learning settings and largely developed their English language skills in isolation by themselves. Having learners collaborate and share their useful language learning strategies with their peers is an important part of learner training (Al Othman and Shuqair, 2013; Al-Hilal in 2005; Ben Ghaith, 2013); however, peer learning in the Kuwaiti educational system seemed to not be encouraged and had limited use in language classrooms. The Kuwaiti educational system should aim to foster and develop social or collaborative learning such as peer negotiation, peer review, or peer teaching in the language learning classrooms more often. To be able to achieve this, organized support from both the teachers and the programme designers should take place.

The learning context is seen as the social, cultural, educational, and political environment where the learning process happens. The learning context is a crucial factor for develop autonomous learning and teaching because it includes the language teachers, the learner's peers, the classroom atmosphere, the curriculum and

learning opportunities in and outside of the classroom. The learning context can foster or constrain the learner's learning process; thus a learning context with the appropriate tools can help in promoting a collaborative learning environment (Arnold and Ducate: 2006). Both Ben Ghaith (2013) and Swain (1995) emphasise that promoting collaborative strategies in the learning process can "lead learners to reflect on their own language production as they attempt to create meaning" (1995:141). In the following paragraphs the strategies of promoting peer learning to achieve autonomous language learning will be discussed.

Learners need to be prepared to assume responsibility for their learning process and be able to initiate collaborative learning (Dickinson and Carver, 1980; and Holec, 1981).The SLTs in this research should increase their motivation level to take part in collaborative peer learning which in turn should increase their learner autonomy.

Al Othman and Shuqair (2013), Al-Hilal (2005) and Ben Ghaith, (2013) in the Kuwaiti context suggest that the language learners do have the necessary levels of knowledge and skills as in Littlewood's (1996) autonomy framework, but they lacked the motivation, guidance and confidence that hinder their willingness to develop. It seems that the SLTs have the ability to collaborate in such autonomous environments, but they may not have the will to do so as they lack motivation as discussed earlier in the literature review chapter. It may thus be important to provide students with a range of contexts, tools and opportunities in which they can interact to develop autonomously.

Both Lee (2010) and Spratt et al. (2002) agree that the positive experience that the learner goes through during their learning process can have a potential effect on their development as autonomous learners. In addition, helping to encourage and initiate learning collaboration between the learners both in and outside of the classroom can

increase their opportunities for developing peer friendship. In the current research context, it is often a challenge for the SLTs coming from a traditional educational environment to use the English language outside of the classroom context. However, having established and developed the relationship between the learners and their peers can increase learner autonomy in the SLTs by overcoming the fear of language use in terms of English communication.

Little (1994) argued that learner autonomy can be developed by the learner in interdependence circumstances and not necessarily by working on one's own. Ben Ghaith's (2013) study revealed that peer learning could lead to independent action. It also shows that the learners enjoyed practising peer teaching, peer evaluation, and direction within the group work. The collaborative group work created a social context for learners which created opportunities for peer learning both in relation to the subject and also to the use of technology skills in learning. In his study most of the participants confirmed that they have sought peers' advice and help in their learning. It is important to note that peer learning should not be limited to peers in the same group or even peers in the same language class. SLTs who have had the chance to learn from their peers in their language classrooms might also be able to play the role of facilitator and pass on their acquired knowledge, for instance of the English language, to others outside of their educational context. The whole learning process does not have to be based on peer learning and discussion but traditional teaching methods that involve sitting in a classroom for two or three hours without interaction with others can decrease the learners' motivation to become interdependent.

Engaging in online collaborative activities as noted by Ben Ghaith (2013) contributes to an increase of the learners' willingness to use peer feedback as well as participating in the course work. Technology can be an ideal tool to foster learner autonomy in language learning in an informal setting because of the learners' use of technology in their daily lives. The peer collaborative learning and feedback by using technology can help to facilitate peer supported learning. The SLTs in the traditional Kuwaiti educational system are not limited by their abilities or skills in developing their English language but rather are limited by the context-based learning. Lack of communication, lack of teacher and peer feedback, lack of motivation, technology constraints and lack of peer learning hinder their development as autonomous learners.

Communicating with others can generate feedback; peer learning also plays an important role in influencing and motivating the learners in the learning process. This is especially significant when the learners are conducting collaborative assignments where it depends largely on feedback from all the participants. It is likely that students will view their peers as teachers, facilitators or consultants, rather than just learners. Establishing such a collaborative relationship can create a less anxious and more confident learner who feels comfortable to share and learn from others in order to develop. Lee's (2010) study showed that the learners participated in the reflective assignments when they knew that they will be evaluated by their peers and not by their instructor.

2.4 Diagnostic View of Autonomy Learning in the State of Kuwait

As mentioned earlier, although there is a lack of autonomous language learning studies[2] done in the Kuwaiti context, there has been some research conducted about autonomy in learning in general, but not specifically in SLTs' language learning in public education. This is where this research comes to fill the gap, as it is based on the Kuwaiti collectivism culture. Learner autonomy should be first studied and examined before trying to implement it in the Kuwaiti public context. Aspects of learner autonomy should be examined, tested and researched first before taking the step to introduce it to the Kuwaiti public educational system to be able to achieve maximum benefit with minimum risks and drawbacks in a slowly changing educational environment, because "establishing a successful second language learning process is a challenging undertaking that is subject to numerous external and internal aspects in the societies where it is brought in" (Al Othman and Shuqair, 2013: 124). Studies from similar cultural backgrounds will be reviewed to support the information provided. Benson and Voller (1997) explained that learner autonomy is a Western concept shaped by the individualism culture in which autonomy is practiced in politics, philosophy, education, and psychology. By contrast, the public education in Kuwait in which this research is conducted is considered as a collective cultural environment and decision-making is taken by groups of people collaboratively.

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[2] Extensive searches were made before the data collection began through many searching tools including: different databases (e.g. Web of Knowledge, Scopus, ERIC) such as Google Scholar, a search for PhD theses was made through the Ethos index, the online catalogues of the Kuwait University library, University of Sheffield libraries and personal information channels, including friends and colleagues. Different keywords were used to search for information, namely in the Kuwaiti context in relation to autonomous language learning such as "autonomous language learning", "autonomous language-teaching" and "public education", "student language-teachers", "learner perceptions" and "language learning", "aspect of learner autonomy", "factors", "reflection learning", and "fostering autonomy".

In this research the SLTs in the Kuwaiti collectivist educational environment share the same basic characteristics as the learners in Mynard's (2006) study. The current research SLTs are used to having the teacher's presence all the time during their educational life, where the teacher takes the role of decision-making, directing them regarding what and how to study and memorise for examination purposes. The language learning in the Kuwaiti public educational environment lacks the enthusiasm factor, which drives the learners to pursue the language learning outside of the educational environment. Al Othman and Shuqair (2013: 126) argue that motivating the students to become autonomous learners should be a goal as it "plays a significant role in enhancing and expediting students' English language learning in the GCC schools and universities".

Al Othman and Shuqair (2013:126) say that "motivation is a proven means to success in language learning, [in] several countries, like the Gulf States" but collectivist cultures still "remain reluctant to cultivate learners' motivation to learn a second language". Learning a foreign language is a challenging task, especially if it is learnt in a setting in which the target language is not motivated to be used outside of the classroom. They also added that the learners' attitudes and degree of motivation for learning English as a second language differ. This does not hinder the language learning to a certain extent, but at the same time does not help in creating a suitable environment for language learning in the educational surroundings. Al Othman and Shuqair (2013) encourage that the language-teachers should tackle this issue by understanding the learner's attitudes, weaknesses, and lack of motivation toward learning a language to be able to develop suitable strategies that can enhance the fostering of a more positive attitude toward fostering language learning.

Following up on this, it should then be realised that teaching and learning at the school level (the micro context) in the first instance and at the national level where it affects learning throughout the State of Kuwait (the macro context) is affected by prevailing factors in the school and also those that prevail throughout the country. All these factors in their own way determine the extent to which autonomous learning can be successful. As context is very important, this research will adopt a holistic and in-depth approach in which the SLTs' perceptions are perceived from both a historical perspective as well as from current and future perceptions[3].

So what does it mean to be an autonomous SLT in the Kuwaiti public language learning environment? This question will be one of the important questions that the research will seek to pose with the answers being co-constructed by the researcher and the participants through the various data collection methods that will be used, which are further reviewed in the Methodology Chapter. The researcher will approach the research participants with an open mind and will thus discover the extent to which the students are aware of autonomous learning.

Learner autonomy differs depending on the individual culture. It is affected by the contrasting definitions, opinions, and institutional policies that can play a huge role in providing the appropriate support for the language-learners. Attempting to apply the concept to the Kuwaiti public education context without amending it to suit the culture will lead to the learners' and teachers' rejection of it. The characteristics of the Kuwaiti educational environment should be integrated with what is learner autonomy in order for the learners and teachers to have the ability to perform the target behaviour in their own context.

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[3] Fourth research question: the relationship between the SLTs' reflection on their language learning and learner autonomy

The concepts and procedures of autonomy are incomprehensible to many outcomes of the traditional educational system because they are not used to this. The traditional way the SLTs were taught leads them to lack the ability to understand how to apply what they have learnt in real life. Because having the chance to only learn how to do something in theory does not always help when faced in practice with reality and different individuals with different needs inside the classroom. As a result of this, the SLTs might lack a sense of the importance of learning how to learn the language, mainly because of the non-autonomous familiar educational approach that mostly leads them to continue to memorise (learn how to do) to achieve high scores to pass examinations more than equipping them for lifelong learning.

Al Othman and Shuqair (2013) advise that identifying and examining the motivators and the characteristics of the Kuwaiti educational culture will contribute to the success of developing its English-language learners and educators. In addition, having a general idea about the SLTs' motivational qualities will help the educators in developing and designing language instructional courses applying suitable tasks and projects that motivate the learners to learn the language autonomously.

The learners in the Kuwaiti public educational environment need to feel as if they are part of an environment in which they could work collaboratively with the educators. They need to feel belonging and attached to that environment and to other students to be able to feel the responsibility of taking charge of their learning. In order to achieve this, the educators need to encourage the learners to become involved in the learning process. The nature of the SLTs in the Kuwaiti educational system is that of inside the classroom learning. For them to be able to take the language learning outside of the classroom they need help from autonomy learning instruments and techniques. Learner autonomy cannot be forced or taught. Therefore the SLTs need

to practise it during their formal learning activities before and specifically in the College of Basic Education while they are still learning how to teach to be able to accept it and learn its advantages and disadvantages from first-hand experience. It is a valuable opportunity for the SLTs at this level to learn the importance of having the chance to reflect upon and critically evaluate their learning process to be able to develop it. This will help them to understand the importance of learner autonomy in their future teaching practices.

In spite of the conflicting definitions of autonomy that might be interpreted by both the learners and the teachers in the Kuwaiti public educational environment, there is still an underlying agreement regarding the desirability of autonomous learning, not only in languages but in learning in general (Al Othman and Shuqair, 2013; Ben Ghaith, 2013; Al Hilal, 2005). There is a demand for well-reviewed research that looks into the different degrees of support that are needed by the learners and offered by the teachers to achieve a learner autonomy atmosphere that can be conducted and applied in the College of Basic Education where the SLTs are taught how to learn and learn how to teach.

So the question is: What does autonomous language learning mean in the Kuwaiti educational environment? Is it an ambition? Is it a theory? Is it a practice (an outcome)? It is important to stress that the intended meaning of the term 'autonomous language learning' in the Kuwaiti educational environment in the current research is: 'autonomous learning as an informed education through interaction and reflection with educators and peers both inside and outside of the language classroom'. It is also intended to be personally constructed knowledge built autonomously outside of the classroom, filtered through a personally constructed system in which the teacher has the role of a facilitator and a monitor who helps in

further guiding the learner's personal development progress and insights. Looking at the current Kuwaiti public educational environment, it is hoped that autonomous learning will be seen as a type of learning that is characterised by less dependency on the educator for assessment and total support (spoon-feeding knowledge and assertions) and more of personalisation and a self-directed nature in learning the language that therefore enhances rather than hinders the capacity for constructive collaborative participation in the workplace and personal development outside of the classroom.

A constructive collaborative learning process between the two parties that could lead the learners to becoming partially autonomous is what this research aims for (see Figure 2.2). By becoming partially autonomous learners inside the educational environment the learners might be able to take the learning process further to the outside and develop it themselves further for lifelong learning. Littlewood (1999) provides a well-formed definition of learner autonomy, which includes the essence of the definition of autonomy that is what this research is trying to achieve within the current public education system (the College of Basic Education).

Littlewood (1999:71) argues:

> "Students should take responsibility for their own learning. This is both because all learning can in any case only be carried out by the students themselves and also because they need to develop the ability to continue learning after the end of their formal education. 'Taking responsibility' involves learners in taking ownership (partial or total) of many processes which have traditionally belonged to the teacher, such as deciding on learning objects, selecting learning methods and evaluating progress".

Total Autonomy   **Total Dependency**

Partial Autonomy

In the Kuwaiti educational environment

Figure 2.2 An illustration of the Intended Partial Autonomy in the
Kuwaiti Public Educational Context

Critical analysis of the main issues surrounding how autonomous learning is viewed from the Kuwaiti local researchers' point of view has been discussed. In addition, a definition is presented about how this current research pursues the presenting of learner autonomy in the Kuwaiti public educational environment. The attempt is to understand the SLTs' perceptions about their language learning and future language learning and teaching in relation to learner autonomy. The essence of this research and their perception will be discussed next.

2.4.1 Comparison

Two studies that were conducted in the public Kuwaiti educational context will now be discussed in relation to the current research findings. The results of this comparison will help in generating further recommendations and future research. This first research was conducted by Al-Hilal in 2005, entitled 'A Case Study: Investigating the Fostering of learner autonomy in ELT at Kuwait University'. The second study was by Ben Ghait in 2013, entitled 'The Impact of Blended Learning on Female Student-Teachers in Kuwait'. The two studies will be compared and contrasted to see how they can support and enrich the findings of the current research.

These studies were chosen because the findings from each of them complement the findings in this research. First of all, the similarities are that the three studies were

conducted with female participants in Higher Education, where either their learning or teaching was investigated. Both Ben Ghaith's and the current research were conducted in the College of Basic Education, while Al-Hilal's research took place at Kuwait University. The reason for choosing Ben Ghaith's research is that both of the participants were learning for the purpose of future teaching, while Al-Hilal's participants focused on language learning. Although Al-Hilal's participants were not learning for teaching purposes, they were developing personal language learning. And finally, the main focus of the current research is to investigate the SLTs' perceptions about their ELL and ELT for the purpose of developing learner autonomy. Al-Hilal (2005) investigated the fostering of learner autonomy in the learners' and teachers' perceptions and attitudes toward foreign language learning. Ben Ghaith's (2013) research was looking at how the use of blended learning and teaching methods can help in the learners' academic development and also the development of their satisfaction with the learning process.

How could the use of those two studies help in enhancing and supporting the current research findings? Looking back at the four main findings mentioned above, we can say that the three studies all agreed that the educational environment is not suitable for developing the learners' autonomous learning and teaching. Although the studies chosen were conducted eight years apart, the findings from both agreed that the Kuwaiti public educational environment was basically still the same. The goal behind this comparison is to investigate the change that has happened in education from the time the first study (Al-Hilal, 2005) used in this research took place until recently when the second study (Ben Ghaith, 2013) was conducted. The educational environment had not changed or developed significantly to suit today's fast educational growth, which is similar to the current research findings. With that, the

findings indicate that the educational environment is not suitable for the development of learner autonomy; the learners, on the other hand, have developed learner autonomy personally.

The learners in all three studies showed aspects and perceptions about learner autonomy. In Ben Ghaith's (2013) research the students were satisfied and made good progress academically when blended learning was introduced to them as a method of teaching and learning. In spite of that, this research did not interview the teachers and it was purely taken from the learners' perception, but we can still get an idea about how the teachers themselves were practising ELL. Although this is not official, we can still know how they taught it and if they were encouraging the development of learner autonomy. Al-Hilal's research (2005) also showed that the Allied Medical students in Kuwait University showed aspects of autonomous learners by having a positive attitude and taking responsibility for their own learning and teaching. Al-Hilal was the only researcher from the three studies that investigated the *teacher's* perceptions, which showed that they did understand the meaning of learner autonomy and its advantages to the learning and teaching process; nevertheless, they lacked the ability to apply it. This adds to the findings that the current study is presenting, that the SLTs are self-developed autonomous learners (authentic autonomy), but they lack the features of autonomous teaching[4] for the reasons mentioned later in the findings and discussion in Chapter Five. Ben Ghaith's findings confirm the current research's findings of the SLTs' perceptions of what would make a better autonomous language learning environment. Both Participants in both of the two studies (current research and Ben Ghaith) agreed that the use of technology has played a major role in the learners' own self-development

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[4] See Figure 4.4 Overview of the Main Findings

and that implementing it in the educational environment, creating a blended learning process, would help develop their autonomous language learning and teaching processes.

To sum up this comparison, it is worth mentioning how the above discussion might help in analysing future work and recommendations. Having the opportunity to review the research related to the Kuwaiti public educational context and having had a first-hand experience with the participants in the field under investigation, a number of questions have been raised. Why are all the studies ending with the same conclusion? All the studies end up agreeing that the educational environment is not suitable for encouraging autonomous learning and teaching. Would it be that hard to change the policies, in-service teachers, the curriculum, or the students' and parents' attitudes? I had the same questions in mind when I began this research when I was trying to decide where to start. What was the starting point? Who was I to start with? I believed that the SLTs were the best starting point. Was possible to prepare them to be self-reliant, self-confident, and develop critical thinking from the first year in the College of Basic Education. After graduation they might then be ready to harvest the benefits from their learner autonomy and be able to share it with their future language learners. Recommendations and further research to achieve this will be presented in the following sections.

2.4.2 Student Language Teachers' Perceptions of the Autonomous Language Learner

The term 'autonomous language learner' is used to describe the learners' behaviours, attitudes, and abilities toward learning. In this case, the language-learners' acceptance or refusal to learn autonomously can differ from one to another, whether they have experienced it properly or not. For the SLTs to be able to engage with the

new responsibilities that are asked of them to develop their learner autonomy, they themselves need to understand it. It is also useful to bear in mind that teacher autonomy and learner autonomy are closely related, a point that is well argued by Vieira (2006) who says:

> "In my understanding of the expression 'pedagogy for autonomy', 'autonomy' refers to both learner and teacher autonomy. The development of teacher autonomy is not independent from the development of learner autonomy, since one gives meaning to the other."

Not being able to understand what the concept of autonomy means and what its benefits to language learning and teaching could be, the SLTs could potentially resist it. The challenge that will be there will be one of inviting the students to reflect upon the claims of autonomous learning and teaching and to arrive at reasoned personal positions. Having done that "few teachers will disagree with the importance of helping language learners become more autonomous as learners" (Wenden, 1991: 11).

Motivation and the SLTs' self-esteem are crucial factors that should be looked at if we seek to foster autonomous learning in the Kuwaiti public educational system. The SLTs need to have a positive learning environment and relationship between themselves and the teachers so that they can build a positive attitude towards their learning and be encouraged to become autonomous. Dickinson (1995) raises some compelling observations about the need for active involvement of learners in the development of autonomy. This is well argued in the following citation:

"There is substantial evidence from cognitive motivational studies that learning success and enhanced motivation is conditional on learners taking responsibility for their own learning, being able to control their own learning and perceiving that their learning successes or failures are to be attributed to their own efforts and strategies rather than to factors outside their control. Each of these conditions is a characteristic of learner autonomy as it is described in applied linguistics" (Dickinson, 1995: 174).

SLTs' interest in the language has to be encouraged. This could be done using a number of different educational techniques both inside and outside of the classroom with the teacher or with other SLTs to achieve what Smith argued to be collaborative learning with others to develop the suitable attitudes, skills and knowledge necessary (Smith, 2006). SLTs are themselves an outcome of a yet slowly changing traditional educational system. The research, among other things, sets out to explore the SLTs' understanding of learner autonomy and the extent to which it could be reflected in the SLTs' own future teaching. During their four years of study at the College of Basic Education, SLTs have the chance to learn new foundational language learning and teaching methods and techniques. This environment could be enhanced in a number of ways to extend the students' learning in new and creative ways that could enhance their effectiveness.

Dam (2007: 25) talked about her learners (newly graduated SLTs) and how they had experienced teaching a language for the first time, saying that:

"These young teachers claimed that as soon as they were confronted with twenty odd children in their own classrooms, they would forget all about theory and grab hold of methods that they themselves had

experienced either at the training college or, for some of them, as far

back as their language classes as school children – methods that had

nothing to do with learner autonomy."

Encouraging autonomous learning and teaching requires time and effort from both the learner and the teacher. Going back to the 'spoon-feeding' process of learning can always be the easiest escape, but the SLTs should continue to try to give their learners every opportunity that may help to develop their learners' autonomy. To achieve this, the SLTs first need to believe in their learners' abilities and, most importantly, their own to be able to foster autonomy in their language classrooms.

Little (2007: 15) points out that "the essence of learner autonomy is the ability to take charge of one's own learning". However, desirable as this might be, there will be a need to take into account that differences in individual cognitive ability will require that personal adjustments be made. While appreciative that the SLTs' own learners' autonomous learning ability will vary as mentioned above, this does not mean that they will not be affected by it. Considering that autonomy is also seen as an attitude as described by Dickinson (1992: 330), he argued that autonomy is "an attitude towards learning in which the learner is prepared to take, or does take, responsibility for his own learning". On the other hand, Cotterall (1995: 1) stressed the behavioural aspect of the learner autonomy by defining it as "the extent to which the learners demonstrate the ability to use a set of tactics for taking control of their learning".

In this research the SLTs will be asked about their perceptions of their ELL and future teaching during the three stages of their educational life and professional career. The concept of the autonomous language-learner is not only about what the learner is doing but also can include the process of thinking about doing it as argued

by Little (1991: 4): "a capacity for detachment, critical reflection, decision making and independent actions". This is investigated by the fourth research question in the current study, which is used to look through the learners' reflection upon their previous language learning stages to be able to give their future perceptions of how they are going to teach in their future language classroom.

2.5 The Link between Teacher Autonomy and Learner Autonomy

The concept of teacher autonomy came from the discussion of learner autonomy. The reason this is discussed here is that when it comes to the Kuwaiti educational environment the teachers' existence in the language classroom is a must and plays a large role in the learning process. To be able to define learner autonomy, teacher autonomy should be taken in consideration. There is an interdependent relationship between learner autonomy and teacher autonomy, but the promotion of learner autonomy depends on the promotion of teacher autonomy (Little, 2007 and 1995; Vieira, 2006; Aoki, 2002; Smith, 2003; and Benson, 2001). The reason teacher autonomy is discussed here with learner autonomy is not only because they are related (Vieira, 2006), but also because as mentioned earlier the participants are at the stage where they are not only learning the language but are also taking preparative steps to becoming English-language teachers.

The definition of what makes an autonomous language-teacher is explained in three main dimensions outlined by Little (2007). The three dimensions are related in a way to the current research that targets the three phases of the SLTs' development in learner autonomy both within and outside of their educational life, e.g. their learning phase, professional teacher education phase, and teaching in practice phase (see

Figure 2.3). Little started first with an important point that states that in order to become an autonomous teacher one must be an autonomous learner (Phase One).

There is confusion in understanding what 'teacher autonomy' might mean and the relation between teacher autonomy and learner autonomy. The major misunderstanding of what is meant by teacher autonomy is when it is assumed that it is limited to just teachers being autonomous themselves, professionally, as a requirement for them to be able to develop their learner's autonomy (Aoki, 2002). Then again is it enough? What is meant by developing teacher autonomy can overlap with what the meaning of fostering learner autonomy represents (Barfield et al., 2001). Obviously, teachers need to become autonomous as professionals for their future career, but not all of those who are able to do so can practice autonomous teaching while in the classroom. This is simply because being autonomous professionally themselves does not always necessarily help these teachers to promote or foster autonomy in their learners.

To me, one of the major reasons I chose to conduct the research in the College of Basic Education was because it is an important stage where the learners need to experience learner autonomy themselves if they are going to be asked to apply it in their future teaching. A point that is also supported by Little (2007) in his second dimension is when he argues that autonomous teachers should be able to reflect upon and self-manage their teaching process as much as they did in their own learning process (Phase Two – Three). This shows that professionally the teachers might apply the same amount of autonomy in their language-teaching as they did in their own language learning. This is not always the case, because we cannot assume that all of the SLTs have experienced learner autonomy during their language learning in their previous educational stages; this is something that is likely to

happen with the current participants, as it could be that most of them are an outcome of public schools and are studying in a public college.

Little (1995) concludes in his third dimension that the autonomous teachers should also learn to be able to deal with the variety of the target language discourses used in their future language classrooms, explaining that a successful autonomous teacher is always "... autonomous in the sense of having a strong sense of personal responsibility for their teaching, exercising via continuous reflection and analysis the highest possible degree of affective and cognitive control of the teaching process, and exploiting the freedom that this confers" (Little, 1995: 179) (Phase Three).
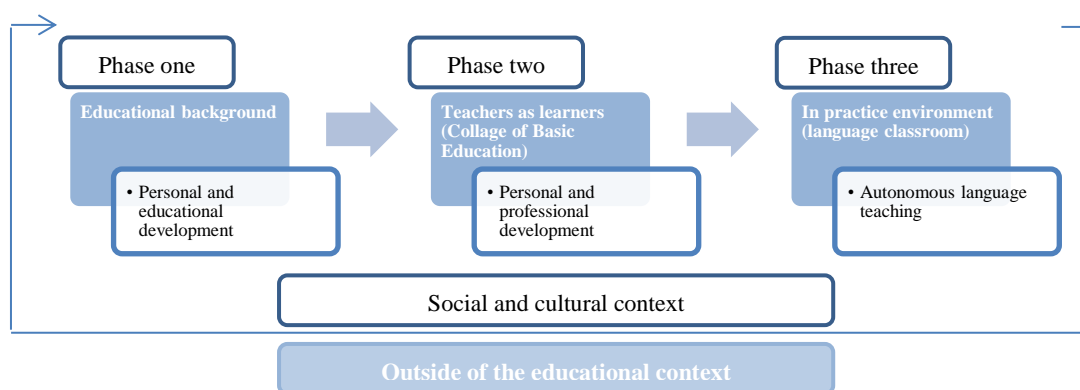
Figure 2.3 The Three Phases of the Development of the SLTs' Learner Autonomy

In the context of the College of Basic Education where the current research was conducted, it is worth mentioning that the SLTs were students in public schools and are currently students in a public college, which means that they might have been exposed to only a limited amount of autonomous learning and teaching in their educational phases due to traditionalism. Going back to Figure 2.3 above, autonomous learning can still take place in parallel with the traditional education context, whether personally in and outside of the classroom or fostered in the language classroom in schools.

The notion that autonomy is a co-constructed relationship between the learner and the teacher in which the learner is encouraged to take part in his own learning by taking some charge of it is supported, as mentioned earlier, by Littlewood (1999) when he argued that the autonomous learner is able to take ownership (partially or totally) of his/her learning process. The definition of teacher autonomy can have two meanings, but at the same time both meanings are interrelated in way (Barfield et al., 2001). It is argued that an autonomous teacher, while developing and enhancing autonomous learning in the learners, is also trying to have control over what is being done. For the teachers, to experience autonomy at first hand and then trying to develop it by acquiring the right skills, can prepare them to move the students toward autonomy by being able to foster it.

The SLTs might have the ability to develop as autonomous language learners by experiencing it at first hand, but when it comes to the practicing of it through teaching they will need to understand it to be able to foster and promote it. Teacher autonomy has to be discussed and understood before it is fostered; as Smith (2003) argues, the concept of teacher autonomy emerged in second language education because of the constant discussions about learner autonomy. He explained that the concept emerged "as a corrective to earlier misconceptions that 'learner autonomy' refers to a situation: that of learning without a teacher (at home, with a computer, in a self-access centre etc.), and/or that it does away with the need for a teacher" (Smith, 2003:2). Smith explained that teacher autonomy has taken on different meanings, including the 'right to freedom from control' (Benson 2000), also a capacity to get involved in self-directed teaching (Little, 1995) and as learners (Smith, 2000; Savage, 2000).

Having had the chance to read Smith's paper, I agree again that it is not possible to ask the teachers to practice autonomous teaching if they themselves have not experienced it in their own learning. In order to send the SLTs into the field and to expect them to foster learner autonomy they need to acquire the ability to self-direct their own learning and teaching process. To do so they need to develop their teaching techniques, reflect upon and learn from their educational life, their language learning experiences, and from their learners in the field. The SLTs also need to be able to give their learners the chance and freedom to practise language learning and experience it without constraints (Smith, 2003).

SLTs in this research might be encouraged to have the willingness to take part in developing themselves and learn the importance of reflective learning as well as reflective teaching; "reflection on and learning from the experience of teaching" in their professional life. "In order for teachers to gain better abilities and a greater willingness to learn for themselves in developing 'an appropriate expertise of their own', this kind of reflection seems to be essential" (Smith, 2003: 8). SLTs should be trained and be aware of their role in fostering reflective and autonomous learning. They should also be aware of the change in the power position and the relationship between themselves and their future learners in the language classrooms by taking the role of a facilitator or counsellor, and also the role of a teacher as a resource (Voller: 1997).

2.5.1 The Shift in Roles: The Learner's Role in the Traditional English Language Classroom

Learning is seen as a personal action with a responsibility that lies on the learner him/herself. It is obvious that in spite of being a competent teacher, still he/she

cannot do the learning for their learners. Learner autonomy, the classroom, and the teacher are interdependent and go hand in hand (Egel: 2009). But nevertheless, for the learner autonomy to take place the learners are the only ones that could do the learning for themselves. If learner autonomy could not be forced and the development in the Kuwaiti public educational systems takes a long time to occur, then what can the autonomous teacher do?

An important point to note, nonetheless, is that learner autonomy does not mean that the teacher is no longer needed in the classroom. On the contrary, the learning and teaching process of a language is a dynamic process between the two because autonomous learning is not a teacherless process. As Sheerin (1997, cited in Benson and Voller, 1997: 63) briefly states, "teachers--have a crucial role to play in launching learners into self-access and in lending them a regular helping hand to stay afloat".

The concept of being learner-centred is starting to take place in the current Kuwaiti public education environment instead of the traditional teaching. The teacher's role will remain similar during this shift, by the teacher still taking charge of the major aspect of the learning and teaching process, such as planning the curriculum development, preparing the needs analysis, setting the goals and objectives, developing the learning methodology and materials in addition to formal evaluation. Nunan (1988) argued that the key difference between traditional and learner-centred learning is that in the latter the learner has a partial part. The learners collaborate with the teacher in working together and are thoroughly involved in the decision-making process regarding their learning process, such as the content of the curriculum and how it is going to be taught.

Teachers who are dedicated to the concepts of being learner-centred and autonomy, are required consequently to support their learners in developing the necessary knowledge and skills for lifelong learning. Littlewood (1999) states, as mentioned earlier, that the autonomous learners need to be able to take responsibility for their own learning by taking control of some of the teachers' roles. The shift in the learner's role from being a passive participant to more of an active role in the classroom activities and as shareholders in deciding the process of their own language learning is an important and massive step in becoming autonomous (Dam, 1995). By knowing their weaknesses, obstacles, the open educational resources and the suitable methods to use in their learning process, the learners will have a greater chance to become autonomous.

Unconstrained communication between the teacher and the learner increases the learner's motivation and enhances responsibility for learning (Ushioda, 2007). Collaborative interaction, personal knowledge, skills and attitudes allow the learners to take an active role and take charge of their learning in the language classroom. Ushioda has highlighted the significance of interaction from a Vygotsky point of view and described learning as a socially mediated process (Vygotsky, 1986 cited in Ushioda, 2007). But will increased opportunity for interaction actually lead to more effective autonomous language learning? That depends on a number of factors, mainly learner individuality, peer interaction, how the relationship between them influences participation and the context in which that interaction takes place.

Ushioda's (2007) study also showed that the learners rely on teachers to help them become better autonomous language-learners. It is not easy for the teachers, especially the ones in the current research who are the outcome of a collectivist educational environment, to waive off the traditional role of 'spoon-feeding', being

in control and not to be mistaken. Communication between learners themselves and with the teacher can greatly enhance the opportunities for learning through interaction. Benson (2003) also argued that autonomy is a capacity with which the learners' different kinds of abilities can be involved in taking control over their learning. Researchers generally agree that the most important roles to give to the learners are those that allow them to monitor their own progress, plan their own learning activities, and get used to evaluating their own progress. For the teachers in the Kuwaiti educational environment letting go of their role is not easy; it is not just for personal reasons why they sometimes do not know how to do so.

The learners need to be able to take responsibility for their own learning by setting their own goals, finding the best learning strategies that best suit their needs, seeking their own educational resources to help ease their learning process, and reflecting upon and evaluating the process. Cappellini (2013) studied the possible relationship between the open educational resources and the development of learner autonomy and self-learning in a learner-centred pedagogy. For the learners to have the chance to develop autonomously, they will need a suitable space, with the suitable open educational resources to create an autonomous environment.

Cappellini argued how open educational resources could play a crucial role in the development of learner autonomy, but do not necessarily develop learner autonomy unless it is under certain important conditions in which the teachers and the peers (with mediation) play a role. He gave the teacher's existence in the autonomous classroom value by arguing that the open educational resources "can be a tool to develop learner autonomy, but only under certain conditions, including a variety of OER[5] types and the mediation of a teacher or a tutor" (Cappellini, 2013: 206).

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[5] Open Educational Resources (OER)

Cappellini (2013) described the teacher's role as a mediator as being able to help in encouraging the learners to question their pedagogical choices, and to be able to experience different and varied learning opportunities. In addition, mediation through peers could also help the learner to discover different ways to use the open educational resources to develop their learning to learn skills and prepare them for lifelong learning (Cappellini, 2013).

2.5.2 Aspects of Learner Autonomy

An autonomous learner is the one who does not learn to please the teacher or to get good grades, but rather the one who learns for the purpose of learning something to develop themselves and achieve progress (Scahrle and Szabo, 2000). Aoki (2002: 111) indicates that learner autonomy is defined as the individual's freedom, capacity, and responsibility in making choices regarding her/his own learning and teaching process. The learners' taking charge of their learning process can be seen by them when they establish learning goals, develop strategies, self-assist, and find the appropriate open educational resources to help them learn the target language. If the learner showed signs of competence in exercising the above skills in their language learning process, then this might mean that he/she is showing signs of "independent learning" and "self-directed learning" (Benson, 2001). Other terminologies that describe the characteristics of the autonomous learner sometimes also come with conflicting ideologies (Oxford, 2003). Therefore, it is difficult to identify a particular definition of 'autonomy' or what 'autonomous learners' are.

Because autonomy is about individuality and must start from within, it cannot be forced upon any learner or taken as a matter of fact, because the teacher is required to foster it. Autonomy is not a method to be taught, as I have understood it with the help and guidance of my Supervisor. Learners have to find it in themselves first and

accept it to be able to practice it. Each learner has his or her own experience and general knowledge to use when learning a new language or a new task. Cappellini (2013: 213) points out that the "learner autonomization" is when the learner is "triggered by an observation of a lack of efficiency, which leads him/her to search for and find new pedagogical contents and methods". For an individual to become an autonomous learner, she/he has to have the ability and desirability to take charge of their own learning as a result of the desire to develop or because of the insufficient learning and teaching environment around them. When this is compared to the traditional learning and teaching context of the SLTs it is obvious that they do not match the criteria.

The current research intends to contribute to the growing quest (Al Othman and Shuqair, 2013) to reshape the learners' roles in the traditional Kuwaiti language classroom. To do so would in part mean that the students should be able to become aware of and be able to face the constraints in the circumstances in which they are learning. In an autonomous learning environment the learners are increasingly expected to reflect on their learning and decision-making in addition to taking more responsibility for their own learning. They will also be able to gradually overcome the constrains to set for themselves a comfortable and suitable learning context, as autonomous learning also implies developing a reflective capacity with which one ought to question one's assumptions and practices as recognised by Raya et al. (2007), leading to the concept of critically aware participants.

This will lead the SLTs to choosing their own aims and purposes for their learning. They have to be able to set goals for themselves and should also have the liberty to choose the materials, methods, and environment in which to achieve them. They also have to be able to evaluate their own progress and achievements. Stated differently,

learner autonomy then can be perceived as "essentially a matter of the learner's psychological relation to the process and content of learning--a capacity for detachment, critical reflection, decision-making, and independent action" (Little, 1991: 4).

Many of the above characteristics are linked and similar to what the literature says about the characteristics of a good autonomous language learner. As can be seen from the above, learner autonomy can have a number of defining characteristics. Some of these, like being able to take risks and being good guessers, could occur without conscious teaching but others, like knowledge of one's learning styles, will require more targeted preparatory teaching on the part of the lecturers/teachers so that the learners can engage in this exercise in a more informed way.

Autonomous learning is known to not only allow learners to have partial or total control of their learning content that might help in their development, but also plays a role in motivating the learning process (Dickinson, 1995). Benson and Voller (1997) adopted Holec's (1981) definition of autonomy and pointed out that in language education the concept of learner autonomy can be demonstrated in at least five different situations, such as when the learners study entirely on their own, when they gain and develop skills that they can use during self-directed learning, when they show that they have an innate natural capacity of personal development but are suppressed by the traditional educational environment, when the learner shows signs of willingness in taking control of their learning process, and finally, when they show determination in exercising their right in collaboratively deciding with the educators about their own learning.

The aspects of autonomous learning in this research will be divided into two major categories adapted from Benson's (1997) versions of learner autonomy, and the

Oxford (2003) models of LA. To be able to categorise the autonomous characteristics that SLTs show during the different stages of their educational life, I will look into Benson's (1997) notion of the three different 'versions' or means of demonstrating the concept of autonomy. He organised the concept of learner autonomy, mentioning that there are three versions of learner autonomy that need to be recognised: technical, psychological, and political. In his opinion in order to understand the learners' own readiness to becoming autonomous learners, Benson (2001) described learner autonomy as a concept with three different dimensions which are presumed to be interdependent: starting with the control over learning behaviour, control over psychology of learning, and control over learning situations.

On the other hand, Oxford (2003) did not want to limit herself to the constricted concept of learner autonomy so she proposed four interdependent models to help in comprehending the versions of learner autonomy. Benson's versions and Oxford's models are almost comparable except that Oxford discussed an extra point related to the sociocultural perspective (Dang, 2010; Benson, 2006; Oxford, 2003; 1997; Sinclair, 2000), presented in Table 2.2.

Dimensions	Technical	Psychological	Political	Sociocultural
Benson (1997) **Versions of LA**	Learning outside the educational environment	Capacity (abilities – attitudes)	Power and structural conditions	-
Oxford (2003) **Models of LA**	Physical situation (learning environment)	Characteristics of learners	Ideologies, access and power structures	Mediated learning

Table 2.2 Benson's (1997) Versions and Oxford's (2003) Models of Defining Learner Autonomy

Benson and Oxford both gave their own description of what each of the versions and models of learner autonomy could mean. We start first with the technical perspective where Benson defined the notion as basically an action of learning the language autonomously without the involvement of an educator taking place outside the context of an educational institution (Benson 2006: 24); while Oxford (2003) described it as perspective that focuses on the qualities in the learning environment, in other words, meaning the physical situation in which the learner takes the language learning outside the classroom.

