



The
University
Of
Sheffield.

School of Education

Department of Educational Studies

**Exploring Omani EFL Student-teachers' Identity, Autonomy,
and Motivation through Participation in Virtual Social Spaces.**

Suad Al Wahaibi

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of
Philosophy (PhD)

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Researcher's Declaration

I declare that the submitted thesis is my own original work. However, I included a few excerpts from my published co-authored scholarly paper. Thereby, explicit acknowledgement has been appropriately made in this regard. I confirm that proper citations have been credited to the studies of other scholars within my PhD research.

Title of the Published Paper:

'We are not as they think about us': exploring Omani EFL learners' 'selves' in digital social spaces.

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Little, S., and Al Wahaibi, S. (2017). 'We are not as they think about us': Exploring Omani EFL learners' 'selves' in digital social spaces. *Multicultural Education Review*, 9 (3), 175-187.

Authors: Dr. Sabine Little and Suad Al Wahaibi

The published paper has reported on my present research, but the paper itself was jointly written. Thus, I cited a few quotations from the article.

Dedication

Dedicated to
my fuel soul, Ahmed Al-Kindi
my wonderful children, Shihab, Kinan, and Mayar
my lovely parents and family
as well as
the loving memory of my little deceased nephew, Osama.

Acknowledgement

Embarking on my PhD study has been a fulfilling journey towards exploring my potential in life. Personally, I have gone through many challenges during my PhD journey, yet I have grown through them. My greatest contribution at a personal level is to re-start exploring myself and think critically to understand who I am. I surely found myself! I am truly indebted to all those who have given me the golden chance to grow into who I am now. I have considerably taken such an opportunity to develop my identity from all its dimensions. Nevertheless, this fundamentally worthwhile experience would have been flavourless without the pleasant company of those people who have lovingly chosen to walk this path with me. My journey would have been more challenging without the moral support and positive presence of my supervisor, family, and friends.

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That is not the end of the journey, I promise to be a diligently active scholar disseminating knowledge which I have developed throughout the precious years of my life. I cannot help thinking of my tomorrow's great responsibility to undertake impactful research endeavours so as to add genuinely to knowledge and contribute to humanity.

Abstract

This present study sets out to investigate the relationship between language learner identity, autonomy, and motivation through participation in social technologies, specifically, within the Omani EFL tertiary education. Thereby, this study embraces Dörnyei's (2009) L2 Motivational Self System (L2MSS) as well as Deci and Ryan's (2002) Self-Determination Theory (SDT) as the primary conceptual frameworks, while investigating other context-dependent motivating drivers. In examining the link between these three concepts from two theoretical standpoints, I problematised them in terms of their limitations and to further extend their boundaries. Thus, I present complementing perspectives grounded on these theories, functioning in a reciprocally reinforcing manner. In so doing, this research sharpened our understanding of the intimate relationship between people's lives, encompassing their institutional, digital, and social settings where they inextricably intersect.

Prior research studies in Oman have neglected to investigate significant motivational dimensions of language learning. Particularly, those studies have not focused on the chances afforded by virtual social spaces for the development of English language learning. This present study addressed this gap in the research. This would lead to increasing students' motivation through relating to their identities to optimise greater engagement in language learning. Reflective focus group discussions were conducted with fourteen Omani EFL student-teachers, along with individually composed language learning histories.

This study makes original and well-grounded contributions to the existing body of literature in the realm of language learner identity, autonomy, motivation, and digital social space, drawing out specifically Omani-Islamic identity and media influence. Also, the findings of the study contribute to the existing knowledge by generating interesting insights, confirming a dynamically non-linear link between language learner identity, autonomy, and motivation via digital social spaces. The research participants engaged actively in cyberspace as an alternative context aimed at expressing and developing their autonomous identities, compensating for the rigidly controlled classroom environment. I suggest, therefore, future research avenues shall be directed at exploring the affordances of cyberspace for the development of language learner identity, autonomy, and motivation in less favourable learning conditions featuring EFL contexts worldwide. I argue that investigating the influence of digital context on L2 motivation research is timely in that it corresponds to an urgent need

to systematically explore the digital context driven by motivation theories at a time when students' cyber-lives become a necessity for the expression of personal and social identity.

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Abbreviations

ELT	English Language Teaching
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
L2	Second/Foreign Language
HEIs	Higher Education Institutions
L2MSS	L2 Motivational Self System
SDT	Self Determination Theory
LLHs	Language Learning Histories
TA	Thematic Analysis

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Chapter One

The Research Focus

1. Introduction

This thesis introduces a research study which aims to investigate the connection between language learner identity, autonomy, and motivation through participation in virtual social spaces, particularly, within the Omani EFL tertiary education. Fourteen Omani EFL student-teachers participated in this study. The driving force behind discussing such a topic can be partially seen in light of the Arab Spring, sweeping the Middle East in 2011, and its dramatic consequences at political and societal levels, which has essentially affected the Omani educational context. This point will be further discussed in chapter two.

This research sets out to answer the following research questions:

1. What role does participation in virtual social spaces play in the development of female and male Omani EFL student-teachers' identity, autonomy, and motivation, as opposed to traditional language learning experiences?
2. How do virtual social spaces facilitate the expression of female and male Omani student-teachers' identities, as compared to offline contexts?
3. How do female and male participants self-report the impact of this study on their understanding of English language, identity, motivation (autonomy, competence, and relatedness)?

This introductory chapter seeks to identify the focus of the research and its aims. Then, it aims at problematising the educational context in Oman in order to locate its challenges. The chapter also sets out to trace my personal and professional journey. Thus, it highlights the key elements which essentially evoked and shaped my research. Finally, the chapter is wrapped up by discussing the significance of the research.

1.1 Weaving the Threads: Research Focus and Aims

This present study sets out to explore the relationship between language learner identity, autonomy, and motivation through the lens of Self-Determination Theory (Deci and Ryan, 2002) and the L2 Motivational Self System (Dörnyei, 2009). This research also offers insights into the realm of L2 motivation, considering the issue of Gardnerian integrativeness (1985) and problematising its relevance to the Omani context as an example of the increasingly complex globalised world. Yet, it is in congruence with the recent perspective in

the field. This study also investigates the relevance of Yashima's (2009) International Posture to the Omani context. Currently, there is an increasing interest in investigating the link between these three concepts, nevertheless, more studies are still needed to widen our comprehension of their dynamic and multifaceted nature (Gao and Lamb, 2011). Therefore, this research aims to investigate the relationship between these concepts through learners' participation in social technologies, encouraged by the growing importance of Web 2.0 technological applications. It should be noted that prior research studies in Oman have neglected to investigate significant motivational dimensions of language learning. Specifically, those studies have not focused on the chances afforded by virtual social platforms for the development of English language learning. As such, the present research aims to address this gap in the research. This would lead to increasing students' motivation through relating to their identities to optimise greater engagement in language learning. These are, in fact, relatively unexplored landscapes of EFL learner autonomy research studies in the age of social networking escorted by the advancement of Web 2.0. Additionally, the emotional aspect of language learning has been largely underemphasised in teaching and learning theories (O'Leary, 2014). O'Leary (2014) also argues that:

The social dimension of control over affect, in particular, that is, the ability to cooperate with others and solve conflicts in a constructive way as well as taking responsibility for one's conduct, should be given more prominence (p. 34).

Ushioda (1996) also emphasises how self-motivation is crucially vital in exercising control over the emotional dimension of learners' experiences in language learning so as to successfully offset their discouraging experiences. Ushioda (2011) also stresses the vitality of encouraging learners to "speak as themselves" (p. 11), by articulating their identities in the L2 in an autonomy promoting atmosphere and taking an increasingly larger role, choice, and charge over their own experiences in language learning.

Murray et al. (2014) maintain that further efforts are still needed to examine out-of-class learning. Benson (2011) further underlines the significance of out-of-class language learning as a research topic "because it is both a way of getting to know students as people learning language in a variety of settings and a way of determining how autonomous they already are" (p. 216). It should be noted that prior research in Oman has ignored to examine the potential

contribution of informal out-of-class experiences to the development of students' English language learning, therefore, this present study aims at addressing this research lacuna.

Although the employment of technological applications in foreign language learning has a quite extensive history, researchers still call for future research studies which explore the use of Web 2.0 in informal learning environments (Chik and Breidbach, 2014; Murphy, 2014). This is justified by the fact that current studies on language learning and Web 2.0 technology are not theoretically-informed as argued by Lomicka and Lord (2009), stating that “there is not a solid base of well-grounded research investigating Web 2.0 tools in language learning from theoretical and empirical perspectives” (p. 5). Therefore, this research aims to enrich epistemology in this arena by examining the use of Web 2.0 applications in language learning through the lens of Dörnyei's L2 Motivational Self System and Self-Determination Theory to explore the link between language learner identity, autonomy, and motivation, thus addressing this specific gap in the research.

1.2 Critical Reflections on ELT in Oman

This section aims to reflect on critical issues pertinent to the practices of the EFL situation in the Omani educational system, highlighting various theoretical and practical shortcomings in order to contextualise my research problem. However, the wider context of the study will be described in detail in chapter two, thoughtfully discussing its different aspects. It includes a discussion of Arab-Muslims' origins of motivation and identity, thus providing insights into their L2 motivation and L2 selves. It also discusses learner autonomy within the Omani context, reflecting Islamic and cultural insights. It also describes Oman in the modern era followed by a discussion of the teaching of EFL in Oman, shedding light on culture and globalisation. The role and status of English in Oman is presented afterwards. Finally, it explains English language teaching (ELT) reform in Oman.

ELT reform in Oman aims to promote meaningful use of the English language through the integration of reading, writing, listening and speaking skills in socially interactive dialogues (Borg, 2006). It thus focuses on language acquisition and motivation through engaging learners in conversational interactions related to their daily lives and their genuine interests. Students are considered as active players in their own learning process, taking an increasing role in their learning (Borg, 2006), “deciding on how to approach different activities, following their own preferred learning style, choosing the topics that appeal to them, and

eventually evaluating their progress” (Little and Al Wahaibi, 2017, p. 175). English Language Teaching Reform in Oman will be further outlined in chapter two (see section 2.6), highlighting what the reform is principally intended to bring about in the Omani education system.

Despite such substantial investment in the teaching of English language, the outcome has been unsatisfactory, as indicated by most educators (Al-Mahrooqi and Denman, 2018; Al Riyami, 2016; Moody, 2009). Al-Mahrooqi et al. (2016) further emphasise that Omani graduates of governmental schools are described as seriously lacking the linguistic and communicative competence in English required by tertiary education institutions and the job market. Al-Mahrooqi et al. (2016) further add that a great number of Omani high school graduates joining higher education institutions are demanded “to enrol in foundation programs to improve their English language skills, while the employability of graduates seeking jobs straight from high school has also been reported as being negatively affected” (p. 59). This enrolment generally covers a period between six months to two years, thus extending the length of time these students invest on trying to complete their academic specialisations (ibid.). As such, it has a negative impact on the Omanisation of the workforce. Given the fact that most graduates of Omani public schools “struggle with their English studies, they are often unable to enter prestigious universities in the country and may also not have the language skills” required by businesses, particularly those required in the private sector (Al-Mahrooqi et al., 2016, p. 60). However, Malcom (2011) attributes such unsatisfactory results to the EFL context in the Arab Gulf region which is characterised by very limited exposure to the authentic language and chances for sustained practice. Al-Mahrooqi and Denman (2018) point to a variety of reasons behind graduates’ weaknesses in English language skills, highlighting areas of serious concerns pertaining to curriculum and teacher training. While Al-Mahrooqi and Asante (2010) describe Omani graduates as being incompetent with regard to their linguistic and communicative skills, other researchers justify this situation on the basis that “ELT reform in Oman has changed in theory, but has been largely otherwise in practice, and that disparity between theory and practice still exists and persists” (Al-Issa and Al Bulushi, 2011, p. 30; cited in Al-Sadi, 2015, p. 17). A vivid indication of such discrepancy between theory and practice characterising the Omani EFL context is the overemphasis of rote learning over reflective thinking, and heavy emphasis on product at the expense of learning process (ibid.). Another example is the teacher-centred

methodology which dominates the teaching and learning situation in Oman, rendering Omani learners as passive receivers of knowledge who do not obviously have any control over their learning process (Al Riyami, 2016). Al-Mahrooqi and Denman (2018) state that English is being taught as a school subject based on a prescribed text-book and transmitted through a teacher-centred approach. Classrooms are quite large, accommodating an average number of mixed ability pupils between thirty to thirty-five (Al-Jadidi, 2009). In turn, such learning and teaching scenario negatively impacts students' motivation and performance as they cannot perceive the intrinsic values of the English language. In this regard, Al-Issa's study (2014) reports that the Omani education system seems to have overlooked the issue of students' motivation. This also chimes with my own experience as a teacher in this context where the teaching philosophy does not explicitly address the value of motivating students.

Crucially, too, EFL teachers are perceived by educational policy makers to be reform agents as they play key roles in overcoming challenges of the 21st century and meeting the increasingly changing demands of this cyber age through providing EFL learners with effectively-tailored instructions to survive in such an economically competitive era (Al-Mekhlafi, 2007). Nonetheless, Moates (2006) reports that Omani EFL graduates lack language competence due to insufficient methodology training. Al Riyami (2016) further criticises teacher education programmes for not incorporating a learner-centred approach.

With regard to the ELT situation in Oman, particularly at the tertiary level, I observed that many novice students join the tertiary education with inadequate study skills, and with over-reliance on the instructor for their learning process. As such, they need to be well-equipped by their tertiary institution with the necessary strategies in order to help them develop greater autonomy and hence become effective students (FPEL Curriculum Document, 2011-2012, p. 9). Therefore, the General Foundation Programme, which has been launched recently at the tertiary education in Oman, aims to integrate learner autonomy into the curriculum (Al-Sadi, 2015; Borg and Al-Busaidi, 2012) As a result, it is hoped that the development of such skills would enable these students to adjust successfully to academic life, experience a smoother transition, and hopefully sustain their motivation in order to optimise greater involvement in learning. They are expected to become autonomous learners and thus to be able to meet the needs and requirements of their degree programmes and the world of work. Nevertheless, Borg and Al-Busaidi's study (2012) on teachers' beliefs and practices concerning learner

autonomy indicates that Omani students are perceived by their teachers to be unmotivated to take control over their own language learning process. This will be further discussed in the literature review chapter (see section 3.12).

Importantly, too, the ultimate goal of the Omani English curriculum, albeit at theoretical level only, is the acquisition of English for communicative purposes, neglecting students' cultural and self-identification processes with the language. Lamb and Budiyanto (2013) argue that such educational practices which highly emphasise linguistic gains at the detriment of identity work might present a considerably lost opportunity to engage students in a conscientiously stimulating process of foreign language learning. House (2003) maintains that education systems which tend to ascertain the teaching of English as a lingua franca, are generally emphasising the communicative dimensions of the language, and rather neglecting its key role as a language for cultural identification purposes. Similarly, Lamb and Budiyanto (2013) criticise the EFL context for its lack of language identification processes as English is being strapped of its cultural meanings, thus such a situation creates a nebulous community of the English-speaking community. House (2003) further explains the significance of integrating the cultural aspects of the target language into the curriculum, allowing L2 learners to be exposed to an authentic language for identification purposes. Kramersch (2009) encourages language educators and classroom practioners to perceive the language not only as a tool for communication, but also as a "meaning-making system" (p. 2). In this respect, Norton (2010) explains that "[l]anguage is thus theorized not only as a linguistic system, but as a social practice in which experiences are organized and identities negotiated" (p. 351). Drawing on Norton (2000), Tong (2011) explains that the "process of learning a language is not merely one of learning the words, grammar and pronunciation, but also involves the construction of self" (p. 38). She further argues that identity-based issues also include the "extent to which the L2 learner self-identifies him or herself as a member of a global English language community" (Tong, 2011, p. 30). Language for identification purposes also implies the developmental process of identity construction within the learners' self-concept (Dörnyei and Csizér, 2002). For example, individuals may start as L2 learners and then develop into proficient L2 users. In this respect, Dörnyei and Kubanyiova (2014, p. 34) argue that:

even if a foreign language has been made a compulsory subject in the school curriculum for a good reason, many students sitting in our classrooms [do not] have a clear idea of what that reason might be or how knowing that language could enrich their personal lives. Therefore, ... the self approach is to

help learners create their desired future selves, that is, to *construct their vision* of who they could become as L2 users and what knowing an L2 could add to their lives (original emphasis).

Literature indicates that L2 identity encapsulates various facets. This point will be further discussed in the literature review, illustrating the notion of identity as well as explaining the relevance of identity or identification processes to second language learning (see sections 3.4, 3.4.1, and 3.4.2, respectively).

It can be argued, then, that it would be unrealistic to assume that these students are ready to take charge of their own learning process. Therefore, one starting point for motivating learners is to investigate their expressions of identities, and motivational dispositions towards autonomy. A thought-provoking question arises regarding the relationship between language learners' identities, motivation, and autonomy. Why should learners' identity and motivation be considered when promoting autonomous approaches to language learning? This study assumes that identity, autonomy, and motivation are intimately interlinked. Research on autonomy reveals that motivation is important for autonomous learning, whereas identity is also considered as a learning objective or an outcome of learners' autonomy (Benson, 2007; cited in Gao and Lamb, 2011).