As for the second viewpoint, they both agreed that the psychological versions of autonomy are related to the personal characteristics of the learners. Benson (2006) referred to it as a construct of the learners' capacity of attitudes and abilities that allows them to step up and take more responsibility for their own learning. The third and last point that they both had in common is the political version of learner autonomy. Oxford (2003) summarised it as the emphasis on ideologies, access, and power structures. Benson (2006) elaborated it more by referring to the political-critical version as the educator's control over the method and content of the learning process. Oxford (2003) also added a fourth perspective that described the sociocultural side of the concept of learner autonomy. She defined it as the focus on mediated learning emphasising the kind of interactions between learners and their environment or context.

Oxford (2003) concluded that the above perspectives may look different and even contrasting in the beginning, but essentially they are balancing and interdependent. She also suggested that all aspects should be used in a research study to cover as many aspects of the concept of learner autonomy because they are all similar and complement each other. The two most interrelated aspects of learner autonomy

foundation and development are the learning environment (technical perspective) and the learner's personal characteristics (psychological perspective). The interactions and the learning process are not only limited to the inside of the educational environment. Autonomous learners take their circumstances and learning process outside of the educational institutions into the outer context (sociocultural perspective). For more effective learning outcomes and productive collaboration between the learners and the inside and outside of the educational environment communities, there should be more intervention and enhanced life qualities (political-critical perspective) (Oxford, 2003).

Benson also argued that these dimensions can differ from one learner to another; in addition, he said that each learner can become autonomous in one dimension more than the others. He continues to highlight that the learner autonomy dimensions could also be both noticeable and non-noticeable aspects in the learners when becoming autonomous language-learners (Benson, 2010a). Learners' abilities and their needs for teacher support during the learning process differ from one to another. Therefore, Benson recommends that it is unreasonable to assume that all learners are able to control every possible aspect of their learning and if they do not, then they are non-autonomous (Benson, 2010a).

In this research I will divide the aspects of learner autonomy mentioned by both (Benson, 1997) and (Oxford, 2003) into two categories based on the learners, seen to be applicable for the current research investigations. The first category (titled 'personal perspectives') highlights the aspects related to the learner personally, while the second category, (the organisational perspective) is related to the context in which the learning takes place (see Figure 2.4). The reason why I divide the aspects under the two categories is that the learners as individuals can control their abilities

and attitudes, learning from their peers and interacting with others in addition to seeking learning outside of the classroom. But there are also things that they cannot control, such as the educational environment they are in, the educational system, and the teacher.
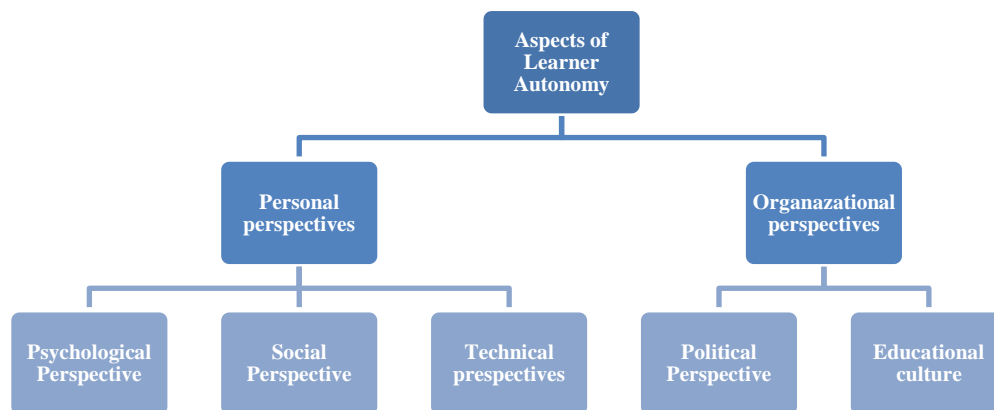
Figure 2.4 Aspects of Learner Autonomy

2.6 Fostering Learner Autonomy

Moving to the empirical part of the research, fostering learner autonomy in the language classroom is a step that should be looked at. This section will look at how learner autonomy will be carried out into the learning process and how will it be incorporated with the learning course and the learning environment. The question to ask here is: To what extent should the language-learner take responsibility for his/her learning? It is argued that learner autonomy is about being free and having the ability to manage their learner process. Scarlet and Szabot (2000) argued that it is difficult to distinguish between learner autonomy and taking responsibility in their learning. They both also added that it is even harder to distinguish between the two definitions when it comes to practice. In order for people to make sense of the world around them, they will need to become autonomous in their educational, professional, and

daily lives. It is important for the learners to understand and be able to use what they learn in their daily lives in and outside the education learning environment. If the language learning process occurs in an environment that lacks the opportunities for using the target language in and outside of the classroom, then autonomy is required. This research seeks to investigate the appropriate ways to foster learner autonomy in the Kuwaiti public educational system, in which the target language is infrequently used outside of the classroom.

Littlewood (1999) argued that there is an increasing change that is accruing in the educational field today, which is leading to a quest for independent lifelong learning. He added that developing the learner's autonomy is becoming a genuine need and goal in the learning and teaching process. Where should the change start? And, with whom should it start? Related to the current research, in my opinion it should start with the 'language-teacher', specifically SLTs who are still learning how to learn and teach the English language in the College of Basic Education, asking for a democratic learning and teaching environment in which the teacher trainees in process of training are able to become freer to learn in their own way in what they see as appropriate. Consequently changing the traditional educational environment's system, the curriculum and the in-service teachers is a time-consuming and complicated process. This takes us back to the reason why I chose and recommend that the SLTs are the starting point in fostering learner autonomy in the language learning process.

Accepting and practising learner autonomy is a collaborative process between the learner and the teacher. The research participants are future teachers. That is why they need to experience learner autonomy to be able to practice it in their future teaching. From my own experience as an English-language-learner and teacher I

have reached a reasoned position, at which, to understand the potential for autonomous learning in the Kuwaiti context, it will be critical to focus on SLTs in the College of Basic Education. The shift from traditional approaches to autonomous teaching and learning has its own challenges.

Edelhoff (1984, cited in Dam, 2007: 25) underscores the need for this shift to begin with the teachers by making the following contention: "Teachers will hardly be prepared or able to administer autonomous learning processes in their students if their own learning is not geared to the same principles." Thus it will be good to engage the SLTs in the research in learner autonomy as they can play a pivotal role in affecting the learning and teaching environment that obtains in their own teaching.

While the definition of learner and teacher autonomy could be defined differently, Raya et al. see common strands transcending both learner and teacher autonomy which they define as "the competence to develop as a self-determined, socially responsible and critically aware participant in (and beyond) educational environment, within a vision of education as (inter) personal empowerment and social transformation" (Raya et al., 2007: 1). It will be important, for the purposes of this research, to establish the extent to which the SLTs are becoming self-determined and taking responsibility for their own teaching and learning.

Cazden (2001) argues that what is meant is the learners collaboratively learning with the teachers through discourse using either student-centred or non-traditional approaches, rather that depending on authoritative teaching and learning methods. He added that the teaching and learning process should focus on supporting the learners to become autonomous by negotiation of meaning. The educators should be able develop their own skills as facilitators of the SLTs' learning process by understanding their past, current, and future context, accepting the change in their

role as teachers, practising giving continued feedback, support, and direction and being able to balance reactive and proactive approaches in the learning process.

Littlewood (1999) also argued that the frequent occurrence of the communicative approach in learning and teaching has grabbed the attention of the teachers and researchers to search further on learner-centred teaching practices for language learning and teaching, implementing learner autonomy through communicative activities performed in the CLT classroom. Learners themselves should definitely play a role in developing their own language learning. To do so the learners can either develop themselves out of personally-learnt efforts or by developing learner autonomy inside the classroom first. Smith (2000) and Benson (2003) both argued that learners' role in the field of foreign-language-teaching is crucial. They also added that it is important to recognise the importance of training learners to become more autonomous in the learning and teaching process.

They concluded by arguing that it is an essential requirement for the teachers to be able to foster autonomy, to be aware of themselves first as learners in addition to having faith in their own learners' abilities and trusting them to partially take charge of their own autonomy. Breen and Mann (1997: 145) argued that it is important for the teachers to have the ambition and willingness to "foster the development of learner autonomy in the classroom and be prepared to live through the consequences", because it is not an easy process for them to shift their roles, especially if they did not go through autonomy learning themselves, but still this is not always the case.

2.6.1 Preparing the SLTs to adopt Learner Autonomy

Smith and Vieira (2009) raised the question of what specific capabilities and circumstances are obligatory for teachers to possess to be able to promote learner autonomy? They added that there are observable and non-observable aspects, indicating the teachers were becoming autonomous language-teachers. They also stressed the need to explore what autonomous teachers need to know and what they themselves think they should do in the language classroom to promote their learner's autonomy. The shift of responsibility from teachers to learners in learning a language does not appear suddenly. Rather, it is a result of a change in the learning and teaching process from a teacher-centred to a more learner-centred environment. The success of the learner is to a great extent dependent on the educational system and the essential role of the teacher. The main idea of autonomous learning is that the SLTs should take responsibility for their own learning and not depend on the teacher to provide the information. Learner autonomy raises a challenge for language teachers and educators. To become qualified to foster learner autonomy, language teachers have to become 'multi-role' teachers. This means that teachers have to improve their own learning and teaching autonomy to be able to motivate their learners' autonomy.

Autonomy in learning and teaching does not mean that the teachers are deprived of their role in the language classroom; rather, their roles are redistributed to enable them to foster learner autonomy. Thus, instead of being the only source of knowledge, teachers will take on different kinds of roles to fulfil the requirements needed to achieve learner autonomy. For the teacher to succeed in these roles there will be a need for the teacher to have a reorientation of the roles that he/she has

traditionally played. There will be a need to have shared authority in the classroom with the learners being given a voice to articulate their viewpoints.

The Kuwaiti educational context can present challenges for language-teachers' attempts to foster autonomous language learning and teaching in their language classrooms (Al Othman and Shuqair, 2013). Traditionally, language-teachers dominate the language classroom by choosing teaching methods and evaluating student learning progress. Alternatively, what should happen in the autonomous language classrooms is that the teachers have to be aware of the shift in their roles from providing and decision-making to facilitating. Littlewood (1996) gives a framework for developing language learning that depends on the language-learners as they become more of a communicator, an autonomous learner, and a person (see Figure 2.5).

Figure 2.5 A Framework for Developing Autonomy in Foreign Language Learning (Littlewood, 1996:432).

There are degrees of how much help and support a teacher should give to the learners in an autonomous language classroom. The degree of the learner's autonomy depends on the learner's personality, need, goal, educational environment, and culture. The degrees of teachers' support and help should be explained to the learners

from the beginning so that they have an idea about what to expect from the teachers and their role in the classroom. There will, however, always be learners who need more guidance or support than others. There will always be some classroom activities in which the learners will depend more on the teacher than other activities. The more the SLTs know and acknowledge these facts, the more they are likely to be able to accept the autonomous language teaching and learning with a degree of confidence. A large number of studies have explored various ways to foster learner autonomy, starting with Nunan (1997) who made a very useful contribution to an understanding of what learner autonomy entails by proposing a number of levels for encouraging learner autonomy that can be presented by the teacher (see Table 2.3).

Learner Action	Content	Process
Awareness	Learners are made aware of the pedagogical goals and content of the materials they are using.	Learners identify strategy implications of pedagogical tasks and identify their own preferred learning styles/strategies.
Involvement	Learners are involved in selecting their own goals from a range of alternatives on offer.	Learners make choices among a range of options.
Intervention	Learners are involved in modifying and adapting the goals and contents of the learning programme.	Learners modify/adapt tasks.
Creation	Learners create their own goals and objectives.	Learners create their own tasks.

Transcendence	Learners go beyond the classroom and make links between the content of classroom learning and the world beyond.	Learners become teachers and researchers.

Table 2.3 Levels of Learner Autonomy (Nunan, 1997:195)

This research seeks that the SLTs should be able to have the capacity to set their own goals, then plan how to achieve those goals. When they do, then they should seek guidance either from peers, outside information, or the teacher. The SLTs then need to be able to assist the tools and steps they took to achieve their goals and how they dealt with forces facing them; they do so by reflecting on their previous experiences and knowledge (Figure 2.6).

STEP ONE

Set the goal

STEP TWO

Planning

STEP THREE

Guidance

STEP FOUR

Assessment

STEP FIVE

Reflection
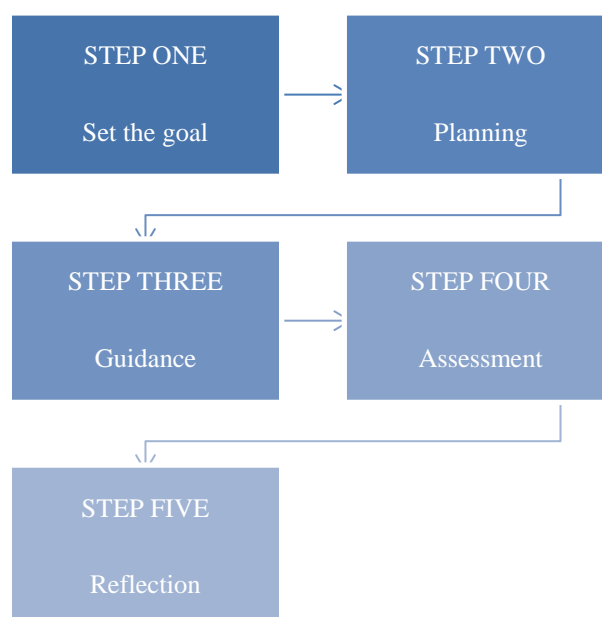
Figure 2.6 SLTs' Steps Toward Self-directed ELL.

While learner autonomy might appear to be all about learners becoming aware of their own strategies, requirements, and goals, nonetheless sight should not be lost of the fact that students will require being supported during this journey by the help of

the teacher, being most critically needed. Teacher autonomy, in its multifaceted nature, does not come of its own accord. Rather, for teachers to bridge the transition there is need to develop themselves to become more of facilitators than teachers. They should not only tell the students what to do, but also ask them how they want to do it. The teachers here have to do more than simply present the curriculum; rather, they should provide learners with guidelines and try to provide the right environment in which they encourage learners to get the required information themselves.

Literature on autonomy grapples with various ways in which teachers could become familiar with what autonomy entails and how it can be fostered in a teaching and learning context. Raya et al. (2007) raise useful points that can go a long way in throwing more light on some of the core tenets of teacher autonomy by positing, "Teacher autonomy, like many other variables in modern language education, exists along a continuum. Therefore a balance between standardization and uniqueness, between license and responsibility is what teacher and learner autonomy can refer to" (Raya et al., 2007: 33).

Nunan (2002) presented a number of principles for the teacher to use while fostering autonomy in the classroom. He started with advising them to be involved in their learners' learning process, giving the learners a variety of choices of open educational resources to choose from. Nunan also recommended that the teachers should give the learners the opportunity to take part in the decision-making of the methods and materials used in the learning process. Finally, he mentioned that the teachers' support is essential because they play a major role in facilitating their learners' learning process, which will lead to encouraging them and driving them to critically reflect upon being able to develop.

Nunan came back (2003) to present another fostering approach, a theoretical justification for a curriculum grounded in notions of being learner-centred and having learner autonomy. Considering it as an imprecise concept, Nunan gave a specific but yet complete definition of what he meant by 'curriculum' in his work. He based his definition on the Stenhouse (1975) model that presents the curriculum as a plan. The model is divided by three principles, namely in planning, in empirical study, and in relation to justification (Stenhouse, 1975 cited in Nunan, 2003: 195). Even though it sounds comprehensive, Nunan found the model to be incomplete for not giving the full story of the meaning of the curriculum. He pointed out that in addition to the above it is also important to shed light on what really is happening in the classroom in the "applied curriculum" and if effective, by assessing what the learners essentially learn from "curriculum as outcome" (Nunan, 2003: 195).

Autonomy can be presented to the students in a staging model as Nunan presented his nine steps to developing learner autonomy from which I have summarised the steps to give a general yet clear view of what they mean. He explained that the nine steps can be incorporated with the educational system either orderly or serially depending on the situation in hand. He also supported his steps by examples and other researchers' points of view, which are also summarised below. Table 2.4 presents the steps mentioned by Nunan (2003) which are used in relation to this research's aim to assist in seeking the learners' perception of their language learning during the three phases of their educational life. Although there is not a sequel pattern for the nine steps, Nunan's first and fourth steps both emphasised that the learners have the ability to absorb from a young age, so it is important to give them the opportunity to recognise and identify what they are learning by introducing them

to the clear goals of their learning process, in addition to giving them the voice to express what, how, and when they want to learn.

Nunan then moved to pointing out that the learner should be encouraged to get involved in modifying the course content and to create their own educational goals. As a third step, Nunan encouraged the learners to seek knowledge and take their learning outside of the classroom, which will motivate them to work in groups and use the target language. Moving to the fifth step, he argued that the notion of choice, although it has been identified as a Western concept, is still suitable to be applied in the Asian culture, mentioning evidence from studies successfully showing that learners in a non-Western culture can adopt the concept of learner autonomy such as in Hong Kong, Thailand, and Japan.

Nunan's (2003) sixth, seventh, and eighth steps all discuss the learners' learning process. He encouraged the teachers to shift their role and give a modest level of control to the learners so that they can have the chance to be participants in the decision-making process, creating their own tasks and even taking the role of the teacher. Nunan concluded by encouraging the teachers to push their learners to become researchers beyond their classroom walls.

Steps	Nunan,2003	Description
1	**Make instruction goals clear to learners** **(what to learn)**	Relatively young learners are able to make decisions about the content and process of their own learning. (Dam and Gabrielsen, 1988)
2	**Allow learners to create their own goals**	A way of involving learners in modifying course content. This will provide an opportunity for individuals to participate (interpersonally and interculturally) in an English-medium. (Parkinson and O'Sullivan, 1990)
3	**Encourage learners to use their target language**	This will enable group unity, motivation and help in activating the learner's language outside the

		classroom.
	outside the classroom **(how to learn)**	
4	**Raise awareness of learning processes**	Giving the learners a voice in deciding what they want to learn.
5	**Help learners identify their own preferred styles and strategies**	The notion of choice is a Western one, still it could work in the Asian culture. (Widdows and Voller, 1991)
6	**Encourage learner choice**	Engaging the learners in a relatively modest level of decision-making in the first instance.
7	**Allow learners to generate their own tasks**	Giving the students the opportunities to create, modify and adapt their own tasks in and out of the classroom.
8	**Encourage learners to become teachers**	Giving the learners the chance to take the role of the teacher. (Assinder, 1991)
9	**Encourage learners to become researchers**	Encouraging the learners to take their learning beyond the classroom walls. (Heath, 1992)

Table 2.4 Nunan's Nine Steps to Learner Autonomy Adopted from (2003:196)

Benson and Lor (1998) argued that autonomy is a process in which the individuals not only take control but also get actively involved in the learning process. They also added that factors such as time, speed, learning methods used, the learning setting, and the learner's own critical awareness that their goals do differ considerably from one learner to another. They also stressed the partnership between the learner and the teacher in and outside of the classroom that can only become a reality if the learner shows signs of autonomy that will enable them to take more of an active role in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of their own learning (Benson and Lor, 1998).

2.6.2 Factors Affecting the Development of Learner Autonomy (Driving and Constraining Forces)

In order to foster learner autonomy in the language classroom, first there should be an investigation of the factors that the SLTs will face in this process. Every concept has its driving forces such as motivation and personal goals and constraining forces such as the traditional learning environment. These forces could either help or hinder the fostering process. This section will discuss both forces and their role in developing the SLTs' learner autonomy in the English classroom.

Scharle and Szabo (2000) argue that the fostering and development of learner autonomy is a gradual process. The learners have to recognise and understand their identities and responsibilities progressively to be able to accept their new role. They categorised the fostering process into three stages, starting with raising the learner awareness. In the current research, as mentioned before, the SLTs might be new to the concept and are used to the traditional role as learners and recipients of knowledge from their educators. Giving them the chance to absorb the concept of how, where, when and what they will learn, as well as how their role as learners is going to change to a more active one. That will help in getting into the second stage of changing their attitude and preparing them to positively transit to the third stage by entering the learner autonomy mode.

There are many attempts to define the concept of learner autonomy and the general agreement is that it is seen as the learner's ability to take charge, whether totally or partially, of his/her own learning. Littlewood (1999) described the autonomous learner as having an independent ability to create and develop 'choices' that determine their current and future 'actions'. In his opinion, the learner's capacity depends on two main components. First, there is their ability to have enough

knowledge to make educational choices and the skills to put those choices into practice. Secondly, he argued that the learner's willingness is also important because it gives them the motivation and confidence to take the responsibility to pursue those choices. Littlewood (1999) concluded that the two components complement each other. In order to become an autonomous learner one needs to develop both. This only proves that "motivation has a primary role to play in the exercise of meta-cognition or autonomy" (Ushioda, 2011: 223).

Learner autonomy is a process that could be presented to the students in different stages as mentioned earlier. A relationship exists between a learner's motivation and autonomy and motivation in language learning. A relationship that Ushioda describes is named, the "Twin areas" (2011:11). Seeing that this research studies the SLTs' learning of the English language and learning how to teach it, it is a high possibility that learner autonomy extends to English proficiency (Deng: 2007). Deng argues that there is a positive relationship linking the learner autonomy to English proficiency in addition to the motivation. So, it is important to point out that motivation is considered as a major factor that can influence the learner process to become autonomous (Chan et al., 2002).

In a book serving as a guide for teachers on how to motivate their learners, Dornyei (2001) describes motivation as the main element that controls the course and degree of human behaviour. Motivation is seen to have two dimensions: the political (Ushioda, 2006) in which the teacher and the institution play a role in fostering ; and a second dimension comprising the inherent motivation that has to come from within the learner and is considered to be both necessary and essential (Scharle and Szabo, 2000).

Apart from motivation having possible impact on autonomy (Dickinson, 1995; Benson, 2006) it also consists of different types (Ellis, 1997) and influences factors. To be able to motivate the learners to learn the language, Dornyei (2001) recommends that the motivation process should go through a number of stages, starting first with providing the learners with different kinds of motivational conditions. Then comes knowing and identifying what inspires and stimulates the learner best. After finding the appropriate motivational tool, it is important to maintain and develop it. Finally, Dornyei encourages that the learner evaluate the motivational tool autonomously to measure its effect on their learning progress.

Each learner has his/her own needs, abilities, and preferences of motivational tools. Motivational tools exist in different forms, each triggering the learner's personal motives. Learners learn the language for various reasons, although most are learnt as a requirement for an educational goal such as school levels. Ellis (2007) and Ushioda (2013) highlighted four motivational types behind the learners' purpose for learning the language, mainly instrumental motivation, integrative motivation, resultative motivation, and intrinsic motivation. Ushioda also gives a fifth type, highlighting the motivational issues in relation to the use of new, mobile technologies in language learning which will be argued below.

Starting with *instrumental motivation*, this is when the learners learn the language for practical reasons (Ellis, 1997). On the other hand, Ushioda (2013) argued that the individual's instrumental motivation can sometimes be controlled by external pressures, such as completing a course to fulfil a requirement. The second type is the *integrative motivation*, by which the learners are driven to learn the language to get a better understanding of the people using the target language. Ellis (1997) pointed out that the integrative motivation is considered one of the effective types of motivation

leading to successful language learning. *Resultative motivation* is the third type presented by Ellis (1997); this type describes the language-learners who succeed and follow their success with a desire to maintain or achieve more motivation. Furthermore, the *intrinsic motivation* is defined by Ushioda (2013) as an internally driven motivation for language learning.

Finally, Ushioda (2013) pointed out that "people bring different degrees of motivation or readiness to embrace new technologies" (Ushioda, 2013: 1). She focused on the motivational issues concerning mobile language learning, such as mobile phones and tablets. The first issue is where motivation is seen as a *matter of choice and autonomy*. The learners' motivations differ from one another when using the technology as a developing tool for language learning purposes. Ushioda (2013) mentioned two kinds of motivation that explain why learners use a certain technology more than another, as follows:

> (a) an inherent interest in the technology, which then leads to discovering its benefits for language learning and to strengthening language learning motivation;

> (b) a strong motivation for language learning, prompting interest in a particular technology that can support and enhance this process (Stockwell, 2013 cited in Ushioda, 2013:1).

The second issue is *motivation as a matter of personally meaningful casual learning*. The language learner in making commitments to using the mobile technologies may be mostly *superficial or casual rather than deep*. By that Ushioda (2013) is reflecting on the value of the mobile technologies as a learning tool. In addition, there are the limitations that the learners will face when using them, e.g. their smaller

size compared to larger devices such as desktops. Finally, she concluded by arguing the extent to which the mobile technologies can manage to sustain the learners in motivation and engagement to the language learning.

Ushioda (2013) also referred to the issue of using the mobile technologies in a frequent rather than a deep way. She argued that using the mobile technology for a "regular and frequent exposure to the target language is recognised by many learners as an important part of language learning". In addition to that she added that the learners' level of "cognitive engagement" with the target language does not make a big difference as long as they are encouraged to use it, which makes them more confident learners (Ushioda, 2013: 3).

Gardner (2000) argued that the greater the learner is motivated, the higher his/her level of achievement. There are some factors that can hinder the learner's development and affect their motivation level toward learning. The factors should be recognised in order to be able to minimise their effect on the learner's language learning outcome. The effect of the influencing factors differs from one learner to another, each depending on their level of capacity and autonomy. The following are some of the factors related to the learner personally, and also to the outside and inside aspect of the educational environment in which the learning takes place.

When it comes to the factors affecting the learner personally, the gender and autonomy of the learner is the first step. Varol and Yilmaz (2010) argued that females tend to be more autonomous learners then males. On the other hand, no matter what the gender of the learner, it is important for them to believe in their capacities to become autonomous learners and be able to measure and evaluate their own development (Thanasoulas, 2000; Cotterall, 1995). To develop the learners' responsibility and autonomy it is important for them to have a strong self-confidence

in themselves (Scharle and Szabo, 2000). This will lead to increasing the learner's own self-esteem and change their attitudes towards the target language (Thanasoulas, 2000).

The educational context is an important element in the process of developing autonomous learning and teaching. As mentioned earlier in sections 2.3 and 2.4, the culture plays a large role in the mediating of where the learning process takes place. Developing learner autonomy can be affected by the rules, characteristics, and politics of the culture which can either drive or hinder the learning process (Schmenk, 2005; Benson, 2006). Inside of the educational environment (schools, colleges, and universities) is another society having its own learning and teaching strategies, its own procedures, and individuals working all together in preparing the learners for autonomy (O'Malley and Chamot, 1990).

Learners face obstacles during their language learning that could hinder their progress. As mentioned above, the hindering forces can be either related to the learners personally or to the context around them that they cannot control. The hindering forces can turn to driving forces if the learners manage to change their abilities, perspectives, and personal goals positively to overcome them. By doing so could mean that they are autonomous learners seeking for alternatives to an obstacle that faces their learning process autonomously.

Nguyen and Gu (2013) argue that although a lot of research has been done on approaches encouraging the fostering of learner autonomy, it is still unclear which specific approach is considered to be the most effective approach. When it comes to investigating learner autonomy in educational environments, such approaches can be considered as driving forces for the learners to become autonomous and at the same time they can become hindering forces if they are not used or applied appropriately.

Benson (2001) mentioned six approaches to fostering learner autonomy that relate to different control aspects that play a role in fostering learner autonomy (see Figure 2.7). The approaches are divided into two groups. The first focuses on methods that give and support the learners by offering the opportunity to take control over their learning process, such as resource-based, technology-based, curriculum-based, teacher-based, and classroom-based. The final approach relates to the learner themselves personally, such as preparing the learners' skills and strategies that might enable them to take part in their learning experience.
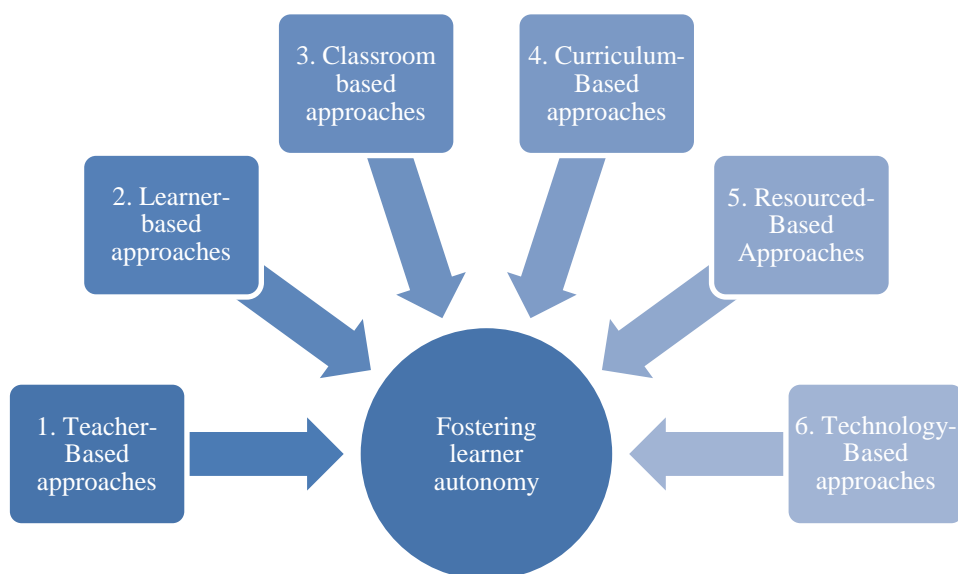
Figure 2.7 Six Approaches to Fostering Learner Autonomy Adopted from
Benson (2001:125)

In this research I will arrange Benson's approaches of fostering learner autonomy in an order that I feel is best suited to the Kuwaiti public educational system. I will once again confirm my argument of starting with Benson's *teacher-based approach* as a main first step. Sheerin (1997) points out the irony that all that the learners need to become autonomous is for the teacher to play the role of a supporter and guider. My reason for ordering Benson's approaches this way and starting with the teacher as a

first step is because having a teacher who believes in autonomy and has developed an understanding of the concept from first-hand experience *might* very strongly lead to more learner autonomy. This is because, as I argued earlier in this chapter, if the teacher is prepared then she/he can deal with any limitations that result from the learning environment that can stand in the way of developing learner autonomy.

Benson's (2001) teacher-based approaches focused on the significance of the teacher's professional development and teacher education. Teachers need to practise ongoing development of themselves as learners and their role as professionals (Aoki, 2002; McGrath, 2000). For them to be able to foster learner autonomy they have to improve their own teacher autonomy and develop principles that suit their learners and the context they are in (Vieira, 1999; Little, 1995).

Learner-based approaches are the second on the list. Yes, it might be important that the teacher is autonomous, but that does not necessarily mean that the learners are going to become autonomous. Benson (2001) described the learners as being prepared with metacognitive skills, personal learning strategies, and critical reflection that will help them to develop autonomously when the opportunity arises and the teacher and the materials exist.

When the learner and the teacher are both autonomously prepared, each on their own way, it is important for them to understand their roles in the collaborative relationship. The third approaches on the list are the *classroom-based approaches*. Benson (2001) discussed the approaches by explaining that the learners and teachers should accept the shift in both of their roles inside the classroom. He added that transferring the responsibility and partial control from the teacher to the learner will give the learners the chance to decide on their goals, learning process, and assessing their learning (Shao and Wu, 2007; Smith, 2003). The learner can also participate in

other activities like having the chance to assess their peers (Miller and Ng, 1996), learn outside of the classroom (Hyland, 2004), and exercise cooperative learning.

If the shift in role succeeds and the learners are capable of taking partial control, then comes the fourth approaches that are the *curriculum-based approaches.* Benson (2001) defined these as a negotiation process between the teachers and the learners that enhances the learner's chances in getting involved in the decision-making, whether of the content, activities, or methods, in addition to the assessment tools and process. Benson divided the curriculum-based approaches into two versions both related to the extent of the learners' involvement in the decision-making. The first version, which Benson (2001) called weak, is limited to the learners having partial control over their own projects, their content, and the methods to use. On the other hand, the stronger version involved having partial control of the syllabus content tasks and methods of learning and teaching used (Dam, 1995).

Autonomy is a desirable goal in all language learning, however and wherever it takes place. In this study the focus is on the SLTs in the language classroom and the existence and use of educational materials and when teacher counselling is a priority. The *resourced-based approaches* presented by Benson (2001) are the fifth approaches. He stresses the role of the materials and facilities in helping the learners to direct their own learning. Such facilities include self-study, self-access, and distance learning. Self-access centres can promote interdependency learning between the learner and their peers and learners and their teachers with the use of technology that could also lead to autonomy (Lee, 1996; Voller, 1997). The self-access centres also provide different kinds of learning opportunities that the learner can conduct autonomously, depending on their own judgement of what suits their needs (Sheerin, 1997).

Being in the self-access centre makes the learning process less constrained than it is in the classroom, where there are time limits, fixed textbooks and reading lists, and fear of making a mistake and of forgetting the teachers' directions and instructions. Benson (2001) stressed that the teacher's role is required as a facilitator, a guide, and a counsellor. Self-access centres can provide the learners with an authentic variety of educational materials that encourage them to become more active and generative learners (Pemberton et al., 2001; Kelly, 1996).

After discussing the self-access centres and the variety of learning materials it is important to stress one particular tool that is playing a large role in the learning process. Benson's (2001) *technology-based approaches* come sixth in this research, where the focus is on how the learners nowadays are captivated by the use of technology and how it plays a role in fostering leaner autonomy in today's modern world (Ushioda, 2013). A large percentage of the participants in the study of Ben Ghaith (2013) conducted with Kuwaiti students expressed their desire to use technology in their classroom learning as it is been helping them to develop more as individuals outside of the classroom.

The use of technology in language learning by the learners can be in different ways and using various tools. Benson (2001) also pointed out that the use of technology in the learning process can create chances for collaboration learning between the learners and the teacher as well as with other learners. Some of the significant language learning technology approaches used includes computer assisted language learning (CALL) (Gardner and Garcia, 1996). Brammerts (2003) presented another way of how to use the technology as a tool for language learning called 'E-tandem – learning a language'. It is a process in which the learners learn by communicating with native speakers of their target language. Finally Ushioda (2013) also discussed

the mobile language learning aspect by emphasising how mobile phones and tablets are playing a major role in developing the learner's language.

To conclude, my defence of ordering the above approaches this way is that I see that the teacher and the learners are the most important people. In that learner autonomy comes from within the individual, then that to a certain extent means that if they are autonomous and are able to work with each other interdependently it does not matter whether the classroom is autonomy friendly or they use an autonomous learning resource. If the individual is not autonomous from the start then nothing, including teachers and tools, can force them to be.

2.7 Reflection and Learner Autonomy

The following section will help in discussing how the SLTs' reflections on their language learning process in different educational stages can help in giving a holistic view that will contribute to understanding the development of autonomous language learning.

Holec (1981) emphasises that the learner's ability to take control of their own learning is by having the ability to critically reflect on and make their own decisions regarding their learning process. Reflection is an important and useful tool in language education and is a rather crucial step to take for the development of a learner's own autonomy (Sinclair, 2000; Little, 1997; Wenden, 1998). The reflection in language learning can be conducted through the use of such methods as journals or diaries (Dam, 1995).

A learning cycle is argued by Zimmerman (1998) where he states that the cycle contains three major phases starting with the forethought, moving to the performance or volitional control, and finally the self-reflection. Zimmerman elaborated more by

defining the first phase indicating that it is setting the stage for the learning process. He continued to explain that the first stage is also seen as helping the learners to set goals, reflect on their previous learning experiences, change their belief in their own abilities, plan strategies based on their own capacity and also develop their interests. Looking to the third phase of the learning cycle, Zimmerman (1998) defined the self-reflection as the procedures that the learners take after the learning process including the ability to conduct their own self-evaluation, acknowledgment of their abilities, self-reaction and their ability to be adaptive to the learning environment around them.

Reflection is a critical component of effective learning as "without awareness learners will remain trapped in their old patterns of beliefs and behaviors and never be fully autonomous" (Wenden, 1998: 90). In this research autonomy is not only seen as the "right to freedom from control" (Benson, 2000:111) but rather it is perceived in its broader context, in which it is seen as "reflective teacher-learning" (Smith, 2003: 8). Reflection has been seen to be very important by Gillis (2001) who posits that reflective learning is of much importance as SLTs will have the chance to critically reflect upon when, where, and how they engaged in learning. This will also help them think about how they can facilitate and guide their students' thinking and behaviour in the classroom. Gillis also underscores the importance of reflection by advancing the contention that reflection makes our "thoughts and ideas visible through descriptions that allow us to recreate experiences" (Gillis, 2001: 50). Taken in the context of today's fast-changing world, it can be argued that reflection gives a better handle for SLTs to engage in their learning and teaching in a more proactive manner.

According to Boud (2001) reflection is very important in that it turns experience into learning. Some of the central tenets of reflective practice were well highlighted by Dewey (1933), who defined reflective thinking as:

> "Active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusions to which it tends [that] includes a conscious and voluntary effort to establish belief upon a firm basis of evidence and rationality" (Dewey, 1933: 9).

Smith and Ushioda (2009) have discussed the desire of encouraging learners to develop critical reflection regardless of the chosen method, design, purpose, and even the degree of its complexity. They both discussed one method in particular, i.e. reflective writing, which they agree is an effective arbitration of metacognition. Boud et al. (1985) discussed an important mechanism of reflection; he stressed that the learners should have a sense of otherness and understand the importance of the need to reflect. He described reflection as a 'recursive' process with which the learners may step back to reflect upon and evaluate their current action, depending on their past experience in order to get a better understanding of the coming actions. While doing the refection, the learners usually return to actions throughout a period of time so that he/she can look forward to the upcoming learning actions, mostly with better reactions (Louden, 1991 cited in Benson, 2001: 91).

Boud et al. (1985) encouraged the learners to gain a new perspective of their own learning by taking the time to reflect on it, and in order to do so the learners need to go through a "perspective transformation" (Mezirow, 1981 cited in Boud et al, 1985: 23). He concluded by explaining how this change can play a role in changing the learners' usual role in becoming more critical.

In the literature there is some overlap between reflection and metacognition that Fook and Gardner (2007) tried to distinguished, when they stressed both talking about the learning process of learners and their ability to think about it. Thus, they suggest that the metacognition mostly refers to the "individualistic aspect of monitoring, planning and evaluating", but the reflection refers to a complete look at the learning process where it is not only about the evaluation and the monitoring, but also looks into "a broader perception to enhance the learner's awareness toward the significances of their own actions".

They highlight the concept of metacognitive reflections, defining it as "the awareness of one's learning experience, the evaluation of the experience, and the regulation of one's attitude and behaviour for better performance and more fruitful experience".

By the "awareness of one's learning experience", they stress the importance of the existing state of learning as a requirement of any effective improvement. A valuable context for that is in writing reflective journals that will help the learners to recognise their learning experiences, particularly when they reflect on their current state; "how they learn, why they learn, etc." When the learners point out the problems of their current learning state, an "evaluation of the experience" is needed that will help them to take it to a better place. Some evaluation criteria would be effective in this stage. The last important stage was about the "regulation of one's attitude and behaviour", in which they indicate that the willingness to make the change is the core element of the improvement. Here is where the preparation started, and where creating a plan for the development would be useful.

Thus in this research, the SLTs will be given an opportunity to stand back and reflect on their own practice and beliefs with a view to enhancing their professional roles as learners while in college, which needs to arm them with useful skills to improve the

learning of their students in the future. This would help them to open up their memories and the skills of communication with others and themselves. An important comment arises from Nunan (1996), who highlights the value of "self-assessment, ongoing monitoring, self-evaluation and reflection" for the training techniques, saying that:

> "Once again, the teacher should not assume that learners have these skills at the beginning of the learning process, nor that all learners will appreciate the potential value of self-monitoring and reflection. However, during the course of instruction, they will be provided with opportunities for engaging in self-monitoring activities and using these as a way of developing their language skills, as well as their sensitivity to the learning process" (Nunan, 1996: 24).

Making the students focus on reflection would mostly protect them from becoming discouraged through not being aware of the starting point for improvement. This also would help the educators to guide their learners into the correct directions of the development areas (Halbach, 1999). Halbach points out two levels of refection, firstly focusing on "the specific and the immediate" that will assist improving the performance. This concerns the content, process, and reasons of the learning experiences. The second level focuses on the "long-term issues and widening the perspective of students", with the purpose of supporting them to recognise the importance of what they are learning; this level would encourage the students to consider the academic, professional, and personal development of their study.

The ability of the student to become a person with the ability of a writer in another language is not a forgotten possibility, and has been discussed in the academic field. Hyland (2005) studied the difficulties that a student faces when seeking to become

more than simply a translator, but finding his/her own identity as a writer in a foreign language. Other researchers have discussed the finer points of students' writing of the English language, e.g. Tang and John (1999: 29), where they observed the writing of students highlighting the issue of the personal pronoun's usage, where they suggest a scale of authority roles that students might have. The role categories proposed include "greater, or lesser, degrees of authority". In their investigation the scale arises from a new 'I' role, considering "'I' as the self-evaluator"; Figure 2.8 below shows the typology of possible identities in students' writing.

No 'I'	'I' as representa-tive	'I' as guide	'I' as architect	'I' as recounter of research process	'I' as opinion-holder	'I' as originator

Least powerful authorial presence ⫸⫸⫸⫸⫸⫸⫸⫸⫸⫸ *Most powerful authorial presence*
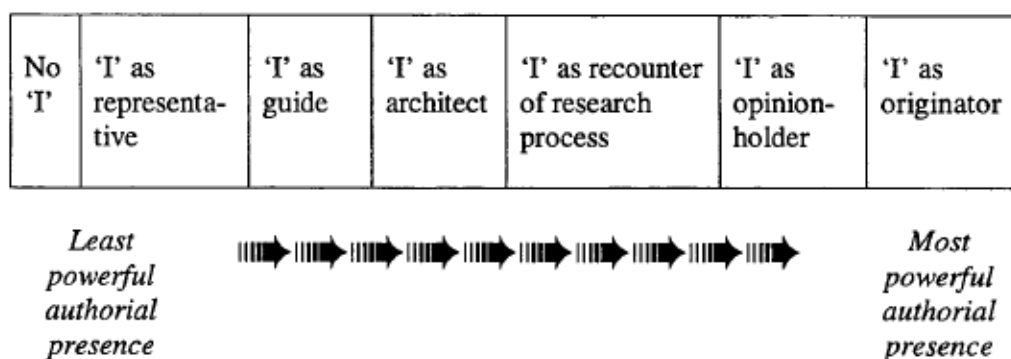
Figure 2.8 A Typology of Possible Identities behind the First Person Pronoun in Academic Writing. (Tang and John, 1999:29)

Palfreyman (2006: 352) highlighted the importance of the learners' identity, with gender and social components, when exploring the students' usage of social resources and tools in the social context of the Middle East. He suggests the need to "treat learners in relative isolation from their social context". Ushioda (2009) also discussed the learner identity when she suggested the essential need to focus not on learners but more importantly on people, more specifically a "person's identity", which is just one aspect of the language-learner. Various factors can play a role in shaping learners' identity that impacts on their choices defining their personal 'learner-context interface'.

In order to analyse reflective journals and diary entries that mostly came from different narratives, Gee (1999) use the I-statement analysis, which is a dialogue analytic tool that can be applied by capturing "a 'snapshot' of the actual use of language so as to further explore their underlying identity formation" (Gee et al, 2001: 177). A categorisation of 'I' was proposed by Gee (2005: 141) arguing that studying "how people use first person forms to describe their actions, feelings etc, gives insight into the identities they are constructing through their discourse." The categories were as follow:

- Cognitive: I think …, I know …, I guess

- Affective: I want …, I like …

- State vs action: I am mature, I hit him back, I paid the bill

- Ability vs constraint: I can't say anything to him, I have to do my paper route

- Achievement: I challenge myself, I want to go to MIT or Harvard (Gee, 2005: 141).

I-statement analysis helps in observing "how people speak or write in the first person to describe their actions, feelings, abilities, goals and so on, and how they thus construct particular socially situated identities for themselves through language" (Gee, 2005: 141). A sociolinguistic aspect of I-statement analysis was suggested by Lankshear and Knobel (2004: 280) that would help scholars to study "how language operates as a social practice within particular contexts that are 'captured' in and through spoken data". This approach is considered to be valuable to examine teacher research, particularly because of the "underlying social view" that could be captured.

In this research, SLTs might show a relationship between their reflection and learner autonomy as "promoting participants' intentional and self-regulatory capacity to

continue developing their English skills in a self-directed way" (Ushioda, 2008:3). In the light of that Little (1991:4) says that learner autonomy is not only shown in "the way learners learn but also in the way they are able to transfer what they have learned to wider contexts". In addition, the increase of explicit skills of reflection, analysis, and motivation in a way that means learners can handle their own learning and build on it, based on their developing interests and needs, is important. Overall, autonomous learning suggests intentional learning, and involves "reflexive awareness of the learning process and thinking about learning" (Little, 2004: 105).

It has been noticed that while there is no complete definition of learner autonomy, all have reached in one way or another a decision that learner autonomy is necessary in the learning environment and to learners as individual characters (Hurd, 2005). The purpose of this section was to give a description of what is meant by 'reflection' in relation to learner autonomy. Within the scope of this research (see Figure 2.9) examining the reflection of SLTs would help to give a clear idea about the changes in the learner's language learning that occurred during their educational lives and how SLTs' autonomy can be fostered through the use of reflection. Reflection can support learners to make sense of their learning as individuals "by recalling past events, monitoring their present action or estimating their next step, all these metacognitive strategies commonly found in good language learners" (Hurd: 2005).
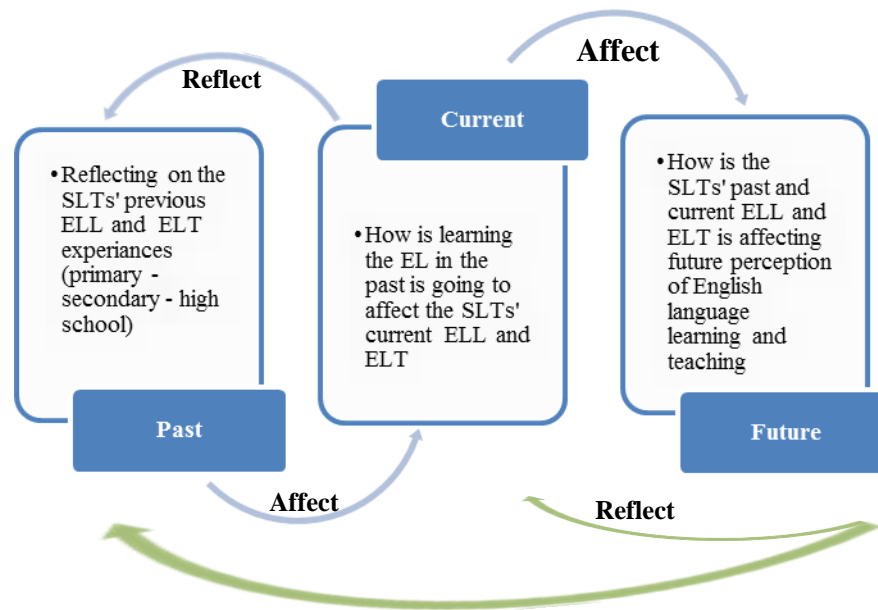
Figure 2.9 Using Reflective Journals in this Study

The teacher's role is crucial in the development and fostering of the learner's autonomy. The change in the teacher's role is important so that they will be able to develop their learners' autonomy. The need to improve this change is critical and necessary in the Kuwaiti educational system, especially in the public educational sector. This research seeks to explore whether SLTs are able to change their own way of ELL, and the need to exercise the autonomous language learning themselves in the College of Basic Education before attempting to foster it in their future language classrooms. They need to experience it first so they will know what they are expected to do. It is necessary to face the process and learn its advantages and disadvantages and the challenges that might face them. A first-hand experience would be helpful to develop autonomous learning in their future classroom.

This process is going to be challenging but not hard or impossible. The SLTs might accept it gradually if it is presented to them in a way that suits their needs, their educational background, and the educational system of their context. For the SLTs to develop their learners' autonomy they must have the ability first to change their way

of learning. By experiencing autonomous learning the SLTs will be able to learn from reflecting on their previous experiences, which will help: "Raising language teachers' awareness of past developments can, I would suggest, be one means for enhancing teacher-learner autonomy" (Smith, 2008:1). This will also help the SLTs to set rational goals, and to be able to critically evaluate the effectiveness and usefulness of the concept and adjust it to suit their abilities in using it inside the language classrooms.

So, why is learner autonomy important for the Kuwaiti language classroom? By promoting and fostering learner autonomy the learners will get the chance to learn through different ways that suit them in order to progress and develop their own requirements and style of learning, being able to make use of what they learn in and outside of the classroom to enhance their language abilities.

By implementing learner autonomy SLTs are fostered to learn from the "bottom up" where they learn from first-hand experience by trying, failing, succeeding, reflecting, evaluating, and critically generating new perspectives about language learning and teaching for themselves and their future language-learners. "Not only can learning about the past empower pre-service and in-service teachers to adopt a critical perspective on new ideas they are exposed to, but also – in particular if narratives are offered which highlight the past contributions of practitioners and the way current theory and practice build on their contributions – teachers may gain an enhanced sense of confidence in their own ability to generate appropriate pedagogies and theory, 'from the bottom up'" (Smith, 2008: 1). Being an autonomous language learner is important for the SLTs to develop lifelong learning through teacher-learner autonomy, which is essential for their educational and professional lives to be able to generate appropriate pedagogy for their future English-language classroom.

2.8 Summary

This chapter has reviewed the main three areas related to the research questions of the study. The chapter starts with the definition of learner autonomy which has also been discussed in the other sections of the literature review because of its importance in how the SLTs perceive learner autonomy. Next, the misconceptions of learner autonomy were argued to highlight the importance of the context effect on the concept. Then a diagnostic view of the concept of learner autonomy in the State of Kuwait was raised to point out the how previous studies have investigated the issue and how the SLTs' perception are developed in the Kuwaiti context. Following the context investigation, the link between the learner autonomy and the teacher autonomy was discussed to give an idea of how one affects the other, depending on and supporting the other, which is especially important for the development of the language teachers in the Kuwaiti language classroom context. The process of fostering learner autonomy was then considered as it is an important aspect of how the SLTs perceive the language learning process. The fostering of learner autonomy in the language classroom could either be affected by driven or constraining factors that play a large role in the SLTs' learner process. Factors are investigated in relation to previous studies in and outside of the Kuwaiti educational environment. Finally, the role of reflection in developing learner autonomy was discussed in relation to the SLTs' three stages of their educational lives. The link between how the SLTs' perceptions of their past, current and future educational lives can affect each other is discussed in relation to autonomous language learning.

The main purpose of the current chapter was to support the research questions raised in 1.5 by providing reviews of different theories of learner autonomy in language

learning. The next chapter will discuss the process of how the research questions will

be investigated in the field by the use of qualitative methodology.

Chapter 3 Methodology

3.1 Introduction

With this chapter I intend to present the research framework used in an effort to answer the research questions. There are many ways to carry out research in Education. Whatever way is used, the objectives are to uncover the unknown and to discover new information as well as resolve old problems (Berg, 2004).This chapter contain nine sections; each will explain the qualitative process used to gain the data necessary for the current research. First the chapter will start by discussing the research philosophy in relation to social science. Then the research design of the study will be stated to give a detailed overview of the qualitative research methodology chosen to be conducted.

After the justifications of why a qualitative approach is adopted for this research a highlight of the study being a case study will be argued. The reasons why the research three main data collection methods are chosen will be argued. These will also be related to the nature of the research context highlighted in the following section which also presents a synopsis of the research participants. The process of conducting the research methods both in the pilot and the main study will be then be discussed, concluding with the ethical considerations made to protect the participants' rights.

3.2 Social Science Research

Social Science research has, as one of its fundamental building blocks, the constructivist position that knowledge-building is an active process rather than one in

which knowledge is taken as "a set of unchanging propositions which merely need to be understood and memorized" (Bullock and Stallibrass, 2000: 346). Taken from this standpoint, any research that has human participants who are in their ecological environment will always need to bear in mind the "multiple perspectives and interpretations" (Opie et al., 2004: 15) that are endemic to the very essence of human perception on any given subject. This presents social science research with a richness that is germane to the interplay of human actors who bring to the social situation a rich tapestry of social experience, interwoven by the different trajectories of their multiple experiences. Opie et al. (2004: 15) raise a very timely caution to social science researchers, as they posit: "A good rule is never to think that anything is straightforward and 'obvious', never to take anything for granted and never to leave any assumptions unquestioned". As the research under study was conducted, a defining element that underpinned the research was thus a realisation of the co-construction of social science categories of meaning that would emerge in the research encounter, as the researcher encountered participants in the research setting.

3.3 Research Philosophies: Epistemology and Ontology

In social sciences research there are two well-known assumptions that exist, based on the two philosophical aspects of epistemology and ontology. Epistemology is "concerned with how we know things and what we can regard as acceptable knowledge in a discipline", whereas ontology is "about the theory of social entities and is concerned with what there exists to be investigated" (Walliman, 2006: 15). In this regard, philosophies about what is an acceptable knowledge can play a role in influencing the type of procedure conducted in a research study and the interpretation of its findings (Bryman, 2012).

The ontological position adopted in this research deals with "the nature of social realities" (Mason, 2002: 14), where I see the individuals as reflective creators of their learning states. Such individuals can be perceived to be the most rewarding, once they were convinced that such states were worth pursuing. In this regard, my epistemological position is that the idea was not that I perceived knowledge as being 'out there to be found'; the underlying assumption was that knowledge is *constructed*. Thus the basic position taken was that there is no true and fixed knowledge that abides outside human agency, but rather that I would have to go out into the 'field' in an attempt to discover it by investigating the individuals personally. That process of 'finding' in itself also entailed the co-construction of knowledge between the participants and me, as mentioned above.

An important consideration that I also needed to bear in mind was that the social construction of meaning is not limited to just the teachers and students, but must also include how the educational system in which the research took place was constructed, being subject to human changes, development, and criticism. What I thus aimed to establish in this research was not a solid statement of facts that had pre-existed, but was rather the authentic position that occurred as a result of interactions with different individuals in the research who, in a sense, were also constrained and affected by the macro-learning dynamics. As a result of adopting a relativist ontological and epistemological position, the approach of choice that was used in the research was predominantly a qualitative one, as the individual positions and perceptions were central to the research.

3.4 Qualitative Research Approach

Taken in the context of the foregoing paradigmatic foundations of social science research, this research adopted the qualitative research methodology, as the research questions required in-depth information as perceived by the research participants. While grounding the research in the locale of the participants and favouring their lived experiences in the co-construction of knowledge has received a lot of plaudits, this approach does include a lot of issues relating to the debate about objectivity and subjectivity that arise out of social science research. A potentially problematic dynamic was that the research investigated personal perception and individual opinions and thus the issue of subjectivity could not be ignored. Not only were issues of participants' perceptions important, but my own perceptions and how they could potentially colour the research were also significant factors. In this regard, the contentions on inherent researcher subjectivity and the need for the researcher to consciously bear this in mind, as advanced by Ramazanoglu (1992), could never be over-emphasised. Ramazanoglu (1992:211) gives timely counsel by arguing: "It is more logical to accept our subjectivity, our emotions and our socially grounded positions than to assume some of us can rise above them." Given the above, as a researcher having been at one time an SLT before examining each step of the research cycle from initial inception through production of research instruments to the actual research and analysis of findings, I thus had to consciously work on potential areas that could lead to pronounced subjectivity while also being cognisant that absolute objectivity could never be sustained in research of this nature. This extra sensitivity on my part enabled me to be on the lookout for assumptions that could have a subjective slant so that they could be dealt with as they arose.

Adopting a qualitative approach would provide a set of techniques to give a deeper description of the social situations in which the research is based. According to Creswell (1994:21) the "chief reason for conducting a qualitative study is that the study is exploratory [...and] the researcher seeks to listen to informants and to build a picture based on their ideas". Creswell also defines qualitative research as an:

"inquiry process of understanding a social or human problem, based on building a complex, holistic picture, formed with words, reporting detailed views of informants, and conducted in a natural setting" (Creswell, 1994:21).

Ultimately, qualitative research aims to offer:

"A perspective of a situation and provide well-written research reports that reflect the researcher's ability to illustrate or describe the corresponding phenomenon. One of the greatest strengths of the qualitative approach is the richness and depth of explorations and descriptions" (Myers, 2000).

These features made it ideally suited for the current research. The quantitative methodology, which is one of the major research paradigms, can be limited when compared to the qualitative methodology (Silverman, 2010). In the current research, the research questions aimed to investigate student teachers' feelings and experiences about the teaching and learning processes as they related to learner autonomy. Quantitative methods were not generally used, as they had little scope for in-depth contact with the SLTs that would allow me to meet with participants in a face-to-face manner and interact with them to gather authentic answers. Qualitative methodology, on the other hand, could address this issue through the ability to meet with the SLTs

in their natural learning environments throughout the college term and thus generate a collection of rich data over time.

Given the focus of this research, it was important to collect data on participants' ideas and opinions about the topic in more detail. Thus, the qualitative methodology enabled me to understand participants' social behaviour while gathering the information needed to capture their experiences. In addition, working with participants in their natural setting is important for ensuring that the data provide a more comprehensive picture of the actual context. Conducting interviews, including open-ended questions, with SLTs in their own environment, namely the College of Basic Education or schools, also gave me the chance to explore unexpected ideas that could emerge.

Given the central role that the researcher plays in such research, the researcher becomes a very important segment of the research process. It is in the context of the critical role that I play that Merriam (cited in Cresswell, 1994) succinctly observes:

> "The qualitative researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis. Data are mediated through this human instrument rather than through inventories, questionnaires, or machines." (Merriam, cited in Cresswell, 1994:19).

Using qualitative methodology in this research was thus deemed preferable, as it provided a better opportunity to gain a clearer understanding of the experiences of the research participants. Using the qualitative methodology allowed me to get close to the participants and to interact with them, whether formally or informally. Some other advantages of the qualitative approach were that I could interview participants,

observing their reactions and taking questions to the next level if needed. In this way, I managed to access the deeply embedded personal opinions of the participants.

Although using the qualitative methodology is more time-consuming than using the quantitative methodology, given the demands on time in respect of in-depth interviews and the verbatim transcription required, it is less structured, which provides me with more flexibility and allows me to build a good working relationship with participants. Ultimately, the qualitative methodology helps capture SLTs' voices and their authentic experiences in the field of teaching and learning, rather than simply providing a superficial overview of a specific problem.

Another reason why I chose to undertake qualitative research was because this approach worked comfortably with my gregarious social personality; I like to engage with other human beings in deep conversations about topical life-related issues. This first-hand experience is greatly valued, as it privileges the writer in the co-construction of knowledge with the participants.

Another evident strength in the qualitative approach is the relative freedom it affords the research context from being encumbered by predetermined categories (Patton, 1990). In this regard, I enjoyed a lot of flexibility, as the participant-researcher relationship is in effect fluid with a malleability that allows it to change course to accommodate practical realities on the ground. This point is also underscored by Richards (2003) who contends that the qualitative approach is an important tool that helps to explore the complexity of the social world and thereby provides a rich understanding and insight for researchers to address their roles in relation to the contexts they are in.

3.5 Research design

In social sciences research it is necessary to plan the process to conduct the research accurately. Therefore, building a research design is important. Walliman (2006: 10) indicates that the research design is "the framework into which the research fits depend[ing] on the theory and the research problem. This will underpin all the research activities." It also "reflects decisions about the priority being given to [a] range of dimensions of the research process" (Bryman, 2012: 46). This mainly concerns demonstrating a structure for the data collection and analysis procedures that help to fulfil the research aim and objectives, and to answer the research questions.

This research adopts a qualitative research approach, using a single descriptive case study. Table 3.1 presents the research stages undertaken, along with a description of each stage and the method used. That follows the five stages of conducting a social science research study suggested by Yates and Yates (2004), i.e. following the reason for the research, collecting information and evidence or data, data exploring or analysing, data interpreting, and finally presenting the work.

Research Stages	Description	Methods
Reason for the research	Investigating the SLTs' perceptions about autonomous language learning and teaching in relation to their own experiences of learning the English language.	Qualitative
Collecting evidence	Data collection	- In-depth semi-structured interviews - Reflective journals - Focus-group discussion
Data exploring	Data analysis	Thematic analysis
Data Interpreting	Linking the data to the main idea	Referring and discussing the findings in relation to the literature before and after the data collection
Presenting	Present to the audience	Work on a written/published text

Table 3.1 Stages of Conducting the Research

3.6 The Case Study

In carrying out qualitative research, several positions can be adopted, depending on the methodological preferences. One could choose participants, ranging from an individual to the entire country. Case studies are detailed investigations of individuals, groups, or other social units that focus attention on the individual case not the whole population. The main focus may thus not be to generalise, but rather to understand the details of that case in its complexity. As such, a case study is a form of qualitative descriptive research, in which "researchers [are] interested in process, meaning, and understanding gained through words or pictures" (Merriam cited in

Creswell, 1994:19). Therefore, case study research explores and describes an individual or group of individuals in a given social situation.

The context in which a research study is undertaken is an aspect that needs to be carefully considered (Cohen et al., 2007). This is very important, especially when innovation is under consideration. According to Yin's (2003) types of case studies, this research was conducting a "descriptive" case study. It thus aimed to present a well-grounded description of the concept of autonomy as perceived by the SLTs in the Kuwaiti context.

Yin (2003) says that;

> "Case study research can be based on either single- or multiple-case studies; whether single or multiple, the case study can be exploratory, descriptive or explanatory (casual)" (Yin, 2003:2).

It can be of several cases or just one. When conducting a case study, I needed to decide whether to go for multiple cases, which would offer the opportunity for comparison, or to choose the single case, which offers in-depth analysis of chosen features. Benbasat et al. (1987) gives an apt summary of the characteristics of the case study approach that are essential for people who consider using case study in their research:

1. Phenomenon is examined in a natural setting.

2. Data is collected by multiple means.

3. One or a few entities (person, group, or organisation) are examined.

4. The complexity of the unit is studied intensively.

5. Case studies are more suitable for the exploration, classification, and hypothesis development stages of the knowledge building process; the investigator should have a receptive attitude towards exploration.

6. No experimental controls or manipulation are involved.

7. The investigator may not specify the set of independent and dependent variables in advance.

8. The results derived depend heavily on the interrogative powers of the investigator.

9. Changes in site selection and data-collection methods could take place as the investigator develops new hypotheses.

10. Case research is useful in researching "why" and "how" questions because these deal with operational links to be traced over time rather than with frequency or incidence. (Benbasat et al., 1987:372).

From an analysis of the above, some strengths of the case study become apparent. One such strength is that phenomena are studied in their natural setting. This is particularly important, because in a natural setting the information gathered from conventional methods of data-collection can be supplemented by observing participants in situations that are outside the research interview situation. Thus the data-collection period is extended beyond the traditional one-hour initial interview and any other follow-up interviews. I was also afforded more time for reflection on the process, as the research site was always 'live'.

Put differently, this advantage is aptly captured by Yin (2009) who underscores the flexibility in case studies that gives the researcher the freedom to deal with issues as they occur, thus allowing researchers to retain holistic and meaningful characteristics of life as it is daily lived in the research context. While case studies have additional

flexibility in the freedom of moving from rather broad categories to a narrower focus as the research unfolds, they nonetheless have a weakness in that they are not generalisable (Yin, 2009). While there can be much merit in studies that work with representative samples and thus can be generalised, individual case studies have their own merit, as they shed much light on the intricacies of individual cases that can act as a reference point when studying similar cases. They are also of particular importance in institutional well-being, as issues that are investigated can be germane to different institutions and thus through the studies as they unravel, administrators can have a better awareness of the institutional dynamics of systems that might be malfunctioning. This point was argued by Stake (1995) who assumed an alternative approach that he called "naturalistic" generalization. He pointed out that people tend to generalize from their own experience which means that their realistic generalizations can be a result of them becoming involved in others' experiences that they feel as if they were their own. In this study I do not intend to generalize the findings but rather to manage them to relate to other case study research that has taken place in other parts of the world (Hammond and Wellington, 2013)

In this research, a case study was preferred as it was deemed more manageable, as all participants would be in a single geographic area, thus easing issues of accessibility. Another demonstrable advantage of a case study was that by being based on one research site, opportunities to develop deeper relationships between the researcher and the participants would be created, as this would move the researcher from being a complete stranger to becoming a person who becomes a natural part of their daily academic environment. This would have the added benefit of reducing the social distance between me and the SLTs. With the social distance considerably reduced over time, I would be accorded the privilege of being taken as a confidante by the

SLTs, thereby being able to access layers of personal perceptions that a complete outsider might never be able to enjoy. This gave me more authentic information relating to the various themes that were under review. A case study offers a manageable way of establishing and managing relationships with participants, as I would have the privilege of working with the same participants over time, allowing for more protracted time in establishing relationships.

3.6.1 Data Collection Methods

In deciding upon the data-collection methods to use, notice was taken of Yin's assertion that "the study cannot rely on a single data collection method but will likely need to use multiple sources of evidence" (Yin, 2003). Therefore, I chose three principal methods for data-collection, namely in-depth semi-structured interviews, reflective journals, as well as focus-group discussion. This was also complemented by the researcher field notes; details of the methods used are presented below.

3.6.1.1 Triangulation in Data Collection Methods

In this research, data triangulation (Bullock and Stallibrass, 2000) has been used. This approach was also taking into account Yin's (1984) assertion: "Any finding or conclusion in a case study is likely to be much more convincing and accurate if it is based on several different sources of information". The main data sources used in the triangulation, as shown in Figure 3.1, were individual semi-structured interviews, semi-structured focus-group discussion, and individual semi-structured reflective journals. These different sources were preferred, as they gave different vantage points from which to view the research's findings.
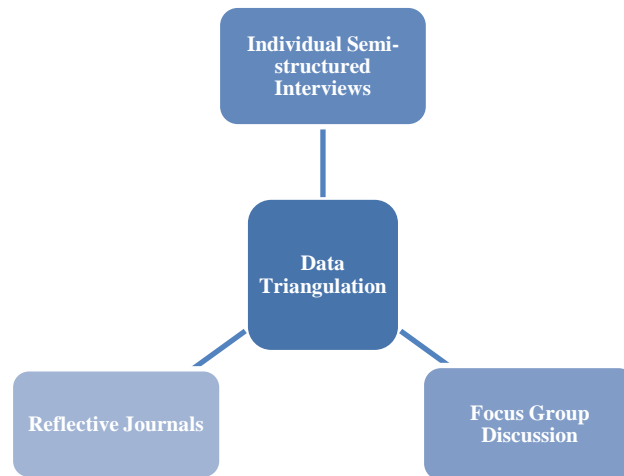
Figure 3.1 Triangulation in Data Collection Methods

3.6.1.2 Individual Interviews

Interviewing was one preferred method for data-collection, particularly because interviews afforded in-depth exploration of the subject under review, allowing the participants to respond as best as they could, also allowing for clarification as necessary. This method was chosen as one of the key data-collection methods. The interviews that were used were semi-structured. In a semi-structured interview, the interviewer sets up a general structure by deciding what ground is to be covered and what main questions are to be asked (Drever, 1995). This allowed me to probe further and explore issues surrounding participants' responses. While interviewing the participants I had always in mind the power differentials between both of our roles, between me as researcher and them as participants. Kvale (1996) posits this power differential as being always tilted in the direction of the researcher, who is usually assumed to be "the one with the higher status and sense of self-worth, who is accustomed to engaging in complex conceptual debates" (Kvale, 1996:52). Thus I needed to be aware of how the power differential played out in the interview context and to reduce any observed researcher dominance by proactively maximising the participants' input.

One challenge that had to be overcome was to ensure that the research captured and represented the participants' perceptions accurately. A principal reason why interviews were chosen was that they help in "enabling multi-sensory channels to be used: verbal, non-verbal, spoken and heard" (Cohen et al., 2007:349). Having the chance to interview and interact closely with the participants helped me to gain deeper knowledge of the participants, relative to the main issues being studied. Interviews have been seen as one of the most common and powerful ways in which people try to understand other fellow human beings. Increasingly, researchers are realising that interviews are not neutral tools of data-gathering, but active interactions between two (or more) people, leading to negotiated, contextually based results (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000). Human interaction is not only to be understood from what is spoken, but also from what is *unspoken* (through body language). Thus the interviews gave me a deeper layer of meaning, going beyond what was overtly stated, to what was communicated through body language punctuated by hesitations, pauses, and self-corrections.

In the current research, the interviews focused on understanding participants' experiences of the ELL and ELT processes. The interviews also sought to investigate factors that either encouraged or hindered these processes. A clear advantage that I experienced through the use of interviews as a data-collection method was that as I was based in the researched site for over ten weeks, the participating SLTs eventually developed close working relationships with me, which helped greatly, in that the SLTs felt freer to express their feelings and perceptions. While this was positive, there was nonetheless the danger that the respondents might on occasion fail to present their honest opinions, if they perceived such views as being likely to be appraised in a bad light. Thus to keep the peace and to save face, some of the

situations presented could possibly have been stage-managed. That would make it imperative not to have just a one-off interview, but also to have other more casual conversations about their daily educational lives.

3.6.1.2.1 The Structure of the Interview

The aims of the interview were to understand the nature of the SLTs' ELL experience in three different stages of their educational life. The first level of focus was their educational life in primary, intermediate, and secondary levels. The second level was the college environment, focusing on the participant's experience of learning in general and learning how to teach the English language in particular. The third level focused on how they intended to teach the English language depending on their own experiences as students and as SLTs in the College of Basic Education. Through administering the research instruments on each occasion, it was hoped that the findings of the SLTs' reflections on the ELL process would provide a clear picture of their attitude towards learner autonomy. Further, I found the nine steps to learner autonomy provided by Nunan (2003) a useful to guide me when writing the semi-structured interview questions (mentioned earlier in Chapter One).

The semi-structured interviews took place mainly on-site at the College of Basic Education in a meeting room that offered sufficient privacy to all interviewees. The setting was chosen to help the participants feel comfortable and at ease, which helped them speak openly and express their points of view during the interviews. Participants were given the chance to express their opinions without interference.

The interviewees were reassured that their names would not be used in any part of the research but they were nonetheless able to use pseudonyms for ease of reference if they wished. The duration of the interviews varied from 45–80 minutes and field

notes were recorded immediately after the interview. The transcription from the audio recording was also made while my memory of the interview was still fresh.

After the initial interview, follow-up interviews were also conducted. In the follow-up interview, participants were given an opportunity to comment on the content of the first interview that had by then been transcribed. Follow-up interviews were successfully held with only two of the SLTs, while the others (forty-five SLTs) did not arrive for follow-up interviews, citing problems with examination pressure and other commitments.

A strategic decision that I made was to adopt flexibility in the choice of language to use in the interviews. As English was not the SLTs' native tongue, I decided to use Arabic for the interviews, as the SLTs were fluent in it. While this appeared to be an initial strategic decision, it was of much interest in that in the actual interviews there was a lot of code-switching between English and Arabic, with several SLTs speaking in English or a mixture of English and Arabic as presented in table , more examples in (appendix A). A discussion of issues around this development will be reviewed more fully in later in Chapter Four on data presentation and analysis.

3.6.1.2.2 The Interview Tool

A digital voice recorder was the main tool used for recording the interviews with the participants. The voice recorder was found to be ideal as it allowed me enough time to concentrate on the interviews, picking up any points that might need to be investigated further. While the digital recorded sessions had recognisable voices, this was not allowed to be a problem as I ensured that the recorded interviews were not accessible to other members in the College of Basic Education. If they needed to be listened to by anyone else, it would only be by my Supervisor, who does not know any of the participants personally.

3.6.1.3 Reflective Journals

The reflective journals, on the other hand, were a complementary data-collection method as they gave opportunity for the SLTs to engage in situated reflection outside the interview context. The SLTs were also afforded more room to write their reflections, unencumbered by the pressure to complete the responses in a scheduled meeting as would normally happen in an interview context.

Reflective journals would be one of the principal methods of data-collection which would measure the students' development in the learning and teaching process (Mlynarczyk, 1998; Peyton, 1990; Bailey, 1990, 1983). Reflective journals have one advantage in that they give prospective journal-keepers adequate time for reflection, as they are normally entered away from the researcher's presence. Thus they can be filled in without the pressure that is sometimes attendant on interviews, which largely require the interviewee's immediate answers. While interviews have the advantage of spontaneity, journals can draw deeper from the participants' analysis. While "a learner can realize his potential interactively—through the guidance of supportive other persons such as parents, teachers, and peers" (Wenden, 1998: 107), this nonetheless does not mean that the learners cannot learn alone or develop by themselves. Having the chance to reflect on their experiences by documenting them might be a very useful additional guide for SLTs, in addition to other guidance that can be provided by the school supervisor.

The reflective journals were used in this research to encourage the SLTs to think critically and reflect on their ELL and teaching processes. It would be interesting to know the students' views of the educational system and their reflections on their own performances as language learners. It also provided them with an opportunity to

reflect on their successes and failures and to try to modify their search strategies accordingly, thereby giving them an opportunity for continual personal growth.

Writing daily reflective journals would potentially help SLTs become aware of their own learning and teaching skills in greater depth. Documenting their experiences in these journals while they were learning how to teach the English language would give them a better understanding of their situation while they were practising it. Through documenting their reflections, the SLTs would have a good opportunity to reflect on their previous educational experiences and compare them to what they are doing now. SLTs can reflect on their feelings toward the process of learning and teaching the English language in the classroom. They can talk about the problems and limits that they might face when teaching and developing their learner autonomy, regardless of whether the problems and limitations are from the system, the curriculum, or themselves. They can also explore how to overcome these limitations in order to teach a language autonomously.

Using reflective journals would help the students to use the target language more, whereby perhaps they would not care about the spelling or the grammar, as long as they were able to express themselves. They would also be able to express themselves as best as they could, as they would have time to write their thoughts and impressions without trying to impress any would-be listeners. If the SLTs were encouraged to discuss their perspectives in their journals with others this would also help them to have confidence in their own opinions and abilities to solve obstacles concerning their learning and teaching, which would help them to become autonomous.

Journals would encourage the SLTs to articulate their cognitive and social interactive dimensions, opinions and ideas about learning and teaching, by stepping back and

observing and reconsidering issues hindering them from becoming autonomous (Little, 1995 and 2001). The advantage of these journals to this research was that they would help in understanding the students' perspectives in certain educational situations in a specific place and time. Through reflective journals, the students would be given plenty of opportunity to think through issues of autonomous learning and teaching and take up their own considered positions. The role of the researcher would be to explore and flag relevant issues for the consideration of the participants. Reflective journals would also provide an opportunity for continuing personal development, as the SLTs would be engaging in daily self-introspection characterised by interrogation of practice, which could result in attempts to try out new approaches in teaching.

Reflective journals would also help SLTs become aware of their own ELL skills in greater depth. Documenting their thoughts in these journals while they were learning the language would give them a better understanding of the situation while they were practising it. SLTs could reflect on their feelings toward the process of learning and teaching in the language classroom. They could talk about the problems and limits that they faced when teaching and developing their learner autonomy, regardless of whether the problems and limitations were from the system, the curriculum, or themselves. They could also explore how to overcome these limitations in order to teach the English language autonomously. They could also use them during seminars with other SLTs to share experiences and learn from each other.

3.6.1.4 Focus Group Discussion

The focus-group interview was used as an additional valuable method to cover the data that might be missed by the previous two individual data-collection methods. Group interviews are preferred for their advantage "to provide data on respondents'

attitudes, feelings, beliefs, experiences and reactions in a way that would not be feasible using other methods" (Morgan, 1997: 40). There are a number of reasons stated by Bryman (2004) that are behind the use of focus-group discussions:

- To discuss with people who have had a certain experience in a relative way about that experience.

- To develop an understanding about why people think the way they do.

- Participants can raise issues and opinions of importance that are not anticipated by the researcher.

- Participants are able to argue and challenge each other's views and replies.

- The researcher provided the opportunity to study the ways in which participants together make sense of a phenomenon and create meaning around it (Bryman, 2004: 346).

This encouraged me to gather together the participants to discuss certain issues related to the research and see how they responded to each other's perceptions, e.g. how their personality changes outside the College of Basic Education, opinions about educators, and developing reflections. Group interviews thus served to elicit individual perceptions as they were juxtaposed and interrogated through the experiences of others. Gathering the participants together in a focus-group discussion will help in generating useful, interesting data and discussion (David and Sutton, 2004). The group interviews did not have much take-up, as some of the SLTs said they did not feel comfortable sharing their personal experiences, whether good or bad, with other people. They were nonetheless prepared to share their experiences with me in confidence. This disquiet was exacerbated as the SLTs would also have shared their perceptions of their college educators in the company of other students.

In total the ten SLTs participating in the focus group also participated previously in either the individual interview or the reflective journals methods.

3.6.1.5 Field Notes

All the previously mentioned methods will be complemented with the use of field notes. Field notes are important for allowing a closer experience in observing the participants' behaviour. I maintained a research diary about observations in the field when conducting the research. The field notes were taken during the interviews and with the SLTs doing the reflective journals when they came to ask about journal-writing. I bore in mind the wise advice that Burns (2000: 430) gives when she said: "Field notes should be written up as soon as possible". These field notes also contained my memos on reflections on the contact with the SLTs, thus preserving authentic participants' feelings as the research unfolded. I also took notes on my personal reactions to the process and the research, in this way allowing regular reflection on objectivity as well as difficulties and limitations encountered, how they were overcome, and how the SLTs were responding to the various data-collection methods that were used.