1.3 Statement of the Research Problem

Having begun to contextualise the research problem, I would firstly hold the position that learner autonomy in this context should be considered principally as a means of attaining great language learning competence, rather than regarding the acquisition of autonomous learning skills as an end in itself. As pointed out earlier, ELT in Oman has witnessed considerable efforts to develop the level of English competency of Omani students in an attempt to respond to constant calls from the government of Oman (Al-Mahrooqi and Denman, 2018). Yet, I would argue that such efforts have no clear future vision of where they would lead students, drawing such an argument on my professional experiences and lack of research in this area in the Omani context. It appears to me that improving English proficiency has become the ultimate goal. In order to explore this in more detail, this study will refer particularly to the construct of ideal self, as part of the theoretical framework of Dörnyei's (2009) tripartite model, to solve the challenges encountered in diverse EFL contexts by motivating students to pursue English learning if they cannot view its immediate necessity, as suggested by Yashima (2009). Within this framework, seeking English language

learning pursuits implies the development of an individual's actual self, moving forward to the realisation of the future idealised self. According to research, most Omani EFL learners do not perceive the intrinsic values of language learning due to various theoretical and methodological challenges which characterise the EFL context in the Omani educational system (Al-Mahrooqi et al, 2016). Their perception of the language use is neither personally meaningful nor socially relevant to their experience of life outside the classroom (Al Riyami, 2016). To this end, the present study aims to explore the real-life experiences concerning students' active involvement with current technological applications outside classrooms. Since the wide spread of technology has brought with it infinite exposure to the English-speaking culture, thus it engages students in real-life experiences where language use is perceived as an extension of their personal habits in a meaningful manner rather than viewing English as an object of learning. In this regard, Islam (2013, p. 3) illuminates the effect of the status of English as a global language on learners' L2 selves by referring to Arnett's (2002) argument;

At a national level, this has often implied a struggle to construct a coherent national identity while absorbing and re-working external influences. At an individual level, citizenship for many necessitates a simultaneous working of national and international attachments. For example, many people are encouraged to develop a bicultural identity, allowing them to feel at home among family and friends in local society as well as in more alien, international contexts among people with different moral, religious, and cultural values ... By virtue of the same processes of economic and cultural globalization, however, English is assuming an ever-larger role within nations, often serving many domestic purposes – to educate, to market and sell goods, to control entry to certain professions, inter alia. It is also used to mediate their relations with other countries, both in official points of contact, such as international organizations (e.g. the United Nations), and through more informal channels (e.g. reporting in the media).

In fact, such experiences are likely to alter learners' views of the language and have a positive impact on their motivation as they can relate English language learning to their daily lives (Murphy, 2014; Yashima, 2014). By so doing, Omani learners are able to control their language learning experience, and thus sustain a motivating involvement in learning. Eventually, they can nurture their identities, and hence develop effective motivational thinking as a crucially important aspect of learner autonomy. It should be noted that while a few researchers differentiate between the notions of "self" and "identity" (e.g. Benson et al., 2013; Taylor, 2013; Ding and White, 2009; Block, 2007; Van Lier, 2007), many researchers

use them interchangeably (e.g. Chik and Breidbach, 2014; Murphy, 2014; Yashima, 2014; Islam, 2013; Dörnyei, 2009; Lamb, 2011; Ushioda, 2011). Therefore, I have decided to use these notions interchangeably as well, otherwise it can be problematic.

Indeed, a large body of research on learner autonomy has been conducted in diverse Arab contexts, addressing various aspects of this pedagogical concept (Aljaser, 2015). Yet, it is still not fully developed as it is perceived as an end product rather than a process (Al-Sadi, 2015). Although these research studies have offered valuable insights into the Arab educational contexts, none of them have investigated the link between language learner autonomy, motivation and identity through participation in digital social spaces, specifically, within the Omani EFL tertiary education, although the first paper based on my PhD study was recently published, beginning to address this gap (Little and Al Wahaibi, 2017). The foundation programmes at the tertiary institutions in Oman are struggling to promote learner autonomy, let alone learner identity and motivation, which are seriously lacking. Prior research studies have not focused on the chances afforded by virtual social spaces for the development of English language learning. Thus, this study will discuss this niche, allowing for critical examination of the participants' perceptions and experiences which, in turn, help them invoke their identities, and increase their motivation in order to optimise their autonomous language learning experience (Lamb, 2011, Ushioda, 2011).

1.4 Positionality: Developing Awareness on Learning and Teaching English in Oman

Providing a reflective account of my personal, academic and professional backgrounds essentially traces my motive for choosing this research topic, its theoretical frameworks, methodological underpinnings, and research participants. This view resonates with what Sikes (2004) refers to as a researcher's positionality with regard to her/his philosophical stance and fundamental assumptions pertinent to "social reality, the nature of knowledge, human nature and agency" (p. 18). She maintains that it is very important to comprehend "where the researcher is coming from" (Sikes, p. 19) since research methodology and methods adopted will be affected by various elements, including the personal interests, preferences and disciplinary background of the investigator (Wellington et al., 2005). In fact, this research topic grew out of my early exposure to pursuing English language learning as a foreign language and then teaching this foreign language at a tertiary institution in Oman.

Regardless of the considerable investment in English language teaching reform discussed earlier, I was not, as a student, privileged to have the opportunity to take control of my learning, make decisions, or express my thoughts regarding what and how to learn. Instead, full obedience to authoritative teachers was obligatory. Classes were primarily teacher-led and test-driven, even classroom arrangements were in line with the vision of a teacher as a source of knowledge that remained static (Al Riyami, 2016). Sadly, the essence of the learning process was very much missing, that is, in terms of self-direction, self-expression of identity, and motivation. Therefore, I finally found my relief in out-of-class learning activities that deeply influenced my identity as a language learner, and hence enabled me to assume responsibility and self-direct my learning process. Fortunately, the arrival of the internet opened new horizons of inquiry to navigate a different world. It also facilitated my social interactions. It is evident that taking greater control over my own learning process gave me a sense of ownership, crafted and cultivated my L2 self (a proficient speaker and writer of English), and hence further increased my motivation for language learning. Indeed, out-of-class learning helped me remarkably to acquire communicative language skills.

Upon graduating from my Bachelor degree with distinction, I was selected to work as a demonstrator at the same university I graduated from. On the 12th September 2006, I officially commenced my professional and academic journey. Two years later, I was awarded a full scholarship to pursue my Master degree. After a year, I graduated from the University of Melbourne in Australia with a first-class honour, specialising in Applied Linguistics. Then, I returned to Oman to pursue my academic career. In 2013, I was granted a fellowship from the University of Maastricht in the Netherlands, studying Leadership and Management of Higher Education Institutions. After graduation, I returned to Oman to carry on my teaching and administrative responsibilities. As a teacher, I enjoy running a student-centred classroom promoting learner-autonomy. However, I was intrigued to explore why teachers state that Omani learners are not motivated to pursue English language learning, when I observed a completely different reality. In my capacity as a library coordinator, I established a self-access space in which students took autonomous pursuits to increase their English language competence, whereas their teachers tended to complain about their passivity. Students appeared to be reluctant to involve themselves in classroom participation, yet they exhibited an active attitude in the self-access space outside the classroom. They demonstrated effective engagement in learning English through digital social platforms. Throughout my PhD

developmental journey and extensive readings, I designed a research project around this topic to contribute genuinely to knowledge by exploring the intricate link between students' identity, motivation, and autonomy via participation in virtual social spaces.

My positionality draws essentially on my reflective histories pertaining to my language learning and teaching, both as a former student as well as a senior university instructor later. Upon reflection, I realise that learners appreciate the value of self-direction, since autonomy is considered an innate capacity (Ryan and Deci, 2002) which students already possess to differing extents (Smith, 2003) irrespective of the socio-cultural environment that may support or curb this capacity. As a result, in order to support learners exercising greater control over their learning process, I would argue that other interconnected constructs besides learner autonomy, such as identity and motivation, should be further explored through learners' engagement in virtual spaces beyond classrooms.

1.5 Significance of the Research

The study aims to make well-grounded and original contributions to the literature in the area of language learner identity, autonomy, motivation, out-of-class learning, second or foreign language learning, digital social spaces, and research methodologies at different levels: theoretically, methodologically and contextually. To begin with the theoretical level, the study contributes to a very recent theoretical debate around identity, autonomy, and motivation, which is obviously under-represented in the existing body of literature (Murray et al., 2011). Scardamalia and Bereiter (1994) maintain that social virtual learning activities can significantly change the educational landscape from being an obligatory, isolated and not intrinsically meaningful part of life to an interesting venue by offering authentic interaction with others to construct knowledge.

Secondly, at the methodological level, given the scarcity of qualitative research in the area of L2 motivation and identity (Dörnyei and Ushioda, 2011), language learning and autonomy (Lamb, 2005), and particularly CALL research and its lack of well-grounded theory (Lomicka and Lord, 2009), this study is underpinned by the constructivist theory. In alignment with this argument, Enonbun (2010) contends that constructivist learning theory is congruent with the underlying principles of Web 2.0 technology as it highly emphasises interaction and knowledge construction among learners. Specifically, Larsen-Freeman (cited in Murray et al., 2011) encourages the use of qualitative research methods to investigate the

intricate connection between language learners' identity, autonomy and motivation in order to precisely understand their lived experiences.

Contextually, this research study significantly contributes to the wider ELT research community in Oman as it embraces interdisciplinary areas of knowledge, aiming to provide a clearer understanding of students' perceptions, dispositions, strategies, and knowledge for curriculum developers, educators and other stakeholders to foster interactive learning environments behind the rigid walls of traditional classrooms.

To recap, my present study explores the relationship between language learners' identity, autonomy, and motivation through participation in social technologies. It holds implications for theory, practice and further inquiry in the realm of language learning and teaching.

1.6 Wrapping up: Reflective Concluding Thoughts

This chapter set out to locate the research focus and highlight its aims after posing the research questions to the reader. It also offered an introductory discussion around the teaching of English as a foreign language (EFL) in Oman. It presented an overview of my personal and professional background which basically stimulated my research enquiry.

The research questions which guided this research drew on my reflective journeys of learning and teaching English, both as a previous student and a practising academic afterwards. The research was equally informed by the existing body of literature. Having critically reflected on the present teaching and learning situation in Oman coupled with the research questions and aims which the study intends to investigate, I believe the research would potentially advance theory development by making necessary re-formulations to the existing ones. I am confident that it will also offer practical implications to improve the ELT situation in the Omani context and similar contexts elsewhere. To this purpose, the next chapter will describe the larger context whereby this research has been conducted.

Chapter Two

Setting the scene: The Wider Context of the Study

2. Introduction

This chapter sets out to describe the wider context where the present study has been carried out, illuminating the key constructs which have been investigated throughout the research. This chapter contextualises the research, helping readers to navigate the research map.

This chapter contains seven headings, discussing various dimensions pertinent to the wider context of the study. It begins with the discussion around the origins of motivation research in the Arab-Muslim context, providing an insight into their L2 motivations and L2 selves. The chapter, then, illustrates how the concept of autonomy is understood and practised from Islamic and cultural viewpoints. The chapter then progresses to cover practices of autonomy within the Omani society in a variety of domains, including the educational context. Also, the chapter describes Oman in the modern era, tracing essentially the emerging status of English in Oman and offering a historical review of its developmental role in Oman. A panoramic view of the English language teaching and learning scenario is being critically discussed as a particular area of investigation within which the present study falls.

2.1 Origins of Research in Motivation and Identity in the Arab-Muslim Context: Insights into their L2 Motivation and L2 Selves

The local interpretation of motivation is grounded on various powerful factors which determine students' motivation. In congruence with Ibn Khaldoun's (1985) opinion, the social and environmental dimensions mirror individuals' walks of life and their motivational tendencies. Arabs basically live in tribes, forming a central unit of social and geographical institution. According to Inayatullah (1963), this tribal behaviour is fundamentally grounded on the values of family relationships or shared blood which principally forms the social unity and cohesion among Arab tribes. This facilitates the application of their group value systems featured by three essential qualities which are communalism, hospitality, and sincere loyalty to the tribe they belong to (Ibrahim, 1982). Social solidarity facilitates the preservation of the local value systems, applying collective thinking (ibid.). As such, individualised and distinctive perspectives are not valued in this conformist society (ibid.). Therefore, pursuing any type of task, including foreign language learning, is considered by how well it parallels the groups' value systems (Hourani, 1991). Until now, Arabs' tribes function as social

organisations, preserving the social identity of the tribe and maintaining a group value system to better sustain a harmonious relationship amongst the tribal members. In such a collectivist culture, exchanging views is one facet of group solidarity. Accordingly, social interactions guide the way in which views on learning a foreign language are shaped and later conveyed to the society (ibid.). In this respect, I would like to draw on my personal observation as an Arabic speaker, referring to a specific linguistic discourse used in Arabic which may highlight Arabs' collective nature. Instead of using the pronoun I, Arabs frequently use We. I would argue that this linguistic aspect may perhaps imply collective voices, and thus collaborative exchanges of opinions dominate over individual-oriented views, and shared goals become a mutually joint concern.

Drawing on the Arab-Islamic perspective, seeking knowledge and acquiring a second language are strongly encouraged. The Islamic interest in exploring knowledge and its magnitude is basically derived from the idea that nobody can comprehend "the message of revelation except [people] of understanding and those firmly grounded in knowledge" (Al-Attas, 1979, p. 93; cited in Dadi, 2011, p.11). Pursuing knowledge in Islam is, therefore, greatly privileged by the Prophet Mohammed (Peace be Upon Him), describing such a noble cause in a very motivational way to Muslims; "He who leaves his home in search of knowledge walks in the path of Allah (God)" (Al Bukhari, 2011; cited in Dadi, 2011, p.11). Albeit there was no consensus amongst the Islamic philosophers on the type of knowledge that the Holy Qur'an means, its literal meaning refers to anybody of knowledge which contributes to the improvement of humankind (Dadi, 2011).

Historically, erstwhile colonial Arab countries recognised the significance of seeking second or foreign language learning. After gaining their independence, those Arab countries emphasised the need to educate their nations and deemed it as mandatory for their national progress. According to Hourani (1991), those Arab states considered bilingualism as an important aspect of their 'cultural capital' (Bourdieu, 1986). Dadi (2011) reports that a variety of public and private services, including "industry and commercial sectors recruited a group of educated elites whose bilingual education had equipped them with a high level of L2 fluency and often a Western style of living" (p. 12). It can be seen, thus, that the L2 motivations of Arab learners are closely interrelated with the social and historical factors, opening up the discussion on language in relation to social and personal aspects of identity

construction. Definitions of identity will be introduced in the literature review (see sections 3.4, 3.4.1, and 3.4.2, respectively).

As such, my study is fundamentally underpinned by broader social, cultural, and Islamic related perspectives on motivation and identity discussed above. In other words, such perspectives have had significant implications at both theoretical and methodological levels, thus determining essentially the design of my research, its ethical consideration, and data collection. For example, participants were given space for self-expressions within their groups, sharing ideas in a socially collective manner. Research findings can be, thus, interpreted in light of such perspectives.

2.2 Learner Autonomy within the Omani Context: Islamic and Cultural insights

In this section, I aim to provide a panoramic view of how autonomy is understood from Islamic and cultural standpoints, establishing a link to its practices within the Omani educational context. More generic definitions of autonomy will be introduced further in the literature review chapter (see sections 3.2, and 3.2.1).

In Islam, autonomy is deemed an originally essential concept grounded on the belief that all individuals are equal and free since birth. Precisely, autonomy refers to an individual's agency to make conscious decisions whilst being held accountable for his/her choices. Al-Sadi (2015) explains that autonomy in its diverse versions and shapes,

be it personal, intellectual, political, social, or educational, remains a basic human right which has been guaranteed and maintained by Islamic law (Shari'a) to all individuals in society (p .2).

Despite the varying explanations and performances of autonomy in Islam, people have free will to make personal choices and decisions regardless of their colour, ethnicity, gender, etc (ibid.). However, complete autonomy does not exist. Autonomy is interpreted and practised in light of a religious and cultural context, emphasising commitment, duty and responsibility. Besides that, all Muslims are anticipated to fulfil their collective responsibility towards other individuals, highlighting interdependence and cooperation (Rayan, 2012). Collective responsibility might be interpreted as lending support to other people in the society, be it moral support or financial support (Zakat). It can also be in the form of exchanging views and advice as well as solving conflicts. From this overview, it can be seen that interdependent-selves are much more appreciated than independent-selves.