3.7 Context of Research

3.7.1 The College of Basic Education – English Language Department

Qualitative researchers investigate phenomena in their natural settings so that they can interpret participants' meaning related to the phenomena. Such a qualitative methodology is an approach that can be practiced in a "real world setting [where] the researcher does not attempt to manipulate the phenomenon of interest" (Patton, 2002:39). In qualitative case studies, such as the one under review here, fieldwork plays a principal role with the researcher going to the people, institution, or research

site where the targeted behaviour or perceptions can be recorded in their natural environments (Merriam cited in Creswell, 1994:19). The context or the environment for the current case study was the College of Basic Education, with particular focus on the English Language Department. Situating the research in the College of Basic Education was important as it gave me first-hand insight of the SLTs' learning experience. From a close range I was able to observe and gather information about their opinion of the educator's role, the materials used, the classrooms, the library, and even where they went for their meals.

3.7.2 Sampling

A purposive sampling approach was used, which is frequently employed in qualitative research studies (Braun and Clarke, 2013). Purposive sampling is aimed to "sample cases/participants in a strategic way, so that those sampled are relevant to research questions that are being posed" (Bryman, 2012: 418). Consequently, the researcher needs to set standards that will be applicable to the units being studied. This will also assist me as a researcher for a better understanding of the phenomena (Creswell, 2003).

Participants in this research were limited to female SLTs (as mentioned earlier; in Chapter One). The SLTs were to be graduates from Kuwaiti public schools. The SLTs were also to be students in the College of Basic Education, particularly in the English-Language Department. The SLTs were further limited to fourth-year students. They were preferred because they had a longer period of experiencing student life in the College of Basic Education and thus were able to draw upon a broader perceptual repertoire regarding the issues under investigation. Fourth-year students were also preferred because they had longer exposure to learning the

English language in addition to more experience of how to teach the English language courses.

3.8 Conducting the Research Methods

In conducting the research methods access to the students was obtained through talking to the Head of Department in the first instance and then through talking to the educators (lecturers). The educators were very helpful in introducing me to the SLTs. After the educators left the classroom I introduced myself to the learners and gave them the opportunity to introduce themselves too. Recruiting the SLTs took two weeks of going back and forth to the English Language Department classes to introduce the research topic and to recruit participants. In the first week, forty SLTs showed interest in participating and by the end of the second week a total of one hundred and seventy SLTs registered an initial intent to participate. However, only fifty six SLTs finally confirmed their willingness to take part in the research, while the rest gave apologies for their inability to participate. This is shown in Figure 3.2 below.
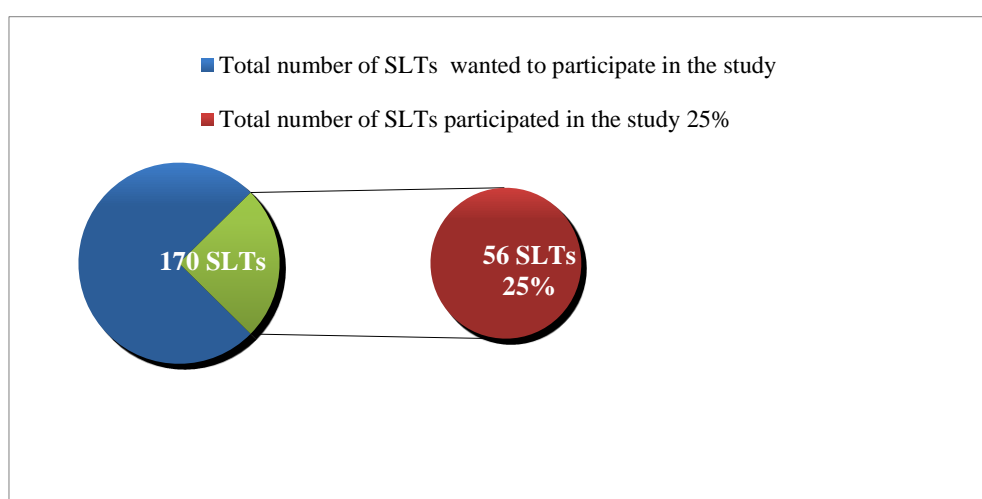
Figure 3.2 Number of SLTs Participating in this Research

The SLTs who expressed their interest in participating in this study were given the opportunity to choose the method they preferred. As a result, the SLTs were further categorised into two principal groups: the first group with ten SLTs showed interest in writing a reflective journal through keeping reflective journals over a period of eight to ten weeks, while the second group comprised forty-six SLTs wanting to participate in semi-structured interviews. Further, from the above groups only twelve SLTs participated in the focus-group discussion. This is shown in Figure 3.3.
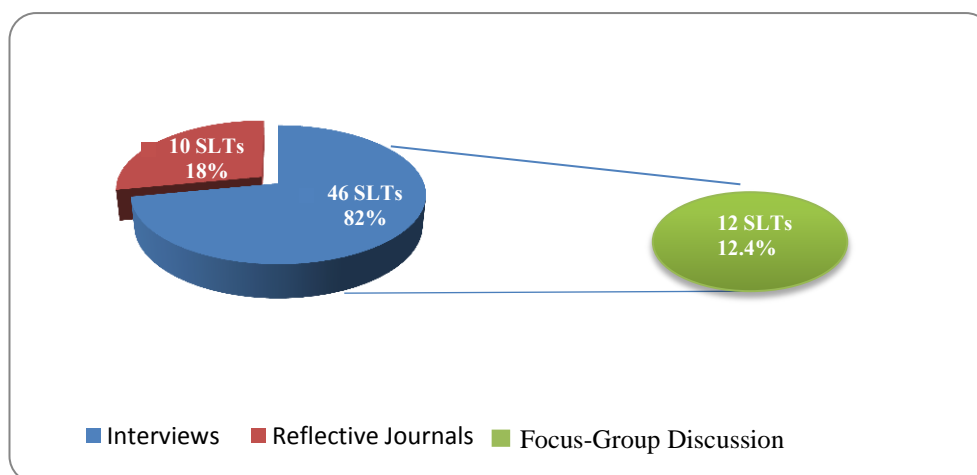
Figure 3.3 Total Numbers of SLTs Participating in the Interview, Reflective Journals and Focus Group Discussion Methods

One of the critical issues that can significantly affect the potential success of a research exercise is the issue of pilot testing. This is very important as it enables the researcher to examine the planned data-collection procedures, thereby avoiding problems that could be experienced when the main research is conducted (Seliger and Shohamy, 1989). In this research, the chosen methods were piloted in the two weeks of recruiting the SLTs for the individual semi-structured interviews and the reflective journals. Focus-group discussion was not tested because of the

examination period that took place in that time, which made it hard to gather the SLTs. However, this did not affect conducting the focus-group discussion without pre-testing it, because the questions were similar to the ones used in the individual semi-structured interviews that had already been tested. Details about the pilot and the main study will be presented under each method below.

3.8.1 Individual Semi-structured Interviews

3.8.1.1 Pilot

The individual semi-structured interviews were tested with three fourth-year SLTs. I explained the purpose of this interview to the participants and also delineated all attendant ethical procedures. The interviews were conducted in one of the English Language Department classrooms. It was the only place that I could find at short notice as use of other rooms required advance bookings. The interviews took almost an hour each with the SLTs being asked three sets of questions. The interview questions were divided into three parts. The first part targeted participants' own experiences in learning the English language as students in the public school system, while the second part focused on their own experience in learning the English language and learning how to teach the language in the College of Basic Education. The third part focused on their perceptions about how they intended to teach the English language as teachers in their English language primary classrooms.

After conducting the interviews I realized several important points that should be avoided in the main study. The participants were uncomfortable with the location where the interviews took place. Although the classrooms were empty, the venue for the interviews was not ideal because of the incessant noise coming from adjacent corridors, coupled with disruptions by other students who kept interrupting by knocking on the door or barging in, thinking that the classroom was empty. The

SLTs preferred a place that was quieter, where no one could interrupt. For the main research, I realised the importance of the advance booking of rooms, which could be clearly cordoned off from interruptive visits.

As for the general levels of participation, the SLTs were most engaged during the interviews, preferring to be interviewed in English rather than Arabic. For three of the students, this choice did not last long as they started code-switching between English and Arabic. For them the rest of the interview became predominantly in Arabic as they had greater flexibility in expressing themselves in their native language.

The data collected from the pilot study helped me in modifying the interview questions, as there were instances where some of the issues were repeated. While rephrasing questions could assist in establishing previous trends observed in the data, sometimes the repetition becomes boring if the questions are not carefully reworded. Other questions were too broad in their meaning, so I amended them to be more specific and added probes to help with additional information, if needed. Some questions were moved to a different point in the interview to serve a more effective purpose.

3.8.1.2 Main Study

Before conducting the main interview the final preparations of the questions were made. They were reviewed several times by me before setting the final format (appendix D). The questions varied and covered a wide range of topics, such as age, input, perceptions, experiences, instruction, error correction, power, and autonomous learning and teaching. Questions were grouped and put under these and other topics.

As has been mentioned above, forty six SLTs participated in the interview. It was important to ensure that the interview preparation was ready before starting the interviews such as by location, voice recorder, and clear instructions. The first couple of interviews were conducted in a classroom, while the rest took place in a meeting room provided by the College of Basic Education for the research to take place in an appropriate environment. All of the participants were provided with the information sheet (appendix B) and consent form (appendix C) to ensure that they had a clear picture of their participation (more details in section 3.12). And for more flexibility I informed them that they could talk either in English or Arabic, based on their preference, to give them more freedom and to feel more comfortable during the interview.

The interviews were conducted over a period of three months, from October 2011 to January 2012 (appendix E). The number of SLTs who were willing to participate in the first two months was higher than in the last month of the research. This was because in January they were taking examinations and thus were involved with preparation for the examinations. This is as shown in Figure 3.4 below.
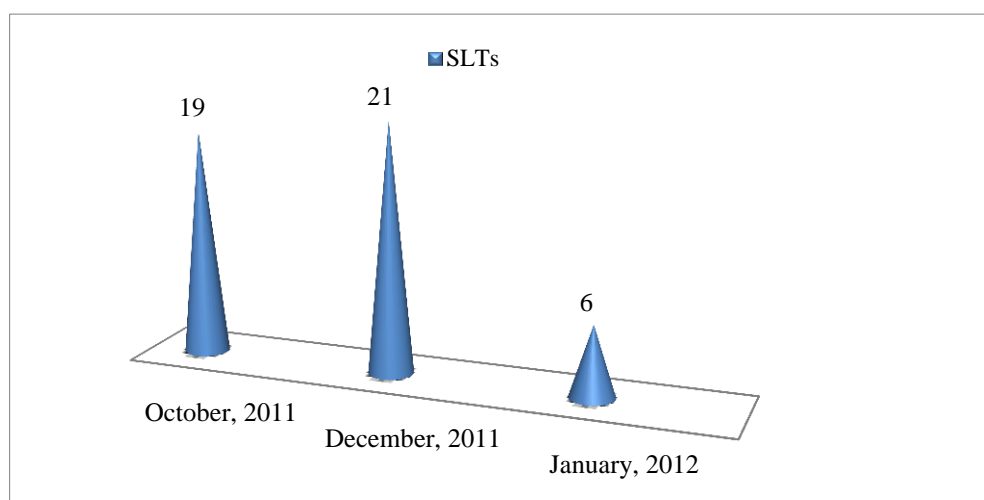
Figure 3.4 Number of SLTs Participating in the Individual Interviews – Main Study

With every interview that was conducted questions were modified to suit the interviewee. However, the basic layout and major questions were the same all the way through, but interviewing participants with different educational and social backgrounds and different experiences led to a slight change in the interview questions. If during an interview a point came up which I felt could be useful for the research, this was added to the interview questions and asked to the future participants. After conducting all the forty six interviews and having the opportunity to translate and transcribe them I produced a final copy of the interview questions.

3.8.2 Reflective Journal

3.8.2.1 Pilot

A small-scale pilot study involving two SLTs was conducted. I used a structured format for the reflective journal design, allowing the SLTs to record their activities and perceptions about the language learning process in their own words. This format allowed the participants to feel comfortable when writing their views and not to be confused about what to write. SLTs were asked to keep a reflective journal for a week. I asked them to try to write at least four entries each in their preferred language either Arabic or English. The reason why they were asked to write four journal entries was to not overload the students in the pilot study. The main objective was to have a 'feel' about the experience of the journal-writing by students who were similar to the participants taking place in the main study.

Each participant was handed a file with practical guidelines on how to write a journal. The SLTs were given the choice of either writing the entries on paper, sending them by email, or by voice recorder; separately every day or as a whole at the end of the week. During the week I made sure that the SLTs had access to me whenever they wanted if they had a question, and they were free to write emails on a

daily basis or meet me in person as I was based at the College of Basic Education throughout the week. Both SLTs handed in the hard copy journals at the end of the week, and both had written four entries. As a result, after having transcribed the pilot reflective journals and having had the chance to talk with the SLTs about their experience in writing them, I decided to make some changes regarding the reflective journal design.

The SLTs in the pilot study had complained about not having had enough time to answer all the questions raised. They would have preferred a checklist of topics to talk about and not questions to answer. Taking into consideration the points arising from analysing the reflective journals in the pilot study, some points were changed to make the journal-writing an easier process. The structured reflective journals were replaced by a semi-structured reflective journal containing a checklist of all the major topics that needed to be focused upon, as well as guidelines and advice from me to the participants to enable them to make journal entries in a more informed way.

The issue of writing a reflective journal is generally something not practiced or preferred by many participants, and especially with the current research participants and context. Using reflective journals could become limiting for the SLTs as they might find it difficult to write their journals day-by-day or even to keep track of everything they faced. Most of the SLTs may also not have had the chance to write journals before this study, especially not reflective journals. This is why in this research I had to use another tool to support the journals such as interviews.

3.8.2.2 Main Study

As has been mentioned above, ten SLTs participated in completing the reflective journal. With the SLTs writing the reflective journals they had the chance to see me

any time they wanted to ask about issues related to the journal-writing. Because I was there in the college almost all the time to conduct the interviews, they were free to speak to me between meetings. I made sure that they felt comfortable to come and see me whenever they wanted. I was also taking notes about the journal-writing every time I met with any of them. To supplement the face-to-face meetings, I also encouraged the SLTs to email me, an option that a number of them frequently took. This attempt provided the students with more space to communicate.

Figure 3.5 below demonstrates the number of entries each student made during the ten weeks of the data-collection period. As shown, six SLTs wrote reflective journals in the ten-week period. One participant kept the reflective journals for eight weeks, while the other three SLTs wrote six entries each during the data-collection period.
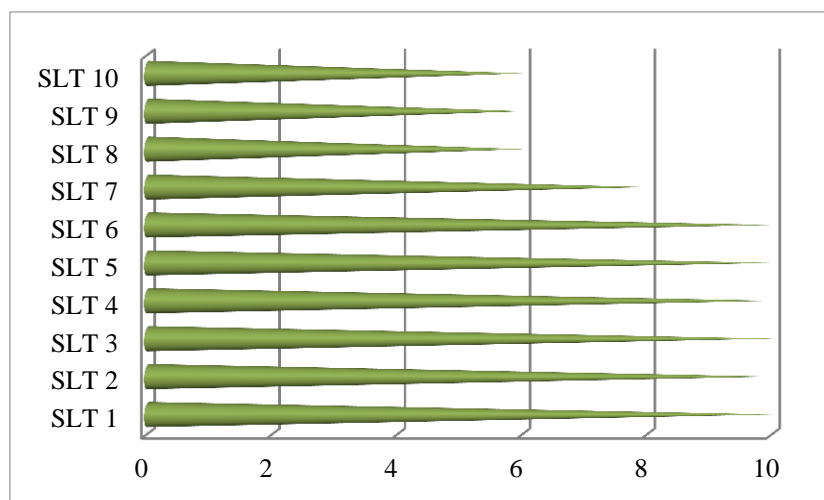
Figure 3.5 Number of Weeks the SLTs Kept Reflective Journals

The SLTs were given flexibility in terms of writing their journal entries. Apart from writing journal entries, they were also given the choice of recording their reflections, which was the choice of a single participant. The majority elected to communicate

their reflections by email (eight SLTs). The distribution of take-up of the three options is shown in Figure 3.6 below.
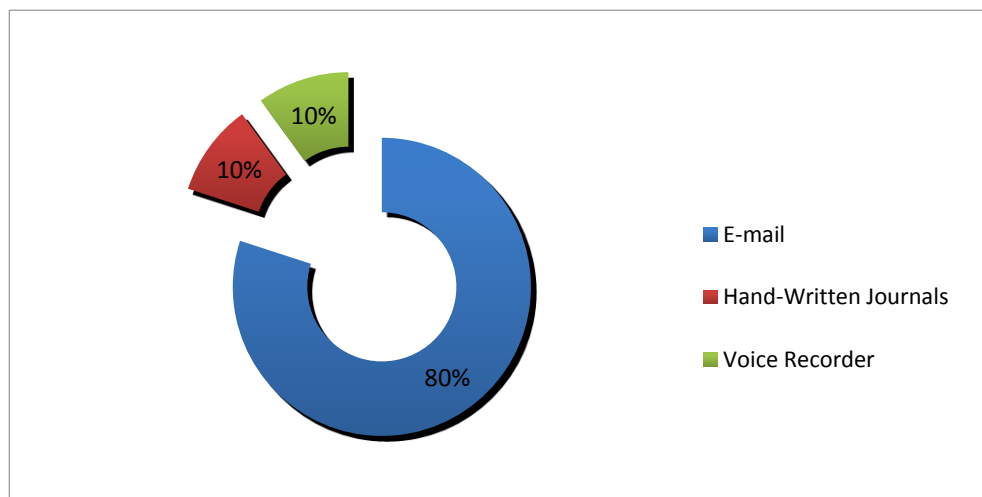
Figure 3.6 Choices of SLTs in Completing the Reflective Journal

3.8.3 Focus-Group Discussion

Focus-group discussion was another data-collection method that was used in the research as a complementary tool to the individual semi-structured interviews and the reflective journals. After the initial comparing and contrasting of the findings of both the previous data-collection methods that were conducted with individual participants separately, the initial data emerging from of both methods pushed me to conduct the focus-group discussion. The SLTs' answers created a gap that I wanted to investigate by gathering them all together and listening to what they had to say about their ELL experiences. The gap was not a lack of data, but more a case of exploring the change (similarities and differences between) in SLTs' responses to the interview questions from being alone and from being with others who shared the same experience.

Inviting the SLTs to take part in the focus-group discussion was challenging. First I emailed them, explaining the need to discuss further matters about their experience in participating in an academic research study, particularly to talk and reflect about developing their learning experiences to discover the issues that helped them to improve their language skills. However, few SLTs replied and expressed their interest in coming. Therefore, I had to invite them again as more for an informal social gathering, saying that food and drinks would be provided with the focus-group discussion. This worked well with them and twelve SLTs were encouraged to participate.

The questions asked in the focus-group discussion were similar to the ones asked in the individual semi-structured interviews, except that they were not as detailed, to allow adequate room for issues to be discussed more in depth without the feeling of being hurried. These questions and their informing rationale are discussed below.

3.8.3.1 The Focus-Group Discussion Questions

The focus-group questions started with general questions as a way of 'breaking the ice' so that the participants would open up more.

Question 1: How would you describe the Kuwaiti English language classroom?

The objective of this question was to identify the positive and negative features that participants saw as characterising the English language classrooms in Kuwait. This was followed by probes covering what they wished to see in the classrooms, how the Kuwaiti culture influenced classroom practices in learning the language, and the unique characteristics defining the Kuwaiti English language classroom.

Question 2: How do you describe your ELL process?

The objective of this question was to make the SLTs talk about their experience as learners in schools and SLTs in the College of Basic Education. It was also intended to give a holistic understanding of the SLTs' language learning experience during their previous and current educational lives. That helps to identify the forces hindering them from, or driving them to, developing their language learning. In addition, this question would also give an idea of the aspects of autonomous language learning that the SLTs might show in the way they describe their learning process.

Question 3: Define how you see your role as a future teacher in the Kuwaiti public English language classroom?

This question addressed the SLT's future views and how they will be affected by their previous and current experiences. The objective of this question was to identify participants' capacity and willingness for autonomous teaching, how they saw their role, what they wished their role to be, what kind of autonomous practices they would use in their classroom, and the issue of control and power over the learning process. This question, with further probing, also elicited the participants' views about how their English language-teachers taught them the language.

Question 4: What do the teachers think about the idea of giving the learners the chance to choose what, how, and when they want to learn?

The objective of this question was to identify the teachers' attitudes about control and power, their attitudes about giving learners the chance to choose how much and to what extent, how they evaluated their students' capacity, what practices they wished they had available when they were learners themselves, how their attitudes about autonomy (either positive or negative) could influence how they want their

learners to learn the language, whether they had the will to train their students to become autonomous, and the kinds of strategies they wanted their students to use.

3.9 Data analysis

This section will present the thematic data analysis approach used to analyze the data. The process of transcribing and generating the themes and codes will be mentioned below. This section will also discuss the approaches that I intend to use to analyses data generated from the four research questions.

3.9.1 Thematic Data Analysis

As stated in previous sections 3.6.1.1, triangulation of data-collection methods was preferred to shed more light on the phenomena under investigation from multiple angles. Data-collection and analysis were concurrent activities which I engaged in. This started from the pilot stages for both individual semi-structured interviews and journal-writing. The data gleaned from the pilot studies was proactively used to inform subsequent stages of the data-collection exercise as questions were modified in the light of the answers that emerged from the pilot studies. Details of the data analysis stages are presented in the following sections.

3.9.1.1 Transcribing

Prior to the analysis stage, the data preparation process needed carrying out to be closely engaged and familiar with all the collected data, including the individual semi-structured interviews, focus-group discussion, and the reflective journals. That was where the transcribing and translating stage took place. As interviews were held, I followed these up by transcribing the recorded interviews while the information was still fresh in my mind, thereby assisting the compilation of more accurate records. The transcription process began by listening to each voice recording several

times before making any notes, as a way of obtaining a holistic picture of each interview.

Ball (1991) suggested an approach whereby the data from interviews is analysed by highlighting only what seems to be important and interesting in relation to the research questions and the major points investigated, with short notes being made for labelling the data. Therefore, I adopted this method of transcribing with which I made a selective transcription of each interview and also highlighted the important observations that were emerging by annotating the text. By using this method of analysis, the data transcribing was less time-consuming and provided the research with a focused selection of codes, which assisted in producing a transcript that could be transformed into a text related to the research questions.

As the interviews were conducted, the participants were given ample time to express their ideas fully without interruption. These verbatim records helped in furnishing the participants' perspective as they also showed what the SLTs were passionate about, as seen from the matters they seemed to dwell upon.

The solid guidelines for transcription were the criteria proposed by Richards (2003: 199): "fitness for purpose, adequacy, and accuracy". As a result, features such as speaker tone, normal pause (less than 3 seconds) etc. were ignored in the transcription. However, the participants' general behaviours, such as speaking tone, gestures, and the way they talked, were observed and noted down in my notebook.

While transcribing, I was sensitive to some of the inherent ethical dilemmas surrounding transcription. As Lapadat and Lindsay (1999) argued, transcribing itself is a process of interpreting, because the extent to which the participants' voices are displayed often involves the researcher's decision-making.

As stated previously, while the interviews started in the medium of Arabic, it became clear to me that some of the SLTs were trying to show me that they were capable of speaking English, but soon they started to code-switch between Arabic and English, showing that they were having problems in expressing themselves fully in English. Thus I gave them the option of choosing to answer the interview questions in the way they felt most comfortable with.

The reason behind this was that most of the SLTs were code-switching all of the time during the interview, e.g. some students used English almost entirely throughout the interview. This was also found in the reflective journals, in which some SLTs used both Arabic and English in their writing. The SLTs were code-switching because of the following reasons:

- They were trying hard to prove that they knew how to speak the language fluently.
- I was asking about things related to their ELL and future teaching.

In the light of the above, I found it more convenient to translate the required materials while transcribing. This also helped me to accurately represent the original meanings of participants' words. Further, my own abilities in using the formal Arabic language were not good enough to be able to transcribe the interviews in perfect Arabic first time and to then do the translation.

Follow-up interviews were also employed to ensure that the transcribed interviews were a correct transcription of what had transpired and been translated in the interviews. After transcribing the data I tried my best to give the transcriptions to the SLTs to review, but unfortunately I could not reach most of them because they were either not in the college due to examinations or they had already finished their

examinations. From the fifty-five SLTs who were both interviewed and had kept a reflective journal, I managed to follow up one of the transcribed interviews with its participant and one of the translated reflective journals with another. The two SLTs who did review the transcriptions agreed that they were an accurate record of what they had said.

3.9.1.2 Codes and Themes

After preparing the written data including the individual interviews, the focus-group discussion, and the reflective journals it was necessary to engage and be familiar with the data in order to understand it prior to the analysis. In that stage, codes and themes needed to be generated. Figure 3.7 illustrates the undertaken stages that were used in conducting the codes and the themes.

To manage this process I initially tried using the qualitative data analysis software (NVivo) to deal and organise the data. However, I found this to be time-consuming and less effective for me. Hence this analysis stage was conducted manually, so that I could physically deal with the data by printing the text and highlighting the codes, and then writing my notes by hand. I then categorised and organised the codes and themes by transferring them into tables in Microsoft Word.
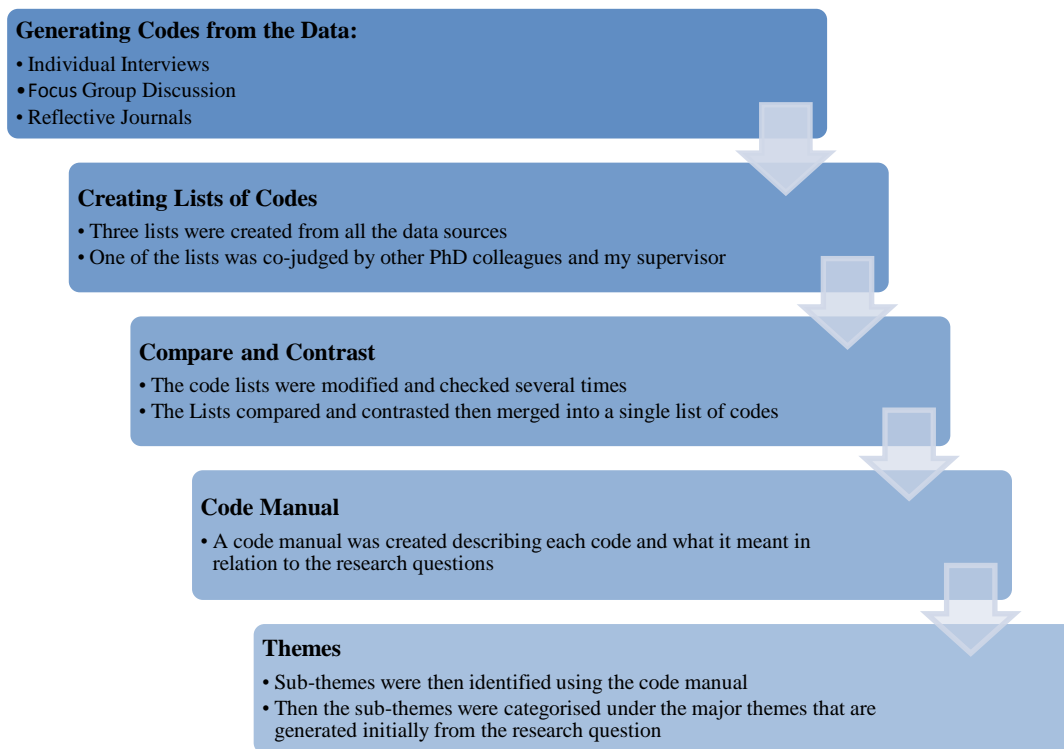
Figure 3.7 Stages of Developing the Codes and Themes in this Research

Through the piloting of both the individual semi-structured interviews as well as the reflective journals, I was able to formatively improve both the interviews and reflective journal data-collection instruments. Following up on selective transcription of all the interviews, I was able to generate manual codes from the data from which subthemes and major themes were drawn. Therefore, facilitating inferences were to be drawn in the further data analysis procedure that was presented, in which data triangulated using thematic analysis approach were divided under headings reflecting the four research questions with reference to learner autonomy. These headings were: Firstly, exploring the general concept by investigating the SLTs' perceptions of their own ELL and ELT in their educational life (past, present, and future); Secondly, understanding the development of learner autonomy, by looking into the forces that might have helped or hindered the SLTs' ELL during the process of their educational life; Thirdly, investigating the practical aspects of learner autonomy as shown from

the SLTs' perception of the ELL and ELT. Finally, the SLTs' reflection and future vision viewpoint will be explored in relation to their ELL and future ELT. The following chapter will present the research finding and discussion under the main four analytical dimensions.

3.9.1.2.1 Codes

In qualitative analysis, code "is most often a word or phrase" that is representatively assigned to summarise a portion of language-based data (Saldana, 2012), to give it a descriptive meaning. To generate codes I started by reading the data repeatedly in order to get a general sense and familiarise myself with the data before making an actual coding. Coding was considered as being the primary step that focused on description but also contributed to a more vibrant data analysis. The codes were not superimposed on the data but were emergent (appendix F and G). Punch (2005: 200) suggests using descriptive codes, i.e. "finding codes from data" rather than "bringing codes to data". Therefore, generated codes were mainly emerging from the data, which were largely formed from recurring trends as seen from the responses of the SLTs as I made a line-by-line analysis of the transcripts (Richards, 2003). In addition, a prior set of codes that reflected the research questions was also used in generating codes (appendix H and I).

Lists of codes were created for all the data, and then one of the lists was co-judged by other fellow PhD colleagues and my Supervisor. Following their comments, the code lists were modified and reorganized. The code lists were checked several times for their overlap in order to compare and contrast all the codes to produce a single list that represented all data for further analysis. Further, to ensure consistency a code manual was created that describes each code and what it meant in relation to the research questions.

3.9.1.2.2 Themes

The code manual in this stage was used as a base to group the codes to identify patterns and themes of the data (Punch, 2005) ending in grouping the codes into similar subthemes. This step used techniques proposed by Strauss and Corbin (2000), namely, first combining individual pieces of open coding with the data as a whole to discover conceptual patterns, then secondly, making an overall judgement based on the data in its entirety to identify central themes.

From the subthemes it was possible for me to draw out broader themes that embraced the subthemes. These themes were then examined in the context of the relevant literature that had a bearing on those themes. This helped in producing the major themes that were originally generated from the research questions. The major themes and subthemes will assist with data-comparison and discussion later in this research. Throughout the process I reflected on whether the themes were "analytically useful, conceptually coherent, empirically relevant, and practically applicable" (Richards, 2003: 276). The main themes and subthemes will be discussed later in Chapter Five.

3.9.2 Data Analysis Procedure

In this section the data analysis procedure will be presented. The findings in this research were analysed and triangulated, based on a qualitative approach involving three major research methods: semi-structured interviews, reflective journals, and focus-group discussion. The data gathered were analysed thematically as presented before. The analysis approaches set out in this section are divided under headings reflecting the four research questions with reference to learner autonomy, as follows:

1. First, *exploring the general concept* by investigating the SLTs' perceptions of their own ELL and ELT in their educational life (past, present, and future).

2. Secondly, *understanding the development of learner autonomy,* by looking into the forces that might have helped or hindered the SLTs' ELL during the process of their educational life.

3. Thirdly, investigating the *practical aspects of learner autonomy* as shown from the SLTs' perception of the ELL and ELT.

4. Finally, the SLTs' *reflection and future vision* viewpoint will be explored in relation to their ELL and future ELT.

This section will also explain in more detail the data analysis procedure developed by the current research to analyse the collected data. Based on the nature of the data, a number of existing theories will be combined to generate the analysis procedure. The theories were researched and modified to produce a data analysis procedure that suits the current research investigation. Each approach was chosen depending on the research's main questions.

The data analysis procedure is intended to explore the SLTs' learner autonomy by investigating four main research areas, starting with the educational background, driving and hindering forces affecting the language learning process, the learner autonomy aspects resulting from reactions to the forces, and finally the learners' critical reflections on their previous learning experiences in relation to their future vision. This procedure was designed so that it could help the current research in identifying the general overview of the learners' perceptions concerning their autonomous language learning and teaching. Figure 3.8 will present the three qualitative thematic analyses that will be conducted in sequential stages through the current research. First, the *preliminary analysis* stage, which focuses on exploring the SLTs' educational background by using the basic *thematic analysis* tool to generate major themes and subthemes. Secondly, the *in-depth analysis* will explore

the overall data generated from the first stage in two steps. Step one intends to understand the driving and hindering forces by the use of *force field analysis* (Lewin, 1951). This will help analysing the following stage that seeks to identify the aspects of learner autonomy that were adapted from Benson and Voller's (1997) versions of autonomy and Oxford's (2003) models of learner autonomy, which will be considered as step two of the in-depth analysis; more details will be presented in the following sections. The third and final stage will be an *overall reflective analysis*, which will cover the previous stages in order to produce the future vision of the SLTs' educational language learning using the *I-statement analysis*, adapted from (Ushioda, 2008; Gee, 2005; Fang and Warschauer, 2004). The above-mentioned data analysis approaches will be discussed in more detail in the next sections.
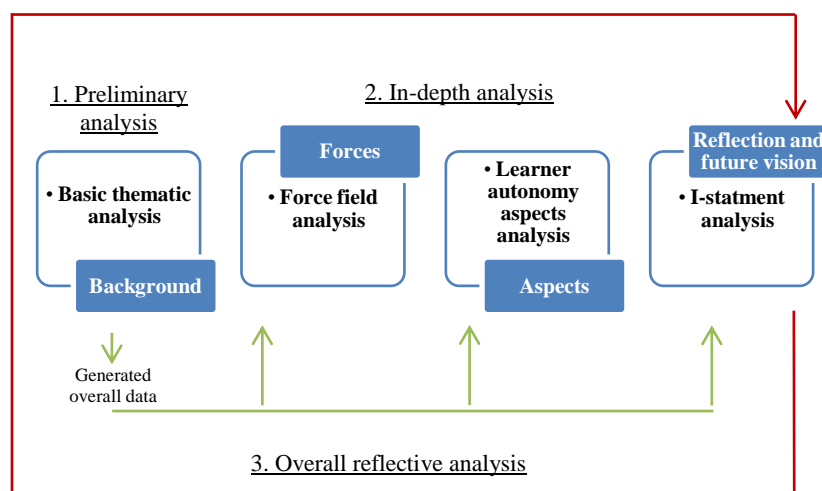
Figure 3.8 Thematic Analysis Procedure Used for Data Interpretation

3.9.2.1 Exploring Student Language Teachers' Perceptions of Learner Autonomy (Background)

This section will first examine the SLTs' perceptions about their own ELL during their educational life (in the past and currently). This will provide an idea of the overall concept of learner autonomy in relation to their ELL backgrounds. The

purpose of these perceptions was to tell a story and give a general view of the SLTs' own experiences, opinions, and views; this is not only about their ELL experiences and the roles of educators and teachers, but also about the environment in which the ELL took place. The SLTs' perceptions are built on their personal experiences and the new knowledge that they have developed over the years. This means that they might able to give their perceptions about what they predict their ELL and ELT will be in the future. Knowing their future vision would help to link the relationships between the SLTs' perceptions of the three levels of their educational life. The analysis approach is used here to demonstrate the data has descriptive themes. The themes will be divided into subthemes that will capture the SLTs' general perceptions of their ELL and ELT.

3.9.2.2 Understanding the Development of Learner Autonomy (Force Field Analysis)

Secondly, a number of forces either driving or restraining might have affected the SLTs' ELL experiences during the previous and current stages of their educational life. Those forces might also affect their perceptions about their ELL and ELT in the future. This part will examine the SLTs' perceptions about the past and currently to identify what has helped in developing their ELL. On the other hand, it will also look into the factors that have hindered the SLTs' ELL experience. The purpose of knowing such factors is to help in understanding the development of learner autonomy, and how forces have helped in shaping the SLTs' views of the development of their ELL and ELT.

To be able to address this step I am using the *'force field theory'* to identify the forces that have most affected the SLTs' ELL. If there had been changes to the SLTs' perceptions about ELL, then there would be reasons behind why and how

those changes accrued. 'Force field' analysis, as discussed by Lewin (1951), concerns when certain forces can affect change. It is a tool for analysing and describing the negative and positive forces that influence the issue being discussed and is used to generate a strategy or plan of action: "a mechanism for identifying and assessing the various forces working for and against strategic changes" (Thomas, 1985: 65). Lewin (1951) also wrote: "An issue is held in balance by the interaction of two opposing sets of forces – those seeking to promote change (driving forces) and those attempting to maintain the status quo (restraining forces)." The reason why I am using force field analysis is because I am trying to identify the forces that are influencing these changes—if any—and after identifying them I can then study how I can strengthen the driving forces and weaken the hindering ones in an attempt to achieve success in the field under research.

Force field analysis is used to improve and evaluate change. "The use of force field analysis is a means of evaluating strategies and planning their implementation" (Thomas, 1985: 54) and this is what this research is looking at. In order to make the SLTs aware of autonomous language learning and teaching it is important to study the situation they are in and what is affecting their learning process, whether in a positive or a negative way. If this research is aiming to implement new techniques and to promote learner autonomy, then identification and evaluation of the forces that play a role in the ELL and ELT processes should take place. Force field analysis is more useful if it is conducted with a group of SLTs. In this research the SLTs were first interviewed and were asked to keep a reflective journal individually, and as mentioned in Chapter Three, after hearing the SLTs' perceptions individually, I wanted to see what would happen if I were to gather them all for a focus-group interview. This step worked for me because after gathering some of the SLTs

together they practised the force field theory through the use of the conversations and debates in the focus-group discussion method.