Moving to the practices of autonomy within the Omani context, it is pertinent to refer to what is essentially called the Arab Spring in the Middle East in 2011, given its dramatic role in the transformation of political and social levels (Al Riyami, 2016; Al-Sadi, 2015; Worrall, 2012). However, the Arab Spring has taken a quite different shape and size in Oman, being demonstrated in a healthy dialogue concerning Omani individuals' rights and duties (ibid.). As such, it has resulted in a positive environment where "public awareness of rights has developed, which soon has transformed into strong demands and aspirations for justice, voice and a greater space for involvement in decision making" (Al-Sadi, 2015, p. 5). Al Hashimi (2011) further explains that Omanis have developed increasingly greater awareness about their rights and responsibilities, coupled with their aspirations for a comprehensively wide-ranging reform across the board, encompassing constitutional, political, economic, and social spheres. Such developing consciousness could be seen through collective public demands to be involved in making decisions in all areas, including workforce, employment, education, etc. People have requested provision of more job opportunities, improving the quality of education, developing overall public services and infrastructure (Al Riyami, 2016; Al-Sadi, 2015). Accordingly, public legitimate demands have been addressed wisely and effectively by His Majesty Sultan Qaboos. That is, "[r]oyal directives were sent to the cabinet to work on achieving people's demands. Most of the public demands have now been met while others are underway" (Al-Sadi, 2015, p. 6). Most significantly, Omani people have started to exercise an increasing participatory role in the society since then (ibid.).

Considering the effects of the Omani Spring on the educational context, students have been requesting significant developments pertinent to their education. Students' demands for improvements have encompassed establishing student councils, providing better-quality learning resources, promoting hands-on training programmes, and having an active role in how their higher education institutions are run (Al-Sadi, 2015). Responding to Omani students' request for initiating Student Advisory Councils, Al Rubei (2011) provided a convincing argument in support of their request. He explained that Omani learners have been principally practising their own rights as protesters, requiring a platform through which their voices could be heard in relation to their Higher Education Institutions. In essence, students should have their own councils to project their insightful voices into how their HEIs should be run, thus empowering them to exercise an active role in shaping their education by making relevant decisions. Student Advisory Councils were subsequently developed. To continue to

facilitate students' voices being heard, I have committed myself to create a participatory study which values learners' contributions and experiences.

2.3 Oman in the Modern Era

The renaissance of Oman began in 1970, heeding His Majesty Sultan Qaboos assumption of the throne (Al-Mahrooqi and Denman, 2018). Under his leadership, Oman has witnessed tremendous changes and modernisation. Before 1970, "there were almost no schools, hospitals or streets and so the challenge was huge for the newly constituted government" (Al-Jadidi, 2009, p. 11). His Majesty outlined a strategic plan for the new government, aiming to revolutionise Oman and well structure its continuous progress. "All this new development was funded by the proceeds of oil, which was discovered in large quantities in 1963" (ibid.).

When his Majesty the Sultan took power in Oman, he pledged to alter the old Oman, targeting development across a variety of domains. He promised that his main primacies would be directed at educational services, health care, and other essential services like water and electricity (Al Riyami, 2016). Because there were inappropriate school buildings during that period, the Sultan announced that the new generation would be necessarily taught under the shelter of trees until the completion of schools' construction. In 1986, Sultan Qaboos University, the only state-governed university, was officially established. He declared upon his royal visit to Sultan Qaboos University on the 2nd of May 2000;

From the moment that we assumed our responsibilities in this land, education was one of our constant preoccupations; in fact, one could say it was our main concern. As we said at the time, we will educate our young people even if it has to be under the shade of trees. Many of you will not remember that period when many of the schools were temporary structures or tents. We established the Ministry of Education and we directed them to speed up the building of schools by all necessary means. This was done, beginning with the primary level and then the preparatory and secondary levels. This urgent need to spread education was based on our knowledge that learning is enlightenment and light is the opposite of darkness. (Educational Statistical Year Book, Issue 34th, 2003/2004; cited in Al-Jadidi, 2009, p. 11).

Until 1970, women were not educated at all. In fact, there was only one school for boys in which they could study till grade six. They could then choose either to go abroad to study or to work. However, women's social roles were basically limited to household chores and child-bearing. Yet, Omani women's social lives have dramatically changed under His Majesty's leadership. After 1970, women started going to school. According to Al-Jadidi

(2009), “[t]he first school in Muscat, was called A’Zahraa Girls’ School. The school is still there and it is an icon for female students in Oman ... As the time passed there were more girls’ schools” (p. 12).

Although I was born after the Omani renaissance, in 1983, my parents’ and grandparents’ stories about the dark and gloomy face of Oman before 1970 are still engraved in my mind. I recall very vividly His Majesty’s eloquent speeches on TV which have utterly captivated all my senses, being eager to hear the rapid development of Oman across the board, particularly, the development of Education. I kept track of all his previous and present speeches that were broadcast through the Omani Channel. I have grown up to be infatuated with learning, being intrinsically enchanted by language learning. The Sultan’s speech to the first batch of male learners going abroad to study was memorable, advising them to be industrious and to be selective when encountering cultural variations, taking cultural elements, which mesh well with their own culture. They were also advised to keep holding on to their own Omani culture. This could partly explain Omani L2 motivations and L2 selves, stemming from their rooted cultural and social beliefs. This point will be further discussed in chapter six due to its special relevance to my study (see sections 6.1, 6.2, 6.3, 6.4, 6.5, and 6.7, respectively).

This study may also be considered as an output of forty-eight years of the Omani educational development. Whereas school education can be seen relatively established at a national level, the tertiary education needs to embrace an international rhythm, thus meeting a globally standardised level. Thereby, effective teaching of EFL in higher educational institutions within the Omani context is a key driver of Oman’s development nationally and internationally. The role and status of the English language in Oman will be critically considered in the following section.

2.4 The Role and Status of English in Oman

Oman was free from British colonial domination and thus “had no foundations for English ... there were no English-medium schools in Oman ... there was no British inspired education” (Al-Busaidi, 1995, p. 90; cited in Al-Jadidi, 2009, p. 21). Nevertheless, English has gained prominence since 1970, when the new Sultan of Oman assumed power. Since then, “English has assumed a central role in the country’s education system and has acted as a lingua franca across a variety of domains” (Al-Mahrooqi et al., 2016, p. 59). That is, English has been officially affirmed as a formal foreign language in the country, and hence has received

considerable support from the newly constituted government, be it legislative, political, and economic (Al-Jadidi, 2009) as it seeks to adopt modernity and economic growth (Al-Issa and Al-Bulushi, 2011). More precisely, since the discovery of oil in Oman, the government has soon understood the significance of strengthening its relationships with non-Arabic speaking countries, since English is recognised as the international medium of business, technology, science, and communication (Al Riyami, 2016). Moreover, English has been acknowledged as a Lingua Franca within the Omani society due to the increasing number of non-Arabic speaking expatriates, coming from various linguistic backgrounds to mainly support the national development in key areas related to petroleum industries, aviation, banking, education, health, business, science and technology (Al-Mahrooqi and Denman, 2018).

Tuzlukova and Al-Mahrooqi (2010) maintain that the English language serves as “a bridge that synchronically and diachronically connects students as individuals with an enormous knowledge base and resource of information” (p. 41; cited in Al-Mahrooqi, 2012, p. 124). Nonetheless, this reservoir of information remains inaccessible without sufficient knowledge of English. As such, Al-Mahrooqi et al. (2016) argue that learning of English needs to be highly emphasised across the education system in order to prepare Omani graduates who are better able to compete in the job market at an international level, and thus develop their countries effectively. Drawing on Al-Mahrooqi and Tuzlukova (2010), Al-Mahrooqi (2012) stresses that “[i]n the Omani job market, a good command of English and a communicative ability certainly prove a competitive advantage” (p. 125). This is particularly significant in the outer and expanding circle nations in which English acts as a functioning driver for both national and international growth across various domains. Importantly, too, English plays a key role in internalising tertiary institutions within Oman and worldwide (Al-Mahrooqi and Denman, 2018). Renard (2010) argues that in an attempt to internalise Omani higher education institutions to act efficiently in the globalised era, they should strive to make considerably important investment in English to allow optimum participation in the international academic networks which mainly work in English. According to Renard, such investment is grounded on the fact that English is the primary language of scholarly publications, academic exchanges, scientific engagement, and effective participation in the global academic community (ibid.). English is the preeminent language of disseminating knowledge in internationally-reputed journals (Al-Mahrooqi et al., 2016). Denman (2014) acknowledges the wide spread of using English in the Arabian Gulf Region in which Arabic

is commonly spoken as their mother tongue, highlighting particularly its function as a formal academic discourse between prestigious Arab Gulf Universities.

For these reasons, this young government has realised the urgent need to reform English language teaching in Oman to meet the rapidly changing demands of the labour market locally and globally (Al Riyami, 2016), by equipping Omani students with key skills necessary for successful professions in order to contribute effectively to the national development. Unfortunately, there is a lack of governmental policies and statistics concerning the percentage of Omani nationals who speak English and their proficiency level, and no figures are available.

2.5 The Teaching of EFL in Oman: Culture and Globalisation

By providing a snapshot of the Omani historical period, I aim to establish a link between Omani students' L2 motivations and L2 identities grounded on their socio-cultural background. As pointed out earlier, English plays a critical role in developing the Omani economy due to the wide spread use of English in the rapidly globalised era, demanding a greater number of English speakers to facilitate cooperation with the wider international community. The advancement of information technology has reduced the distance between diverse continents, crossing geographical boundaries with its far-reaching services which facilitate greater human communications for different purposes. According to Al-Jadidi (2009), "Information Technology has penetrated not only the industrial borders but also the Third and Developed worlds, thanks to telecommunications and English language" (p. 20). Indeed, the revolution of information technology has effectively assisted nations, mediating essentially social interactions through which English language is the primary tool. The number of English users is growing rapidly and extensively, rendering English a truly global language. Obviously, globalisation has contributed to greater social communications between varying nations that are far apart ideologically and geographically (Islam, 2013).

Nonetheless, given the fact that Arab students have their own distinctive cultural and linguistic background, it may establish a barrier against easy acquisition of English (Al-Mahrooqi and Denman, 2018). Arab learners mainly pursue English learning for instrumental purposes (Dadi, 2011). They do not essentially learn English to integrate into the English-speaking community, they may learn it to get access to their local English-speaking community or the larger international community (for more details see chapter 5 and 6).

Nevertheless, it seems quite impossible to completely isolate the cultural dimension of the language from its instrumental advantages. Besides, Al-Jadidi (2009) asserts that there are cultural tensions carried within the English language. Al-Jadidi refers to some cultural messages and connotations which do not fit with the Islamic culture, alluding to alcohol and dating (ibid.).

Regardless of such cultural tensions around the teaching of English in an Islamic culture, the government has emphasised its teaching as a foreign language in the Omani context, assuming a critical role in developing Oman. The next section offers an overview of ELT reform in Oman.

2.6 English Language Teaching (ELT) Reform in Oman

This section outlines the reasons behind reforming English language teaching in Oman, discussing what the ELT reform is fundamentally intended to change in the existing educational system. In the last twenty years or so, proficiency in English has been regarded a pre-requisite for undergraduate education and employability in order to serve Omanisation, “the government scheme for gradually replacing the expatriate skilled labour force with Omani citizens” (Al-Jadidi, 2009, p. 24). Al- Issa (2007) asserts the vitality of English in education and employment within the Omani society, highlighting that “Oman needs English – the only official foreign language in the country, as a fundamental tool for ‘modernization’, ‘nationalization’ and the acquisition of science and technology” (p.199-200; cited in Al-Mahrooqi, 2012, p. 125). Thus, acquiring adequate English communicative competence constitutes a competitive advantage for getting white-collar professions. Due to the officially assumed position of English as a driving force for the nationalisation of labour force or Omanisation and as an influential driver in enhancing Oman’s participatory involvement in the international economy, ELT teaching in Oman has been revolutionised over the past twenty years. Al-Mahrooqi and Denman (2018) emphasise that ELT reform in Oman is an imperative strategic plan, highlighting that the new government is well-informed about the interconnections between the Omani national economy and the wider international economy. To quote The Reform and Development of General Education;

The government recognizes that facility in English is important in the new global economy. English is the most common language for international sectors such as banking and aviation. The global language of science and technology is also English as are the rapidly expanding international computerized

databases and telecommunications networks, which are becoming an increasingly important part of academic and business life (Ministry of Education, 1995, p. A5-1; cited in Al-Jadidi, 2009, p. 23).

In 1997, the Basic Education System was introduced to gradually replace the previous General Education System (Al Riyami, 2016). Thus, children commence studying English from Grade one at the age of Six, compared to the former system where English was introduced to learners at the age of ten (Grade 4). Moreover, English has been introduced as the language of instruction in science-based majors in all higher education institutions throughout Oman (Al-Mahrooqi and Denman, 2018). To further emphasise the educational reform in Oman, the Ministry of Education claims that the education system embraced by the Omani government is

well-founded scientifically and pedagogically, developed with all its input, without any elimination of any features, provides basic educational needs of knowledge and skills, and the development of attitudes and values that enable learners to continue in education or training in accordance with their abilities and interests (www.moe.gov.om, para. 14; cited in Al-Sadi, 2015, p. 8).

The English Language teaching reform primarily sets out to mirror modern perspectives and recent trends in ELT through stressing purposefully and meaningfully relevant language use, encouraging self-evaluation, and offering a myriad of communicative and inspiring experiences of language learning (Borg, 2006). More importantly, too, ELT reform seeks to foster learner-centred pedagogical approach, reflective and motivational thinking, and embrace modern technologies to ultimately achieve the goals of this promising reform (Al-Issa and Al-Bulushi, 2011). Despite such tremendous investment on ELT reform, the reality of teaching and learning situation in Oman depicts a wider discrepancy between theory and practice, which will be critically evaluated in chapter five (see sections 5.1, 5.1.1, 5.1.2, 5.1.3, 5.1.4, and 5.1.5, respectively). For more details, see also section 1.1 in chapter one.

To conclude, EFL teaching and learning in Oman at various levels, ranging from schools, colleges to universities is considered a central strategy for the country's development. In effect, ELT in Oman has become a thriving enterprise with a myriad of language institutes spreading throughout the Sultanate.

2.7 Wrapping up: Reflective Concluding Thoughts

The purpose of this chapter was to depict the larger context within which the present study has been carried out, illustrating a broader image of the Omani society and pointing to its diverse dimensions. Fundamental research constructs such as motivation and autonomy have been introduced from Islamic, socio-cultural, and educational lenses. The chapter has also presented a historical review of the status of English in Oman, tracing its domestic and international role during the modern era of Oman. It has also pointed out to the teaching of English as a foreign language, referring to its development and reform within the educational context. While this chapter has presented a wider picture of the Omani context, section 3.12 in the following chapter will particularly examine a variety of studies which have investigated issues relevant to L2 identity, motivation, and autonomy in Oman.

Chapter Three

Mapping and Reviewing the Literature

3. Introduction

This chapter sets out to critically map the scope of relevant literature, thus reviewing and forming the conceptual frameworks of the present research. The relationship between L2 identity, autonomy, and motivation through participation in digital social spaces is the focal topic of my study, as it aims to explore the link between these three concepts through the lens of Self-Determination Theory (Deci and Ryan, 2002) and the L2 Motivational Self System (Dörnyei, 2009). To begin with, a revision of historical perspectives on autonomy and motivation is offered, followed by definitions of autonomy in language learning underpinned by various theoretical frameworks. An explanation of motivation, another key construct, is presented, followed by a discussion on the relationship between motivation and autonomy. Self-Determination Theory is particularly referred to due to its relevance to my own study. I will also critically discuss ontological perspectives underpinning motivation and autonomy research. Identity-oriented perspectives on motivation are illustrated afterwards, followed by definitions of identity. Dörnyei's L2 Motivational Self System is particularly addressed, justifying its relevance to the present study and relating it to antecedent theories of self. I will also address biculturalism, highlighting the notion of identity in the globalisation era. Discussions on the international posture and national affiliations are also presented. Students' identities in the era of Web 2.0 are explained afterwards, followed by a discussion around cultural encounters and identity in EFL classrooms. Additionally, I will critically review recent research on the connection between identity, motivation, and autonomy in language learning, discussing the findings of these research studies and addressing their great connections to my present research. The last section presents critical revisions of recent research conducted in the Omani context which revolves around L2 motivation, identity, and autonomy, offering a critique on the methodologies used and pointing out to the areas of close relevance to my own study. All in all, this chapter aims to describe the theoretical frameworks of my study by presenting definitions of the key constructs, and hence locating such constructs in the wider domains of enquiry. Discussions on how important and relevant

these constructs are to the research questions and aims will be also presented. Therefore, it seems pertinent to re-iterate the research questions:

1. What role does participation in virtual social spaces play in the development of female and male Omani EFL student-teachers' identity, autonomy, and motivation, as opposed to traditional language learning experiences?
2. How do virtual social spaces facilitate the expression of female and male Omani student-teachers' identities, as compared to offline context?
3. How do female and male participants self-report the impact of this study on their understanding of English language, identity, motivation (autonomy, competence, and relatedness)?

3.1 Historical Perspectives on Autonomy and Motivation

Initial conceptualisations of autonomy in the area of language learning were primarily associated with individualism (Dickinson, 1987). That is to say, in view of its initial origins, autonomy was perceived as an individual's capacity to control his/her process of learning (Holec, 1981). Holec's classic definition conceives autonomy as an individual ability, depicting a portrait of a solitary student pursuing language learning with or without a teacher's support, and with or without a formal institutional context.

However, these earlier conceptions of learner autonomy in the arena of language learning, which have been characterised by individualism or independence, have been conversely debated over the past years. Some researchers even call for a collective re-consideration of the notion of autonomy. For example, Little (2007) argues that in order to avoid fossilisation and maintain a coherent view of any discipline, reconceptualisation of terms through constant reflection is essential.

This is further supported by the rapid advancement of the Web 2.0 tools which have prompted a pedagogical shift in language learning towards a socially situated view, by providing great chances for social networking and co-construction of knowledge (Chik and Breidbach, 2014; Murphy, 2014). In turn, this has also affected the educational system in general. Thus, the ultimate educational goal for the 21st century is to prepare individuals who are able to control their process of learning independently, as well as in collaboration with

others. Again, this has significantly contributed to the reconceptualisation of language learning autonomy within virtual social learning spaces and the interplay between autonomy, interdependence, motivation and identity beyond the boundaries of a classroom. McLaughlin and Lee (2008) suggest a learner-centred ‘Pedagogy 2.0’, which principally aligns with autonomous pedagogy reinforced by a socio-constructivist theory, and thus incorporating Web 2.0 applications that “support greater learner autonomy through encouraging co-construction of knowledge, networking with peers and communicating with a global audience” (Little and Al Wahaibi, 2017, p.176).

By the same token, Chik and Breidbach (2014) postulate that social technologies encourage learners’ autonomy as they can involve learners in meaningfully and authentically relevant communications with others and providing them with chances to freely express themselves, both inside and outside the class. Thus, social media tools can allow students to personalise their learning (Murphy, 2014), and facilitate students’ efforts to co-construct knowledge with their peers in a socially collective learning atmosphere. Recently, autonomy researchers have emphasised the importance of interdependent learning in congruence with the advancement of students’ capacities for autonomous learning (Benson, 2011). For instance, Murray (2014) emphasises the necessity of social interactions with peers and teachers in the sense of developing autonomy. Similarly, motivation researchers correlate between the development of identity and autonomy, leading to increased motivations in a socially facilitated process of learning (Ushioda, 2011). Ushioda (2011) argues that “motivations and identities develop and emerge as dynamically co-constructed processes” through socially interactive communications (p. 22). Drawing on McCaslin (2009), she further illustrates that:

When students are enabled to voice opinions, preferences and values, align themselves with those of others, engage in discussion, struggle, resist, negotiate, compromise or adapt, their motivational dispositions and identities evolve and are given expression (Ushioda, 2011, p. 21).

Obviously, understanding virtual Web 2.0 practices as social spaces which afford greater chances for autonomy and their interconnected constructs via social communication is the premise of my present research, being essentially enhanced by the notions of learner autonomy and motivation as a social-related agency (Van Lier, 2007). In other words, autonomy, identity, and motivation stem from social interaction. Definitions of these key constructs will be introduced in the following sections due to their relevance to my study.

Definition of Web 2.0 will be also outlined further in section 3.7, as it constitutes a focal aspect of my study.

It is also vital to consider the “wider ecology of learning” put forward by Barron (2004) which he defines as multiple contexts constituted of a variety of learning opportunities, activities, resources, and relationships, which exist in co-located virtual or physical spaces. Similarly, Sefton-Green (2006) stresses that out-of-class learning should be accorded status in order to improve the education system in general. Having acknowledged that learning can occur in various settings and across a multitude of resources, researchers are now inviting future studies to investigate students’ out-of-class language learning activities (Benson, 2011).

By reviewing a large body of literature on learner autonomy, Benson (2007) underlines that autonomy is a characteristic of the student, rather than the educational context. Yet, the context can support or constrain autonomy. Establishing a theoretically-driven framework that positions the student at the forefront of the learning process is thus a critical and engaging aspect of discussions around autonomy, identity and motivation along with Web 2.0 technology. Drawing on the affordances of Web 2.0 applications, language learners could assume a greater responsibility in terms of expressing their identities and collaborating interdependently, as these technological tools can provide authenticity in the realm of language learning, by responding to students’ sense of relatedness, as well as increasing their sense of competence through offering feedback from peers through virtual communities, while being engaged in positive social interactions as a consequence of learners’ choices and decisions (Murphy, 2011). This perhaps leads to a greater development of motivation (ibid.). Taken all together, I would argue that the social nature of Web 2.0 practices could be deemed as a fertile ground for developing language learner autonomy, identity, and motivation given the technological affordances that lend themselves to interaction, interdependence, collaboration, and negotiation. In order to explore this in detail, the present study aims to examine the relationship between language learner identity, autonomy, and motivation through engaging in virtual social spaces, particularly, within the Omani EFL tertiary education (see chapter 5 and 6). This topic is discussed in depth in sections 5.1.3, 5.1.3.1, 5.1.3.2, 5.1.3.3, 5.1.9, 6.1, 6.2, 6.4, 6.5, 6.6, and 6.7.

3.2 Definitions of Autonomy in Language Learning Underpinned by Different Theoretical Frameworks

The notion of learner autonomy has established itself a firm place in research around second language learning over the past thirty decades. The notion of learner autonomy has gained keen interest due to its distinct approach and way of thinking amongst teaching practitioners and educators (Benson, 2011; Pemberton et al., 2009). The construct of learner autonomy has been of critical importance to the Council of Europe's educational concerns pertaining to language learning and teaching since the introduction of Holec's seminal report on *Autonomy and foreign language learning* (Benson, 2011; Holec, 1981).

Arriving at a definition of autonomy is quite challenging, given its complex nature and multidimensionality (Benson, 2011; Reinders, 2010; Pavia and Braga, 2008). Reinders (2010) proposes defining autonomous behaviours from a pedagogical perspective, so as to arrive at an easily meaningful definition of autonomy. Therefore, I will attempt to interpret the most cited definitions of autonomy underpinned by various philosophical paradigms, and also review those definitions which are potentially characterised by observable actions. According to Holec (1981), learner autonomy is the "ability to take charge of one's own learning", however, this capacity "is not inborn but must be acquired either by 'natural' means or (as most often happens) by formal learning, i.e. in a systematic, deliberate way" (p. 3). He further illustrates that "[t]o take charge of one's learning is to have, and to hold, the responsibility for all the decisions concerning all aspects of this learning" (Holec, 1981, p. 3). He classifies all the related dimensions of decision making in terms of defining the learning objectives, determining the contents and learning materials, choosing appropriate learning strategies, monitoring development and assessing acquisition of learning (Holec, 1981). Holec's definition of learner autonomy underlines the various stages of making decisions and managing the learning process in terms of setting goals, monitoring procedures, and evaluating performance (Benson, 2011). This perspective of autonomy draws on a positivist philosophical paradigm which views learners as capable of working on their own by being equipped with the essential skills and effective strategies (Benson, 1997). Yet, Holec's definition does not take into account the psychological aspect of autonomous learner, which is referred to by Little (1991) as

a capacity- for detachment, critical reflection, decision making, and independent action. It presupposes, but also entails, that the learner will develop a particular kind of psychological relation to the process

and content of his learning. The capacity of autonomy will be displayed both in the way the learner learns and in the way he or she transfers what has been learned to wider contexts (p. 4; cited in Warni, 2016, p. 50).

Little's (1991) definition emphasises the inescapably psychological nature of autonomous learning, putting forth the notion of interdependence as a reasonably accepted justification; "[b]ecause we are social beings our independence is always balanced by dependence; our essential condition is one of interdependence" (p. 5). He goes even further to argue that absolute detachment would mean autism, so it is not definitely a characteristic of autonomy. It should be noted that the psychological version of autonomy is driven by a constructivist theoretical framework (Benson, 1997). Due to the special relevance of the concept of interdependence to my present study, it will be explored further in the next section. The political aspect of autonomy, nonetheless, is underpinned by critical theory, perceiving autonomy as basically "the learner's right to freedom in learning" (Benson, 2000, p. 114), driven intrinsically by the ideological ideas of emancipation and power. Benson (2000) argues that "freedom in learning, the provision of an adequate range of learning options and teaching which develops the capacity to exercise choice" are all regarded as non-controversial components of students' right to education which significantly contribute to the development of personal autonomy (p. 114). In the context under investigation, learner autonomy is a prestigious concept that is promoted in policy documents, and yet it remains far from reality (Al-Sadi, 2015). It is only found in the document policy (ibid.). Socio-cultural perspective is another important aspect of autonomy (Oxford, 2003). It mainly focuses on the learner and the social setting, considering autonomy as a form of self-regulation that learners acquire through their participation and social interaction with competent persons in a specific context (ibid.). Clearly, the cultural context plays a fundamentally critical role in the process of learning and the development of learner autonomy as indicated by Oxford (2003).

However, Reinders (2010) critically questions the absence of consciousness in the learning process, thus severely criticising the previous definitions of autonomy introduced by Holec (1981) and Little (1991). Reinders (2010) argues that such definitions consider autonomy as a capacity, thus neglecting the actual behaviours of the learners. Reinders further argues that possessing the ability to do a task, yet not performing it is barely beneficial (ibid.). Sinclair (1999) attaches a further cognitive aspect to the notion of autonomy, emphasising the students' ability to make wise choices based on insightful knowledge concerning their own

learning, and the ability to justify their decisions rationally, as well as to describe alternative learning strategies which they could have possibly utilised. Put simply, they are aware of what to study, how they study, and why they are studying. Yet, Sinclair maintains that observable actions are a poor indicator of autonomy (ibid.). I would also argue that it is quite hard to explore autonomy on the basis of students' observable actions, since autonomous behaviours are largely context-dependent, as indicated earlier. The existing body of literature points to diverse contextual elements which might determine the promotion or hindrance of autonomous behaviours such as the broader language learning and teaching context, encompassing teachers' roles, curriculum, teaching methodologies, etc. (Warni, 2016; Aljaser, 2015; Benson, 2011).

In the context under study, the construct of autonomy will be thus explored through students' self-reported language learning experiences via digital social spaces, highlighting their distinct approaches to learning English as well as their potential responsibilities in this respect. With regard to the argument raised by Reinders (2010), it would be problematic at a methodological and practical level to observe students' autonomous behaviours due to the limitations of research design and time.

In sum, autonomy in language learning is viewed from various perspectives according to different philosophical underpinnings. Given the multifaceted and complex nature of autonomy, it is thus quite hard to reach a consensus about a single definition of autonomy, mirroring Lamb's (2011) argument that autonomy is "resistant to a common definition" (p. 80). Similarly, Aoki (2002) maintains that defining autonomy is problematic due to its multidimensionality, and they are only various perspectives on autonomy rather than a definitive definition. Regardless of problematising the definition of autonomy, there is a general agreement over the following:

It is a construct of capacity for self-management through conscious reflection and informed decision making; it requires both willingness and ability to assume responsibility for learning; it involves both independence and interdependence; it develops and varies across time and circumstances; it can be acquired naturally and in formal educational settings; it has a political as well as a psychological dimension; and it may take different forms in different cultures (Jiménez Raya, 2007, p. 29).

3.2.1 The Social Aspect of Autonomy in Language Learning: Spelling out the Dilemma

In line with the historical perspectives on autonomy discussed in section 3.1, this section sheds light on the basic dilemma of learner autonomy as an individual capacity or as a social capacity, and thus providing answers to this basic tension. Social dimensions of autonomy have long been a primary concern of research studies on language learner autonomy (Warni, 2016; Murphy, 2014; Yasima, 2014). In contrast to the earlier views of autonomy as an individual ability, autonomy researchers have reconceptualised this construct and revisited the significant role of social learning and interdependence driven basically by the renewed interest of Vygotsky's work. Vygotsky (1991) asserts the social-interactive aspects of the learning process. As such, autonomy is construed as "the ability of learners to work together for mutual benefit, and to take responsibility for their learning" (Palfreyman, 2003, p. 4). Conversely, autonomy was initially perceived as an individual's total responsibility over his/her learning process, essentially conducted without the presence or contribution of teachers or pedagogical resources (Dickinson, 1987). Nevertheless, Little (1999) argues that the most prevalent fallacy is that autonomy equals self-instruction. Findings of a research study carried out by Jiang (2008) indicate that "individualization did not generate learner autonomy" (p. 43). Autonomy does not occur in isolation, thus it is being increasingly perceived as a social construct in which individuals diligently communicate with one another and with their surrounding context (Tassinari, 2008). Autonomy researchers suggest that the advancement of learner autonomy is inevitably associated with individuals' perceptions of relatedness with their social groups or communities (Jiménez Raya et al., 2007). By the same token, recent perspectives on autonomy imply that autonomous learners are necessarily social individuals (Murray, 2014). In support of the social dimension of autonomy or interdependence, Benson (2011) postulates that learner's control of his/her learning process is a matter of taking decision collectively rather than individually.

Increasingly, the concept of social autonomy or interdependence is highly valued for being perceived as a further developed step beyond independence, as indicated by Boud (1981). Such belief in the critical significance of interdependence in classrooms and out-of-classrooms leads researchers to expound on its value, emphasising that learner autonomy is featured by a willingness to take control over "one's own learning in the service of one's needs and purposes. This entails a capacity and willingness to act independently and in co-operation with others, as a socially responsible person" (Bergen, 1990; cited in Dam and

Legenhausen, 2001, p. 66). A recent work in the realm of language teaching and learning is that of Murray (2014), editing a book that critically discusses the social aspects of learner autonomy. The contributing authors in Murray's (2014) edited volume point out that language learner autonomy is socially constructed, facilitated and inhibited (Chik and Breidbach, 2014; Murphy, 2014). Thus, autonomy in language learning can be best developed in contexts which emphasise collaboratively interdependent learning (ibid.).

Increasingly, the notion of 'social space' is now considered as an influential factor for encouraging social dialogues among people, including language learners (Murray, 2014). Such social interactions may take place inside the classroom, or at the larger society outside the classroom, or perhaps via digital social spaces (ibid.). In this regard, Vygotsky shows that reflection is deemed imperative for effective learning, encompassing an internally personal discussion mediated between an individual and himself/herself as well as between an individual and another individual of a society (1986; cited in Riley, 2009). Thereby, this kind of interpersonal dialogue is vitally important for the development of social skills needed for effectively handling of social conversations and interactive dialogues among people (Riley, 2009). It is worth noting that the notion of social dialogue is of particular relevance to my research methodology, as participants engaged in reflective focus group discussions, thus constructing knowledge in a collectively social manner.

Within the context of the classroom, social dialogic interaction is considered crucial for developing students' autonomy, be it among students themselves, or amongst students and their teachers. Nonetheless, such dialogues, including decision-making and management of students' own learning, depend mostly on the social and cultural effects and the manners in which students handle such effects. Currently, these social and cultural effects are largely derived nowadays from social media and popular cultures (Murray, 2014). Overall, autonomous learning is increasingly construed as a social ability, developing primarily in environments which emphasise students' collaboration and interdependence.

3.3 Definitions of Motivation

This section illuminates the concept of motivation and its definitions across disciplines, particularly, in the realm of second language learning as it relates to my study. Further aspects of motivation, specifically linked to Gardnerian integrativeness (1985), the link between motivation and autonomy through the lens of Self-Determination Theory,

ontological perspectives underpinning motivation research, and identity-related perspectives on motivation, will be discussed in sections 3.3.1, 3.3.2, 3.3.3, and 3.3.4, respectively. Various disciplines have referred to the word *motivation* to discuss why individuals behave in particular ways. Motivation includes the reasons behind human conducts (Dörnyei, 2005). In other words, motivation illustrates what drives individuals to make specific choices, to involve themselves in particular activities, to invest considerable efforts and to persist in such activities (Dörnyei and Ushioda, 2011). According to Pintrich (2003), theories of motivation focus generally on stimulating and directing behaviour. However, articulating a concise definition is rather difficult, due to its multidimensional and complex nature as it includes “not only the choice, direction, and the continuation of human behaviour, but also multiple reasons behind these aspects”, rendering it quite hard to construct a comprehensive theory of motivation (Islam, 2013, p. 18). For this reason, Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011) encourage scholars to focus on particular dimensions of motivation in order to theorise them.

Considering educational research, motivation has been brought into focus in an attempt to arrive at an insightful understanding of people’s motivation to learn. Dörnyei (1998) justifies such tremendous efforts invested in motivation research with the fact that even those people with the highest innate intellectual ability may not be able to attain long-term goals without a sufficient degree of motivation. As such, research endeavours have been geared to innovating pedagogical implications to improve students’ motivation, devising state-of-the art technologies, creating enabling learning environments, and enhancing teaching methodologies (Islam, 2013; Pintrich, 2003). Academically, the topic of motivation is a focal research area. Besides its influential impact on human actions in various aspects of life, motivation contributes considerably to successful academic achievements (Wiseman and Hunt, 2013). Therefore, researchers strive to define such a multifaceted construct. For example, Dörnyei and Ottó (1998) conceive motivation as “the dynamically changing cumulative arousal in a person that initiates, directs, coordinates, amplifies, terminates, and evaluates the cognitive and motor processes” (p. 65).