By using the force field theory to analysis the data at this stage (see Figure 3.9), I will be able to build an idea of whether the driving forces or the restraining forces had the biggest influence on the SLTs' ELL and ELT. This will lead me to investigate the effects of those forces, e.g. were the SLTs promoted to seek alternative ways to develop their ELL? Are those new ways helping in making the SLTs become autonomous learners? Did those forces change the SLTs' perceptions about their future ELT? After completing the analysis at this stage, I will be able to identify the aspects of learner autonomy as shown by the SLTs' perceptions and actions.
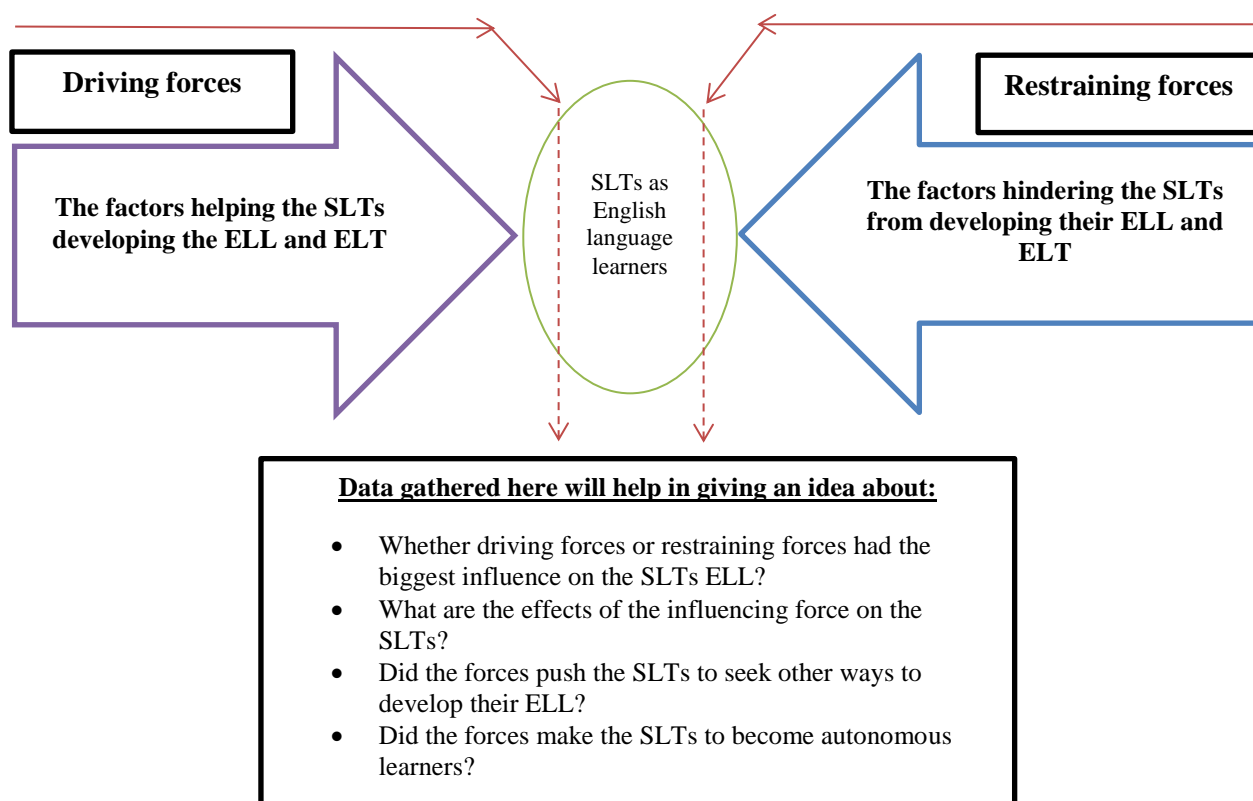
Figure 3.9 Applying the Force Field Theory to Analyse the Forces Affecting Change in the SLTs' ELL and ELT (Adapted from Lewin, 1951)

3.9.2.3 The Practical Aspects of Learner Autonomy

The third part of the data analysis procedure is where I explore the aspects of learner autonomy shown by the SLTs' perceptions and actions, and examine what practical and appropriate language learning skills they have used or have personally developed and enhanced to improve their own ELL and future ELT. Facing different forces, whether driving or restraining, might have led the SLTs to seek alternative ways to develop their ELL. Certain methods of language learning that the SLTs have practised necessitated their relying on themselves, determining whether those ways are affective, suitable, and beneficial or appropriate for their age and educational level. The goal of this investigation was to identify the practical aspects of learner autonomy as used by the SLTs and why they used them.

The aspects of learner autonomy that the SLTs might show can be divided into categories adapted from Benson's (2006) versions of autonomy and Oxford's (2003) models of learner autonomy. Figure 3.10 demonstrates that the aspects of learner autonomy in this research are divided into two main categories: *personal perspectives* and *organisational perspective*. Personal perspective refers to the SLT's aspects as a person, while the organisational perspective refers to the Kuwaiti public educational environment surrounding them. The personal aspects are subdivided into three parts: first the psychological aspect, from which the SLTs have the ability to take more responsibility for their own language learning. This includes awareness of what they want to do and the choices that they make to take responsibility for their ELL. Secondly, the social aspect indicates the capacity to interact and collaborate with others. This includes being able to learn from resources other than the teacher, e.g. from peers or learning groups, or seeking advice from other educators who do not teach them. This relates to facilitated learning. Finally, there is the technical

perspective (the act of learning a language outside the framework of an educational institution and without the intervention of the teacher). This involves being able to learn in a different environment to the classroom, e.g. a library, self-study centres, other colleges, cafés, etc. where there is no teacher supervision. This relates to the physical situation of the learning and transcendence of the conventional learning space.

The second category is the organisational perspective of the SLTs' assessment of learner autonomy. The organisational perspective is also divided into two parts; first the power and control aspect, referring to the conditions that allow learners to control the process and content of their own learning, as well as the institutional context within which the learning takes place. This includes being able to become involved in the learning process, being able to take decisions about the learning process, e.g. when and how they want to learn, and being able to choose the learning activities that they are going to follow, so that the 'teacher' and the 'student' are equal in playing their own roles in the language classroom. The power and control aspects also included the relationship and interaction between the learner and the teacher in the language classroom. The second part in this category is the educational culture, which refers to how the system controls the learners' ELL and ELT. This includes the system's requirements, rules, and policies that restrict the SLTs, in terms of what, when, and how they learn and how these requirements affect the development of their ELL and ELT. After identifying the aspects, they will then be categorised under each perspective as themes and subthemes.

Aspects of Learner Autonomy				
Personal perspectives			Organisational perspectives	
Psychological Perspective	Social Perspective	Technical perspective	Power and control aspect	Educational culture
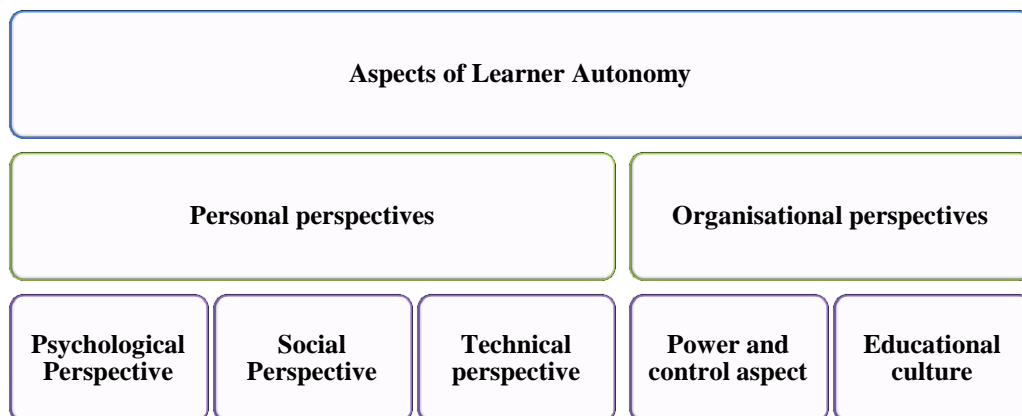
Figure 3.10 Aspects of Learner Autonomy adapted from Benson (2006) and Oxford (2003)

3.9.2.4 Reflection and Future Vision (I-statement)

The fourth part of the data analysis procedure discusses the SLTs' reflection and future vision of their educational and professional life. The reflections depend on their own experiences as learners and as SLTs and the new knowledge that they have developed, either by themselves or with the help of others. As mentioned in the first analysis stage, the SLTs' perception from their previous and current experiences will focus on how they have been taught the English language and how they themselves learned it. The future will depend on the SLTs' personal experience and knowledge, developed both from the past and from current experience, and how those are going to affect their own ELL and ELT in their future English language classrooms, with the use of reflection. The SLTs' perceptions will illustrate how they perceive ELL and ELT in the Kuwaiti educational context at different levels (past, current, and future), which will then be compared to see whether there are any significant differences or a relationship between the previous two educational stages and their future vision.

The SLTs' perceptions in this research are gathered by the use of interviews, reflective journals, and focus-group discussion. The nature of the data gathered is of

a *narrative type*, due to the investigation of their own experiences in the ELL and ELT. To analyse the data gathered I decided to use the *'I-statement'* and '*We-statement'* analysis as tools to study the SLTs' reflections during the three levels of their educational lives. I-statements are typically categorised on the basis of the type of predicate that follows 'I' (Ushioda, 2008: 5).

The thematic approach is used to generate the codes from the data, collected and categorised under themes that represent the major points that are being investigated in the research questions. The I-statement analysis is the data analysis approach that is used here to understand the SLTs' ELL patterns and to compare and contrast them over the course of their educational stages. Ushioda takes on the definition by Gee (2005) of I-statement analysis that it is "a form of discourse analysis that examines how people speak or write in the first person to describe their actions, feelings, abilities, goals, and so on, and how they thus construct particular socially situated identities through language" (Ushioda, 2008: 5).

The advantage of I-statement analysis is that it can be used as a systematic tool for "quantifying textual data in a comprehensive way". Secondly, it "offers a fine-grained tool for exploring specific cognitions and individual case histories in a qualitative way" (Ushioda, 2008: 6).

The findings will be presented using the I-statement analysis which will be discussed in relation to (Ushioda et al., 2011; Wei, 2011; Ushioda, 2010; Ushioda, 2008; Gee, 2005; and Fang and Warschauer, 2004). I will then give an explanation of how the I-statement approach was adapted for the current research and how it is going to be used to present findings later in this chapter.

To achieve learner autonomy the SLTs should develop growth in their *metacognitive knowledge* and *self-regularity* skills. When I adopted the I-statement categories, I relied on Gee's explanation that the categories depend on the overall outcome of the data, the context, and the research focus (Gee, 2005). Such metacognitive knowledge and self-regulatory skills are key to mainstream conceptions of learner autonomy in the applied linguistics literature, defined by Little as "a capacity – for detachment, critical reflection, decision-making, and independent action" (Little, 1991: 4). This research will adopt the categories of I-statement analysis from (Ushioda, 2008; Gee, 2005; Fang and Warschauer, 2004). The categories of Cognitive Statements (affective statements, action statements, constraint statements, and achievements statements) will be used to enable 'vertical' analysis (how I-statements change over time through a student's learning process) as well as 'horizontal' analysis (I-statement patterns across the whole learner group) as demonstrated in Figure 3.11.

The challenge that I might have faced while analysing the SLTs' reflections was, as Wei explains, that the "actual analysis is not as clear-cut as that, since in reflective accounts, it was common to find more than one type of statement in one single sentence" (Wei, 2011: 130). To overcome this obstacle, Wei decided to calculate I-statements on the basis of 'clauses' so that she could manage to break down the long sentences. Using I-statement analysis will not only link together the four research questions, but also help to give a general idea about the SLTs' reflection and future vision, in addition to capturing their ELL process during their educational life and examining the changes that accrued over time.

"Horizontal analyses"
(I-statement patterns across whole SLTs participants)

I was

- Cognitive statements
- Affective statements
- Action statements
- Constraint statements
- Achievements statement
- (We) statement

Past

I am

- Cognitive statements
- Affective statements
- Action statements
- Constraint statements
- Achievements statement
- (We) statement

Current

I will

- Cognitive statements
- Affective statements
- Action statements
- Constraint statements
- Achievements statement
- (We) statement

Future

Reflection

The experience as a whole:

The I-statement analysis

"Vertical analysis"
(How I-statements change over time through the SLTs learning process)

Identifying aspects of LA through evidence of personal language learning growth

Examining the SLTs' reflections to evaluate their development in LA

Figure 3.11 I-statement Analysis, adapted from (Ushioda, 2008; Gee, 2005; Fang and Warschauer, 2004).

3.9.3 Summary of the data analysis

In the previous sections the data analysis tools used to generate the data were discussed in addition to the data analysis procedures that were modified to suit the current research. The table below summarises how the following chapter will be presented (Table 3.2) depending on the four research questions. The table presents the major and sub-themes that were generated with the help of the data analysis procedures.

RQ	Data analysis procedure	Major themes	Sub-themes
RQ1	Basic thematic analysis	Autonomy and age	-
		Creating own goals	
		Out of the classroom learning	
		Raising awareness, identifying styles, strategies and generating tasks	
		Decision making and learner as teacher	
		Learners and resources	
RQ2	Force field theory (Figure 3.9)	External forces	Power
			Motivation
			Resources/teaching
			Culture/environment
		Internal forces	Attitudes in relation to motivation
			Capacity in relation to technology
RQ3	Learner autonomy aspects (Figure 3.10)	Personal perspective	Psychological
			Sociological
			Technical
		Organizational perspectives	Political
			Educational culture
RQ4	I and we-statements (Figure 3.11)	SLT's I-statements	Awareness
			Evaluation
			Regulation

Table 3.2 A Summary of the Data Analysis Procedures, Major Themes and Sub-themes in Relation to Research Questions

3.10 Ethical Considerations

In conducting a research study involving people, it is critical that the researcher observes ethical practice (Punch, 2005; Richards, 2003; Miles and Huberman, 1994). Ethical practice entails, among other things, ensuring that the researcher treats the participants fairly and with respect. These points on some of the fundamentals of ethical practice are highlighted by (Sieber, cited in Opie et al., 1993). The information gathered should also be freely given with participants well aware of their rights. The participation should be voluntary at all times and the participants should not be coerced into participation and should from the first contact be informed of their right to withdraw or decline to participate. Sikes (2004) raises a timely warning in respect of a number of requirements that researchers have to bear in mind when they intend to collect data from the participants. One of these is that the participants must have full knowledge of all aspects of the research. They also have to know their role and rights, and they must agree to participate willingly without pressure from educators (Sikes, 2004). They should be thanked for their participation and informed of the findings. Thus, I presented prospective participants with all the required information to enable them to make informed choices.

3.10.1 Access

Gaining access is critical when conducting ethical research. Gaining access is indeed not a case of 'one size fits all' but must be negotiated at each level. When conducting the research, it was important for me to seek appropriate permission from the authorities in order to be granted entry to the participants and the research site (Marshal and Rossman cited in Creswell, 1994). In the current research, as a graduate research student, I first sought permission from the University of Sheffield,

where ethical issues need to be cleared before one may embark on the fieldwork (appendix I and J). I also lodged the Research Proposal with the Public Authority of Applied Education and Training requesting permission to enter the research sites; this was also granted by that organisation. Having cleared all these preliminary hurdles, the next hurdle to be cleared was in the research site: the College of Basic Education. In that case, clearance had to be given by the Head of the English Language Department who had oversight for all the students in the College of Basic Education. Subsequently, I had to approach the educators (lecturers) in the College of Basic Education, who had responsibility over the SLTs who were the targeted participants. At each stage, I had to briefly explain the research while also explaining the ways in which the various authorities could facilitate entry at the next level, as these were gatekeepers who had the power either to open or close doors to the next stage of the research cycle. Having received the green light, I then approached the SLTs in their respective classes, when invited to the respective classes by the educators. In approaching the SLTs in the English classes, I had to introduce the research and explain how it would be conducted, as well as how participants would be involved.

3.10.2 Informed Consent

Research participants at all times should be made aware of what they are committing themselves to by agreeing to participate in a research project. Not only should they be made aware of what the intended research is about, but also they should be informed that the decision to participate is entirely their own and thus they need to be made aware that I would have no ill feelings towards them should they decide not to take part in the research. As participation is entirely voluntary, the participants should not be coerced to participate and should be informed of their right to

withdraw or decline to participate from the first contact. Sikes (2004) raises a timely warning in respect of a number of requirements that researchers have to bear in mind when they intend to collect data from the participants. One of these is that participants must have full knowledge about all aspects of the research. They also have to know their role and rights and in addition they have to agree to participate willingly without pressure from anyone, be it internal or external to the research context.

 The SLTs who participated in this research were first addressed by me while they were in their teaching groups. Subsequent to this, I worked with the SLTs who volunteered to participate in the research. Agreements were arrived at through discussions as to which SLTs would participate in the individual interviews, as well as those who would participate in the focus-group discussion. Negotiations were also made with some of the SLTs participating in the interviews, so that they could also participate in journal-writing. In all instances, the SLTs were informed of their right to withdraw from the research at any point if they so decided. They were also assured that participation in the research would not affect their grades in any way, either for those who chose to participate in the research or those who chose not to.

3.10.3 Confidentiality

Another prerequisite for ethical research practice is confidentiality. Participants need to be assured at all times that what they share in the research will be treated confidentially without unnecessary disclosure to parties that are not privy to the research. In this research I assured the SLTs of their anonymity, and as a way of ensuring that their views would not be attributed to them in their personal capacity, the SLTs chose pseudonyms that they used and which were also used for the write-up.

3.10.4 Trustworthiness and credibility

Achieving quality in a research study is a crucial step to take to guarantee the study's trustworthiness. So the question that needs to be addressed is what constitutes the quality of qualitative research? Throughout this research I made every effort to provide details of each step to achieve transparency for the reader. This follows the process as argued by Flick (2007) that "transparency becomes relevant in several ways for enhancing the quality of qualitative research. Transparency means in general to make the research process, in its steps and in the decisions that influenced how data and results were produced, understandable to readers in the broadest sense" (p. 137). Trustworthiness, nonetheless, is of the essence as all research should as far as is possible be a true reflection of what actually transpired. One way in which researchers can check whether their records and analysis are reliable is through member validation (Richards, 2003).

In this research, transparency does not only imply clear communication, but is also a measure for the trustworthiness of the research findings. The current research has tried to achieve trustworthiness throughout the research process, starting with the research questions, then choosing the research methods and finally analysing the data to seeking feedback from others. The research questions have gone through a number of steps to reach the final stage where four main research questions were developed to help obtain the best data possible. Questions were developed through careful consideration of how to approach a particular environment and specific participants.

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the methodological paradigm preferred for this research was the qualitative research paradigm, as it was believed that this gave an opportunity for the fullest rendition of the phenomena under

investigation from the perspective of the SLTs. To achieve trustworthiness while collecting the data, triangulation when choosing the research methods was applied. Through in-depth individual semi-structured interviews and focus-group discussion, as well as analytic reflective journals, the SLTs were afforded an opportunity to express their views on autonomous learning from their perspectives as SLTs in the Kuwaiti public educational environment. These methods were then complemented by field notes while expression of the SLTs' deeply felt views was given not only through the initial one-to-one interviews but also through the focus group discussion.

Following the data collection, a number of data analysis approaches were developed to ensure that the data were analysed properly and made use of the full range of information provided. To achieve trustworthiness of the data gathered I sought member validation by giving two SLTs the opportunity to read and comment on the transcripts of previous interviews. Any comments or observations on points which participants felt I had not understood correctly were noted and added to the original transcripts. I also ensured that I sought continuous feedback from I supervisor and other colleagues to develop my knowledge and avoid any bias.

Reliability and validity are contested concepts in research, particularly when viewed from the contrasting perspectives of the qualitative and quantitative research paradigms. Central to the issues being debated is the extent to which qualitative or naturalistic inquiry could be considered to be objective. Mellon puts forward a very well-considered view on how objectivity should be perceived from a naturalistic perspective, by arguing:

"Total objectivity is impossible for researchers who are, after all, human beings. The difference between the two research traditions is not that one has and one lacks

objectivity. The difference is that naturalistic researchers systematically acknowledge and document their biases rather than striving to rise above them". (Mellon,1990: 26).

Thus I have to acknowledge my positioning as a person who was also a Kuwaiti female student language learner and teacher. While being positioned as a female could in some way have assisted in reducing the social distance between the SLTs and me that in itself presented problems, as closeness had its own limitations of blurring aspects that could stand out to researchers external to the context of the research. While it is good practice for researchers to reflect on possible biases that could affect the authenticity of the research findings, it is nonetheless essential that researchers bear in mind the limit to which they may truly eliminate their own influence, a point well-argued by Bogdan and Biklen (2006) who propose that researchers cannot reduce all of their own effects on subjects or obtain a perfect communication between what they wish to study and what they actually study.

3.11 Summary

The chapter discussed the main methodology chosen for this research in addition to the research methods and the data analysis procedures used to generate the data. Ethical considerations were also highlighted to protect the participant's rights.

"Investigating the driving forces and the restraining forces, and then start the journey to fight with and against each to achieve a better language learning circumstances and environment for the language learners to develop their autonomy" Aljaser, 2015

Chapter 4 Findings and Discussion

4.1 Introduction

With the aim to be able to provide the best answers to my research questions I have decided to follow the same pattern that I have been using throughout the thesis by first combining the findings and discussion chapters together and then dividing the chapter into four parts relating to the four research questions. This chapter will present the main findings of the research, as well as the discussion highlighting the relevant points studied from the literature in relation to the current research. As mentioned earlier in Chapter Three, the data were collected from three main qualitative research methods, such as individual semi-structured interviews, the reflective journals, and the focus-group discussion, which was analysed thematically using different analysis approaches. The chapter will start with a research overview that will give an overall view of the data collection process, information about the participants, as well as the number of participants in each method used. The section will also show how each method helped in answering the research questions. After that the main findings and discussion will be presented, structured by the four main research questions as follows: exploring SLTs' perceptions of learner autonomy, understanding the development of learner autonomy, the practical aspects of learner autonomy, and reflection and future vision. Under each of these sections an explanation of the purpose of the question will be revisited followed by the main findings, and will end with a discussion of these findings in relation to other studies. The chapter will end with a summary highlighting the key finding of the research.

4.2 Research Overview

The following (Figure 4.1) summarises the setting of the current research as a collectivist context, taking place in a public educational sector in which the teachers have existed in the traditional language classroom as their main source of information. As mentioned before, it is intended that what suits the current educational system is a collaborative relationship between the teacher and the learner in taking the responsibilities for the learning process inside of the classroom.

1. Cultural perspective - Collectivist context

2. Public educational environment

3. Inside the classroom learning

Constructive collaborative development

Partial autonomy

4. Outside of the classroom learning

Personal development

Personal knowledge
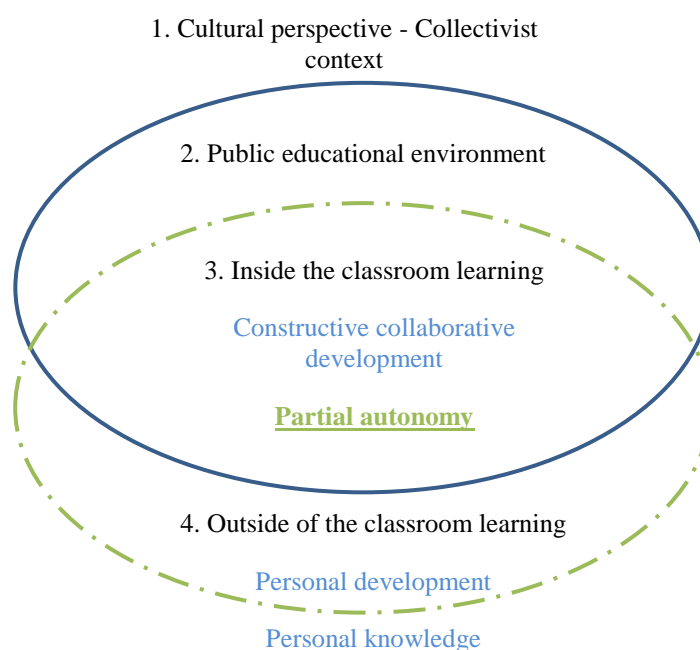
Figure 4.1 The Intended Autonomous Language Learning Definition in the Kuwaiti Educational Environment in the Current Research

Changing this research study's educational system, textbooks, and the educational environment is a big step that will require time and new policies and practice. If the language-teachers are well prepared, well educated, and able to develop independently they can respond positively to changes that could accrue in their professional life. Ushioda (2008) conducted a study on the Chinese academic context, based on important measures of which, in order for the language learning model to succeed, there should be "growth in metacognitive knowledge and self-regulatory skills, enabling those who complete the course to continue learning

independently and continue developing their English language skills in response to changing professional needs and circumstances" (Ushioda, 2008: 3).

In this research the development of the SLTs' autonomous language learning process depends on their reflective thinking. Before beginning the improvement process they should first be able to develop their metacognitive knowledge and self-regulatory skills. Growth in the SLTs' awareness of reflective learning could help them to become more autonomous language-learners. The participants in this study are fourth-year SLTs from the College of Basic Education (English language Department). The SLTs are learning the English language and also learning how to teach it. The demographical information for the fifty-six SLTs (see Table 4.1) is detailed below and further information can be found later in this chapter. Although the following details were gathered, not all were used directly within the data analysis; they are here to give a general idea about the research participants. In addition to this, the research was investigating learners as outcomes of public education sectors, but still as shown in the table, three SLTs graduated from other types of school such as the Persian school and private schools in Kuwait. Even though these participants did not fit the criteria, I find it valuable to include their data but selectively, regarding a certain period of their educational time when they had public education.

Age	- 55 (SLTs) were aged between 20 – 26 years - 1 (SLT) was over 30 and preferred not to state their age
Year of Study	- All (SLTs) were in their Fourth year of study
Previous education	- 1 (SLT) was a graduate of a Persian school - 2 (SLTs) were graduates of private schools in Kuwait - 53 (SLTs) were graduates of Kuwaiti public schools

Table 4.1 Demographic Data of the Participants (SLTs)

In the main study the participating SLTs were divided into two groups, forty six SLTs having semi-structured interviews and ten SLTs writing the reflective journals. At the end of the data collection period a focus-group discussion was held and twelve SLTs participated. The data collection was conducted over a period of three months (see appendix E), depending on the SLTs' availability and circumstances, e.g. the beginning of the semester – Eid holiday – the examinations at the end of the semester (see Table 4.2).

Data Collection stages	Data collection Methods		Number of responses (SLTs)	Total responses (SLTs)
Pilot study	Semi-structured interviews		3	5
	Reflective journals		2	
Main study	Semi-structured interviews		46	46
	Reflective journals (10 weeks duration)	10 entries	6	10
		8 entries	1	
		6 entries	3	
	Focus group discussion		9 (participated in semi-structured interviews)	10
			1 (participated in Reflective journals)	
Follow-up	Semi-structured interviews		2	2
	Reflective journals		0	

Table 4.2 Overview of the Number of Participants in Each Data Collection Method

Once again it is worth saying that this research was not intended to measure the effectiveness of the data collection methods; rather they were used only to help in giving an accurate perception (see Figure 4.2)

During the process of data collection, participants had access to the researcher on a daily basis by phone, email, or face-to-face meeting in the college, to provide more

explanation for them if needed. In addition, the researcher tried to achieve triangulation in various stages of the data analysis. By carrying out a follow-up interview with SLTs (see Table 4.2) and also having the chance to discuss the data with other PhD colleagues in the same field, the researcher's own perspectives and field notes and, of course, feedback from the researcher's Supervisor, all supported triangulation. The data collection methods were chosen depending on the research question, the context, and the participants. The following is a Table (4.3) explaining in brief the research questions and what methods helped in answering them.

Main Focus	Semi-structured interviews	Reflective journals	Focus group
RQ1: What are the perceptions of SLTs about their own English language learning and teaching experiences in the Kuwaiti context, with special reference to the place of learner autonomy?	√	—	√
RQ2: What factors encourage or hinder the SLTs in the development of their own Learner Autonomy?	√	—	√
RQ3: What practical and appropriate aspects were used to enhance the SLTs' own learner autonomy?	√	√	√
RQ4: How will the SLTs' reflections on ELL in their previous and current educational life affect their perceptions about the future development of their own ELL and ELT in relation to learner autonomy?	√	√	√

Table 4.3 Data Collection Methods Used to Answer the Research Questions

The STLs were given the chance to choose to be interviewed either in Arabic or English. For three of the students, their choice did not last long as they started code-switching between English and Arabic. For them the rest of the interview became predominantly in Arabic as they had greater flexibility in expressing themselves in their native language. As stated, while the interviews started in the medium of Arabic, it became clear to me that some of the SLTs were trying to show me that

they were capable of speaking English, but soon they started to code-switch between Arabic and English, showing that they were having problems in expressing themselves fully in English. Thus I gave them the option of choosing to answer the interview questions in the way they felt most comfortable with.

The reason behind this was that most of the SLTs were code-switching all of the time during the interview, e.g. some students used English almost entirely throughout the interview. This was also found in the reflective journals, in which some SLTs used both Arabic and English in their writing. Code switching accrued in all of the research methods conducted in this research but particularly in the focus group discussion when I noticed that the SLTs were trying hard to show that they are capable of speaking the language in front of their peers while in the individual interviews they were more relaxed and code switched between the two languages.

The SLTs were code-switching because they were trying hard to prove that they knew how to speak the language fluently but could not manage so they went back to using Arabic. In the light of the above, I found it more convenient to translate the required materials while transcribing. This also helped me to accurately represent the original meanings of participants' words. Further, my own abilities in using the formal Arabic language are not good enough because I was not taught the Arabic Language formally from an early age to be able to transcribe the interviews in perfect Arabic first time and then translate them.

The data was thematically analysed; the interviews and journals were first transcribed and translated and then codes were generated. The codes were then categorised manually to major themes and subthemes that were generated in advance

from the literature and the research questions. The diagram in Figure 4.2 below shows the case study methods.
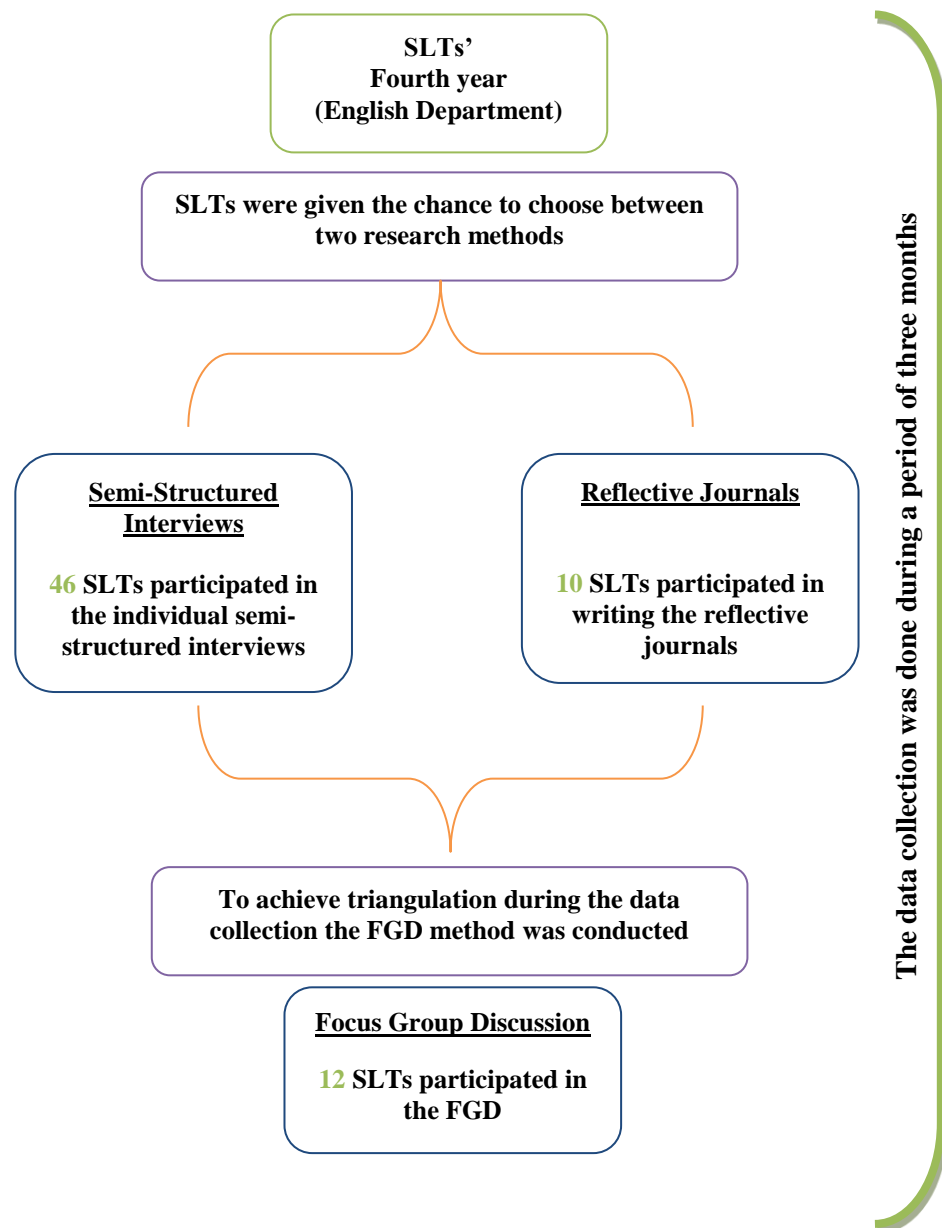
Figure 4.2 A Brief of the Methods Used in the Case Study

As mentioned earlier in the methodology chapter, the choice of the research methods was dependent on the context where this research was taking place and the participants involved. Initially, three research methods were used to collect the data starting with the individual face to face interviews, the reflective journal and

concluding with a focus group discussion. During the recruitment period, the SLTs were asked whether they had participated in an educational research project or if they had been interviewed or even if they had kept an educational journal before; the majority of them said they had not. This was an issue that made me keen to conduct the focus group at the end of the data collection period, so that I could have the opportunity to conduct an individual evaluation of the SLTs' perceptions and then use the focus group discussion as a means to explore more fully what had emerged from the two previous methods.

It is important to mention that in this research it was not intended to *measure* the effectiveness of the data collection methods though this was reflected on; rather they were used to help in giving a holistic sense of the SLTs' perception of the issues raised. As an essential stage in an educational research study, a pilot was conducted simultaneously for both the individual interview and the reflective journals. The decision to conduct a pilot study prior to embarking on the main research project was significant as it can provide a crucial trial of what might happen in the main study so that any problems or weaknesses identified can be avoided. The process of testing the recruitment of participants, the research methods and the analysis of the initial data revealed the constraints of time and that the SLTs were very busy at that period preparing for examinations; in addition, they lacked the knowledge of how to express their opinions.

The outcome of the pilot study in relation to both methods showed that the SLTs with whom the individual interviews were conducted were confused about certain questions and felt that they were repeated; this was because either they did not know how to answer them or did not have an answer to them. This did not mean that the interview questions were not appropriate or well prepared but simply revealed that

the effect of the SLTs' traditional educational background was very apparent. Their lack of individual and collaborative learning experiences and their lack of knowledge about the range of possible learning and teaching methods made them feel at a loss and question the meaning behind the questions. What was also a constraint was that the SLTs, because that they are English major students, wanted to prove to me that they were fluent in English; they became confused by the questions and thus started to code-switch between English and Arabic as mentioned earlier in the methodology chapter. As a result, the interview questions were modified to suit their language abilities to get the best data possible.

With the reflective journals, the SLTs were given the opportunity to present their perceptions in more than one way. Most of the SLTs chose email as the means of communication between us. The reflective journals were structured, with specific questions for each SLT to answer depending on what they had experienced during their daily learning process. As a result of the pilot study of writing the reflective journal, the SLTs suggested some changes be made as a result of the constraints they faced such as lack of time and lack of knowledge of what to write. They preferred a checklist of topics to talk about rather than questions to answer. I decided to make some changes regarding the reflective journal design to make it easier for the SLTs by adding a checklist of important topics. In the end, in the main study, the SLTs participating ended up not following the guidelines but just writing what they felt to be relevant.

My observation after conducting the pilot study was that even though the SLTs were new to this experience they still showed interest in going through it. Firstly, by asking me to make the amendments to the methods to suit them; and secondly by attending the interviews and continuing to participate by writing the reflective

journals. After having the opportunity to quickly analyse some of the data gathered, I noticed that the SLTs had opinions, faced constraints and overcame those constraints but only as individuals. The main conclusion drawn from this was that they were not used to working with other students or learning from each other; in addition, they were used to being in an educational environment that did not encourage collaborative learning.

Even though I knew that not many SLTs would attend the focus group interviews because they were held at the end of their educational courses and they all needed to study for the examinations, I still went ahead and invited them to participate. Ten of the SLTs expressed interest while the rest declined. What motivated me to conduct the focus group discussion was that I wanted to explore if the SLTs' individual perceptions would change or develop if they discussed them with their peers. The results of the focus group discussion showed that the SLTs did in fact show signs of autonomous learning. Each stated their perceptions and shared them with their peers. The themes that emerged from the individual interviews were similar to the themes that emerged from the focus group interviews. This confirmed that the SLTs found that group discussions with their peers about their English language learning and teaching were helpful and beneficial.

The following table shows the links between the initial themes that emerged from the individual interviews of the ten SLTs and how frequently they were mentioned in the focus group. Only the individual interviews of the ten SLTs who attended the focus group will be used. The themes in the table are the major themes generated from the data analysis (see table 4.3). The tick under each theme indicates how frequently each theme was mentioned in the two types of interviews.

The table below shows that some themes did not emerge from some of the individual interviews but were still mentioned in the focus group discussion. The SLTs with lack of knowledge of these aspects were encouraged to participate and expressed their perceptions about the themes when they were in a group discussion with their peers. One of the main points the table below raises is that all of the SLTs in the two types of interviews mentioned three major themes (the learner resources – external forces – organizational perspective). This indicates that they all have perceptions when it comes to their educational context. Also, the issues of power position, teaching styles, educational culture and resources were raised. It was concluded that their educational environment is seen still as traditional as it was in their previous educational life and will be in their future teaching career. Another interesting point emerging from the table below is that only four SLTs (1-2-5 and 10) showed the interest and opinions about the themes in both types of interviews. They especially stood out in the focus group discussion, expressing perceptions that were very helpful to the other SLTs.

Type of interviews	Autonomy and age	Creating own goals	Out of the classroom learning	Raising awareness, identifying styles, strategies and generating tasks	Decision making and learner as teacher	Learners and resources	External forces	Internal forces	Personal perspective	Organizational perspectives	SLT's (I) statement
Individual interview (1)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Individual interview (2)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Individual interview (3)				✓		✓	✓			✓	
Individual interview (4)			✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Individual interview (5)	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Individual interview (6)	✓			✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Individual interview (7)				✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Individual interview (8)						✓	✓			✓	
Individual interview (9)	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Individual interview (10)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Focus group discussion	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Total	7	5	8	8	6	11	11	8	9	11	9

Table 4.3 A Summary Findings from the Individuals Interview and the Focus Group Discussion

4.3 Research Question One: Exploring Student Language Teachers' Perceptions of Learner Autonomy

What are the perceptions of SLTs' about their own ELL and teaching experiences in the Kuwaiti context, with special reference to the place of learner autonomy?

The first research question is related to SLTs' general perceptions about their ELL and ELT. The objective of this question is to establish current perceptions of SLTs in the College of Basic Education regarding their own ELL in relation to learner autonomy during the three phases of their educational life. I have adopted Nunan's (2003) nine steps for developing learner autonomy (section 2.6.1) to present the findings of the first research question. These steps were also used as a base to generate the interview questions as explained in the previous chapter. In addition to that, the nine steps were diverse and mixed so that they covered all areas of this question concerning the learners' ELL and ELT.

The following Table (4.4) contains Nunan's (2003) nine steps of developing learner autonomy in addition to the adapted main themes of each step and a brief summary of the SLTs' outcome that will be elaborated in more detail below.

Steps	Nunan (2003)	Themes adapted from Nunan (2003)	SLTs' Outcomes
1	Make instruction goals clear to learners (What to learn)	Autonomy and age	Not actively involved
2	Allow learners to create their own goals	Creating own goals	Not actively involved
3	Encourage learners to use their target language outside the classroom (how to learn)	Out of the classroom learning	To a certain extent. SLTs' personal efforts.