Turning to second language motivation, Dörnyei (1998) illustrates that motivation initiates second language learning and, then, functions as a driver to maintain such a long and usually laborious learning process. Dörnyei et al. (2006) maintain that L2 motivation is a fundamental element of successful second language acquisition. Ushioda (2013) further

explains that motivation is an influential factor which pushes an individual to pursue language learning and eventually achieves a successful outcome, yet it is not a direct precursor to its effective acquisition (Ryan, 2008). Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011) even go further to emphasise that motivation entails *choosing* a specific task, *persisting* in it, and *putting in effort*. Dörnyei (2005) puts forward a self-based system which accentuates the significance of the visionary element included in visualising the individual's ideal L2 self, arguing that students' visions of themselves as competent language users can immensely contribute to their effective learning since language learning is a long and arduous process with many highs and lows (Dörnyei, 2009). When students possess vivid visions of their linguistic competence they would ideally like to realise, and the way they perceive themselves in the future as proficient language users, their learning process is likely to be effectively directed. Furthermore, such future images would help them evaluate their learning process. Such definitions imply the cognitive aspect of motivation, emphasising the intellectual stimulation that pushes an individual to put on sustained efforts (Williams and Burden, 1997). However, Gardner (1985) focuses primarily on a person's desires, positive attitudes to language learning, and his/her efforts to pursue language learning, emphasising that students' desires are static and unitary. Integrative motivation (Gardner, 1985) will be further outlined in section 3.3.1 due to its particular relevance to my study, which aims to problematise some important parts of integrativeness.

Moving to the area of second language acquisition, Norton (2000) re-termed L2 motivation as an investment. Her research on social identity introduces the concept of investment in an effort to comprehend students' connection with the target language by relating to their social and historical background, "and their often ambivalent desire to learn and practice it" (Norton, 2000, p. 10). Norton explains that motivation needs to be viewed in accordance with the social relationship of power which establishes the chances for language students to communicate in the target language (ibid.). She further argues that students' investment, or motivation, to converse in the target language needs to be conceived with reference to their continually changing numerous identities (Norton, 2000). She explains that whilst learners engage in a conversation with the speakers of the target language, they are equally involved in a re-construction of their identities just as they exchange information. From the perspective of motivational investment and social identity in language learning, a learner's "investment in the target language is also an investment in [his/her] own social identity" (Peirce, 1995, p.

411). Norton (2000) problematises the construct of motivation as a static personality trait, implying its inadequacy to understand students' investment and readiness to communicate in the target language. She further emphasises that her motivational investment theory sets out to create a meaningful link between students' persistent desire to seek language learning and their dynamically changing identity (Norton, 2010). She explains that:

while motivation can be seen as a primarily psychological construct (Dörnyei, 2001), investment must be seen within a sociological framework, and seeks to make a meaningful connection between a learner's desire and commitment to learn a language, and [his/her] changing identity (Norton, 2010, p. 354).

Exploring motivation from the perspectives of identity helps us understand how people see themselves in relation to the wider social world as well as their direct contexts (Ryan, 2008). This perspective of motivation is essentially justified by the social advantages earned through acquiring English in EFL settings (Pan and Block, 2011), allowing them access to both the target language communities and the international community of English language users due to its spread as a lingua franca in this globalising era (Crystal, 2012). The notion of identity will be discussed in section 3.4, as it forms a significant aspect of my study which sets out to investigate the connection between language learner identity, autonomy, and motivation through participation in social technologies. The following section discusses integrative motivation (Gardner, 1985) and its relevance to my study, which will be elucidated below.

3.3.1 Gardnerian Integrative Motivation: Critique

This section addresses the problematic dimensions pertinent to the Gardnerian Integrativeness as these issues have partly contributed to the development of Dörnyei's self-based model, which will be discussed in section 3.5. Dörnyei's tripartite system, which I embraced in my present study, re-formulates or perhaps expands the theoretical framework of second language motivation. In this section, therefore, I will focus on problematising the notion of integrativeness as my research aims to explore some significant constituents of integrativeness as part of students' ideal L2 self, including their attitudes to the L2 community and their keen interest in L2 learning (see section 5.1.8.2 for thorough explanations). Nevertheless, such elements appear in different shapes in my study, reflecting the need to re-visit the traditionally narrow view of integrativeness within the era of

globalisation (see also sections 6.1, 6.2, 6.4, 6.7, and 8.2.7 for more details in relation to my data).

Classically, second language motivation research studies have been profoundly affected by Gardner's (1985) socio-educational model with the construct of integrativeness at the forefront of L2 motivation, leading to L2 academic achievement (Ryan, 2009; MacIntyre et al., 2009). Gardner's proposed integrativeness does not only represent learners' positive affective disposition towards the L2 community, but also does manifest their wish to involve themselves in and assimilate into the second language cultural community (Dörnyei and Al-Hoorie, 2017). This concept was also explored in my study. Recently, integrativeness has been extremely criticised by many motivation researchers due to its irrelevance to diverse EFL settings, lacking a comprehensively robust explanation of learners' L2 motivations (Dörnyei and Al-Hoorie, 2017; Csizér and Kormos, 2009). For example, Apple and Da Silva (2017) maintain that the traditional notion of integrative motivation does not fit EFL contexts since "there is no 'target culture' for English and therefore no target language community with which to integrate. The concept is seen as a particular misfit for learners in Asian contexts" (p. 232), in which English is viewed as a global language practically used by anyone not part of the Anglo-phone communities. In a similar vein, Dörnyei and Al-Hoori (2017, p. 458) argue that:

One reason why Gardner's concept of integrative motivation has fallen out of favor is the fact that it was seen by many to be linked to the learners' attitudes toward the target language community, whereas such a direct link could not be maintained with regard to Global English associated with "a nonspecific global community of English language users" (Ushioda & Dörnyei, 2009, p. 3).

Research indicates that students may exhibit positive attitudes towards the target language community, yet they do not express any desire or interest to assimilate into the L2 cultural community (Ryan, 2009). This appears in disagreement with the essence of integrativeness which positions the desire to integratively assimilate into the L2 target community at the core of L2 motivation, and thus leads to successful L2 acquisition. I would argue, along with Dörnyei (1990), that the traditional view of integrativeness is culture-specific, making it appropriate only to multilingual contexts in which L2 students have immediate chance to communicate with the target L2 speakers directly. Accordingly, this construct in its traditional sense appears irrelevant to diverse EFL settings in which L2 students have no or scarce chances to immediate interaction with the L2 community.

Despite such severe disapproval and problematisation of integrativeness, Gardner (2010, 2007, 2005) has been forcefully defending his construct over the last decade. He maintains that L2 motivation researchers seem to misunderstand his integrativeness, arguing that their interpretations are erroneous (Gardner, 2010). Recently, he argues that integrativeness does not necessarily propose that people wish to assimilate into a target culture or be part of (Gardner, 2010). Instead, it can be construed as a combination of emotional elements which mirror a person's "openness" to a different language and its culture (Gardner, 2010, p. 23). Gardner (2005) also proposes that openness may include embracing linguistic or cultural features of another community, thus affecting one's L2 motivation. Gardner (2007) extends further arguments by stating that due to the excessive meanings associated with integrativeness, he occasionally calls it "openness" (p. 15). In my view, it is an implicit confession of an essentially required reformation of Gardnerian traditional construct.

Regardless of Gardner's continuous efforts to justify his integrative motivation, problematisation of his socio-educational model remains. Researchers still critically question the target language community in Asian settings and whether EFL students would like to integrate into the Anglophone communities (Apple et al., 2017). Apple and Da Silva (2017) point out that the need for English in Asian contexts is purely instrumental, illuminating that:

this need is provided by the ever-present English exam (either for classroom purposes, for entering higher education or for getting jobs or job promotions). Success in English as a school subject is thus a powerful motivating force for many students in Asian contexts. In such a situation, the language community is the community of L2 learners themselves, who are obliged to learn a language because of familial, education or even societal expectations (p. 233).

The notion of integrativeness, including its shortcomings, is worth exploring in the present study as my research data explored participants' attitudes to the English-speaking community. My research also explored participants' future selves, which potentially includes membership of certain communities. The following section explores the relationship between motivation and autonomy, which forms the nexus of my research.

3.3.2 The Link between Motivation and Autonomy

Autonomous language learners are basically motivated learners, perhaps being motivated by very different things (Lamb and Little, 2016; Warni, 2016; Yashima, 2014; Ushioda, 2011). Ushioda (2011) further clarifies this reciprocal relationship between motivation and

autonomy, highlighting that autonomy and motivation are closely interconnected, and explaining that the practice of meta-cognition can happen only when the capacity to take charge over one's strategic thinking process is facilitated by her/his motivation. By the same token, Ridley points out that any investigation of learner autonomy should be linked to learner motivation, emphasising that through understanding the considerable degree to which students are able to take charge over their own learning process entails an appraisal of their intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (2001; cited in Lamb, 2005).

In this sense, it is implied that motivation plays a critical role in the practice of autonomy, which gives rise to the question of which comes first: is motivation a prerequisite for autonomy, or vice versa? In this respect, findings from a quantitative research study conducted by Sprat et al. (2002) among university students in Hong Kong reveal that motivation is a necessity for students to be autonomous. Nonetheless, other studies provide evidence that by having the capacity for autonomy and the availability of chances to practise that ability, this combination can, thus, lead to increased motivation (Lamb, 2009). Therefore, in order to sort out this controversy, Lamb (2007) provides an answer to this directional argument. He relates it to the sense of autonomy that is referred to; pointing out differences between autonomy with regard to self-regulation, and autonomy as a psychological need for self-determination. Autonomy in terms of self-regulation of one's learning draws on motivation, for the continuous engagement with and exercise of meta-cognition which characterises autonomous learning requires students to be motivated. However, autonomy in the sense of personal agency, which represents a fundamental psychological condition to experience one's behaviour as self-determined, is highly needed in order to encourage motivation. Similarly, Ushioda (2011) emphasises the promotion of autonomy so that learners are encouraged "to experience that sense of personal agency and self-determination", which is crucially important "to developing their motivation from within" (p. 224; cited in Little and Al Wahaibi, 2017, p. 177). Put simply, she explains that self-motivation plays an influential role in the promotion and advancement of learner autonomy (Ushioda, 1996). The potential capacity for self-motivation is fulfilled in light of how students construe their learning experiences so as to optimise their engagement in the learning process. According to Ushioda (1996), self-motivation helps in sustaining confident self-concepts, mediating the personal influence of demotivating experiences, and thus resulting in successful consequences. The learning situation entails a degree of motivation along with self-

management capacity to maintain autonomous learning. Little (1991) clarifies that self-motivation indicates taking control over the emotional aspect of one's learning experience, whereas autonomy points toward being actively engaged in and fully responsible for an individual's learning process from all its dimensions. Ushioda further argues that self-motivation effectively enables motivational thinking, which can be enhanced through offering constructive feedback, using evaluation systems and absolute performance criteria, setting interim learning objectives, and holding a positive process of attribution (*ibid.*). With regards to developing students' intrinsic motivation, teachers may focus on enhancing students' self-perceptions of competence by identifying their learning goals according to performance criteria and skill mastery, instead of how good or how bad they perform in comparison to one another (Ushioda, 1996).

A closer examination of motivation literature reveals once again that the interplay between motivation and autonomy is not crystal clear, since there is no "comprehensive account" of motivation and its role in ELT literature (Benson, 2001, p. 70). Both motivation and autonomy are deemed as complex and multidimensional constructs. Lamb and Little (2016) illustrate the connection between motivation and autonomy through providing insightful understanding of Self-Determination Theory (SDT). This theory basically distinguishes between intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation. Ryan and Deci's (2002) SDT explains that learners who have intrinsic motivation tend to do a task for its own sake and hence enjoy the process of learning as long as it satisfies three basic human needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness (see section 3.3.2.1). On the other hand, externally motivated learners tend to focus on external rewards (Ryan and Deci, 2000). A plethora of research studies which draw on Ryan and Deci's (2002) SDT indicate that intrinsic motivation contributes to a very effective learning experience and it is further enhanced in autonomy-facilitating contexts in which learners are self-determined, taking control of their own learning (e.g. Warni, 2016). In this respect, intrinsic motivation is closely related to learner autonomy. In SDT, autonomy is a key construct of motivation (Yashima, 2014). Being considered as a main conceptual framework in this research, Self-determination Theory will be further explained in the next section. The concept of future selves, depicted through Dörnyei's (2009) L2MSS, further highlights how a discrepancy between the current and the future self can impact on learner effort in a bid to reduce any discrepancies. According to Yashima (2014), L2MSS "relates to autonomy in the sense that L2-using self-images are

regarded as crucial in guiding learners as they make autonomous efforts toward their goal” (P. 61). Similarly, Lamb and Little (2016) further expound on the conceptual connection between motivation and autonomy:

Motivation is influenced by learners’ interpretation of their possible future selves and the role that knowing another language plays there, with a positive future self being able to shape motivation, effort, and persistence...The learner’s imagined identity within an imagined community has the potential to influence the amount of time and effort invested in the target language (Norton, 2013), as well as having an impact on learner autonomy and readiness for collaboration (p.191).

Lanvers (2017a) states that both motivational models of L2MSS and SDT “emphasise self-development and autonomy” (p. 224). Ushioda (1996) maintains that learners set their intrinsic ‘motivational agenda’ when embarking on language learning, and effective engagement of their agenda encourages greater learners’ autonomy. She further argues that language classrooms should facilitate students’ autonomy in the sense of choosing their favourable learning styles, developing their intellectual curiosity, challenging themselves, and creating motivating experiences of learning in an inspirational ambience of learning (ibid.). By the same token, Jiménez Raya et al. (2007) maintain that establishing a conducive environment in which students feel intrinsically driven to pursue learning is vital for a successful and purposeful learning to happen. They also report on the elements which facilitate the promotion of intrinsic motivation, focusing primarily on responsibility, control, challenge, recognition, curiosity, fantasy, and cooperation. Ushioda (1996) further elaborates on the functions of language, emphasising its communicative uses in a socially mediated interaction. In this respect, collaborative learning could help in establishing conducive psychological conditions for the development of intrinsic motivation by allowing students greater control over their presumably initiative learning pursuits. Thereby, they could assume an increased responsibility of their overall learning process by capitalising on peers’ unity and collective responsibility as well as reducing teachers’ control (Ushioda, 1996).

According to Ushioda (2011), autonomy does not exist without motivation. However, I would suggest that due to the complex nature of motivation and autonomy, researchers should take a careful approach to investigate the relationship between these two concepts as a linear manner can neither be contended nor generalised. The following section will further explain the link between motivation and autonomy with reference to Self-Determination Theory.

3.3.2.1 Self-Determination Theory: Intrinsic Motivation vs. Extrinsic Motivation

In this section, I will focus on Self-Determination Theory as I adopt it in my study as a theoretical framework. This theory differentiates between two types of motivation, namely, intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation (Deci and Ryan, 2002). The first type is driven by intrinsic interest in the task per se, thus individuals go about “doing something because it is inherently interesting or enjoyable” (Deci and Ryan, 2000, p. 55). However, extrinsic motivation is pushed by extrinsic rewards, hence individuals undertake a specific task as it results in a positive consequence, like earning high scores, preventing dreadful outcomes or that task may have a utilitarian worth like passing a module so as to gain a worthwhile degree (ibid.). It is worth noting, though, that extrinsic motivation is beyond the remit of my study, given the fact that students’ initiative to autonomously pursue language learning in cyberspace is driven by their intrinsic motivation based on the findings of my present study (see chapter five). For more details, see sections 5.1.3, 5.1.3.1, 5.1.3.2, and 5.1.3.3, respectively. Literature also indicates that intrinsic motivation is greatly connected with learner autonomy (Lamb, 2005). For the purpose of my present study, the key relevant insight of Self-Determination Theory lies in the innate human needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Ryan and Deci, 2002), which will be explored respectively.

Competence indicates that students are able to perform specific actions effectively, and thus look for quite challenging tasks to boost their capacities, provided they are supported by constructive feedback which helps them appraise their own performance in a positive light. Relatedness refers to a fundamental desire for belongingness with others, encompassing both a feeling of affection and security facilitated by positive communication with other people and their constructive feedback on performance (ibid.). However, social technologies have opened up new insights into those originally introduced by Deci and Ryan (2002), providing fresh interpretations of concepts such as ‘belonging’ and ‘relatedness’. As such, future research needs to accommodate a new look at both learners’ cyber-lives and the terminologies. This point will be further discussed in chapter six (see section 6.7).

Within this theoretical orientation, Ryan and Deci (2002) argue that autonomy and relatedness are deemed vital in maintaining language learning motivation. In fact, intrinsic motivation results in effective and creative learning (Deci and Ryan, 2002). Nevertheless, students’ motivation is largely shaped by how far the contextual elements and conditions

permit a student to have a satisfying sense of relatedness, autonomy, and competence (Vallerand et al., 2008; cited in Hartnett, 2009). Within the framework of Self-determination Theory, intrinsic motivation illustrates humans' innate tendency to exhibit curiosity in examining and controlling their surroundings, however, this natural inclination can be disturbed in particular situations (Lamb, 2007). Thereby, this theoretical framework sets out to investigate the conditions which support or thwart it.

SDT has been brought to the area of language learning by Noels and her Canadian colleagues (Noels, 2000; Noels et al., 2000). Their research studies propose that autonomy-supportive environments render students more intrinsically motivated to learn. In such teaching environment, teaching practitioners can significantly contribute to students' intrinsic motivation by providing learners with greater options, and offering them regular constructive feedback as well as enhancing their feelings of competence. Another prior research project carried out from the perspective of SDT is that of Hiromori (2003), proposing that Japanese students' sense of relatedness to others in a reciprocally satisfying social manner can be vitally imperative for encouraging them to be intrinsically motivated. Another work of Wu (2003) emphasises that both perceived autonomy and perceived competence are primary elements of intrinsic motivation. Therefore, they may be enhanced by different teaching strategies like offering pedagogical activities at a reasonably suitable level of challenge, and providing appropriate scaffolding (*ibid.*). More recently, Yashima (2014) underlines that increasing feelings of competence and belongingness to significant others are deemed fundamental in internalising the self-regulation. Along the way, Japanese students would hopefully manage to learn how to learn, facilitating their growing sense of autonomy to become genuinely self-sustained (*ibid.*).

With regard to the usefulness of Self-Determination Theory, Dörnyei (2001) maintains that SDT helps learners systemise their L2 varying goals and consider the role of the teaching environment, including that of the teacher, in facilitating students' autonomy and self-regulation. Nevertheless, Self-Determination Theory has its critics. For instance, some researchers critically question the dichotomy between the intrinsic type of motivation and the extrinsic one, claiming that in many highly-motivated students the two motivational orientations tend to be closely interrelated to the extent that they cannot be differentiated (Van Lier, 1996). In the context of L2 learning, I would argue that L2 learners need greater

levels of autonomy in order to make personal and meaningful decisions which will essentially direct their behaviours. As such, they will be able to carry out often long and mundane learning tasks, enjoying a sense of competence and relatedness postulated by SDT (Ryan and Deci, 2002).

Other researchers question if SDT values the Western independent-self over the Eastern interdependent-self, since Western autonomy is less valued in eastern collectivist societies (Triandis, 1995; Markus and Kitayama, 1991). In congruence with the findings of a highly cited research study of Iyengar and Lepper (1999), Asian-American children are reported to be more motivationally encouraged to follow the choices made by parents, respected elders, or peers. However, the same study reveals that Anglo-American children become intrinsically motivated to involve themselves in activities, provided they have made their decisions regarding the choice of activity (*ibid.*). Iyengar and Lepper (1999) make a concluding remark, stating that individual choices are not easily available to eastern people, rendering it of less relevance to such interdependent societies. This aspect was also explored in the context under investigation (see chapter 5). For more details, see sections 5.1.3, 5.1.3.1, 5.1.3.2, and 5.1.3.3, respectively. Arguably, d'Ailly (2003) maintains that autonomy could have contrary results since highly autonomous learners can be resistant to learning if it lacks meaningfulness and relevance to them. He also reports that teachers' motivational strategies bear little relevance to Asian children as they perceive firmness as a representation of an elder individual's love and care for them (*ibid.*).

Nonetheless, other researchers refute such criticism, claiming that autonomy is misrepresented as being equivalent to independence, whereas SDT stipulates that individuals are willing to receive direction and cooperation, however, they still feel in charge with regard to their conduct and behaviour (Vansteenkiste et al., 2005). Individuals with an interdependent self-concept tend to take serious consideration of respected others' opinions, yet true autonomy may also mean the acceptance of others' opinions as their own (*ibid.*). Involving Chinese learners of English in their study, results confirm their proposition that autonomy is fundamentally imperative and valued across cultures, and thus can generate effective learning and happy individuals (Vansteenkiste et al., 2005). An empirically-supported notion of autonomy as being different from individualism is introduced by Chirkov et al. (2003), proving its suitability to four different cultures, namely, South Korea, Russia,

Turkey, and the United States, among university-aged learners. They concluded that cultural practices do involve varying degrees of autonomy, and hence have potential implications for individuals' welfare.

In order to further explore the potential of Self-Determination Theory, the present study adopts it as its theoretical framework along with Dörnyei's L2 motivational Self System to investigate the relationship between language learner identity, autonomy, and motivation through participation in virtual social spaces. It is also imperative to review the theoretical framework of SDT within the traditional language learning context, highlighting different dimensions of language learning within the classroom environment. Dörnyei (1998) expounds on the category pertaining to "Course Specific Motivational Components" as they are "related to the syllabus, the teaching materials, the teaching method and the learning tasks" (p. 125). What is of particular relevance to the present study, though, is that looking at students' language learning context or situation-specific motives potentially provides great insights into their motivation and development of self.

3.3.3 Ontological Perspectives underpinning Motivation and Autonomy Research: Critique

As indicated earlier, there is consensus among researchers that motivation and autonomy are inextricably interlinked. Yet, Ushioda (2009) argues that there is a clear ontological diversity underlying both research areas. On the one hand, motivation research has been traditionally concerned with theoretical abstractions, adopting statistical procedures pertinent to the measurement of individual difference (ID) variables like aptitude, personality, and cognitive style. However, motivation research, in particular, ID research is not only concerned with variations amongst persons, "but on averages and aggregates that lump together people who share certain characteristics such as high intrinsic motivation or low self-efficacy" (Ushioda, 2011, p. 12).

In pursuing generalisable models of learner motivation, the focus has been thus on abstract language learners rather than individuals with unique identities and motivations. Norton (2000) argues for an inclusive theory of identity, stressing the social exchanges amongst language students and their learning context (cited in Little and Al Wahaibi, 2017). Norton (2000) explains that students' investment in the target language corresponds to their own identities. Also, Ushioda (2009) ambitiously calls for a research design which emphasises a

‘person-in-context relational view’, by yielding qualitatively holistic accounts of the person’s experiences, revealing the complexity of relations exhibited in a social phenomenon. On the other hand, autonomy research has given considerable attention to the student as a distinguished individual, with a much focus directed towards his/her social identity positioned in a specific context (Ushioda, 2011; Lamb, 2009). For example, Huang’s (2011) interpretive qualitative study sets out to examine the role of identity and agency in developing language learning autonomy. Anchored in qualitatively constructivist tradition, this is lucidly portrayed in autonomy supportive environments in which learners are strongly encouraged to negotiate their identities in relation to the world by expressing their own voices in varied and interesting fashions (Lamb, 2011).

3.3.4 Identity-oriented Perspectives on Motivation: L2MSS

With the introduction of the L2 Motivational Self System (Dörnyei, 2005), motivation researchers have commenced re-theorising motivation by referring to the concept of self and identity (e.g. Lanvers, 2016; Murphy, 2014; Yashima, 2014; Lamb, 2011; Ushioda, 2011).

Dörnyei’s theoretical framework represents two eminent selves, namely, the Ideal L2 self and Ought-to L2 self (Dörnyei, 2009). The first self reflects individual aspirations and desires, mirroring the individual’s ideal visions of himself/herself (Dörnyei and Al-Hoorie, 2017). The second self represents “what people feel obliged to become, possibly imposed on them by parents, teachers and other social pressures” (Little and Al Wahaibi, 2017, p .177). The third constituent of Dörnyei’s self-based system involves the L2 learning experience, including “situation specific motives related to the immediate learning environment and experience” (Dörnyei, 2005, p. 106; cited in Little and Al Wahaibi, 2017, p. 177). Dörnyei’s L2 Motivational System will be discussed at length in section 3.5 and 3.5.3, given its special relevance to the present study, being embraced as its main theoretical framework.

More importantly, the identity perspective on motivation highlights the vital role of socialisation in promoting motivation towards personally and socially valued identities (Ushioda, 2011). Students’ personal involvement can be stimulated at a higher level by relating to their own identities in a socially-mediated interaction (Ushioda, 2011; Norton, 2010; Kim, 2009; Lamb, 2009). Ushioda (2009) further stresses the importance of considering the concepts of identity and self while trying to explore L2 learners’ motivation. She explains that such consideration would lead to a wealthy diversity of perspectives on how

motivation influences and is influenced through the involvement in second language tasks and the “engagement of identities and engagement with possible selves” (Ushioda, 2009, p. 225).

3.4 Definitions of Identity

As pointed out earlier, *Identity* has been recently associated with motivation (e.g. Apple et al., 2017; Dörnyei and Al-Hoorie, 2017; Lanvers, 2016; Murphy, 2014; Yashima, 2014; Lamb, 2011; Dörnyei, 2009). Considering relevant literature around the notion of identity, I have realised that it has been defined and conceptualised differently across disciplines grounded on various theoretical underpinnings. Nonetheless, identity has gained its prominence in the field of second language learning as well as second language acquisition over the last decade. The existing literature reveals that identity is a multiple construct, context-sensitive, and ever-changing (Tong, 2011; Norton, 2010; Pavlenko and Blackledge, 2001; Hall, 1996).

3.4.1 L2 Identity

In the field of language learning, identity-related issues have been taken up intensively as being inspired by the eminence of social perspectives on second language acquisition, explaining that learning an L2 is a social phenomenon rather than a cognitive one (Block, 2007). According to Kanno and Norton (2003), pursuing second language learning is driven by the students’ wish to stretch the scope of their actual identities and soar to higher horizons. The language a person uses as a mode of expression and his/her identity as an L2 speaker are deemed as interrelated entities (Tabouret-Keller, 1998). Norton’s (2000) conception of identity is quite fluid, reflecting how an individual view his/her interaction with the world throughout “time and space” (p. 5), and how the individual views his/her future opportunities. Drawing on Bourdieu (1977), Norton (2010) expounds on the construct of identity by illustrating the relationship between language and identity, maintaining that speech “cannot be understood apart from larger networks of social relationships. Every time we speak, we are negotiating and renegotiating our sense of self in relation to the larger social world” (p. 350). The poststructuralist perspective on identity permits us to revisit the issue of identity not “as a static entity or a collection of social roles one is assigned to perform”, but rather “as a dynamic process of self-identification on a moment-to-moment basis in social interactions” with others belonging to different cultural communities (Klimanova, 2013, p. 27). Focusing

primarily on the developmental process of identity, Hall (1996) preferably terms it as *identification* rather than *identity*. He construes identification as a fluidly changing process whereas identity reflects a fixed state. Benson et al. (2013) clearly define *second language identity* as any facet of an individual's identity which is related to his/her language use and knowledge of a second language. This definition expounds on various issues concerning the identity of a bilingual or a multilingual speaker, encompassing varying levels of L2 competence and L2 cultures (ibid.). According to Benson et al. (2013), a second language identity involves an L2 learning experience and a developmental sense of how an individual is, affirming the fluidity and multidimensionality of the construct which differs in accordance with the context. They highlight the dynamically changing nature of L2 identity and how both positive and negative experiences may alter a learner's identity. Emphasising that a learner's self-concept is linguistically constructed, Benson et al. (2013) contend that L2 learning essentially affects the student's identity. Research studies on language and second language identities have been mainly carried out in study abroad settings or migrant contexts such as those of Al Rhyami (2014), Benson et al. (2013), Tong (2011), and Block (2007), as well as Norton (2000). As can be seen, there is a need for relevant research around second language identity in EFL settings. As such, this present study corresponds to this increasing call.

3.4.2 Social Network and Social L2 Identity

According to Higgins (2011), learners' investment in L2 identity may be seen as a developmental construction of selves by articulating their voices in the target language, and thus forming a meaningfully social connection with L2 speakers grounded in their intricate background, various wishes, and social situations in which they communicate through using the L2. This particular reference to the social context forces us to reflect on the vitality of the digital context, regarding it as a vibrant domain of L2 identity construction. The expanding use of social and cultural technologies afforded by Web 2.0 has brought into focus the notion of digital identity (Kramsch, 2009). Defined by Klimanova (2013), it is "an identity [which is] dynamically co-constructed in dialogue with (visible and invisible) others in the cyber world of Internet social spaces" (p. 29). Thorne and Black (2011) explain that social networking sites are active environments whereby L2 selves can be formed and enacted through social interaction. Research around second language identity indicate that cyberspace

is reported to be friendly places in which L2 students can openly express themselves in the target language (Lam, 2010).

To conclude, the notion of identity is considered as a dynamic construct since it changes across time and is context-based (Norton, 2000). Norton further emphasises the influence of an individual's cultural and social context, necessarily shaping his/her identity (ibid.). She also refers to the social relationships a person has with others, networking within the society he/she belongs to like family members, peers, friends, and school (ibid.). With regard to the digital context, Klimanova (2013) emphasises the dynamic nature of the digital self. Citing Turkle (1995), she argues for the need to “think of ourselves as fluid, emergent, decentralized, multiplicitous, flexible, and ever in process” (p. 263-264; cited in Klimanova, 2013, p. 29).

3.5 An Overview of Dörnyei's L2 Motivational Self System (L2MSS)

In this research, I refer to the L2 Motivational Self System, as it seems to provide a wider view of the complex nature of second language motivation, being essentially adopted as the main conceptual framework of my study. Dörnyei (2009) has put forward his L2MSS as a response to the increasing calls for broadening or perhaps re-introducing L2 motivation. However, this study aims to problematise Dörnyei's theoretical framework to accommodate recent perspectives of L2 motivation in this globalising era, mirroring its multi-faceted nature (see chapter five and six for more details).

Dörnyei's self-based framework sets out to reinterpret second language motivation studies by integrating the “psychological theories of self” (2009, p. 9). This framework was first introduced by Dörnyei in 2005, and later discussed at length in Dörnyei (2009). It should be noted that Dörnyei's

L2 Motivational Self System is based on Higgins's (1987) and Markus and Nurius's (1986) Self-Discrepancy Theory, which stipulates that discrepancies between what we are (*Actual self*) and what we would like to be (*possible selves*) provide a motivator for learning” (Lanvers, 2017b, p. 521).

Therefore, it is significant to begin with an exploration of Higgins' Self-Discrepancy Theory followed by a discussion on Markus and Nurius's possible selves before deconstructing Dörnyei's self-based model in greater depth. The following sections will go back in time, discussing antecedent theories of self which are relevant to Dörnyei's L2 self-based model.

3.5.1 Higgins' Self-Discrepancy Theory

In this section, I will present the Self-Discrepancy Theory developed by Higgins (1987), thus illustrating the motivational power of the future self-guides. It is useful to reiterate that Dörnyei builds on this theory to develop his L2 Motivational Self System. Therefore, it is of relevance to my study, explaining its motivational function.

Higgins (1987) suggests self domains whilst introducing a reasonable link between ideal and ought selves and motivation. The first type is the 'actual self' which depicts the qualities an individual thinks he enjoys currently. The second type is the 'ideal self' that embodies future desires a person strives ideally to realise. The third type is 'ought self' which reflects the qualities a person believes he ought to be acquired, being wrapped in an individual's feeling of commitments and obligatory duties in the future (Higgins, 1987). The last two selves are relevant to future self-guides. Lanvers (2016, p. 80) explains that Higgins' Self Discrepancy Theory also differentiates between

two Self *standpoints* (Own/Other), resulting in four Self *guides* (Own/Ideal, Own/Ought, Other/Ideal, Other/Ought). The current, or *Actual Self* can be viewed either by *Own* or *Other(s)* [...] *Own Selves* describe Selves that stem from self-determined goals (Own/Ideal); conversely, the learner might have internalized goals that stem from outside (Own/Ought). *Ideal* refers to representations of attributes that either yourself or others would like to possess, while *other Selves* could be specific others as well as others as wider (societal) influence (Higgins, 1987:320); *Ideal Other* refers to attributes that others would like you to possess, and *Ought Other* to attributes that other think you should possess.

Self-Discrepancy Theory postulates that individuals are motivationally driven to realise their future selves. That is, they are motivated to find a platform through which they can transform their currently actual selves into their possible selves: ideal and ought (Higgins, 1987). As argued by Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011), motivation includes peoples' wishes to decrease the divergence between their actually present selves and the possible selves. As such, future self-guides tend to function as a motivational drive to facilitate the development of essential motivational strategies, thus enabling individuals to lessen the difference between present and future self-guides. This is further supported by Lanvers (2016), stating that "in well-balanced language learners, discrepancies are considered a motivator for change" (p. 80). Thus, possible selves (ideal and ought) appear to reflect similar tendencies towards reaching particular goals or future self-states. Yet, Higgins (1998) extends an argument regarding the predilections of possible selves, emphasising their distinctiveness. That is, he argues that the

ideal self represents a promotional nature, focusing on future dreams, progress, and achievements. However, ought-self manifests a prevention focus, hence avoiding fears or negative consequences because of a failure to realise future responsibilities. This distinction pertaining to the motivational orientations of both selves seems to be in congruence with a traditional motivational principle dated back to Epicurus, the Greek philosopher, which illustrates that people tend to seek happiness and keep away from pain (Higgins, 1997). This supports the relevance of my research, demonstrating the promotional nature of Omani participants' ideal L2 selves and the prevention nature of their ought-to L2 selves (see chapter six). For detailed explanation, see sections 5.1.8, 5.1.8.1, 5.1.8.2, 5.1.8.3, and 5.1.8.4, respectively.