4	Raise awareness of learning processes	Raising awareness	To a certain extent, teachers' poor guidance, SLTs' personal efforts
5	Help learners identify their own preferred styles and strategies	Identifying styles and strategies	Limited; the SLTS are not as free as they want to be. The traditional classroom restricts the SLTs and the exam-based structure.
6	Encourage learner choice	Decision-making	Limited choices of materials and facilities
7	Allow learners to generate their own tasks	Generating tasks	Limited time – not actively involved
8	Encourage learners to become teachers	Learners as teachers	It was practised for a while in the intermediate level, although not all the learners had the chance to become a teacher in the classroom
9	Encourage learners to become researchers	Learners as researchers	Limited to higher education

Table 4.4 Research Question One: Themes adapted from Nunan's Nine Steps to Developing Learner Autonomy (2003) and Data Outcome.

4.3.1 Main Findings

The following are the main themes generated from the data collected in relation to Nunan's (2003) nine steps to developing learner autonomy. Each theme will give its own meaning in comparison to Nunan's steps. The examples presented under each theme will be from the SLTs' own perceptions. It has to be noted that not all of the participants' data is going to be used, because most of the data were similar. The SLTs' perceptions were in a way alike when it came to both agreeing and disagreeing on the topics raised. Some SLTs stood apart in giving their opinion and thoughts and they will be mentioned below, but that does not mean that the rest of the SLTs' perception will not be taken into consideration. The SLTs' examples from

their data will be divided to three phases. The first two are related to their (past and current English language learning) and the third about their (future) teaching for later comparison in the fourth research question.

4.3.1.1 Autonomy and Age

Nunan's (2003) first step of his fostering approach is concerned with making the learning and teaching instruction's goals clear to the learners. He argued that the teachers should always encourage the learners to identify and recognise their learning process from a young age. In this research, whether being at the primary or secondary level it is important for the learners to be able to understand the goal behind their learning process. This should not only be limited to the higher education level but also to the younger learners. It is a good step for the teachers to be able to communicate with their learners in the Kuwaiti public schools by discussing and introducing to them the purpose of what they will be learning and giving them a voice to find out what, where, and when they will learn.

The SLTs were asked several questions about their previous language learning experiences in relation to the way they were taught the English language and their experience of communicating with the teacher both inside and outside of the classroom. Almost all of the SLTs responded that the relationship was formal, except for a few learners. One of them recalled that, because of the classroom setting and it being required for the SLTs to remain in the classroom almost all of the day while the teachers were mobile and moved from class to class, this made it hard for SLTs to communicate with their teachers, explaining that: *"She comes in, tries to prepare everything quick and starts. After she finishes she has to go because the other teacher is coming in. I could go to her office but I don't feel the connection that makes me comfortable"* (SLT-7). When the SLTs were asked whether their teachers

ever started the semester or the lesson by introducing either the curriculum or the lesson, they answered with, *"No, no time I guess. And then why would she do that? Does she have to?"* (SLT- 4) and another SLT added that they would not have understood if she had (SLT -13).

Moving to the current phase of the SLTs' educational stage in the College of Basic Education, when they were asked the same question related to their experience now, the answers were mixed between being the same as or different from the previous stage while others mentioned, *"It depends on the doctor"* (SLT-6). In the current stage the student felt that it was helpful when the teacher talked to them as *"grown-ups"* and communicated with them *"informally"* about their learning (SLT-6). One SLT added that "*It's great when the teacher talks with us about what we are going to do"* (SLT-8), indicating that this has made her feel more involved and motivated.

Although the SLTs participating in this research had not experienced actual teaching yet, they were still asked whether they will try to introduce it when they do start teaching and help their future learners to recognise and understand what they are going to be learning. The answers also were divided between *yes* and *no*, but most of them agreed that they would try as much as they could, especially as they will graduate to teach at primary level. One SLT said: *"I think if the teacher spoke to us when I was at that age I would have understood her, so, why not? I will talk to them like I talk to any other child and make an effort"* (SLT- 6). Another positive reaction was raised from another SLT, arguing: *"I can't assume all of my students are not going to understand at this age but still there can be one that does. It's unfair to her"* (SLT-13).

To conclude the main findings from Nunan's first step, in relation to *autonomy and age*, clearly show that the SLTs need and want to be involved at any age. Almost all of them agreed that they were not actively involved in the learning process. In addition to the weak communication between the teacher and learners at all levels both formally and informally in the learning process, this is a step that will make them feel more in control and informed about what they will learn.

4.3.1.2 Creating Own Goals

Nunan's (2003) steps argued that the learners should be involved in modifying the course content and creating their own educational goals. As mentioned above, because of the weaknesses in the communication between (teachers/ learners), it is hard for the teacher to know exactly what her learners' personal educational goals are. In the Kuwaiti public language classroom the learner is a one of a maximum of twenty-one other students in the same classroom, which makes it hard for a non-autonomous language-teacher to be able to acknowledge all of their learning needs and goals; nevertheless asking them to be involved in modifying or deciding the coursework is also going to be hard to apply.

Again the SLTs participating in this research were asked several questions about their previous language learning experience in relation to being involved in choosing the course content and coursework. The majority of them agreed that they did not experience such involvement and described it as "*not our right*" (SLT-4). In the Kuwaiti public education sector the course content (books and workbooks) are fixed. In that the SLTs studying at the College of Basic Education are learning the English language and how to teach it, they do have ideas about the lesson plans and the fixed curriculum used in public schools. One of SLTs argued that: "*I can't imagine what I would have said if the teacher asked my opinion about the course content*" when she

was asked what she would do to modify the course content. She also added: *"I guess if she (the teacher) gave me choices I might choose one (course modification tool) but still, how do I know if it is the good one for me?"* (SLT-6). Further, another participant indicated that she does not think that it would work because *"the teacher doesn't have time to see what we want; she has a lesson plan to finish in a short time first"* (SLT-13).

The SLT (13) also added*: "Now that I am learning how to teach and how to prepare lesson plan and how to use the right materials, I don't know if it is going to work. It's going to be hard, you know"* referring to working with a fixed curriculum.

When the SLTs were asked about their current language-learning experience in the current educational stage in relation to being involved in choosing the course content and course work, the majority of the SLTs agreed that currently it is a slightly different situation. They do have a chance to be involved but with a lot of limitations. SLT 6 confirmed that on reaching her fourth year she had had the chance to be taught by almost all of the teachers in the English language department. She pointed out that *"having the chance now to be in the College of Basic Education and learning how to teach, and knowing new methods of teaching and learning, look back and see that the teachers in my previous stage only used one or two methods ... why?"* she asked, referring to the traditional way of teaching that she went through. Another SLT added: *"Now (referring to her learning in the College of Basic Education) I can suggest some methods or course contents' changes – even though – I wasn't asked for my opinion from the teachers"* (SLT-8)*,* justifying her action for doing so by the new knowledge she has been taught currently (in theory in the teaching method class) about the variety of teaching and learning methods.

Finally, another SLT continued to have a negative attitude toward the issue of

involvement by irritably adding: *"You know we don't have a choice honestly, they (referring to the teachers) force us to buy their own personal books! And the same boring notes that we also have to buy from our own money."* (SLT-4). They have also agreed that although currently they do have the chance to be involved, it is limited to their own work (assignments and projects) but not the course content.

Again, even with no previous experience in teaching they were nevertheless asked about what would they do in their future teaching. The majority of the enthusiast SLTs wished that they had been given that chance in their previous educational stages and were interested to apply it in their teaching, but still fear what they do not know. SLT (6) honestly argued: *"What if I fail? I didn't experience it and currently they are not teaching us to practise it."*

So, summarising the main findings from Nunan's (2003) second step related to the learners creating their own goals, the data showed that a large number of the SLTs believe that they are not actively involved in the process of the learning when it comes to modifying their own goals and being involved in the course content.

4.3.1.3 Out of Classroom Learning

The third step pointed out by Nunan (2003) related to the notion of how to learn by encouraging learners to use their target language outside the classroom. Nunan's step is a clear and obvious one that should be taken, especially if the learners are learning a foreign language. As mentioned earlier in Section 2.4, in the context in which this research is taking place, the English language is considered to be a foreign language that is not taught or learnt properly, except in the English classroom once or twice a day. Encouraging the language learners to take the learning process outside of the classroom is a great step in the Kuwaiti traditional public educational environment.

The SLTs were asked a set of questions related to their English langue learning in relation to taking it outside of the classroom walls. When they were asked if the teachers encouraged them to seek new knowledge or practise the target language and work on projects and with other students outside of the classroom, their answers were divided, with a majority not having had the chance to do so a lot, especially in their previous educational stages. SLT (6) stated and confirmed a previous comment about the traditional classroom system in previous educational stages, in which there was no chance to exercise the target language or any other activity outside of the classroom. She explained: *"We are in the classroom having one lesson after another and the teacher comes in the classroom, so we do not have a chance to go out and work with others because we do not have time"* (SLT-6). On the other hand, SLT (13) stressed that the lack of facilities, such as a walk-in library or a self-study centre that could motivate them. SLT 6 also continued to explain that they do practise group work, except in the classroom, with the teacher giving them the task related to the coursework.

As for the current stage in the College of Basic Education, the SLTs agreed that it is different from being in a school system. SLT (8) pointed out that "*teachers here (referring to the College of Basic Education) tell us to go to the library and to work in groups outside of the classroom, but still not a lot of them do and if they did that task[s] are the same every year".* SLTs (4, 6, and 7), in addition to others, have agreed that in the current stage of their educational life they have a greater chance to do what they see as appropriate for their needs and their level. SLT (7) says: *"Now that I have free time and less classes to attend than before, I meet my friends outside of the classroom to study."* When the SLTs were asked to elaborate about what activities they do to develop their English language, almost all of them agreed that all

the activities they do outside the classroom are from personal efforts, but so as not to exclude some of the few autonomous teachers in the college, SLT (13) stated: *"Once a doctor ... asked us to attend a conference and asked us to attend as many lectures as possible and report to her what we gained from the experience. I like it a lot and I really like her style."*

Concluding the third step, the SLTs expressed their high approval of encouraging their future learners to practise the target language outside of the classroom by providing them with a variety of tasks to suit every learner's need. But still there are setbacks on which they all agreed, which will stop them doing that, such as the lack of facilities in the public schools where they will teach. SLT (4) stated: *"During the class I cannot do anything and out of the classroom there are not a lot of varieties, except the library, where the learners have to get permission to go to."*

The concluding remarks of the third step is that the SLTs do to a certain extent practise the target language outside of the classroom in the current stage of their educational life, but mostly out of personal efforts.

4.3.1.4 Rising Awareness, Identifying Styles and Strategies and Generating Tasks

In this section, Nunan's (2003) fourth, fifth, and seventh steps will all be conjoined for the reason that they relate to and at the same time complete each other. With the emerging data from the SLTs' perceptions I decided to group the three steps together to suit the data available. Nunan (2003) continued to stress the importance of making the learners aware of their learning process, by encouraging them to have their own voice in deciding what they want to learn and by becoming aware that they will be able to identify their own preferred learning styles and strategies. Even if the learners know how to search for the appropriate learning styles alone, things are different if it

occurs with the teacher's guidance and support. After being able to perform the two steps the learners will have the confidence and motivation to generate their own tasks both in and outside of the classroom (Nunan, 2003). In the Kuwaiti public educational environment, traditionalism in the learning process hinders the teacher's abilities, even if they try their hardest to become autonomous and promote autonomy in their language classroom.

When the SLTs were asked about the three steps mentioned above, the majority of their responses were that at the previous level the three steps were not choices to be made mostly due to the teachers' *"poor guidance"* (SLT-8). As far as identifying learning styles and generating one's own tasks is concerned, the SLTs said that they rarely were asked about it or allowed to practise it. As for the current stage, there is an effort from the teachers to make the SLTs aware of their learning process, mainly *"because we are old enough to take responsibility and because we are going to become teachers"* (SLT-6). But still when it comes to deciding on styles and strategies in the classroom it is limited to graded coursework.

When the SLTs were asked about their future teaching, it was again a desire with no hope of being achieved easily because of the traditional educational system. One of the SLT commented sorrowfully about the teachers, saying: *"You (referring to me as the interviewer) made us talk about what the teachers did not do for us as learners previously and now, but I am going to be a teacher next year and still not sure if I can practice all of this (referring to the autonomous learning and teaching)"* (SLT-6).

Again the concluding remarks concerning the three steps are that the SLTs feel that they neither are actively involved nor encouraged to become so. They were also uncertain about whose fault the matter was. Because they are becoming teachers next

year, they are rethinking their styles and strategies but most importantly their autonomy as future teachers. They are uncertain about whether they will be able to avoid becoming like their own teachers.

4.3.1.5 Decision-making and Learner as Teacher

Again I have grouped two of Nunan's (2003) steps to developing LA. My justification for linking the two together is that they are both related to the teacher's position in the classroom. With both steps Nunan is encouraging the learners to take the role that belongs to the traditional teacher. Nunan is encouraging the shift in role by giving the learners "relatively modest" control over their learning process. We refer back to the Kuwaiti public educational classroom where it is still considered to be a traditional method, based on the learner's perceptions.

When the learners were asked questions related to them being engaged in the decision-making in the classroom concerning the learning and teaching process, their answers were mostly negative but were defensive at the same time. The SLTs believed in their abilities from a young age and from their perceptions it is apparent that they do have the capacity to decide on what best helps them to develop as learners. They revealed sensitive issues about the power position in the Kuwaiti language classroom. SLT (6) argued: *"I as a learner did not feel comfortable saying what I want to the teacher even if I know I am right, either because I am not confident about myself or because I am avoiding embarrassing the teacher in front of the other learners."* The teacher is in full control of the language classroom*: "She comes ready to present her lesson before time ends. I didn't feel that the English language lesson has spontaneity to make us feel we can take control"* (SLT-8).

As for the current stage, one SLT (11) who was sensitive about this issue said that some of the teachers still *"do not give us the impression that we can see ourselves us*

as mature enough to say our opinions ... once I corrected a teacher (refused to give a name) and he made fun of all my course." The issue of control in the Kuwaiti language classroom is not limited to the shift in role but rather also the learner's desire to be treated as an adult learner. Although having reached this stage of their educational lives *"we are still not encouraged to take charge of our learning process"* (SLT-11).

When they were asked about their future role as language-teachers and being in the power position, the majority of them gave an unexpected answer when they decided that they *"... may not allow the learner to take charge, at least not the first year. First I have to get used to the environment and then I will see what happens"* (SLT-6). This only confirms that most of the SLTs are not confident enough to go and try something that they themselves did not experience.

4.3.1.6 Learners as Researchers

Finally, Nunan (2003) concludes his nine steps to developing learner autonomy by encouraging the learners to take the role of the researcher by taking their learning beyond the school. Again he is encouraging the learners to be seeking knowledge from a source other than that of the teacher. Such a step will motivate the learners to engage in group-work and depend on themselves to find the information alone. In the Kuwaiti public educational environment the facilities are limited to a library and some schools do have a computer laboratory where the learners can practise ELL.

When the SLTs were asked questions in relation to the learner as a research step, they agreed on its benefits but still denied practising it in their previous educational stages. SLT (7) argued: *"All I remember from my previous education stage is a library where we were not allowed to read what we wanted and was locked most of*

the time" referring to an experience of *wanting* to search for an essay but not getting the chance to use the library at the time.

As for the current stage, things are slightly different as the learners have more time and the ability to go to other libraries in Kuwait and have frequent access to the Internet more than before. SLT (18) said: *"When I search the net or go to search for a book I feel like I am learning something for the first time."* SLT (6) referred to what she called boring and usual tasks that had been required from them since they had been in the primary level. Concluding the final step, we can confirm that the students are not motivated by the use of traditional learning and teaching methods and that even if they are trying their best to make use of their educational environment it is still not *"learner friendly"* (SLT-6).

4.3.2 Discussion

The SLTS' perceptions about Nunan's (2003) nine steps to developing learner autonomy overlapped but did not affect the purpose behind using them to answer the first research question. The SLTs understand the difference between the two stages (past and current) of their educational life, but in their opinion, if they had had the chance before to learn autonomously they would have done as they are doing now. What the learners are experiencing now is what Benson (2001) calls the weakest version of the curriculum-based approach with which the learner is only partially responsible for their projects.

Little (1991) described the autonomous learner as having the capacity to know what they want to do with the learning process. Most of the participants agreed that if they had been asked about their preference for what they wanted to learn and how and when to have learnt it, it would have made a difference in their English language.

This shows that they are autonomous from within, but lack the teacher's role of being a 'facilitator' (Nunan, 2002; Al Othman and Shuqair, 2013).

Benson and Lor (1998) positively stressed the importance of the learner's independent role over their own learning process, which is with the help of the teacher. The SLTs blamed their lack of awareness, difficulties in setting goals, and the capacity of their learning on the weak communication between them and their teachers. The power position and traditionalism also affected the development of their English language. Benson and Lor (1998) also pointed out the importance of the partnership between the learner and the teacher in avoiding driving the learners to become less confident and less self-sufficient when it comes to their learning. This was the case with some of the SLTs. They agreed that during their study in both the previous and the current stages of their educational life they did not feel actively involved in their own learning process, although they felt that they could have managed to become involved even at a young age if they had been given the chance.

Although the majority of SLTs had a positive attitude toward the whole process, still there were others who were affected by it, and all they wanted to do was to graduate. Benson (2001) suggested a stronger version of the curriculum-based approaches as a way of improving such an educational context. He based the approach on the negotiation process between the teachers and the learners, claiming that such an approach will help in enhancing the learner's chances in getting also partially involved in the decision-making about their own learning process, such as the methods used, the course content, and their choice of tasks.

Little (2007) pointed out that although learner autonomy should be the ultimate goal, still learner individuality should be taken into consideration. The SLTs are afraid of what they are unfamiliar with. They wish that they could practice autonomous

teaching in the future classroom, but at the same time they fear they might fail to do so, and would return to the traditional methods as being the safest retreat. Dam (2007) stated that if it is hard for the student learners to be expected to practice autonomous learning if they are themselves are not autonomous learners by choice, but rather by force. This confirms that the learners differ from one another, and the ones that overcome the limitations seek another alternative while others surrender and lose the battle to traditionalism.

The SLTs at the current stage know more than they used to before but still the traditional education is undermining their needs and abilities. The majority complained and stated that the teaching and learning system differs from one teacher to another, although almost all of them use traditional methods and still the minority using autonomous methods are not enough to help them develop. This brings us to the main finding that emerged from this theme, which is that the Kuwaiti public educational environment is unsupportive of learner autonomy as argued by Hofstede (1986) by classifying it as a 'collectivist' context. Even if the environment is classified as a collectivist educational context, this does not necessarily mean that the individuals in it cannot become autonomous learners and teachers (Pennycook, 1997).

4.4 Research Question Two: Understanding the Development of Learner Autonomy

What factors encourage or hinder the SLTs in the development of their own learner autonomy?

After having had the chance to investigate the SLTs' general perceptions about the ELL and ELT during the three stages of their educational life, the second research questions were conducted for the purpose of highlighting in depth the forces that

affect the SLTs' learner autonomy development. The participants were asked about their perceptions about their ELL and ELT in three different stages of their educational lives. Their answers were both positive and negative perceptions about their experiences and how those experiences helped them in a way to develop the language learning process. Force-field analysis will be used here to give an idea about the different kinds of forces that the learners face during their learning process, such as the physical, social, economic, or psychological forces.

It was clear that they have been through forces that influenced them and brought them to where they are now. The data were analysed and codes were generated accordingly (see Table 4.5). The codes were compared and contrasted and a final list was produced. The force-field analysis (Lewin, 1951) will simply give the understanding about which forces influence the learner's learning the most and whether they drove them to develop or perhaps hindered their development. In addition, this investigates any overlapping forces that played a double role both for and against the learner.

The forces are going to be divided into two main groups, mainly *hindering* or *driving* forces. Being that this research is investigating the SLTs in the College of Basic Education it was necessary also to look into the forces that influence the learner's education, whether those forces are from the educational environment around them or from within themselves. As a final step, each force will also be divided into two sub-categories, namely *external* and *internal* force. As can be seen from the final list of codes, there are some forces that took action both as a driving and a hindering force that will be mentioned later. Finally, the main forces will be analysed and discussed in relation to Benson (2001) who classifies six approaches to developing learner autonomy.

Type	Driving forces codes	Restraining forces codes	Type
External	Empowerment	Power	External
Internal	Passion	Stereotypes	Internal
Internal	Motivation	Motivation	Both
Internal	Attitudes	Educators' attitude	External
Internal	Future goals	Financial cost of course outside the educational institutions	External
Internal	Abilities	Abilities	External
External	Resources	Resources	Internal
External	Culture	Culture	External
External	Learning curve	Risks of conflicting with educators	External
Internal	Competition	Time	External
Internal	New experiences	Lack of experiences	External
Both	Support	Support	External
Internal	Self-esteem	Embarrassment by making mistakes	External
Both	Technology	Technology	External
External	Environment	Environment	External
Internal	Peer direct communication	General knowledge	Internal
External	Good income and holidays	Traditions	External
	-	Entry requirement	Internal
External	Rewards	Reward	Internal
Internal	Reflection	Reflection	
	-	Incorrect beliefs about their rights as SLTs in the CBE	External

Table 4.5 Codes Generated from the SLTs' Perception of their ELL and ELT and their

Classification of each as either Internal or External Forces

Bearing in mind that the SLTs used to be and still are students in both a public school and college, they are exposed to a limited amount of autonomous learning and teaching in their educational stages (previous and current). So we must return to a point that should be raised about this when we speak of the amount of autonomy that the teachers applied in their learning. It is worth mentioning that the autonomy is a personal effort on the learner's side to develop themselves despite the traditionalist environment, as was mentioned in the findings of the first research question. The process of resistance to change comes from a variety of sources (Thomas, 1985) and also occurs for a number of reasons.

As it can be seen from Table 5.5 above there are twenty-one codes that are related to the second research question. The main codes will be discussed in detail and in relation to learner autonomy. Again not all codes will be used in this analysis except for the ones that were mentioned and agreed on by most of the SLTs.

By internal resource it refers to the kind that the SLTs have said that they can control. Whether they succeed in controlling them or not, they are still internal ones and are not forces upon them from the environment or from others. On the other hand, the external forces are the ones that, for a long time, hindered the SLTs' learning process. The external resources, especially in the traditional educational environment like the one in which this research took place, are hard to overcome. The following will present in detail the main forces in both categories in addition to the SLTs' own description of what each force means in terms of learner autonomy.

4.4.1 Main Findings

4.4.1.1 External Forces

The external forces that were generated from the codes list contained some main forces. They will be discussed in detail below in relation to the SLTs' perceptions. The forces are also presented in the order that the SLTs saw them, decreasing from the most important to the least.

4.4.1.1.1 Power

When the SLTs were asked questions about their language-learning experiences during the previous and current educational life, they have mentioned that the most important hindering force that could influence them is the power position. As this research is conducted in a collectivist environment, the teachers' existence in the classroom is essential in addition to having the full control over the learning and teaching process.

SLT (6) argued that some teachers do not give the learners the right to express their opinions: *"It is like whatever she (referring to the teacher) said is right! And cannot be negotiated."* The SLTs described the language-learning classroom during the previous stages of their life as being simply a *"revision classroom"* (SLT-8). She elaborated more by saying: *"Most of what we do is repeat after the teacher, whether it's vocabulary, role play, or even reading."* They also related to the influence of power on the choice of learning and teaching methods that are being used, which mainly shows the control of the teacher over the learning process.

As for the current stage, the SLTs also saw that the power position is almost the same if not even worse. SLT (4) continued to express her negative attitudes about her experience by stressing this point of control, by arguing: *"It's not fair, I used to*

spend most of my day in schools and now even longer in the college and during all of this time I do not feel like I am in control of my learning" referring to the style of learning as being like a *"robot"* (SLT-4).

Power as a force is either a product of or a reason for other forces that the SLTs have faced during their learning, but the most interesting point about it is how the SLTs perceived it: *"Even if we don't have computers, or blackboard, or good textbooks it does not matter if the teachers were less controlling and gave us the chance to take partial control"* (FGD-1)[6].

4.4.1.1.2 Motivation

The second restraining force that the SLTs faced is the lack of motivation. The motivation force came to be both hindering and driving in the SLTs' perceptions. First, this section will discuss how it is seen as a form of hindering, forced externally upon them from either the teacher or the learning environment. SLT (13) argued: *"I as a learner, I am not motivated to learn the English language because of the same traditional teaching and learning methods."* The SLTs linked their motivation to a number of restraining forces, such as reflection, reward, the college's entry requirements, not encouraged to seek general knowledge, lack of support from the educators and sometimes from their peers, and lack of resources, which will be mentioned in the next force. The SLTs have also added how motivation links with the power force: *"We are always in the fear of conflicting with the teacher if we want to say our opinions"* (FGD-1). The SLTs do not feel that they are welcome to participate, and again they are not allowed to except in a limited way within their own work, such as in projects and assignments.

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[6] Focus group discussion.

4.4.1.1.3 Resources / Technology

We move to the third restraining forces that faced the SLTs' learning process, namely both the resources and the technology. I have grouped the two codes together because I saw that there were similar views between the SLTs. Although the SLTs have expressed their desire for a modern classroom, still it was not a priority and the main reason for that was that in their own perception: *"We can get the technology everywhere even by using the phones and our computer"* (FGD-1).

When it came to the inside of the school the SLTs saw that the lack of resources was restraining their learning process and by 'resources' they referred to: "Poor teaching materials, lack of technology and internet access and no libraries or self-access centres" (FGD-1). SLT (6) argued: *"I know that the teacher's role is important in the learning process, but to what extent?"* She also added: *"I do not know how to learn without a teacher but at the same time I want to use other things (referring to other educational methods) to learn from."*

The learners know that the teachers' presence will always continue, but they wanted to see more collaboration and conjoined learning between the teacher and technology: *"I wish we had a self-study centre before (referring to the previous educational stage), if we did, my English would have been much better before I came to college"* (SLT-13). Another recalled that in her four years studying at the College of Basic Education it only happened once that they *"used to communicate with the teacher several times a week by using the 'WhatsApp App' on the iPhones where we just discuss issues and communicated in an informal way which was nice"* (SLT-7 during the FGD). SLT (4) added: *"This helped a lot because I am shy and writing on the phone and not being afraid of making mistakes helped me to develop by choosing the right words to write."*

When the SLTs were gathered for a focus-group discussion interesting points arose that confirmed the reason why I chose to conduct the data collecting method. Individually the SLTs gave their opinions about their learning and each gave an idea about her weakness and strengths. But when they were gathered together it was quite different. As a group, they have admitted: *"Not all of them are capable of becoming autonomous learners, and we are not all equally having the same experiences so it is not fair that we are all forced to study the same things and use the same materials"* (FGD-1). With this point the SLTs are admitting that they are different with different needs, which is not supported by the educational environment that they are in. To overcome this the SLTs tend to shift and attempt to direct their educational need by looking outside of the classroom to find what best suits them to develop more as language learner.

4.4.1.1.4 Culture/ Environment

The context came last in the SLTs' list of restraining forces. Being in a collectivist environment and educational system it is hard to implement learner autonomy without the proper preparations. In this section I will not talk about the context as it has been discussed before in previous sections. But being interesting, I will focus on a couple of points that have been raised from the SLTs' perceptions. Traditions and tribalism are two restraining forces that the SLTs brought up during their focus-group discussion.

The students were asked in each interview about why they had chosen to study in the College of Basic Education, especially the English department. The unexpected answers were: *"Because of traditions I had to go to an all-girls college (referring to the current context of the College of Basic Education)"* and when she was asked why she had chosen the English Major Course she continued to say: *"It is a dream of*

mine, but I want to learn but not so I can teach it" (SLT-5). Another SLT has argued: *"My grades did not help me to go to the university, so my second choice is here (College of Basic Education)"* (SLT-1).

The SLTs are in Teacher Preparation College for the wrong reasons. This may not mean a lot at the moment while they are students but what will happen if they graduate, having then spent the four years in college developing themselves for the purpose of running away from future teaching? *"I am trying to develop my English because when I graduate I will work in a bank. I always wanted to, but my grades did not help me"* (SLT-19). The problem with that lies in that, when this unqualified teacher does graduate and has to teach, because they cannot transfer qualifications to another job, what will happen to her learners?

As another restraining force, most of the SLTs referred to tribal traditions as influencing their language development. SLT (6) argued by leading the conversation in the focus-group discussion: *"You all know ... (referring to another student in the department who is not a participant) she is getting the full marks even with not attending all of the classes,"* while another SLT continued: *"Because she is related to ... (referring to a teacher in the same institution)"* (SLT-4). The SLTs show frustration that the environment can sometimes be unfair because of the cultural and contextual restraints.

4.4.1.2 Internal Forces

When the SLTs were asked about the driving and constraining forces that they themselves have practiced that influenced their own learning process, the majority of the answers were about their attitude in relation to motivation and their capacity in relation to technology use.

4.4.1.2.1 Attitude in Relation to Motivation

Being in the fourth year and getting the chance to go through good and bad experiences, the SLTs were able to rethink their alternatives to developing their language learning. The SLTs agreed: *"If we cannot change the environment – which is not going to change any time soon (adds another) – then we have to change"* (FGD-1). One SLT argued: *"If I keep complaining, will anything change?"* (SLT-6) referring to having to change her attitude toward the things that she cannot control and to rather start looking for alternatives to develop. The majority of the SLTs agreed that when they started to look for alternatives, which was not always easy, and found one, they felt motivated again to develop their language. Despite all the above constraints inside and outside of the language classroom they still managed to succeed in doing so, mostly because of the use of technology, which will be discussed next.

4.4.1.2.2 Capacity in Relation to Technology

The SLTs believe in their abilities as learners and know their weakness and strengths so they turned to technology as almost the most important tool for learning. As mentioned above the SLTs considered the lack of technology-use in the formal learning to be a constraint, but that did not stop them from using it personally. SLTs viewed technology as being one of the most powerful driving forces that had the biggest influence on their development, but again it was an outcome of personal effort.

When the SLTs were asked during the interview about the methods that helped in developing their language learning, they started to show off their gadgets that were with them (mobile phones and iPads). SLT (7) said: *"I have been collecting as many words as possible from here (College of Basic Education), watch the TV, reading*

stories, and from the internet," referring to her personal dictionary that she had created in her phone notes. When the SLTs were all asked in the focus group about developing methods that they have used, the majority referred to technology as being Number One in importance.

4.4.2 Discussion

Facing the forces, whether external or internal, has divided the SLTs into groups, the first having a negative attitude and insisting on not changing things, and the second group caught in between by not going after other alternatives but happy to use them if they were introduced by the teacher. The third group, on the other hand, are the ones that showed the most autonomy by not settling with the constraints of the educational environment. Group (C)[7] overcame the obstacles and transferred their learning process to a more personal effort to motivate themselves. "Motivation and metacognition are highly interrelated, since the exercise of metacognition can occur only when the ability to control strategic thinking processes is accompanied by the motivation or will to do so" (Ushioda, 2011: 223).

The findings from Group (C) showed that although the SLTs faced all of the above constraints that might have hindered their language-learning development, still they managed to enhance their experience by self-directing their own language-learning. Ushido (2011:223) also emphasised the importance of motivation for driving the learner to develop, by arguing that "Autonomous learners are by definition motivated learners". This shows that "motivation and autonomy" can be affected by each other, for example by "willingness and ability"; these types of relationship are commonly found in the autonomy literature.

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[7]   Main finding (2): section 4.7.2

Ushioda argued, "People bring different degrees of motivation or readiness to embrace new technologies" (Ushioda, 2013: 1). She also emphasised the use of technology as a motivational tool to developing language-learning, which is what the SLTs in this research found. Ushioda (2013: 1) also mentioned that people view motivation as either a "matter of choice and autonomy" when the SLTs choose to use technology more than any other tool, or as a "matter of personally meaningful casual learning" when the STLs are using their mobile phones for casual rather than deep learner development.

To conclude discussion of the second research question, the main finding is that the SLTs in Group (C) have shown signs of 'authentic autonomy' by managing to shift to alternative solutions by setting their own goals, making the effort to seek new alternative learning methods and use the appropriate learning tools to help them develop personally.

4.5 Research Question Three: The Practical Aspects of Learner Autonomy

What practical and appropriate aspects are used to enhance the SLTs' own learner autonomy?

After having had the chance to investigate the SLTs' perceptions about the hindering and driving forces and how they were divided into categories based on how they managed to overcome the obstacles, the third question comes to look more in depth at the characteristics and skills that they have shown during this process. The aspects of learner autonomy shown by the SLTs will be categorised under two main themes, namely aspects generated from the personal perspectives and aspects generated from the organisational perspective.

4.5.1 Main Findings

4.5.1.1 Personal Perspectives

After analysing the SLTs' perspectives, some aspects that were related to them as individuals were observed.

4.5.1.1.1 Psychological

When the SLTs were asked about their personal efforts to develop their language-learning they have shown aspects of autonomy in what they have done. An SLT stated: *"I have noticed myself and my grades. I can speak well but I cannot write well. I have to write more often"* (SLT-11). This indicates that she is reflecting on her progress and is able to evaluate it and has detected her writing weakness. For her to evaluate her progress and give a solution shows that she is aware of limits to her capacity and is willing to overcome this weakness by developing her writing skills.

Other SLTs have also shown the initiative to take responsibility for their own learning by directing themselves to what they see as appropriate for their level and needs. SLT (7) added*: "When I first started the college I wanted to develop myself so I used to write extra assignments and give them to my teacher to give me her feedback."*

SLTs' awareness of what they wanted to learn and how they wanted to learn it also was shown when they were asked in the focus group about how they evaluated their level of English proficiency and whether they thought that it was adequate for them to be able to teach in the future. A number of self-evaluation and self-directing aspects were shown in their answers. SLT (6) indicated that she wanted to develop her speaking and her accent showed that she had enrolled herself in a private English course. On the other hand, SLT (4) was able to identify her weakness but was not

able to take the responsibility to overcome it: *"I know I have to read more … I am always shy of making mistakes when I speak, that's why I do not participate a lot in class. What can I do?"*

4.5.1.1.2 Sociocultural

Between the individual interviews and what the SLTs have written in their reflective journals, the SLTs showed aspects of the capacity to develop personally and by themselves. What was interesting to observe in the focus group was that when the SLTs were asked about the restraining and driving forces that influenced their language-learning, they started to discuss their difficulties and solutions together. The SLTs started to advise one another about different issues related to inside and outside of the language classroom. SLT 6 started to give advice to the other SLT by referring her to the English course that she had enrolled in and how it had developed her speaking skills.

After ending the focus group the SLTs expressed that they could not remember when they had last sat together as learners of the English department to discuss informally the issues related to their learning process, blaming it on the lack of facilities in the educational environment.

4.5.1.1.3 Technical

The technical aspect shown from the SLTs' perspective was their desire to take the learning process outside of the traditional classroom. One of the SLTs participating in the focus-group discussion mentioned: *"Going to conferences has benefited me a lot. I met a lot of native speakers and I tested my speaking skills"* (SLT 13 in FGD). This was supported by another SLT (6) with the experience of benefiting from going to an English course held by a native speaker.

4.5.1.2 Organisational Perspectives

This category will discuss the autonomous aspect shown by the SLTs as a result of interacting with other external factors such as the educational environment, teachers, and the fixed curriculum. Individuals do not become good autonomous language learners on their own because it is a collaborative process. The guidance from teachers and with the determination and effort of the learners can make a difference. Fostering language-learners to become able to identify and apply different resources for their own development will help them to improve their language abilities.

4.5.1.2.1 Political

Power position has proved to be a big restraining force that the SLTs have experienced during their previous and current educational stages. SLT (8) has argued: *"With some teachers in the language classroom I see myself as a passive student. I don't have the chance to talk or say my opinion."* Power position has affected the teacher/learner communication as argued by SLT (18): *"Some teachers I avoid taking class with because I didn't know how to interact with them. They are always negative."*

During the focus group, the majority of the SLTs confirmed that the effects of power position has given them the courage to prove that they can face the teachers by educating themselves first and seeking general knowledge and methods to develop their language-learning process as stated by SLT (6): *"I like to discuss and debate with others about different topics so I always seek to do my research first and get as much knowledge as possible to be ready."*

4.5.1.2.2 Educational Culture

As mentioned earlier, because this research is investigating SLTs as outcomes of the public educational system, then it was expected and was confirmed by the participants themselves that the course books, the facilities, and the learning and teaching materials are all *"old fashioned and to be honest are not helping us in any way"* (SLT-7). SLT (6) confirms: *"During my four years in the college I did not depend on only what they gave us because I did not benefit from them a lot, and I need more."* Again the technology was the main tool that the learners seem to respond to more and seek knowledge from.

4.5.2 Discussion

Autonomous learning indicates intended learning and requires reflexive awareness of the learning process (Benson, 2007). After discussing the main themes the data showed some aspects that were common between the participants and were related to the learner autonomy. Analysing the SLTs' perceptive about how, when, and what they are learning shows that they have the capacity to set their own goals, then plan how they are going to achieve those goals by seeking guidance from others. Then they showed that they are capable of evaluating themselves and finally make use of their previous experience by reflecting on it (see Figure 4.3).
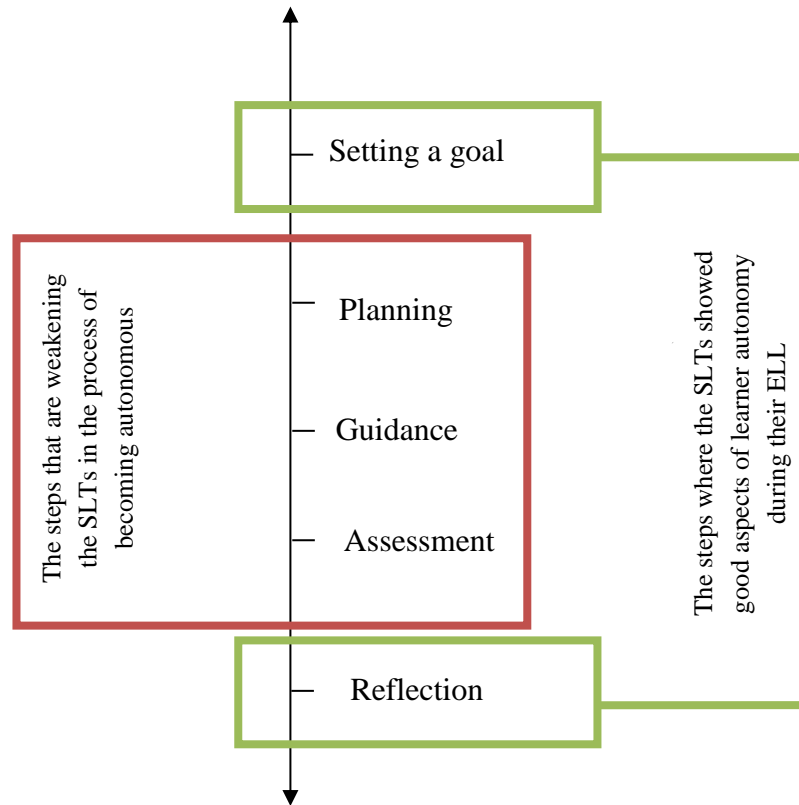
Figure 4.3 The SLTs' Capacity towards Autonomous Learning

To discuss this in more detail, the capacity for autonomous learning is not only shown in how the learners learn but also in how they are able to transfer what they have learned to a wider context (Little, 1991). When SLTs evaluate their language learning abilities the findings have shown that the SLTs are showing good effort in setting their own goals and they are able to identify what they need to achieve to develop their ELL and ELT, plus they showed good abilities in reflecting on their ELL experiences. On the other hand, the findings also found that there was less capacity in planning, seeking guidance, and in assessment abilities, which has created a large gap that affects their development and the chance to become autonomous learners.