3.5.2 Markus and Nurius's Possible Selves

In this section, I will introduce the theory of possible selves. Markus and Nurius's (1986) focus on pedagogy could justify why research on second language motivation is "largely based on their work, rather than Higgins" (Lanvers, 2016, p. 80). For example, Apple and Da Silva (2017) state that:

The concept of an 'L2 self' stems largely from the theories of Markus and Nurius (1986), who posited the possibility of what some call visions and what others call images of 'future selves'. When this idea of mental representations of the self, or self-concept, was reimagined as the L2 motivational self system (Dörnyei, 2005, 2009), the 'possible L2 selves' were envisioned as 'self guides' of future selves as L2 users, and thus have a motivational influence on language learning (p. 233).

Markus and Nurius (1986) illustrate the connection between an individual's cognitive future visions and motivation. Put simply, this theory explains how one's possible selves can guide their mental images of future aspirations, thus directing their behaviour. Generally, the concept of possible selves (Markus and Nurius, 1986) illustrates how individuals envision themselves in the future can possibly influence their present behaviour, functioning primarily as "incentives" for future actions (p. 954). Possible selves mirror one's views on "what they might become, what they would like to become, and what they are afraid of becoming" (Markus and Nurius, 1986, p. 954). Carver et al. (1994) explain this dichotomy of possible selves, highlighting that the first type is concerned with likely expected selves. The second one is concerned with the ideally desired selves, encompassing probably the positive and well-respected selves, as well as the brilliant and successful selves (Markus and Nurius, 1986). The third type, however, represents the feared selves, involving perhaps the miserable

and lonely selves (ibid.). In this regard, the second and third selves reflect the finest and poorest scenarios respectively whereas the first self is the expected type for people (Dörnyei, 2009).

Although Markus and Nurius' possible selves (ideal and ought-to) manifest one's future self-images, they are also affected by his/her former manifestations of selves. Additionally, possible selves (ideal and ought-to) strongly relate to present selves, yet obviously distinct from them. Albeit possible selves (ideal and ought-to) are one's own representations of future aspirations and fears, they are immensely affected by the immediate situation, encompassing social, cultural, and historical backgrounds as well as influential role models, significant others, and overall life-time experiences (Markus and Nurius, 1986). Other researchers also claim that one may represent various aspired and feared selves which are intimately connected to various social identities and roles (Oyserman and James, 2009). In line with this argument, possible selves (ideal and ought-to) are believed to be constructed in congruence with one's socio-cultural background, and thus projecting culturally-conditioned values (Hamman et al., 2010). Therefore, future selves (ideal and ought-to) potentially stem from what is considered to be valued, within one's particular social experiences (ibid.).

Markus and Nurius (1986) also suggest the importance of realistic future visions which can be attainable within the realm of possibilities for learners, illustrating that possible selves (ideal and ought-to) are not empty dreams but conceivable pictures grounded on reality. Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011) expound on the realistic senses of possible selves (ideal and ought-to), stating that individuals can look at and listen to possible selves. Accordingly, a robust understanding of possible selves (ideal and ought-to) gives us great insights into real experiences of a person's life (Markus and Ruvolo, 1989). Obviously, possible selves (ideal and ought-to) work in two significant manners as explained by Markus and Nurius (1986). They, firstly, function as motivationally driving engines for human conduct. They, secondly, act as appraisal standards to evaluate and interpret the current status of self (ibid.).

3.5.2.1 Serving as Future Self-guides: Possible Selves (Ideal and Ought-to)

Linking Markus and Nurius' (1986) to Dörnyei (2009), possible selves (ideal and ought-to) are described as future self-guides due to their key role in determining human conduct, with the exception of "could-become self" which indicates "the default situation and therefore does not so much guide as predict the likely future scenario" (Dörnyei, 2009, p. 13).

Conversely, both ideal and feared selves pertaining to Markus and Nurius's (1986) theory guide human behaviour in an effective manner through motivating people. To further explain this point, the ideal self stimulates one's future and thus directs human actions by invoking individuals' hopes pertinent to the goals they would ideally like to realise in the time to come. The feared self does so by guiding people to refrain from particular actions they would like to avoid in the future. Considering these aspects of ideal and feared selves, Higgins (1987) also regards these two selves as being immensely powerful in shaping future individuals' conduct and emotional reactions. Nevertheless, Higgins refers to the feared self as 'ought-self' (ibid.). In the realm of second language motivation, the L2 Motivational Self System has been developed based on these two influential selves: ideal and ought selves (Dörnyei, 2005).

3.5.3 The Key Constructs of Dörnyei's Self-based System

Through his L2 Motivational Self System, Dörnyei (2009) aims to critically revisit specific theoretical concerns of previous L2 motivation studies such as Gardnerian Integrativeness (1985), thus rendering such construct in tune with contemporary changes related to diverse EFL settings in the increasingly complex globalising world. In an attempt to emphasise the multi-faceted nature of one's L2 self, it is, therefore, imperative to explore its different aspects (Dörnyei, 2009). He further argues that L2 learners' identities have always been at the core of L2 research (ibid.). As the term implies, Dörnyei's tripartite framework includes three fundamental constituents: Ideal L2 Self, Ought-to L2 Self, and L2 Learning Experience (Dörnyei, 2009). Put Simply, Dörnyei's self-based system

suggests that there are three primary sources of the motivation to learn a foreign/second language: (1) the learner's internal desire to become an effective L2 user, (2) social pressures coming from the learner's environment to master the L2 and (3) the actual experience of being engaged in the L2 learning process. This model is therefore fully compatible with possible selves theory and also embraces the experiential nature of 'vision'...the first two components involve future self-states that the learner envisages and experiences as if they were reality, while the third component focuses on the direct experience associated with the actual self (Dörnyei and Kubanyiova, 2014, p. 22).

These constituents will be further explained respectively in the following sections 3.5.3.1 and 3.5.3.2. Nonetheless, the L2MSS has been critiqued as being both basic and binary, thus, Lanvers (2016) suggests the extension of Dörnyei's model by revisiting Higgins' (1987) theory of self-discrepancy. In her context of Anglophone learners, L2 motivation is considered 'vulnerable' due to the predominantly anglicised era (Lanvers, 2016). Lanvers

(2016, p. 83) refers to 'Alex' in the work of Thompson and Vásquez (2015, p. 166) who perceives himself as the "anti-stereotypical American learning Chinese", rebelling against such stereotypical perception of Anglophone monoglot context. Thus, he articulates a quite expressive clash between "his *Ideal Self* and that which *Others* have of him" (Lanvers, 2016, p. 83). Lanvers' (2016) study explores, amongst other issues, the 'rebellious' stance of some Anglophone students, suggesting explicitly that Dörnyei's (2009) L2 Motivational Self System does not fit these students' profiles in her research. Albeit Lanvers's s is contextualised within Anglophones learning another language, she provides cogent arguments for a necessary reformulation of Dörnyei's L2MSS (Little and Al Wahaibi, 2017). She proposes a thoroughly nuanced model, allowing different notions of self to emerg which are basically affected "by a variety of 'others', including significant others, peers, socio-cultural milieu, and global milieu" (Lanvers, 2016, p. 90; cited in Little and Al Wahaibi, 2017, p. 177). In her article, *Contradictory Others and the Habitus of Languages: Surveying the L2 Motivation Landscape in the United Kingdom*, Lanvers (2017b) discusses her new motivational model, which "includes multifaceted *Others* as well as *Own* selves, including that of *resistence/rebellion* against *Others*" (p. 517). Lanvers (2017b) argues that the alternative models to L2MSS are suitable for more than just Anglophone L2 learners, highlighting that the 'rebellious' stance might "emerge not just in Anglophones but in learners who wish to dissociate themselves from influences that they perceive as hindering their learning and development" (p. 527). Similar to the 'rebellious motivation' (Lanvers, 2017b, 2016) is the 'anti-ought-to self' (Thompson, 2017). It is defined as "a self guide that is sensitive to external pressures (similar to the ought-to self), but that has a promotion focus (similar to the ideal L2 self)" (Thompson, 2017, p. 40). She proposes the integration of the anti-ought-to self dimension into the L2 Motivational Self System (ibid.). Thompson (2017) argues that "the anti-ought-to self could be the missing link to explanatory value of the L2MSS" (p. 38). With this added dimension of the self, Thompson (2017) further explains that language educators can comprehensively comprehend the 'rebellious motivation' (Lanvers, 2017b, 2016) of their students. Another alternative self-based model is Taylor's (2013) quadripolar model of selves, which is apparently stimulated by a misfit between some of her students' profiles and the L2 Motivational Self System. In her model, Taylor (2013) represents Higgins' self standpoints (own/other). However, she uses different terminologies to describe them. For example, she uses the term 'internal' to refer to *own* in Higgins' model. She also uses 'external' to indicate *other* in Higgins' original model. Regarding the Ideal and

Ought Selves, she puts them under the category *possible*. In this model, Taylor (2013) identifies four types of selves, including ‘Ideal, Imposed, Private, and Public’. In combining these selves together, she distinguishes between ‘submissive, duplicitous, harmonious, and rebellious selves’ (ibid.). The above cited studies problematise Dörnyei’s (2009) L2 Motivational Self System, showing complexities relevant to my research.

3.5.3.1 The Construct of Ideal L2 Self

Ideal L2 Self depicts qualities and desires an individual would ideally like to achieve, being primarily derived from the construct of *ideal self* (Dörnyei and Al-Hoorie, 2017). Dörnyei (2009) explains that his Ideal L2 Self emphasises L2-related future visions and aspirations one would ideally like to realise (ibid.). He further ascertains the centrality of L2 proficiency in order for the ideal self to reach its optimum motivational capacity (ibid.). Besides that, it can considerably increase students’ L2 motivation given its strong wish to decrease some differences between their ideal and present selves (Dörnyei, 2009). This is further explained by Dörnyei and Kubanyiova (2014), stating that:

Ideal L2 self, which concerns the L2-specific facet of one’s *ideal self*: if the person we would like to become speaks an L2 (e.g. the person we would like to become is associated with traveling or doing business internationally), the ideal L2 self is a powerful motivator to learn the L2 because we would like to reduce the gap between our actual and ideal selves (p. 22).

That is to say, it illustrates the potential focus of aspired future self (MacIntyre et al., 2009), encapsulating integrative and instrumental orientations (Dörnyei and Al-Hoorie, 2017). Ideal selves are believed to exert a profound role in achieving successful academic results (Higgins, 1998). As such, ideal selves also maintain a significant place in Dörnyei’s tripartite framework. Empirical research on L2 Motivational Self System has constantly reported that the ideal self is “the strongest motivator” (Thompson and Liu, 2018, p. 2).

Dörnyei (2009) suggest re-interpreting Gardner’s (1985) classical construct of integrativeness, thus reconsidering it as an L2-related facet of the individual’s ideal self. Thereby, changing integrativeness into ideal L2 self gives Dörnyei’s key construct (Ideal L2 Self) a much more powerful explanatory strength and comprehensive capacity, and perhaps welcoming other internalised instrumental tendencies which might change into integratively motivated behaviours (Islam, 2013).

3.5.3.2 The Construct of Ought-to L2 Self

The ‘ought-to self’ represents an individual’s desire to acquire particular capacities, depicting a prevention focus of future feared consequences (Dörnyei, 2009). Within the field of L2 motivation, it is construed as a person’s decision to pursue second language learning to avoid any negative outcomes as a consequence of lacking L2-related knowledge in the future. It also includes one’s parents and family’s desires as well as significant others’ aspirations of his/her future self. Besides that, it encompasses future social obligations and responsibilities towards others. Thereby, Dörnyei and Kubanyiova (2014) argue that it has less relevance to one’s own wishes and dreams.

Dörnyei and Al-Hoorie (2017) indicate that “the explanatory power of the ought-to dimension of the L2 Motivational Self System has been limited compared to the impact of the ideal L2 self” (p. 460). Similarly, Lamb’s (2011) empirical study reveals that the ought-to L2 self has a “much weaker motivational power” (p. 191), as opposed to the ideal L2 self. A number of empirical studies have reported the minimal effect of the ought-to L2 self on students’ L2 motivation (Kormos et al., 2011; Taguchi et al., 2009). Arguably, L2 motivation researchers contend that the ought-to L2 self could exert an influentially motivational role in Asian L2 settings given the fact that Asian cultures have a conventional family system, holding collective responsibilities towards its members and thus greatly influencing their decisions (Apple et al., 2017; Islam, 2013). In the context of my study, the Omani culture has also a traditional family system, exerting a powerful influence on its members (see chapter five and eight). For further details, see sections 5.1.6, 5.1.8.3, 5.1.8.4, and 8.2.5, respectively.

3.5.3.3 Language Learning Experience

As the term implies, L2 learning experience focuses on various dimensions of the learning situation, including the influence of teachers, curricula, peers and previous successful experiences of language learning (Dörnyei and Ushioda, 2011) as well as teaching methodologies, textbooks, the peer group dynamics and, overall, the classroom environment (Moskovsky et al., 2016). With that focus, Dörnyei (2009) proposes that the L2 learning experience involves students’ attitudes to the direct learning setting in an attempt to investigate whether they enjoy their L2 learning experience or not. With such emphasis, the construct of L2 learning experience appears to overlap with Gardnerian attitudes (1985) towards the learning context, emphasising its importance in determining students’ learning

experience (Moskovsky et al., 2016). Thereby, the L2 learning experience refers to the situated type of motivation, stemming from students' attitudes towards various aspects of their immediate experience pertaining to the L2 learning process (Alqahtani, 2018; Thompson and Liu, 2018; Dörnyei and Al-Hoorie, 2017). In this regard, Dörnyei (2009) draws on Ushioda's (2001) idea of *causal motivation* and links it with his element of L2 learning experience, suggesting that learners' motivational orientation differs in accordance with their varying experiences of learning conditions. In Dörnyei's (2009) view, positive learning experience impacts positively on students' motivation. This view is further corroborated by recent empirical work conducted by Lamb (2012) on adolescents' motivations to seek English language learning in Indonesian urban and rural contexts from the standpoint of Dörnyei's self-based system, ascertaining that a positive L2 learning experience was found to be an influentially motivating factor contributing to sustained learning behaviours and L2 proficiency. Thus, it seemed to be an essential dimension to be considered whilst examining students' motivation from the self-perspective, as it represents a nexus of motives pertaining to particular learning conditions. It may be necessary to reiterate that contextual dimensions of the L2 learning experience should not be deemed as solely a backdrop, but as a major component, in line with Lanvers' (2016) argument for the necessity to further add nuanced delineations to provide potentially manifold positive and negative contextual effects. Drawing on Larsen-Freeman (2015), Apple et al. (2017) explain that L2 motivation researchers who are keen on exploring language learners' "motivations and selves should understand that the social context where the learning occurs cannot be completely separated from or considered independently from the learner" (p. 235). Surprisingly, though, the emphasis of L2 Motivational Self-System research studies has been geared towards the two self-guides, with little attention paid to the L2 learning experience, for it is being notoriously hard to operationalise (Moskovsky et al., 2016). Thus, these studies tend to operationalise this construct with respect to participants' overall experience, with no particularly detailed reference to its main constituents (Moskovsky et al., 2016). Chik and Breidbach (2011) maintain that the L2 learning experience is still a theoretical concept.

Recently, though, in the L2 Motivational Self-System, this issue is being attempted from the newly theoretical perspective of Complex Dynamic Systems so as to better integrate contextual factors (Thompson, 2017; Dörnyei et al., 2015). Additionally, some L2 motivation researchers have investigated larger contextual aspects in an attempt to further elaborate on

issues pertinent to the precise meanings of ideal and ought selves. For example, Lamb (2009) proposes the expansion of L2 motivational system with a Bourdieuan model to examine how selves are supported or hindered by their background. Besides that, Taguchi et al. (2009) introduce ‘cultural difference hypothesis’ to explain that ought motivations are prevalent in collectivist cultures rather than individualist cultures. To further explore this, the present research sets out to examine the language learning context of the Omani EFL learners in order to gain a fine-grained understanding of their motivation and development of self. I would also suggest that much qualitatively empirical work remains to be done to further extend Dörnyei’s simplistic quantitative instrument and maximise its full potential, striking a balance of data in this field which is in tune with the calls for qualitative investigations highlighted by well-established scholars in the realm of L2 motivation such as Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011).

I would also argue that exploring participants’ language learning experiences serves as an important platform through which they articulate their experiences in order to understand how their actual experiences in language learning might potentially influence their learning, and hence could perhaps shape their current learning behaviour, throwing light on their identity, motivation, and autonomy. Dörnyei (2009) argues that learners’ effective engagement with their actual language learning process can be an initial motivational engine, galvanising their interest to pursue language learning. It can also help them raise increasing consciousness of themselves as students as well as their process of learning through reflecting thoughtfully on their language learning experiences and sharing their stories with their peers, which is ultimately one of my ethical commitments for conducting this research. This point will be picked up further in chapter seven, which is devoted to the discussion of findings related to awareness-raising.