Learners, who show authentic autonomy[8] aspects of responsibility and willingness to take charge of their own learning but face obstacles, such as the learning contexts or the lack of qualified support from teachers, might not be able to develop learner autonomy. Therefore it is necessary to recognise that "from a psychological point of view, involving people in making choices and decisions not only engenders willingness. It also instils a sense of responsibility, since people become responsible for the choices they make and their outcomes" (Ushioda, 2011: 224).

4.6 Research Question Four: Reflection and Future Vision

How will the SLTs' reflections on ELL in their previous and current educational life affect their perceptions about the future development of their own ELL and ELT in relation to learner autonomy?

The purpose of this final research question is to measure the SLTs' development of their own ELL. Their perceptions here will depend on their previous and current ELL and ELT experiences and how they are affecting their future vision. The first research question was demonstrating how the SLTs' perception has changed through the different stages of their educational life and how it changed their view about their future teaching. In this I will analyse the SLTs' autonomous identities from their perception by the use of the I-statement and we-statement analysis.

4.6.1 Main Findings

4.6.1.1 Student Language Teachers' I-statement

The majority of SLTs used "I" in their perceptions to indicate how, why, what, and when in describing their ELL process. They also used "we" mainly during the focus-group discussion and individual interviews. It was noticeable that when the SLTs

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[8]   Main finding (3): section 4.7.3

used "we" it was because they were talking about a teacher or someone in a higher position. They have also used it when they felt that I might judge what they were going to say.

Most of the active SLTs that participated in this research have used "I" to express their awareness about their learning process. They also used the statement to show signs of evaluation of their learning process as well as to express their attitudes and behaviour. The following are some examples of the use of "I" and "we" statements used by the SLTs in writing the reflective journals and answering the individual and focus-group interviews; see Table 4.6 below.

"I" Statement Examples		"We" Statement Example
I enrolled		
I feel	I planned	
I understand	I can see	Most SLTs
I want	I learnt	They
I am sure	I need	The group
I think	I came up with	People
I would	I went	The books
I managed to	I became	The class
I pushed myself	I found	We studied
I am disappointed	I became aware of	We worked together
I am embarrassed	After that now I know	We advise
I did not know	I encourage myself	We passed
I realized		
I searched		

Table 4.6 Examples of the Use of "I" and "we" Statement Used by the SLTs

The examples above indicate that the SLTs showed features of cognitive abilities such as *"I think, I would,* and *I found"*; affection such as: *"I want, I need, I am disappointed, I am embarrassed"*; action: *"I came up with,* and *I searched"*; ability and constraint: *"I did not know";* and finally achievement, such as: *"I encouraged myself* and *I managed to."* Other statements, although the SLTs were not using *"I* or

we" still showed the SLTs' identity in taking charge, such as *"most of the SLTs and the group".*

4.6.1.1.1 Awareness

The SLTs' perceptions showed that there are signs of awareness of their language-learning process in addition to identifying the necessary requirements for better learning development. Being able to monitor one's own learning can help in knowing how much the current learning has improved, and comparing it to the previous experiences and how to develop the future ones. One example from the reflective journals comments: *"Documenting what I have done today and what I learnt was good and encouraging; it just shows me how much I have learnt"* (SLT-17).

The SLTs in the focus group discussion also stated that the reflecting on the previous educational life and comparing it with what they have learnt now is helping them *"to be prepared to be become a good teacher"* (SLT-6). When reflecting on her everyday vocabulary learning, another SLT also indicated: *"that improved my English speaking skills"* (SLT-8). During the ten weeks of writing the reflective journals an SLT participating said: *"Having the chance to monitor my work and my interaction with the teacher and evaluate myself made me proud of myself to see that I have progressed"* (SLT-6).

4.6.1.1.2 Evaluation

Reflection also helped the SLTs to understand their learning process. Understanding the learning process is a criterion for the evaluation that can help them to step back to rethink, improve, and practise more to develop as autonomous learners. From the following comment made by an SLT it can be understood that they can be capable of identifying their weakness from comparing their actions with previous experiences:

"I always go back to see my exams and try to learn from my mistakes so that I can do better next time" (SLT-13).

The SLTs argued that they hoped that the teacher would try to give them more projects that focus on "*understanding we do not want to memorise anymore*" (SLT 6) so they can know how their learning improved by understanding their progress. Another SLT stated when asked about her English proficiency: *"I think it is very good because I passed all my modules and I when I travel I can manage myself very well. It was a good opportunity to improve my English"* (SLT-8). Finally, during the focus-group discussion the SLTs admitted that they sometimes evaluate one another and also evaluate the teacher's performance. They also do reflect on the work done during the whole year to see if they have progressed, but the problem is they do not know how too: *"It is a good thing to understand what I have learnt all year long because it motivates me to want to be better"* (SLT-8).

4.6.1.1.3 Regulation

Regulation is one of the important stages that the SLTs should be aware of, be able to practise, and be able to benefit the most from their reflection process. It is also one of the stages that will require the teacher's involvement as a guide and director for a better learning process. Because the SLTs in the College of Basic Education only know the basic level of the English language without knowing what to do next, this does not lead them to improvement as stated by one of the SLTs: *"Sometimes if I like and want to know more about something I learnt in class I go to the teacher and ask her if there are other books or something that is similar or better to make me learn more"* (SLT-6).

The learners need to be trained by the teachers to always look at their language-learning from a positive viewpoint, which will help in making them find the

solutions and alternatives to develop. SLT (11) commented: *"I ask about where I can get more information about learning English and I like it when I get feedback from the teacher, especially when she recommends to read a certain book for example."*

At this stage it is also helpful for the SLTs to be able to think about or write down a learning plan to help have a clear look at what they are supposed to do and try to achieve it. Doing so can help the SLTs to keep track of their learning and reflect on previous successful and unsuccessful experiences to learn from them and generate solutions and alternative considerations. There was an example of an SLT who participated in writing the reflective journal: *"While she was in class the teacher gave us a plan of how to prepare for the exams and I remember your* (referring to the researcher) *journal, so I wrote on it the plan and I tried to modify it to suit my other classes and assignment"* (SLT-19).

4.6.2 Discussion

As discussed above the purpose of asking the SLTs about the three stages of their educational life is to understand their language learning process and progress along the way. This includes how one stage is affecting the other and how and when did their language learning develop (Ushioda, 2008; Gee, 2005). By examining the SLTs' perceptions, it was clear that their identities as autonomous learners exist in what they have written and said. This section will first discuss the change that the SLTs went through vertically during the same educational stage and then horizontally by looking at their development through the three stages.

Little argued that learner's developing skills of reflection and analysis will help in growth of the learner's capacity which helps in developing of their motivation that leads them to manage their own learning and cope with developing interests and

needs (Little, 2004). As mentioned before, the learning practice is a collaborative process (Cazden, 2001; Benson, 2011). Because of the lack of teachers' support during each stage, where the learners are in need of the teachers' support (Benson, 2010), the SLTs who participated in the reflective journal method have shown signs of low development on the 'vertical' level.

Not all of the SLTs accepted the idea of reflection either because they were not sure of its benefits or had never tried keeping a reflective journal before. But when it came to looking at the SLTs' reflection during the three phases of their educational lives horizontally, it showed that they developed more autonomous learning aspects than on the vertical analysis level. The learners' identity showed that they are claiming the development of their own autonomy for themselves. SLTs stated that they have developed their "capacity – for detachment, critical reflection, decision-making, and independent action" (Little, 1991: 4) through time and that they did not notice the change until they moved from one stage to another.

4.7 Overview of the Main Findings of the Research

After exploring the findings under each research question, it will be valuable to have an overview look at the main findings, which will present the most significant findings emerging from this research. The present research was designed to define the status of learner autonomy in language learning in the Kuwaiti context and the SLTs' own perceptions of it. This begins by exploring their *perceptions of learner autonomy* by investigating their opinions about how they learned and how they have been taught the English language in the three levels of their educational lives. This led to identifying the forces that either helped or hindered the *development of learner autonomy,* which showed the extent of the SLTs' *understanding* of their own

language learning and teaching processes. The purpose of the two previous investigations was to identify *the practical aspects of learner autonomy* that the SLTs revealed in facing the forces that affected them. Finally, the research was looking at how to determine the effect of the SLTs' *reflection* on their *future vision* for their own language learning and teaching.

A definition of learner autonomy in the Kuwaiti public educational context was generated from the findings of the SLTs' own perceptions about their ELL and ELT processes in addition to my own interpretations of the data. The two autonomy definitions related to the *language learner* SLTs and the *language learning process* in the Kuwaiti public educational context. . The following diagram (Figure 5.4) will summarise the key findings of the current research in relation to the four main research questions.

RQ1: Exploring SLTs' perceptions about LA - SLTs' General evaluation and reflection

RQ2: Understanding the development of LA – SLTs' reflections

The research educational environment:

Public education sector

Past: Previous educational levels: Primary- intermediate- secondary

Current: Collage of Basic Education

Future: Teaching English language in schools

Main finding (1) Un-supporting autonomous learning environment

Reverse reactions The SLTs are divided into three groups

Group A Negative reaction — (Non- Autonomous language learners)

Group B Neither negative nor positive reaction — (Non-Autonomous language learners)

Main finding (2) Group C Negative & positive reaction — (Autonomous language learners)

Aspects of Collectivism Culture

Aspects of autonomous language learning based on the SLTs' reactions:

Efforts = Personal
Goals = Personal
Tools = Technology

Learner autonomy

Teacher autonomy

More developed

Less developed

Main finding (3) *Authentic Autonomy*

RQ3: The practical aspects of LA – SLTs' LA definitions

Aspects of Individualism culture

Context based LA definitions

RQ4: Reflection and future vision – Proposed learning environment)

Main finding (4) *Partial Autonomy*

Interdependent

Independent

Dependent

- Learners and teachers
- Learner and learners
- Text book and technology
- Learner/technology/teacher

Figure 4.4 Overview of the Main Findings

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In order to summarise the investigation of the SLTs' perceptions of learner autonomy, the research questions will now be reconsidered, with the main findings presented under each one, as in the following:

4.7.1 Main Finding (1): Un-supporting of the Developing of Autonomous Learning Educational Environment

RQ1 (Exploring SLTs' perceptions of learner autonomy): *What are the perceptions of SLTs about their own ELL and teaching experiences in the Kuwaiti public educational context, with special reference to the place of learner autonomy?*

The SLTs gave their perceptions about their ELL and ELT in the three levels of their educational lives in the Kuwaiti public educational system, starting first with their previous educational phases, then their current College of Basic Education phase, and finally about their future ELT in public schools. Although the current study is based on a small sample of participants, the findings of their perceptions confirms that the Kuwaiti public educational environment is considered as a collectivist context as mentioned previously.

The SLTs' general evaluation and reflections about their ELL and ELT in the Kuwaiti public education environment was mostly negative. This research has found that the difficulties— the complicated teacher-learner relationship, the lack of modern learning and teaching techniques and the slow-changing rules and policies— have led the SLTs to view the public educational system as still being and probably always being an *environment that does not support the development of autonomous learning*. This negative reflection created a reverse reaction that divided the SLTs into three groups, depending on those reactions. The reactions were developed as a result of the factors which the SLTs faced during their ELL and ELT process.

This takes us to the second research question, which seeks to understand the development of learner autonomy by probing the factors affecting SLTs and their reactions.

4.7.2 Main Finding (2): SLTs Showing Negative and Positive Reactions

RQ2 (Understanding the development of learner autonomy): *What factors encourage or hinder the SLTs in the development of their own learner autonomy?*

After asking the SLTs about the driving and hindering forces that helped in developing their language learning, their perceptions were divided into: group (a) *negative* reaction; group (b) *neither negative nor positive* reaction; and finally group (c) *negative and positive* reaction. As a result of this negativity, the first SLT group (a) that represents the minority (three SLTs—5%) of the participants became non-autonomous. Their evaluation and reflection about their public educational environment led them to accept becoming passive learners who just wanted to graduate by agreeing to what the educators asked them to do and not do. The second group (b) (nine SLTs—16%) also developed a non-autonomous reaction to an extent by becoming uncertain about what they wanted. They reacted according to the environment that they were in and the educator teaching them. If the educational environment and the educator provided them with an autonomous learning and teaching atmosphere, they developed as autonomous learners; if not, they did not mind and could adapt to the traditional way of language learning and teaching.

As for the majority (forty four SLTs—78.5%) representing the last group (c), their reflections and evaluation led them to become in some way self-reliant in developing their ELL. They had both negative and positive reactions toward their ELL and ELT and this led them to become autonomously driven by different reasons. It is

important to remember that the participants in the study were SLTs studying English as their main subject in the College of Basic Education. The SLTs were required to learn the English language and to learn how to teach it for the purpose of teaching after graduation. Having said that, it was expected of the SLTs that they develop both personal and professional goals. The finding showed that the SLTs have aspects of autonomous language learning based on their reactions and efforts, which were developed for personal reasons. They also admitted that they were planning for future goals after they graduated; most of the goals were personal and did not include the desire to teach the English language. The findings also indicated that the SLTs depended on themselves in developing their ELL by the use of technology as a main source. They used the technology outside of the educational environment by making a personal decision to use it as a learning tool. Returning to the second research question posed above, it is now possible to state that the SLTs are developing their ELL for the purpose of achieving personal goals. This leads to the third research question, which investigated the aspects of the SLTs' learner autonomy.

4.7.3 Main Finding (3): Authentic Autonomy

RQ3 (The practical aspects of learner autonomy): *What practical and appropriate aspects were used to enhance the SLTs' own learner autonomy?*

In this research the majority of the SLTs managed to develop themselves as language learners. They expressed that they themselves had the biggest role in their own development, followed by the educator's role in the teaching process and ending with the educational environment as the least helpful instrument in their autonomous language learning development. The SLTs' reflections also showed that although the educational environment was not helping in the learning and teaching process, still

the educators tried as much as they could to motivate and encourage the learners by using what was available, in spite of their not being autonomous teachers themselves.

As a result of the educators not fostering an adequate learning environment the SLTs lost interest in learning for the purpose of teaching and their interest turned more to personal reasons. A significant finding emerged from this research question that the SLTs started to show aspects of an individualist learner.

As a result of the collectivist environment, most of the SLTs participating in this research had become autonomous self-learners who were learning the language by themselves (positive reaction). The findings drawn from the SLTs in group (c) helped in generating the research's own learner autonomy definition (*authentic autonomy*) which meant that they had the largest role in their own language learning development and that most of the reasons behind their development were personal ones.

The findings also show the weakness of the teacher preparation programme and that there is a defect in the developing of the SLTs' teacher autonomy. This is why the majority of them are spending their time in the College of Basic Education learning the English language for personal reasons more than for the purpose of teaching it. So what is missing? The SLTs developed themselves as authentic autonomous learners, but what about their future ELT? Because of the previously mentioned restraining forces, they felt that they were neither developed nor qualified as autonomous teachers. So where does that take us? This takes us back to square one, when thirty SLTs (53.5%) said that they would go back to the traditional teaching methods, which in turn would lead to traditional learning (a negative reaction). As one of the participants concluded:

"It is a hard and a complicated process. We reached a level where we are able to recognise that we were taught and learnt the English language in a traditional way and that there are different teaching and learning methods that can develop the learners' autonomous ELL, but still it is hard for us to apply it. We managed to learn the English language autonomously but it was hard for us to teach it autonomously" (STLs-7).

Overall, these findings suggest that in general the educational environment made the SLTs more developed as autonomous learners and less developed as autonomous teachers. This led to the final research question, which investigates the SLTs' perspectives and *reflections about the future vision* concerning what they perceived to be a suitable solution to developing ELL and ELT.

4.7.4 Main Finding (4): Partial Autonomy

RQ4 (Reflection and future vision*): How will the SLTs' reflections on ELL in their previous and current educational life affect their perceptions about the future development of their own ELL and ELT in relation to learner autonomy?*

The most obvious finding to emerge from this research question is that having the chance to reflect on the past has helped the SLTs to be able to have the confidence and ability to navigate and evaluate their current situation. This also led them to be able to reflect on their future ELL and ELT. Findings showed that the SLTs feel that after graduating and going into the field, although they are developed as autonomous learners they will be revert to traditional teaching approaches and will not be able to teach autonomously. They feel that they are unqualified to become autonomous

teachers and that they will always go back to the traditional way of teaching because that is an easy escape when it comes to facing the difficulties in schools.

In this investigation, the aim was to explore the SLTs' perceptions of learner autonomy by asking them about their educational environment. The reason they have become individualist is mostly by force. They did not have the opportunity to become *authentic autonomous learners* because of their previous and current educational environments. The need for a well-prepared educational environment and autonomous educators is clearly supported by the current findings from the SLTs. From the findings it has been shown that we are going round in circles; the SLTs' past is not just affecting their current phase but also affecting their perceptions about the future. Knowing the problems that they will face in the future affects how they perceive the ELL and ELT processes.

The results of this exploration are that the SLTs' perceptions, reflections, and actions all indicate that they are *individualist learners* in a *collectivist educational environment*. Taken together, these results suggest that there is a need to adjust the Kuwaiti educational environment if we wish to develop autonomous ELL and ELT. The findings from the SLTs' perceptions proposed an autonomous context-based definition that will be able to achieve *partial autonomy*. The evidence from this research argues that the inter-dependent educational environment is the best solution for an appropriate learning setting in which the learners can become partially autonomous, even in a teacher-centred environment. The SLTs perceive that, aside from the limitations of the traditional Kuwaiti educational environment, learner autonomy and teacher autonomy can still be developed. To be able to create an independent educational environment, changes should be made to the relationship between: 1) the teacher and the learner; 2) between the learners themselves; 3) the

textbooks; and 4) with the technology, and the learner – technology – teacher relationship.

Chapter 5 Conclusions

After having the chance to explore the SLTs' perceptions about their educational background in learning and teaching the English language in the Kuwaiti public education system, the following conclusions were drawn. One of the more significant findings that emerged in this research was that, in general, autonomy exists. The questions are: *How did it develop? When did it develop? By whom was it developed?* and *What is the most suitable way to foster it in the Kuwaiti public educational system, from the Student Language-Teachers' perceptions?*

Learning a language is an essential subject nowadays among Kuwaitis. Their lifestyle and future plans drive the students as individuals to learn the English language from an early age and to continue the learning by trying to get it from different sources using different learning tools. The current research is not focusing on the organisational structure of the educational system. Instead it is investigating the SLTs' perspectives about ELL and ELT. This research is seeking to understand the SLTs' perceptions more than any other element in the learning and teaching processes. The purpose of the current research was not to directly shift and apply theoretical concepts into practice in the Kuwaiti environment, but rather to investigate the actual perceptions of the SLTs about their ELL and ELT. Doing so will help to understand what their perceptions tell us about the status and level of practice, and to what extent we can foster learner autonomy in language learning. The SLTs' perceptions were investigated by using multiple methods, such as reflective journals, individual semi-structured interviews, in addition to the focus-group that was used to confirm the finding from the former methods.

This chapter provides a brief comparison in relation to the findings, followed by which the strengths and weaknesses of this research will be presented. The contributions of the research will then be presented, showing how these findings benefit our understanding of learner autonomy in further research. Based on that, the suggested recommendations for future teaching and research will be discussed. Lastly, I will end this chapter by my final concluding remarks reflecting on this journey as a researcher.

5.1 Recommendations to the Higher Education Sector and Specifically the Educators in the College of Basic Education

The concept of applying learner autonomy is not easy, especially if we want to apply it in an educational context that has been used to the traditional way of teaching for a long time. In this current context there were many constraints that could be barriers to fostering learner autonomy in language learning. Regarding constraints such as the learning for examinations, the power relation between the teacher and the learner, the lack of communication, the untrained in-service teachers, and the poorly equipped and unsuitable learning environment, in this section I will present some recommendations based on the key findings of this research.

No-one can deny that the fostering of autonomous language learning is hard for both the teachers and the learners in the educational process. To achieve the best results, learning and teaching should be looked at as a dual process between the two roles and not just a problem for the teacher. Although only some of the teachers and learners were involved in this collegiate process for autonomy in the current study, its success as an initial attempt seemed to indicate its potential for developing teacher autonomy and learner autonomy. The evidence from this study suggests that almost

78.5% of the SLTs graduating from the College of Basic Education do not want to teach when they graduate, for reasons mentioned earlier in Chapter Four. Taken together, these results suggest that change and development should take place as soon as possible because if this is the case, then we are producing graduate teachers who are not suitable for teaching, which will take us back to the starting point of traditional teaching.

As mentioned previously the English language is only taught once a day in an Arabic-speaking public educational environment, in which the whole curriculum is taught in Arabic to Arabic speakers by the Arabic-speaking teacher. In other words, there should be more focus on how the SLTs in the College of Basic Education, especially in the English Language Department, are taught the English language and how they are taught to teach it in the future. The following recommendations are based on the research findings and what should be focused on, from my point of view.

The first-hand findings in this research provide a new understanding of what the SLTs in the College of Basic Education think about their ELL and ELT in the public education sector. This understanding adds considerably to the recommendation to the policy-makers about what should be done concerning the development of learner autonomy. The findings of my research have shown that there would be considerable opportunities to improve things, in that the learners in the public educational sectors have the potential to develop as autonomous language learners if the teacher education curriculum adds the discipline of learner autonomy. Taken together, these findings suggest a role for educators in the promoting of learner autonomy by well-equipped educators. Developing autonomous language learning depends mostly on

the educators' readiness and capability to be able to go through and beyond continual constraints that come from the policies' changes and problems.

The present research provides additional evidence with respect to how teachers should give their students the chance to think critically, try new things, and explore their identities and abilities to be able to develop. Variety in teaching methods used would mean that teachers give students the opportunity to choose the preferred learning method depending on their own evaluation of their abilities and interests. A mutual trust and development in a collaborative learning environment should be the aim of the educators, to be able to shift their role from being the main source of information to becoming facilitators turning traditional language learning classrooms into a more self-reliant environment. The Kuwaiti public educational context is not fully ready for the promotion of learner autonomy, and the learners' voices will still be passive if change does not take place.

Despite its investigative nature, this study offers some insight into what really matters to the SLTs. The present study makes several noteworthy contributions when it comes to what should be changed in the educational environment for it to become learner autonomy- and teacher autonomy-friendly. The SLTs had really positive attitudes towards the learner autonomy concept and stated that the use of technology played a major role as a learning tool for self-development. The need for a blended learning environment is obviously reinforced by the current research findings as was confirmed by (Ben Ghaith, 2013). The current research recommends that the policy-makers use these findings to detect areas of weakness in the educational environment and try to work on them for the future, aiming at raising the teachers' and students' awareness of autonomous language learning and teaching.

5.2 Strengths and Weaknesses of this Research

The current research was not specifically designed to evaluate factors related to the organisational structure of the education system. Instead, it sought to investigate the SLTs' perspectives about ELL and ELT as a central resource of information. This was considered a core starting point for initiating the change. Data from other resources, such as the institution's policy towards college materials and a direct observation of the actual teaching process, could have played an important role in this research as supportive information alongside the students' perceptions in terms of enriching the investigation conducted in this research. However, those sources of information were avoided, because of the complicated access procedures that faced me in my previous study stages. Generally this would limit the outcomes of the current research in one way or another. It is also worth mentioning that the lack of studies undertaken in the College of Basic Education about learner autonomy in language learning has left a gap that has led to the need to search for other studies carried out in contexts that share a similar educational system, which might be slightly different from the context under investigation.

Although the aim of this study was to focus on a specific context and specific participants, as mentioned regarding my positionality in Chapter One, this means that the findings of the current study cannot be generalised. As with most qualitative studies, this research is limited with respect to generalisability, as it focuses on participants in a specific context. However, with a small sample size caution must be applied, as the findings might not be transferable and the subject of generalisability of the current findings is subject to certain limitations. Despite that, it is still possible for the current research to contribute a valuable step in the right direction, as it focuses on a topic that is of an educational significance and one that might have the

potential to improve language learning and teaching practice in the Kuwaiti public education system.

The findings in this research are subject to at least three limitations related to the participants. The first limitation emerging from the richness of the collected data in this study that could have affected the quality of the outcome was that almost all of the SLTs' answers were the same, mainly because they were learning in a closed environment in which they were experiencing the same difficulties, opportunities, and advantages. Although the findings from this study are valuable and interesting, still there was no change in the SLTs' educational experience. That could have helped generate different and more varied data. Their answers were genuine and were an outcome of authentic experiences, but they lacked critical thinking and evaluation, due to a lack of general knowledge.

The second important limitation lies in the fact that the students in the Kuwaiti public educational system were not aware of the importance of participating in an academic research study. Because they themselves had no experience of undertaking research, they did not feel they had any responsibility to participate in the study. As mentioned earlier in Chapter Three, only fifty six SLTs participated from the original 170 students who had signed up for the initial sampling recruitment.

The third limitation in the current investigation was that this research was conducted with only female SLTs in the College of Basic Education. The reason for this was that there were no male SLTs in the English Language Department. A male perspective on ELL and ELT might have added a lot to this research from the other gender's point of view. Time was also an issue, not only that it was during an examinations period but also related to the suitability and the availability of the place where the data collection was conducted. In the first stages, when the interviews

were carried out in the classrooms there was no privacy in terms of the disturbance and the noises occurring during the interviews and the need to change the place because of the teaching classes' schedules. This happened because of the shortage of rooms available in the college at that time. Afterward, a booking arrangement for a meeting room was made, where the rest of the interviews were conducted.

The final limitation essentially was connected to the cultural and traditional sides of the research context, which affected the initial plans and the methods used to collect the data. The current study was intended to look into the SLTs' future teaching in the language classrooms by examining not only SLTs in the fourth year but also the SLTs who were out on fieldwork. The initial aim was to investigate the participants' perspectives about learner autonomy and teacher autonomy. However, because of cultural and traditional limitations, the SLTs who were out on fieldwork in the mornings could only finish their training in the schools and then head home straight away, because their families would not allow them to go back to college in the afternoons, which made them apologise for participating in this study. By contrast, the SLTs in the fourth year also had similar influences, but with fewer restrictions from their families. They managed to meet me in their free time between classes, although they could not stay long after they had finished classes. The lack of accessibility to the SLTs out on fieldwork resulted in a shifting of focus onto only the fourth-year student language-teachers. The following section will demonstrate how the above limitations could be overcome by using the findings of the current research as a base to conducting further studies that would benefit various sectors in different educational areas.

5.3 Further Research

The findings of this research have a number of important implications for future practice. In the course of my research, a number of possible lines of further enquiry have emerged. The following are some of my suggestions for possible future studies, based on the current research findings. The Kuwaiti public education system has been under scrutiny as a result of the growing dissatisfaction from the Kuwaiti public, due to the continued failure of traditional learning and teaching approaches that are not helping to ensure more development of autonomy for both teachers and learners. Although change can be a hard step to take because of the constraints that might accrue from the components involved in the process, there should nevertheless be clear and well-planned research strategies and goals to achieve change in the best way possible that could benefit both the teachers and the learners. It is recommended that further research be undertaken in the following areas: Kuwait as a context, how ELL and ELT should be taught differently, and finally how blended learning could be a solution. The studies are mainly planned to be conducted in the College of Basic Education, but they could be applicable to other similar educational contexts.

5.3.1 Kuwait

Since the majority of Kuwaitis attend public schools, more research is required to help in developing and enhancing educational standards and to provide the learners with the best possible educational environment for them to progress in. More broadly, research is also needed to determine practical ways to foster learner autonomy and teacher autonomy in the Kuwaiti public educational context. This is going to be hard to achieve if all the parties involved do not share their perceptions of it. Thus, further research needs be undertaken to establish a fuller understanding of

the Kuwaiti context. The Kuwaiti government, the Kuwaiti Ministry of Education, the educational institutions, the principals, the head teachers, the teachers, the parents, and the learners should all have a say in the concept of fostering learner autonomy and teacher autonomy, so that it can be accepted by everyone, because in the learning and teaching process all elements should combine together to achieve an autonomous educational environment.

It would be interesting to compare the experiences of the SLT in the current research and the individuals studying English as their main subject at Kuwait University, and then go to the next level and compare the results of the two public Higher Educational institutions with other private universities in the Kuwaiti context. It would be beneficial to assess the effects of being in a public or a private educational environment, and how the learner's learner autonomy is affected.

5.3.2 English Language Learning and English Language Teaching

Further study is needed to assess the development of ELL by studying the gap between Higher Education and the schools. Future research should therefore concentrate on the investigation of how each educational level should assess its outcomes and try to adjust to new development. The ELL and ELT should be considered in the Kuwaiti public educational context since, as has been mentioned in Chapter Two, Kuwait is regarded an Arabic-speaking country in which the Arabic language is used by all the learners and teachers. In Kuwaiti public schools all modules are taught in Arabic and the English module is taught once a day. The findings from the students' language perceptions suggest that before asking the teachers to foster learner autonomy in public schools, further research should be carried out on how the English language ought to be taught differently in the College of Basic Education.

Based on the findings, I am planning to investigate whether the SLTs from the English Language Department in the College of Basic Education should be taught how to teach the language differently from other student-teachers in other departments. Conducting such research will help the SLTs to face the constraints and difficulties that they might face when they go into the field where the majority of their learners' time is spent in communicating in Arabic. This future research could encourage the SLTs at this stage (College of Basic Education) to reflect on their ELL and ELT so that they will be able to learn the language autonomously and might also be able to teach it autonomously in their English language classrooms in the future.

5.3.3 Collaborative Learning

Further research in the fields of learner autonomy and teacher autonomy regarding the role of technology in developing it in the Kuwaiti public educational context would be of great help. The current research findings have indicated that the SLTs depended on the technology as a main source of self-development in learning the English language. They stated the need for technology to be used more often in the teaching process. The findings provide the following insights for future research about implementing blended learning in language-teaching in the College of Basic Education. A blended learning environment would involve both face-to-face learning and the use of technology. During the period in which the SLTs are still in college, which is regarded as the main learning focus, there needs to be more educational resources to help them develop. With this future research it is hoped that the findings could provoke educators in the English Language Department to reflect on the way SLTs should be taught the language at this stage before they are sent to teach in public schools. I would like to see what would happen if the SLTs were exposed to

the use of technology during their study in the College of Basic Education. Would it then be possible for them to use it in their own language-teaching in schools?

I also want to do further research and investigate how the notion of social media technology tools and applications could be used in developing the SLTs' autonomous language learning and teaching. I am planning to create my own website that will incorporate the curriculum content as an experiment whereby the SLTs can have the chance to learn using new technology applications or tools. The website will include different features such as a blackboard and weblog, and with a range of content including reading lists and other useful links to online educational websites. There will be links to the students' existing social networking accounts (if not private and with their agreement) and there will be a live chat facility for the students to use and direct feedback from me during the week.

By conducting this kind of investigation I want to see how the SLTs interact in an informal collaborative online environment. For example, before the lectures a reading list will be available on the website, which students could be asked to read and to interact with using different features such as the use of tags[9] to express their thoughts by assigning their own keywords that reflect their understanding of the information content. Their interaction using the tools provided could be shown to all the students with whom they could exchange information or answer each others' questions, plus discussing the learning materials from their own point of view using the technological applications available on the website. This kind of research can provide a better understanding of how the SLTs could learn from me and from each other and how they could develop their autonomous language learning and teaching in a fostered collaborative online environment.

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[9] Golder and Huberman (2005:1) state that social tagging is "the practice of allowing anyone - especially consumers - to freely attach keywords or tags to content".

5.4 Closing statement

The value of learner autonomy is normally acknowledged today, but some countries are still not yet ready to apply it in their educational systems. In my opinion, the Kuwaiti Ministry of Education and in-service teachers are still unclear about the concept of learner autonomy, and autonomy remains a theoretical topic for them. There is always hope for growth in understanding of the concept of learner autonomy and there will always be the possibility of finding a place for it in our curriculum design. The SLTs have the ability to become autonomous but all they need is that extra drive by providing them with the appropriate educational environment.

Considering my educational background, which was similar to that of the SLTs participating in this research, I recognised how I have developed as an autonomous learner studying in an environment in which learner autonomy is encouraged. I am grateful that I had to spend a year researching a concept that I will be able to practice directly with my students. So even if change and development does not occur to the curriculum or the system in the near future, I will always keep going and practice the fostering of learner autonomy every day in my classroom.

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Attachment (5.b) Code switching appendix

Examples of the data showing code switching between the two languages (Arabic and English) used by the SLTs in the current research.

Method	SLT	Example (code switching)	Translation
Interview	SLT-7	*"She comes in* وتبدي تحاول تتجهز بسرعة. وبعد ما تخلص لازم تطلع لانه في teacher ثاني راح تدخل، كنت اقدر اروح مكتبها بس ما احس في connection الي يخليني مرتاحة"	"She comes in, tries to prepare everything quick and starts. After she finishes she has to go because the other teacher is coming in. I could go to her office but I don't feel the connection that makes me comfortable"
	SLT-4	*"No,* ما احس في time. وبحين ليش اسوي جني؟ Does she have to?"*	"No, no time I guess. And then why would she do that? Does she have to?"
Journal	SLT-11 (email)	" ما يعطونا الانطباع انه احنا كبار ونقدر نقول ال opinions مالتنا ومره من المرات صلحت حق ال teacher (refused to give a name) وضحك على ال class كله "	"do not give us the impression that we can see ourselves as mature enough to say our opinions ... once I corrected a teacher (refused to give a name) and he made fun of me in front of the class."
	SLT-1 (written)		"It's a genius idea - it made things much easier for us, in the WhatsApp class, we managed to talk more, exchange information, express thoughts and ideas, and no one was afraid or shy or hesitant"
Focus group	FGD-1	انا ما نقدر نغير البيئة والي اصلا باين ما راح تتغير soon (adds another) فلازم احنا الّي اتغير" (FGD-1)	"If we cannot change the environment – which is not going to change any time soon (adds another) – then we have to change" (FGD-1).
	SLT-13	انا ما راح اقول انه كل طالباتي ما راح يفهمون بهالعمر بس still اكيد في وحده راح تكون فاهمة بوهذا راح يكون unfair حقها "	"I can't assume all of my students are not going to understand at this age but still there can be one that does. It's unfair to her"

Appendix B: Information Sheet

1. **Research Project Title:**

Making Space for Reflective Learning and Teaching in the Kuwaiti Language Classrooms: The Case for Autonomous Learning and Teaching

2. **Invitation**

You are being invited to take part in this research project; however, you should read the following information in order to understand why this project is being carried out and what will be expected from it. Take some time to read this information sheet carefully.

3. **What is the project's purpose?**

The present study is being undertaken in partial fulfilment of the requirements for a PhD course I am doing with the University of Sheffield. This means that the findings of the study will be used solely for academic purposes. It is a study of an on-going PhD research project entitled "**Making Space for Reflective Learning and Teaching in the Kuwaiti Language Classrooms: The Case for Autonomous Learning and Teaching**".

4. **Why have I been chosen?**

In order to achieve the projects aims and objectives, English department student language teachers (from the fourth level) are required; you have been chosen to be asked to take part because you fit this profile.

5. **Do I have to take part?**

Taking part in this research is entirely voluntary. If you decide to take part, you will be provided with an information sheet to keep (and be asked to sign a consent form) and you can still withdraw at any time without giving a reason.

6. **What will happen to me if I take part?**

Date:

Name of Applicant:

1

In this research I will be asking the participants to participate in two principal ways. One group will participate in an in-depth interviews and the second group will be asked to keep personal journals. At the end of the data collection process a focus group discussion (FGD) will be held for all participating student language teachers.

1. **INTERVIEWS**

If you agree to take part in this research, you will be invited to a one-to-one semi-structured interview. The interview questions will be divided into four main sections. The first part will start with general biographical questions; the second set of questions will focus on your educational background (primary – secondary and intermediate). The third set of questions focuses on your learning experiences as student language teachers in the College of Basic Education and finally the fourth set of questions will be related to your future teaching process as English teachers in the Kuwaiti public schools.

The researcher will be using an audio recorder to record the interview. Any audio recordings of your activities made during this research will be used only for analysis and for illustration in conference presentations and lectures. No other use will be made of them without your written permission, and no one outside the project will be allowed access to the original recordings.

2. **QUALITATIVE QUESTIONNAIRES**

As an alternative to the one to one interviews you can participate by filling in a qualitative questionnaire. If you agree to take part in this research, you will be invited to complete a qualitative questionnaire, divided into four main sections: The first part will start with general biographical questions; the second set of questions will focus on your educational background from (primary – secondary and intermediate). The third set of questions focuses on your learning experiences as student language teachers in the College of Basic Education and finally the fourth set of questions is related to your future teaching process as English teachers in the Kuwaiti public schools. The survey should take 30 minutes to complete.

3. **REFLECTIVE JOURNALS:**

If you agree to take part in this research, you will be invited to keep a reflective journal for a period of eight to ten weeks. You will be asked to write about your reflection on learning and teaching issues related to your previous language learning, you're learning in the College of Basic Education and

Date: 2
Name of Applicant:

about your future teaching in the fieldwork training. The journals will be semi-structured and guided which will make it easier for you to write and you will be asked to write the reflective journals on a weekly basis. There will be a brief introduction about writing reflective journals that will be presented by the researcher at the beginning, and there will always be an on-going support and guidance from the researcher if you need it.

4. FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION (FGD):

After agreeing to participate in one of the pervious data collection methods (semi-structured interview - reflective journals - qualitative questionnaire), you will then be asked if you would like to participate in a focus group discussion (FGD). The focus group discussion aims to give the student language teacher's the chance to exchange and reflect on each other's' perceptions regarding your English language learning process.

The researcher will be using an audio recorder to record the focus group discussion. Any audio recordings of your activities made during this research will be used only for analysis and for illustration in conference presentations and lectures. No other use will be made of them without your written permission, and no one outside the project will be allowed access to the original recordings.

7.   What do I have to do?

Your participation in this study will not impose any restrictions on your lifestyle.

8.   What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

There are no risks involved in taking part in this study. Your participation in this study will not expose you to any risks or disadvantages. If there is any information that you do not want to provide, you are completely free to decline to give it.

9.   What are the possible benefits of taking part?

By taking part in this study, it is hoped that we can use your input to improve our understanding of the rationale for and possibility of introducing learning and teaching autonomy within the existing educational system in the Kuwaiti context. The reflective journals will also offer an additional aspect to our understanding of learning from the participating students' experience.

10.   What happens if the research study stops earlier than expected?

Date: 3
Name of Applicant:

If this is the case the reason(s) will be explained to you.

11. What if something goes wrong?

If anything goes wrong, please contact the researcher via this email address (Anfal.a.univ@gmail.com – edp09aa@sheffield.ac.uk). Your complaint will be dealt with respectfully, and we will respond appropriately and as soon as possible. However, if you feel that your complaint has not been dealt with appropriately then, you can email the research supervisor via this email (T.Lamb@sheffield.ac.uk). In addition, if you wish to complain about any other serious problems that may arise during or following your participation in the research, you can contact the Head of Research Degrees at the University of Sheffield: Professor Jerry Wellington, Department of Educational Studies: (j.wellington@sheffield.ac.uk).

12. Will my taking part in this project be kept confidential?
All of the information that we collect from you and through the reflective journals, qualitative questionnaires and interviews will be kept strictly confidential and you will not be identifiable in any reports or publications.

13. What will happen to the results of the research project?

The results will be used to inform further studies in this research area. Results may be published based on the data collected.

14. Who is organising and funding the research?

This research is funded by the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training.

15. Who has ethically reviewed the project?

This project has been ethically approved via the Department of Educational Studies' ethics review procedure.

16. Contact for further information

Dr Terry LAMB
Senior Lecturer in Education
Director of Learning and Teaching

Date: 4
Name of Applicant:

Director, MA in Applied Professional Studies in Education

University of Sheffield

President, FIPLV (Fédération Internationale des Professeurs de Langues Vivantes)

Chief Editor, International Journal of Innovation in Language Learning and Teaching

School of Education

The Education Building

388 Glossop Road

Sheffield

S10 2JA

Tel: (+)44 (0)114 222 8118

Fax: (+)44 (0)114 279 8631

http://www.shef.ac.uk/education/staff/academic/lambt.html

Each participant will receive a copy of the information sheet and a copy of the signed and dated participant consent form.

Thank you for considering participating in this small-scale study.

<div align="center">

Regards

Anfal Aljaser

</div>

Date:
Name of Applicant:

5

Appendix C: Participants Consent Form

Participant Consent Form

Title of Project:

Making Space for Reflective Learning and Teaching in The Kuwaiti Language Classrooms: The Case for Autonomous Learning and Teaching

Name of Researcher: ANFAL ALJASER

Please initial box

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet dated [1st October 2011] for the above project and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason.

   RESEARCHER DETAILS:
   EMAIL: EDP09AA@SHEFFIELD.AC.UK – ANFAL.A.UNIV@GMAIL.COM
   TEL: ***************
   TEL: ***************

3. I understand that my responses will be anonymised before analysis. I give permission for members of the research team to have access to my anonymised responses.

4. I agree to take part in the above research project.

_____   _____   _____
Name of Participant   Date   Signature

_____   _____   _____
 Researcher   Date   Signature
To be signed and dated in presence of the participant

Copies:

Once this has been signed by all parties the participant should receive a copy of the signed and dated participant consent form, the letter/pre-written script/information sheet and any other written information provided to the participants. A copy for the signed and dated consent form should be placed in the project's main record (e.g. a site file), which must be kept in a secure location.

Date: Name of Applicant:

Appendix D: Individual Interviews Guide

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

STUDENT LANGUAGE TEACHERS

College of Basic Education – English Department

Interview Guide for the individual Interviews with Participating Student language teachers

a. Educational background:

Question number	Question	Probes
1	Would you please kindly tell me about yourself?	- Name, age and year of study?
2	2.1 What type of school did you attend prior to enrolling in the College of Basic Education? 2.2 What do you think about the way you were taught English language at school? 2.3 Do you feel your previous school experience prepared you adequately for the language learning in your current institution?	- State schools – private schools - How previous type of schools is affecting learning in the College of Basic Education - Qualifications before College of Basic Education.
3	3.1 In your previous language learning experience, what were the methods used in the language teaching and learning? 3.2 In your view to were these methods effective in promoting language learning?	- For example, group work, pair work and role-play - Are the SLTs capable of: - Evaluation - Justification - Reflection
4	Is there any language teacher in the school you worked with that you could single out as being out standing? If so, what makes him/her standout from the rest?	- Identify attributes of good teaching - Examine the teachers' effect on the students' learning - How do they relate to autonomy and reflective teaching?
5	5.1 Were the language teachers encouraging you to learn the language outside the classroom? 5.2 What sorts of activities were you encouraged to engage in?	- Finding information alone - Personal reading

6	6.1 Were there any school facilities that helped you learn the language outside the classroom? 6.2 To what extent did these facilities help you to enhance your language learning?	- Self access centres - Language labs - Library - Class libraries - Generating interest in leaning the language as an individual - Nature of guidance given in the facilities - Effectiveness of the guidance
7	Were there any rewards in the school to promote language learning?	- Nature of the reward system - The level of language learning - The school role in developing language learning
8	8.1 Do you feel teachers provided you with adequate opportunities to express your views freely and to interact with other learners during language lessons? 8.2 In your opinion was your language classroom a learner-centred or teacher-centred?	- Power relation - Traditional way of teaching and learning - Control and power

b. Current educational life (College of Basic Education):

Question number	Question	Probes
1	Can you please tell me the reasons why you chose to enroll as a student at the College of Basic Education?	Reasons (motivation for choosing teaching).
2	What approaches are being used in your current language classroom? What do you think about the effectiveness of these methods in terms of preparing you as a language learner and a teacher?	- Language learning approaches - Teaching/learning methods - Rationale for different teaching approaches - Lecture - Project work - Group assignments - Learner centred approaches - Elements of reflective analysis - Strengths and limitations of the approaches - Opportunities for further investigation of alternative approaches
3	From the team of language teachers you have in the college is there anyone who you would consider to be the most outstanding? If so, what makes him/her stand out from all the rest?	Reflect on the good teaching practices – good model – good qualities – enhance learner autonomy.
4	4.1 Are there any language educators that encourage you to learn a language outside the classroom? If so, what sort of activities do you engage in? 4.2 Are there any facilities in the college that help you to learn the language outside the classroom? 4.3 To what extent are these facilities helping you to enhance your language learning?	- Finding information alone – Personal reading - Self access centers – Language labs – Library – Class libraries - Generating interest in leaning the language as an individual - Nature of guidance give in the facilities - The effectiveness of the guidance
5	Have you been able to identify any new approaches to language learning on your own?	- Opportunity to find individual learning style - Personal growth - Self-evaluation

6	Is there a system of reward in the college to promote language learning?	- Nature of the reward system - The level of language learning - The college role in developing language learning
7	If you have a friend that is learning a language now, what would you advice him/her about what and how they should learn it?	- Self Reflection
8	8.1 Do you feel educators provided you with adequate opportunities to express your views freely and to interact with other learners during language lessons? 8.2 In your opinion was your language classroom a learner-centred or teacher-centred?	- Power relation - Traditional way of teaching and learning - Control and power

b. **Life after college (in the future language classroom in the Kuwaiti state schools)**

This section comprises of questions for SLTs in level four, the questions will target the SLTs' intentions of how they will want to teach in their future language classrooms. Their answers will depend fully on their own experience as learners and as student teacher trainees in the current educational phase.

Question number	Question	Probes
1	1.1 Define what does it mean to be an effective language teacher in the Kuwaiti language classroom? (General definition and their own definition) 1.2 What other roles should the English language teacher practice other than being a source of information? 1.3 Are there any aspects of the teaching and learning of English language you think need to be improved? (Time, teacher preparation, availability of resources, classroom site, methods) 1.4 What factors are militating against the effective teaching and learning of English language in Kuwait language classroom? (Challenges) 1.5 Are you with or against that u cant teach the learners what you yourself did not learn?	- The objectives of this question will be to identify the positive and negative features participants' see as characterising the language classrooms in Kuwait; - What they wish to see in the classrooms; - How the Kuwaiti cultures influence classroom practices; - and the unique characteristics defining the Kuwaiti classroom.
2	As an English language teacher, how do you plan to keep yourself informed of the developments in your subject area?	- The objectives of this question are to identify participants' capacity and willingness for self-directed teaching; - How they see their role; - What they wish their role to be; - What kind of autonomous practices they will use in their classroom; - And the issue of control and power over the learning process.
3	Do you think the English language learning and	- The objectives of this

	teaching experience you have had changed your previous perspectives about teaching and learning a language? How?	question are to identify the strategies the teachers use/will use in their classroom; - Whether the teachers use autonomous practices in their teaching (and how many); - The changes in the teachers' teaching and learning perspectives before and after they had the chance to experience teaching in the field work; - The different perspectives of the teachers regarding the way in which a language should be taught; - And teachers' strategies for helping learners learn a language (e.g., strategy training, learning strategy).
4	4.1 Apart from the training and support you are getting from the college, what else are you doing as an individual to help yourself become an effective English language teacher in the future? 4.2 What kind of support would you like to receive from the Ministry of Education, school and your supervisor?	- The objectives of this question are to identify participants' self-directed learning (learning how to teach); - The problems they face in the teaching process; - The developments they want from the system so that they can develop themselves (e.g., teacher training workshops); - Their perspectives about the teaching process; - and what they are doing on their own to improve their teaching skills.
5	5.1 To what extent are you willing to give your learners the chance to take an active role in the language classroom? e.g. What do you think about the idea of giving the learners the chance to choose what, how, and when they want to learn in your language classroom? 5.2 Is there anything from your current experience about the learning of a language that you wish your teachers in the past should have used? Can you identify them? 5.3 What learning strategies are you going to encourage you learners to adopt in learning the English language in your classroom?	- The objectives of this question are to identify the teachers' perceptions about control and power; - Their attitudes about giving learners the chance to choose (how much and to what extent); - How they evaluate their students' capacity; - What practices they wished they had available when they were learners themselves; - How their attitudes about autonomy (either positive or negative) can influence how they want their learners to learn the language;

		- Whether they have the will to train their students to become autonomous; - And the kinds of strategies they want their students to use.

In order to investigate the SLTs' opinion about reflection, they will be asked about a certain tool such as reflective journals. The main purpose is not to measure the effect of this tool as much as learn their own perception about reflection.

(a brief introduction about what reflective journal will be provided if needed after hearing their own opinions about it)

There is a possibility that the student language teachers are not familiar with the meaning of the term "reflective journals". What the researcher will do is to find out what reflecting means to them then explain what it could it mean in brief.

What is Reflective Journal?

- A reflective journal is a means of recording ideas, personal thoughts and experiences, as well as reflections and insights a student has in the learning process of a course.
- Demonstrate basic understanding of course materials.
- Reflective journal requires the students to think more deeply, to challenge their old ideas with new incoming information, to synthesize the course materials they have learnt into their personal thoughts and philosophy, and also to integrate it into their daily experiences and future actions.

Chan C. (2009) Assessment: Reflective Journal, Assessment Resources @HKU, University of Hong Kong [http://ar.cetl.hku.hk]: Available: Accessed: 23-6-2011

7	6.2 What is your understanding of a reflective learning journal? 3.1 To what extent are you being encouraged to reflect on your language learning in the College of Basic Education? 3.2 How effective are these reflective approaches helping you to develop as a language learner and a teacher? Experience a. Are you happy to keep a reflective learning journal? b. Why would you like/ not want to keep a journal?	- Their opinions about reflection - The effect of reflection on language learning

Appendix E: Data Collection Timetable

Date	Activity	Outcome
October		
14-18 October	Pilot study	- Change in interview questions.
21-25 October & 28 October -1 November	Recruiting the students language teachers from both (4th-field work)	- A good result. - About 40 students registered (first week). - A total of (170) SLT that wanted to participated in two weeks.
25th	5 (SLTs)	Total: 19 (SLTs)
26th	5 (SLTs)	
27th	4 (SLTs)	
28th	3 (SLTs)	
30th	1 (SLTs)	
31st	1(SLTs)	
November		
1st to the 13	Eid Holiday	
7th to the 16th	Upgrade in UK	
December		
4th	1 (SLTs)	Total: 19 (SLTs)
11th	1 (SLTs)	
14th	2 (SLTs)	
16th	1 (SLTs)	
19th	2 (SLTs)	
22nd	1 (SLTs)	
25th	2 (SLTs)	
26th	4 (SLTs)	
27th	3 (SLTs)	
28th	1 (SLTs)	
29th	3 (SLTs)	
January		
2nd	1 (SLTs)	Total: 6 (SLTs)
3rd	1 (SLTs)	
4th	1 (SLTs)	
8th	3 (SLTs)	
10th	Focus group interviews between 10 STLs some doing the reflective journals.	
Total number of (SLTs) interviewed: 46		

Appendix F: SLT Reflective Journal transcript

Selective paragraphs from a (SLT-2) reflective journal: manual coding

Morphology and syntax Doctor...

The most scary and nice thing that our Doctor did is that he didn't allow us to speak unless the sentences were fully in English. It was scary because when the students are tense they find it hard to make English aid them in the situation. It was nice because most of the student were learning to try uttering everything properly with no mistakes.

→ Attitude and motivation

→ Reflection and evaluation

The bad thing about this technique is that students were afraid to ask anything even if they were having problems. They were afraid that the Doctor would make fun of their English and the rest of the class would laugh. This made students prefer skipping the problems rather than solving them.

→ Constrains

Nevertheless, I believe it has several downs. I don't want my future student being afraid to ask about anything if they are having some problems. One of the things I learned this course in my psychology class that in order to have a good learning discussion, you must allow your students some freedom. Student's must feel free to say their opinions or questions without being oppressed because of their undeveloped language

→ Critical future reflection

Another thing about this course: we were asked to attend a class in a primary school as observers to see the techniques teacher uses to correct students' mistakes. Afterward, we should submit a report about it with our opinion. Which are the ways we prefer? Could we have done any better? What else did we learn?

→ Reflection and critical thinking

This was a different experience made us look to our future career and see how to interact in a real class. I liked the fact that the teacher was actually using stars and crosses under the number of each group in that class. If you are good you will get a star if you are not or naughty you will get a cross, and guess what? It actually worked with students. Once they see that the teacher puts a cross on the bored they go quiet.

→ Teaching methods

There were a lot of different ways in correcting errors and mistakes to choose from. The smart teacher is the one chooses the one appropriate for every teaching situation. The report that was submitted afterward

made us look harder to what we have seen in that class and pay attention to the interaction. I guess if we weren't asked to submit a report we would be less interested in observing and most likely we would have forgotten most of the things we seen there.

Two things I would like to do when I became a teacher: ⟶ Teacher autonomy and reflection

1- use debate as a way of teaching once and while.

2- Asking students write small reports on every unit we finish.

‹‹ of course those two things can't be done unless the students were 5th graders or older.

In college nowadays the doctors always ask us to read some new stories or books so that we can enrich our voc. , but that didn't seem to do the trick. Once I decided to read 'Harry Potter and the half-blood prince' and I did, but I don't recall holding the dictionary to look for the meaning. I just tried to figure out the meaning from the context and if I couldn't I would ignore it and continue; that was four years ago even before entering CBE. ⟶ Critical reflection and constrains

⟶ Learner autonomy and evaluation

Frankly, I get very excited to develop my language abilities, but soon those feelings are gone with the wind. It's boring to develop yourself if you thought that you don't need to or you just weren't encouraged all the way. Yes, I do understand that I need to do it for my sake, but the idea is not that attracting. ⟶ Learner autonomy

⟶ Constrains

Why? ⟶ Learner autonomy and constrains

I'll leave that for another time ‹‹---- tiered of the keyboard ‹__‹"

The thing is in basic writing as I should imagine students are required to write paragraphs and essays all the time, at least once a week so that they can develop their writing abilities. However, our nice beloved doctor never asked us to do so. As a matter of fact, he thought that our English is rubbish simply because we all came from government system schools. He didn't bother seeing what we are able to do, and didn't care less to develop anything about our writing. Nevertheless, I can't deny that he spent the whole course teaching us how to use punctuation. As if we are inadequate to learn anything beyond that level. ⟶ Constrains

⟶ Constrains and reflection

made us look harder to what we have seen in that class and pay attention to the interaction. I guess if we weren't asked to submit a report we would be less interested in observing and most likely we would have forgotten most of the things we seen there.

Two things I would like to do when I became a teacher: —————→ Teacher autonomy and reflection

1- use debate as a way of teaching once and while.

2- Asking students write small reports on every unit we finish.

<< of course those two things can't be done unless the students were 5th graders or older.

In college nowadays the doctors always ask us to read some new stories or books so that we can enrich our voc. , but that didn't seem to do the trick. Once I decided to read 'Harry Potter and the half-blood prince' and →Critical reflection and constrains
I did, but I don't recall holding the dictionary to look for the meaning. I just tried to figure out the meaning from the context and if I couldn't I would ignore it and continue; that was four years ago even before entering CBE. →Learner autonomy and evaluation

Frankly, I get very excited to develop my language abilities, but soon →Learner autonomy
those feelings are gone with the wind. It's boring to develop yourself if you thought that you don't need to or you just weren't encouraged all the way, Yes, I do understand that I need to do it for my sake, but the idea is not that attracting. →Constrains

Why? →Learner autonomy and constrains

I'll leave that for another time <<---- tiered of the keyboard <__<"

The thing is in basic writing as I should imagine students are required to write paragraphs and essays all the time, at least once a week so that they can develop their writing abilities. However, our nice beloved doctor never asked us to do so. As a matter of fact, he thought that our English →Constrains
is rubbish simply because we all came from government system schools. He didn't bother seeing what we are able to do, and didn't care less to develop anything about our writing. Nevertheless, I can't deny that he spent the whole course teaching us how to use punctuation. As if we are inadequate to learn anything beyond that level. —————→ Constrains and reflection

One last thing: in the developed writing course our doctor introduced us to his idea about having something called 'the writing clinic' for English major students, so we can write whatever we want and if we want to get any feedback about it, we can simply give it to him or any volunteering member of the faculty of English Major or send it to them by e-mail. It was a very nice idea, but unfortunately it didn't see the light yet because not many of the faculty members are committed to it and the students don't like to write things if they weren't obligated to do so. It's a two way fail.. —→ Driving forces

—→ Constrains

After that course I got an idea about having a group of friends and all of us should write, then we give the drafts to each other to get different opinions on how to improve. Then, after processing what we wrote we would give it to the 'Writing Clinic' idea doctor for feedback. That idea also didn't work because nobody of my friends was willing to participate and I took that as an excuse for me to let the idea go…« lazy people always live in their safe comfortable zone! —→ Learner autonomy

—→ Constrains

The thing I liked the most and really benefited from is that we were most of the time asked to re-write our quizzes essay questions and send them via e-mail. This helped in having a better understanding of the course and made us look for additional information ourselves. —→ Reflection and driving forces

Appendix G: Individual Interview Transcript

Attachment (3) Interview raw data transcript

Selective questions from a SLT's individual interview (SLT-6): Manual coding

Phase one: Past educational background			
Question #3	3.1 In your previous language learning experience, what were the methods used in the language teaching and learning? 3.2 In your view were these methods effective in promoting language learning?	"It depends on the doctor, some use the same approach but I don't benefit from the both of them the same way"... "I prefer it when the teachers treat us like grownups and talk to us informally"	Driving forces and motivation Reflection and critical thinking
Question #9	Control and power	"I can't imagine what I would have said if the teacher asked my opinion about the course content" "I guess if she (the teacher) gave me choices I might choose one (course modification tool) but still, how do I know if it is the good one for me?"	Power position Reflection, evaluation and constrains
Phase two: Current educational life			
Question #3	From the team of language teachers you have in the college is there anyone who you would consider to be the most outstanding? If so, what makes him/her stand out from all the rest?	"couple of them always encourage us to depend on ourselves, they say because we are old enough to take responsibility and because we are going to become teachers"	Motivation, driving forces and teacher autonomy
Question #4.1	Are there any language educators that encourage you to learn a language outside the classroom? If so, what sort of activities do you engage in?	"We are in the classroom having one lesson after another and the teacher comes in the classroom, so we do not have a chance to go out and work with others because we do not have time"	Constraints

Phase three: Future language classroom			
Question #2	As an English language teacher, how do you plan to keep yourself informed of the developments in your subject area?	*"Having the chance to monitor my work and my interaction with the teacher and evaluate myself made me proud of myself to see that I have progressed"* *"Sometimes if I like and want to know more about something I learnt in class I go to the teacher and ask her if there are other books or something that is similar or better to make me learn more"*	Evaluation, reflection, driving forces and learner autonomy Evaluation, critical thinking and learner autonomy
Question #5.1	To what extent are you willing to give your learners the chance to take an active role in the language classroom? E.g. What do you think about the idea of giving the learners the chance to choose what, how, and when they want to learn in your language classroom?	*"You (referring to me as the interviewer) made us talk about what the teachers did not do for us as learners previously and now, but I am going to be a teacher next year and still not sure if I can practice all of this (referring to the autonomous learning and teaching)"* *"... may not allow the learner to take charge, at least not the first year. First I have to get used to the environment and then I will see what happens"*	Evaluation, critical thinking, reflection and constraints Constraints and reflection

Appendix H: Initial Codes Generated from the Research Questions and the Data

Codes Generated from The Research Questions and The Data

No.	Code	Explaining the code	Notes
1	Driving and hindering forces	• Elements such as the educators, textbooks, the environment ... • What attributed to their success in language learning and what didn't?	What SLTs did to either develop the driving forces or overcoming constrains will show their ability to become learner autonomy.
2	Scores	• Evaluation and achieving the highest score in previous and current language learning process, how did it affect their language learning?	The effect of traditional teaching and learning on the SLTs' educational lives.
3	Memorizing for exams	• How did learning for exams affect the SLTs language learning?	The effect of traditional teaching and learning on the SLTs' educational lives.
4	Learning for exams vs. lifelong learning	• What are they doing to learn for lifelong learning? • Their perceptions about how they have been taught. • The effect of learning method? Exams? Assignment? Group work? • Quantity vs. quality of learning.	Traditional learning vs. learner autonomy
5	Confident	• Are they confident to adopt their own learning methods and styles? • Are they confident about discussing their language learning with their educators? • Did the lack or over confidence helped in their language learning? • Did the confidence in their language learning helped in how they perceive their future language teaching?	• Reflection and the effect of previous educational phases. • How is the SLTs previous English language learning experiences influence their adaptation of LA in their future teaching of English language?
6	The role of the educators in their learning process	• How the educator's role in the language classroom help the SLTs to develop as learners. • How did the role of the educator influence the SLTs perceptions about their future role as language teachers?	Learner autonomy and teacher autonomy
7	Motivation and support	• The effect of motivation on the SLTs' language learning? • Did the lack of teacher motivation affect the SLTs' learning or was it cause of encouragement to push them? • What was the source of motivation? (Educators, parents, peers)	The role of attitudes and motivation on LA.
8	Perceptions	• The SLTs perceptions of. 1 What is language learning? 2 What is their role as learners in improving their own language learning? 3 What is their role as SLTs in learning how to teach the language to their future language students? 4 In their opinion could their previous and current experience weather good or bad, affect how they think about future language learning and teaching? 5 How could the environment whether inside and outside of the classroom setting could enhance or hinders their language learning?	The role of reflection and critical thinking of developing LA.
9	Reflective learning (Self-evaluation of the language learning process)	• What do the SLTs think about reflective learning? • Did they practice it before? • Were the SLTs encouraged to reflect by using reflective tools such as	• SLTs that have strong relationships with other SLTs in the collage benefit more than the ones that didn't.

		diaries as a requirement? • Did evaluating their own learning process help in strengthen their confidence? • Opinion about peer learning and evaluating? • What could they have done differently in previous educational phases that might have helped them to develop more? • Evaluating themselves with other peers. • Evaluating their own learning process, language use, language understanding.	• From what I have noticed that they meet in groups after classes and talk about what happened during the class. • But they also complain about the environment and how it is not helping them to improve and develop as learners. • Yes they get high scores for memorizing but they have low abilities to use the language.
10	Learner autonomy	• SLTs aspects of individuality and autonomy. • Learning methods that played a role in their development as language learners? (TV, radio, internet) • The effect of the SLTs' evaluation of their own language learning?	What aspects of LA do the SLTs show in their own language learning?
11	Power and control	• Educator's control of chosen educational materials used. • Power over articulating their opinions in class with the educators. • Fear of the educators taking bad impressions or misunderstand the SLTs motive in challenging them. • Teacher centred vs. student centred classrooms. • The fear of the educator's reaction and lack of general knowledge are main constrains in the traditional classroom.	Traditional educational environment and power position.
12	Critical thinking	• Critical thinking and expressing reflective thoughts about learning experiences. • Communicating or criticizing the learning and teaching process in the English classroom. • Researching to be able to have the chance to think critically and challenge themselves and others educationally.	Thing beyond the educational classroom.
13	Critical reflection	• Reflection and general feedback play a role in developing the SLTs' LA. • Having the chance to reflect on their learning experience can affect how they think about their future teaching.	-
14	Can LA improve the SLTs English language learning	• Because the SLTs are practicing LA without knowing that they are, I have asked them about how did those learning methods that they are using help in enhancing their English language learning: • The answers were positive mostly. • They expressed how happy and interesting this makes the learning process. They feel that depending on outside general method made them more open to the world. • More educated. • More professional. • Knowing something for the first time gave the rush to keep going and search for more. • Having the chance to learn a new thing and sharing it with other SLTs helped to improve their language learning.	The SLTs believe that they can develop but they need guidance and feedback.
15	The SLTs future view about English language teaching	• Most of the SLTs said that because they have not had the chance to become learner autonomy during their previous educational	• Previous educational phases effect on SLTs future views.

life, they are willing to work hard to facilitate the right environment for their future learner to become more autonomous. • Other said that they do not know how they will deal with this situation looking that they did not had the chance to learn autonomously or practiced how facilitate it.	• Some SLTs are not interested at this level and are planning to do more when they graduate. • Others have learnt new ways and styles and tried them and are willing to improve them more when they graduate.

Appendix I: Research Ethics Application Form

University of Sheffield School of Education
RESEARCH ETHICS APPLICATION FORM

Complete this form if you are planning to carry out research in the School of Education which will <u>not</u> involve the NHS but which will involve people participating in research either directly (e.g. interviews, questionnaires) and/or indirectly (e.g. people permitting access to data).

Documents to enclose with this form, where appropriate:
This form should be accompanied, where appropriate, by an Information Sheet/Covering Letter/Written Script, which informs the prospective participants about the proposed research, and/or by a Consent Form.

Guidance on how to complete this form is at:
http://www.shef.ac.uk/content/1/c6/11/43/27/Application%20Guide.pdf

Once you have completed this research ethics application form in full, and other documents where appropriate email it to the:

Either

Ethics Administrator if you are a member of staff.

Or

Secretary for your programme/course if you are a student.

NOTE
- Staff and Post Graduate Research (EdDII/PhD) requires 3 reviewers
- Undergraduate and Taught Post Graduate requires 1 reviewer – **low risk**
- Undergraduate and Taught Post Graduate requires 2 reviewers – **high risk**

I am a member of staff and consider this research to be (according to University definitions)
:   **low risk** ☐

     high risk   ☐

I am a student and consider this research to be (according to University definitions):
     low risk ✓

     high risk   ☐

*Note: For the purposes of Ethical Review the University Research Ethics Committee considers all research with 'vulnerable people' to be 'high risk' (eg children under 18 years of age).

COVER SHEET

I confirm that in my judgment, due to the project's nature, the use of a method to inform prospective participants about the project (eg 'Information Sheet'/'Covering Letter'/'Pre-Written Script'?:	
Is relevant	**Is not relevant**
✓ (if relevant then this should be enclosed)	

I confirm that in my judgment, due to the project's nature, the use of a 'Consent Form':	
Is relevant	**Is not relevant**
✓ (if relevant then this should be enclosed)	

Is this a 'generic "en bloc" application (ie does it cover more than one project that is sufficiently similar)	
Yes	**No**
	✓

I am a member of staff	☐
I am a PhD/EdD student	✓
I am a Master's student	☐
I am an Undergraduate student	☐
I am a PGCE student	☐
The submission of this ethics application has been agreed by my supervisor	✓

Supervisor's signature/name and date of agreement

....

I have enclosed a signed copy of Part B	✓

PART A

A1.   Title of Research Project

Making Space for Reflective Learning and Teaching in the Kuwaiti Language Classrooms: The Case
for Autonomous Learning and Teaching

**A2.   Applicant (normally the Principal Investigator, in the case of staff-led research projects,
or the student in the case of supervised research projects):**

Title: Miss   First Name/Initials: ANFAL   Last Name: ALJASER
Post: PhD STUDENT   Department: EDUCATION
Email: ANFAL.A.UNIV@GMAIL.COM Telephone:
EDP09AA@sheffield.ac.uk

A.2.1.   Is this a student project? Yes

Dr Terry LAMB
Senior Lecturer in Education
Director of Learning and Teaching
Director, MA in Applied Professional Studies in Education
University of Sheffield
President, FIPLV (Fédération Internationale des Professeurs de Langues
Vivantes)
Chief Editor, International Journal of Innovation in Language Learning and
Teaching
School of Education
The Education Building
388 Glossop Road
Sheffield
S10 2JA
Tel: (+)44 (0)114 222 8118
Fax: (+)44 (0)114 279 8631

http://www.shef.ac.uk/education/staff/academic/lambt.html

A2.2.   Other key investigators/co-applicants (within/outside University), where applicable:

Please list all (add more rows if necessary)

Title	Full Name	Post	Responsibility in project	Organisation	Department

A3.   Proposed Project Duration:
Start date: OCTOBER 2011   End date: JANUARY 2012

A4.   Mark 'X' in one or more of the following boxes if your research:

	Involves children or young people aged under 18 years
	Involves only identifiable personal data with no direct contact with participants
X	Involves only anonymised or aggregated data
	Involves prisoners or others in custodial care (e.g. young offenders)
	Involves adults with mental incapacity or mental illness
X	Has the primary aim of being educational (e.g. student research, a project necessary for a postgraduate degree or diploma, MA, PhD or EdD)

A5. **Briefly summarise the project's**

Aims,

- The aim of this study is to explore what learner autonomy might mean in the Kuwaiti context and whether this may enhance the learning process.

- The study will deal in depth with what autonomous learning means and some of the challenges and possibilities in the application of autonomous learning for the third and fourth year Student Language Teachers in the College of Basic Education.

- The study will be principally embedded in the Student Language Teachers' (SLTs') perceptions and reflections. The contributions of participants will be crucial as autonomy has as one of its basic elements the ability to articulate reasoned personal positions.

Objectives

- To establish current perceptions of Student Language Teachers (SLTs) in the College of Basic Education regarding their own autonomy as learners.
- To explore the potential for autonomy as a concept that could lead to qualitative improvement in the training and practice of Student Language Teachers in the College of Basic Education in Kuwait.
- To facilitate critical reflection on practice by SLTs so as to contribute to qualitative improvement in the development of the student language teachers as educational professionals
- To explore the potential for the usage of journals in the development of the Student Language Teachers' autonomous learning in the Kuwait educational system.

Methodology?

This research will collect the data mainly from third and fourth year student language teachers at the College of Basic Education. The data that is expected to be gathered from this research will explore three phases of the student language teacher's educational life. The first is about their educational background from primary to high school level. The second is about their experiences in the College of Basic Education as student language teachers and the third will focus on fourth year students doing their field work in state schools. This research will employ two main methods for collecting the data needed namely face to face interviews and reflective journals. The third optional method will be the use of qualitative questionnaires.

1. INTERVIEWS

If the SLTs agree to take part in this research, they will be invited to a one-to-one interview. The interview questions will be divided into four main sections. The first part will start with general biographical questions; the second set of questions will focus on their educational background from (primary to high school). The third set of questions focuses on the SLTs' learning experiences in the College of Basic Education and finally the fourth set of questions is related to their future teaching process.

The researcher will be using an audio recorder to record the interview. Any audio recordings of the SLTs activities made during this research will be used only for analysis and for illustration in conference presentations and lectures. No other use will be made of them without their written permission, and no one outside the project will be allowed access to the original recordings.

At the end of the interview the SLTs will be asked if they wish to participate in a second interview after a period of time (six to ten weeks) relating to the same project. This is entirely optional but, if the SLTs agree, they will be asked to provide your contact details for future communication.

2. QUALITATIVE QUESTIONNAIRES

As an alternative to the one to one interviews you can participate by filling in a qualitative questionnaire. If they agree to take part in this research, they will be invited to complete a qualitative questionnaire, divided into four main sections: The first part will start with general biographical questions; the second set of questions will focus on their educational background from (primary to high school). The third set of questions focuses on their learning experiences in the College of Basic Education and finally the fourth set of questions is related to their future teaching process. The survey should take 30 minutes to complete.

At the end of the questionnaire the SLTs will be asked if you wish to participate in further research activities (e.g. Interviews) relating to the same project. This is entirely optional but, if they agree, you will be asked to provide their contact details for future communication

3. REFLECTIVE JOURNALS:

If the SLTs agree to take part in this research, they will be invited to keep a reflective journal for a period of six to ten weeks. They will be asked to write about their reflection on learning and teaching issues related to their previous learning, their language learning in the College of Basic Education and about their teaching in the fieldwork training. The journals will be semi-structured and guided which will make it easier for the SLTs to write and they will be asked to write the reflective journals on weekly basis. There will be a brief introduction about writing reflective journals that will be presented by the researcher at the beginning, and there will always be an on-going support and guidance from the researcher if you need it.

In addition to the reflective journals you will be asked to participate in a one-to-one follow-up interview with the researcher that will take place twice a month.

A6.   What is the potential for physical and/or psychological harm / distress to participants?

I am aware that my research participants may feel that they are being investigated and hence subject themselves to working under pressure which can be stressful. I will make sure these participants understand the purpose of the study and an emphasis will be put on ensuring that they are not going to be identified in any way that will compromise their anonymity.

A7.   Does your research raise any issues of personal safety for you or other researchers involved in the project and, if yes, explain how these issues will be managed?

No personal safety issues.

A8.   How will the potential participants in the project be

   (i)   identified,

The participants in this study will be known using pseudonyms of their choice. As I have worked in the College of Basic Education before, I will seek clearance from the key people who have responsibility for the students including the head of the English Department.

   (ii)   approached

After securing access from the gatekeepers, I will approach the participants personally and invite them to participate in the study. I will direct the invitation to third and fourth year students from the English

Department in the College of Basic Education. I will provide the information sheet when I meet each potential participant.

(iii) **recruited?**

The recruitment of the student language teachers will be on a voluntary basis. Once each participant has agreed to take part in the study, I will give them the consent form to sign.

A9. **Will informed consent be obtained from the participants?**

Yes ✓

No

If informed consent is not to be obtained please explain why. Further guidance is at http://www.shef.ac.uk/ris/other/gov-ethics/researchethics/policy-notes/consent
Only under exceptional circumstances are studies without informed consent permitted. Students should consult their tutors.

A.9.1 **How do you plan to obtain informed consent? (i.e. the proposed process?):**

- I will use a participant information form and a consent form for each individual interviewee having explained what the research is about and how confidentiality will be guaranteed.
- I will have a separate consent form for educators whose classes I will observe.
- In addition, submission of the reflective journal and qualitative questionnaire will imply consent.

A.10 **How will you ensure appropriate protection and well-being of participants?**

No one will be obliged to participate in the study; this will be spelt out obviously in the consent forms. I will also adhere to the ethical considerations for protection of participants' dignity. Anonymity will be strictly maintained as the real identity of the participants will never be revealed in any part of the research.

A.11 **What measures will be put in place to ensure confidentiality of personal data, where appropriate?**

The data will be collected, analysed and accessed only by the researcher and will be used only for the purpose of this research. The data will be stored on a University of Sheffield computer and will not be accessible to any unauthorised persons except for the supervisor will have access to the data but it will be anonymised. In addition, the raw data will be destroyed on completion of the study.

A.12 **Will financial / in kind payments (other than reasonable expenses and compensation for time) be offered to participants?** (Indicate how much and on what basis this has been decided.)

Yes

No ✓

A.13 **Will the research involve the production of recorded or photographic media such as audio and/or video recordings or photographs?**

Yes ✓

No

A.13.1 This question is only applicable if you are planning to produce recorded or visual media:

How will you ensure that there is a clear agreement with participants as to how these recorded media or photographs may be stored, used and (if appropriate) destroyed?

Recording will only be carried out with participants' consent and assurance will be given to participants that no third party other than the project supervisor and examiner will have access to recorded data without the participant's written consent. Any data recording media used to collect information will be destroyed after completion of the study.

PART B - THE SIGNED DECLARATION

Title of Research Project:

**Making Space for Reflective Learning and Teaching in the Kuwaiti Language Classrooms:
The Case for Autonomous Learning and Teaching**

Name of Applicant: ANFAL ALJASER

I confirm my responsibility to deliver the research project in accordance with the University of Sheffield's policies and procedures, which include the University's *'Financial Regulations', 'Good research Practice Standards'* and the *'Ethics Policy for Research Involving Human Participants, Data and Tissue'* (Ethics Policy) and, where externally funded, with the terms and conditions of the research funder.

In signing this research ethics application I am confirming that:

1. The above-named project will abide by the University's Ethics Policy for Research Involving Human Participants, Data and Tissue': **http://www.shef.ac.uk/ris/other/gov-ethics/researchethics/index.html**

2. The above-named project will abide by the University's 'Good Research Practice Standards': http://www.shef.ac.uk/ris/other/gov-ethics/researchethics/general-principles/homepage.html

3. The research ethics application form for the above-named project is accurate to the best of my knowledge and belief.

4. There is no potential material interest that may, or may appear to, impair the independence and objectivity of researchers conducting this project.

5. Subject to the research being approved, I undertake to adhere to the project protocol without unagreed deviation and to comply with any conditions set out in the letter from the University ethics reviewers notifying me of this.

6. I undertake to inform the ethics reviewers of significant changes to the protocol (by contacting my supervisor or the Ethics Administrator as appropriate

7. I am aware of my responsibility to be up to date and comply with the requirements of the law and relevant guidelines relating to security and confidentiality of personal data, including the need to register when necessary with the appropriate Data Protection Officer (within the University the Data Protection Officer is based in CICS).

8. I understand that the project, including research records and data, may be subject to inspection for audit purposes, if required in future.

9. I understand that personal data about me as a researcher in this form will be held by those involved in the ethics review procedure (eg the Ethics Administrator and/or ethics reviewers/supervisors) and that this will be managed according to Data Protection Act principles.

10. If this is an application for a 'generic'/'en block' project all the individual projects that fit under the generic project are compatible with this application.

11. I will inform the Chair of Ethics Review Panel if prospective participants make a complaint about the above-named project.

Name of the Principal Investigator (or the name of the Supervisor if this is a student project:

DR TERRY LAMB

If this is a student project insert the student's name here:

ANFAL ALJASER

Signature of Principal Investigator (or the Supervisor):

Signature of student:

Date:

> **Email the completed application form to the course/programme secretary**
>
> **For staff projects contact the Ethics Secretary, Colleen Woodward**
> **Email: c.woodward@sheffield.ac.uk for details of how to submit**

Appendix J: Resaerch Approval Letter

The University Of Sheffield.

The School Of Education.

Anfal Aljaser
090120057

Head of School
Professor Jackie Marsh

Department of Educational Studies
388 Glossop Road
Sheffield S10 2JA

15th November 2011

Telephone: +44 (0114) 222 8081
Fax: +44 (0114) 222 8105
Email: F.R.Gilligan@sheffield.ac.uk

Dear Anfal

Ethical Review Application: Making Space for Reflective Learning and Teaching in Kuwaiti Language Classrooms: The Case for Autonomous Learning and Teaching

Thank you for your application for ethical review for the above project. The reviewers have now considered this and have agreed that you can go ahead with your research project. Any conditions will be shown on the Reviewers Comments attached.

Yours sincerely

Felicity Gilligan
PGR Officer