Although Dörnyei’s self-based model has been validated empirically in various settings (Boo et al., 2015), the way how L2 self-guides could function in diverse sociocultural settings has not yet been fully explored (Apple et al., 2017). This, in turn, throws some light on the significance of the distinct social and cultural EFL context in examining learners’ motivation. Fan (2011) argues that academic motivation basically “develops and is embedded within a complex web of environmental and social influences” (p. 159). Importantly, too, Noels (2009) posits that such valuable contextual insights would help us comprehend the position of

autonomy in motivation, highlighting other significant dynamics such as competence and relatedness. The primacy of the context, therefore, seems to play a significant role in either nurturing or thwarting students' language learning experiences. To this end, the present study aims to explore how participants' language learning experience through participating in virtual social spaces plays a role in the development of their identity, autonomy, and motivation, as opposed to traditional language learning experience in a formal educational context (see section 5.5).

3.6 Biculturalism: The notion of Identity in the Globalisation Era

Learners' aspiration to pursue second language learning is inextricably interconnected with the social identification processes they inevitably undergo (Norton, 2000). Likewise, maintaining learners' local cultural and linguistic identity in an increasingly globalising world concomitated by the spread of English as an international language has been widely debated in the realm of ELT (Islam, 2013; East, 2008). What is of particular relevance to the present research, though, is the impact of globalisation on youth identity. Arnett (2002) argues that one of its prominent effects is that a lot of individuals all over the globe construct bicultural identities which are partly ingrained in their national cultures whilst "another part stems from an awareness of their relation to global culture" (p. 777). Besides belonging to their national cultures, individuals tend to develop global identities which offer them a feeling of relatedness to the international cultures (*ibid.*). As such, English seems to function as a significant means to attain and maintain the international self. Lamb (2004) believes that English provides people worldwide with privileged access to media, thus communicating with speakers of English from different countries. In other words, globalisation can considerably affect adolescents in economically thriving communities where youth appears to explore different identities, and hence might become confused with the modern western identity (*ibid.*). Drawing on the viewpoint which describes English as a global language, this language therefore seems to be linked to the modern self that many individuals strive to achieve (Lamb and Budiyanto, 2013). Another research study revealed that young Taiwanese endeavour to bring about reconciliation between their socially national identity and an individually western identity (Lu and Yang, 2006). These researchers also expound on the biculturality of the Chinese self, being construed as "a fluid process of continuously sorting out clashes and aiming at a well-adapted self when a person is being involved in "cultural systems side by side" (Lu and Yang, 2006, p. 170).

Significantly, too, research studies indicate that many students of English in diverse second language settings do not perceive the language as a potential challenge to their identity or rather a foreign cultural imposition (Alqahtani, 2018). Instead, they envision personal and social growth in pursuing English language learning at domestic and international levels (Islam, 2013; Islam et al., 2013). For instance, a study conducted by Pan and Block (2011) reveals that both Chinese instructors and learners conceive English as being essential for their national development in the international arena. They also view this language as a vital tool to achieve prestigious social standing, mirroring a positive connection between the English language and their perceived social identity (ibid.). By the same token, most Indians tend to consider English as a “means of inclusion” amongst the modern Indian community, highlighting that English proficiency is a crucial manifestation of relating to the middle-class of the Indian society (Graddol, 2010, p. 120). Given the fact that these people do not view English from a rather unproblematic perspective, it does not necessarily mean it is not problematic as these studies may highlight aspects of neo-colonialism, which might need further investigation. However, I would argue that these people have deeply internalised the significance of English in their immediate and future life.

Interestingly, too, Canagarajah (1999) proposes that the emergence of newly different variations of English in second language settings, resulting in the world Englishes could be viewed as a sign of the appropriation of English by various local speakers. All in all, this discussion points out to the dynamically social dimensions of English uses, indicating potential implications for learners’ motivations and identities. Importantly, too, it seems imperative to robustly comprehend students’ international posture (Yashima, 2009) given the fact that the English language is contemporarily linked to a wider international English-speaking community, and hence is no longer owned by Anglophone countries alone (Islam, 2013; Holliday, 2005). This point will be further discussed in the following section.

3.7 International Posture and Possible L2 Selves

International Posture is deemed as an influential motivational construct developed by Yashima (2002) to better account for the tendency of her Japanese students to belong to the larger international community instead of relating to any particular English-speaking community. Generally, she introduced her theoretical construct as a means of illustrating how students in EFL contexts, in which meaningful relevant contact with target language speakers

is largely absent, can still manage to belong to an L2 community (Yashima, 2000; cited in Ryan, 2009). Yashima (2009) further explains that her construct of international posture is influenced by Gardner's (1985) integrativeness, yet it differs in the sense that it is specifically related to EFL contexts. Considering the fundamental principles of integrativeness pertinent to individuals' desire to communicate and identify with L2 members driven basically by positive affective disposition toward the target language community, she arguably illustrates that although a lot of Japanese students have genuine interests to communicate with English native speakers, they do not exhibit any specific desire to identify with them (Yashima, 2009). She further expounds on their motives, encompassing both integrative and instrumental considerations (ibid.). With regard to integrative orientations, Japanese students exhibit strong desires to have intercultural friendships and keen interests in foreign cultures (ibid.). Capturing their instrumental orientations, they demonstrate aspirations towards study abroad opportunities and possibilities for Business (ibid.). Research studies on L2 motivation reveal that many motivated language learners show greater levels of international posture, proposing that the quest for intercultural relationships seems to be a commonly shared goal amongst language learners. For instance, Islam (2013) reports that his university-aged participants consider the use of English as a means of establishing intercultural and interfaith dialogues between Pakistan and other countries, thus projecting a positive image of their country. Yashima's (2002) theoretical notion of international posture is defined as

interest in foreign or international affairs, willingness to go overseas to stay or work, readiness to interact with intercultural partners, and, one hopes, openness or a non-ethnocentric attitude toward different cultures (p. 57).

International posture can also be construed as a significant aspect of the powerful L2 self-based system as learners tend to extend their selves by constructing new visions of themselves pertinent to international affairs in the contemporary globalised era (Yashima, 2009). Recent L2 motivation research unveils a strong reciprocal link between Ideal L2 self and International Posture (Islam, 2013; Kormos et al., 2011).

3.8 National Affiliations: L2 Possible Selves in a Collectivist Culture

Reflecting on L2 motivation and identity literature, it therefore seems imperative to take serious consideration of the cultural variations. Cross and Gore (2003) maintain that people tend to describe themselves using the perceptions, terminologies, morals, and philosophies

conditioned by their socio-cultural settings. Whereas western individualistic cultures place much value on independence, eastern collectivist cultures tend to emphasise interdependence, promoting a collectivist approach (Markus and Kitayama, 1991; cited in Little and Al Wahaibi, 2017). Thus, collective social tendencies hold greater value in shaping adolescents' ideal selves (Lamb, 2013). Islam et al. (2013) report that 'National Interest' may function as a motivational force behind seeking English language learning in Eastern societies. To further explain this cultural variation, Gore et al. (2009) argue that western people tend to view personal motivations as being influential in guiding a person's actions as they are illustrative of his/her individuality and independence. They further argue that Eastern people consider social motivations as being highly motivating as they are expressions of their collective responsibilities (ibid.). While the Eastern cultures perceive the self as being interdependent, the Western cultures conceive it as an independent self. In the rapidly complex globalising world, learning English language in diverse L2 contexts hold potential significance towards the development of their local communities and local citizens in their countries, contributing considerably to their L2 motivation (Islam, 2013; Islam et al., 2013). Islam (2013) further argues that English is mostly conceived as an official language with a deep-rooted position in erstwhile colonial countries. Canagarajah (1999) describes the ambivalent motivational attitudes generated by such collective national orientations in post-colonial societies. Nonetheless, recent works of Islam (2013) and Shamim (2011) recommend that younger generations may effortlessly neglect the imperialist history of English and its negative connotations, and thus capitalise on the instrumental advantages of the English language.

Learners' motivation in EFL contexts, in which English serves as an official foreign language, could also be influenced by the nature and strength of their national identifications (Islam, 2013). For instance, Rivers (2011) interprets his research findings concerning the strong correlations between nationalism and positive attitudes towards English language pursuits in light of the predominant belief amongst Japanese people that English is a key to globalising Japan whilst simultaneously emphasising their unique culture worldwide. Rivers (2010) maintains that learners' national attachment could have potential implications in diverse EFL settings, as the L2 target language holds a valuable ideologic symbol and international prominence such as English. Also, two studies carried out in China by Lo-Bianco (2009) and Orton (2009) found that internalisation of Chinese identity and culture to the global world is a powerful motivator to learn English. In a similar vein, a recent work of

Pan and Block (2011) conducted in Beijing unveils that both university teachers and students view the knowledge of English as a significant means of internalising China.

Moving to the Middle Eastern Arab Countries, the existing literature informs us that the national and religious affiliations of Arab learners contribute significantly to shaping their motivation to pursue English language learning. For example, a recent work conducted by Al-Maharooqi and Denman (2014) within the Omani context shows that several research participants

claimed to have made a conscious effort to maintain their own identity in their encounters with English, or even to employ the language to project their cultural and religious beliefs outwards (p. 118).

Also, a Jordanian case study unveils that learners do not view English as holding a potential risk to their local and spiritual self (Al-Haq and Al-Masaeid, 2009). Instead, they perceive learning of English as part and parcel of their devoted commitments to their religion and nation (*ibid.*). By the same token, a recent work conducted in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia uncovers that learners see English as an influential mediating tool to gaining insights into the western culture and acquiring different skills, thus promoting national growth (Alqahtani, 2018). Equally, too, they aspire to project a positive picture of the Islamic religion, explaining that their motivations are more of a religious orientation rather than a materialistic one (*ibid.*).

On the other hand, MacIntyre et al. (2009) alert investigators to reflect on cultural differences in the conceptualisation of self in research investigating the potential motivating capacity of the L2 selves. As argued by Murray (2011), considering cultural differences flags up issues of valid concern as it firstly “implies the comparison of cultures on a macro level; e.g. contrasting western independent conceptions of the self with East Asian interdependent notions of the self” (p. 256). He further explains that looking into cultural differences on this level may contribute to producing inaccurate generalisations that can unjustifiably affect researchers’ interpretations of students’ experiences in specific settings (*ibid.*). For instance, in the field of learner autonomy, these sweeping generalisations have brought about a controversy regarding the suitability of a western-rooted concept such as autonomy to students of eastern cultural backgrounds, particularly Asian. A study conducted by Reinders and Lázaro (2011), which navigated diverse cultural contexts, emphasises the necessity to be conscious of such ideas while handling data interpretation. They reported a prevalent criticism amongst teachers, working in self-access centres, that learners do not realise the

importance in the development of autonomy and they seem to lack the essential skills for independent learning (ibid.). Whilst others may justify such tendency in light of cultural differences, the research findings of Reinders and Lázaro (2011) indicated students' lack of robust educational experiences. They made a concluding remark, highlighting that learners were basically not acquainted with the notion of taking charge of their learning process. Interestingly, their conclusion reminds us of the vitality of interpreting analyses grounded on students' experiences within a specific learning environment, thus shifting attention away from cultural discrepancies. Explaining this phenomenon in such terms offers the potential of engaging learners in suitable educational interventions (Murray, 2011).

Drawing on Benson (2007), Murray (2011) goes further to argue that a culturally mediated self raises an important issue in relation to foreign language learning, which includes intercultural learning and may perhaps question culturally-driven self-representations. Moreover, considering research around the bicultural and multicultural self, it shows that participatory involvement in different cultural environments may lead to changes in self-perception as people obtain feedback which differs from their own opinions (Cross and Gore, 2003). These authors also point to growing evidence, signalling that people who are exposed to different cultures may construct distinct, culturally-based self-concepts, meaning that various adopted cultures may not be essentially combined together (ibid.). These results lend credence to the argument raised by Castillo and Zaragoza (2011), maintaining that plurilingual students may construct distinct L2 identities for each language they are studying. Indeed, further research endeavours are needed to investigate issues of self and culture change from the perspective of second language acquisition.

Therefore, a newly edited volume by Apple et al. (2017) is devoted entirely to *L2 Selves and Motivations in Asian Contexts*, focusing primarily on culturising second language motivation. All the including chapters embrace a situated approach to language learning, highlighting the significance of the cultural and social milieu. They argue that the main problem of the educational motivation research lies in its restricted generalisability across diverse cultural contexts (ibid.). They even go further to argue that researchers, practising teachers, and students tend to draw a comparison between Western and Eastern societies. They emphasise that these are convenient labelling markers, yet they are basically

unsophisticated and “fail to capture the range of historical, educational, religious and philosophical differences both between and within cultures” (Apple et al., 2017, p. 2).

Significantly, too, the potential affordances of social technologies accommodate an extensively greater exposure to and participatory involvement in multicultural social platforms, requiring a fresher insight into this specific context (Little and Al Wahaibi, 2017). Also, Islam et al. (2013) encourage the exploration of students’ national interest in an effort to arrive at a comprehensive understanding of their L2 motivation. However, this does not indicate in any way that we should solely focus analyses on cultural variations. Rather, students’ learning experiences need to be interpreted within a specific setting.

3.9 Students’ Identities in Digital Times: The Era of Web 2.0

Before discussing the construct of identity in the era of Web 2.0, it seems pertinent to provide a definition of Web 2.0, which obviously extends far beyond the delivery of viewable and downloadable subjects that the previous ‘read-web’ provides to its viewers (McLoughlin and Lee, 2008). Web 2.0 is the ‘read-write web’ which enables its members to collaboratively create content, thus changing them from being passive users to active contributors and producers (Greenhow et al., 2009). McLoughlin and Lee (2007) emphasise that Web 2.0 applications provide students with “the freedom to decide how to engage in personally meaningful learning through connection, collaboration and shared knowledge building” (p. 669). Drawing on Bryant (2006), McLoughlin and Lee (2007) further explain that Web 2.0 applications

hold considerable potential for addressing the needs of today’s diverse students, enhancing their learning experiences through customisation, personalisation, and rich opportunities for networking and collaboration (p. 665).

Discussions around learners’ identities in digital social spaces entail referring to the notion of “curatorship” (Potter, 2012, p .5). Potter (2012) considers how a person gathers, collects and distributes his/her life via digital social platforms, highlighting the necessity to focus on “human rather than technological determinism” (p. 5; cited in Little and Al Wahaibi, 2017, p. 178). Moving to the argument raised by Ushioda (2011) pertaining to the ideas of self and identity, which are palpable in the current theorisations of L2 motivation, and the criticality of evoking learners’ identities in their social communication, she relates specifically to the students’ digital interactive participation. She further explains that:

students' transportable identities are grounded not only in the physical world of their lives, interests and social relations outside the classroom, but increasingly in the virtual world of cyberspace ... in which so much of their life is immersed (Ushioda, 2011, p. 12; cited in Little and Al Wahaibi, 2017, p. 178).

To justify her point, she draws on Prensky's general description of the new generation of students as 'digital natives' compared to the previously 'digital immigrants' of students, highlighting how proficient and comfortable these students are with technology (Prensky, 2001; cited in Ushioda, 2011). Chik and Breidbach (2014) expound on the development of Web 2.0, highlighting the value of collaborative communication and interactive engagement through blogs and different social media. Murphy (2014) regards learners' participatory involvement in social technologies as an integral aspect of their motivations and identities. Drawing on Ushioda (2011), Little and Al Wahaibi (2017) argue that autonomous participation is required if these social technologies are to be considered as "motivational resources for language learning and language use ... and hence are to be directed by students themselves" (p. 178). Ushioda (2011) also cites Levy (2009) to further elaborate that autonomy is vital in re-assuring that learners' participation in social technologies is being shaped by themselves so as to realise their personal needs and interests. In this respect, Little and Al Wahaibi (2017) refer to Potter's (2012) curatorship, emphasising that this notion "in and of itself implies choice and control – Control over what to share, how to share it, and how to present oneself in cyberspace" (p. 179). Moreover, learners' participatory involvement in the digital social space generates the opportunity of developing their L2 future selves which could boost their motivations and increase their autonomous capacities (Chik and Breidbach, 2014; Murphy, 2014). It should be noted, though, that the above cited literature does not inform us how Web 2.0 technologies can potentially facilitate the expression of L2 identity. Therefore, the present study aims to address this niche in the existing literature.

3.10 Cultural Encounters and Identity in Traditional EFL Classrooms

The centrality of identity in language learning has been discussed among applied linguists over the past decade, reaching a consensus about its vitality (Lamb and Budiyo, 2013). From a social standpoint, learning is construed as the development of a new identity pertaining to a culture (Lave and Wenger, 1991). This, in fact, resonates with Van Lier's (2007) argument that "learning an L2 involves a struggle to forge a new identity that is true to the self" (p. 47), and being considered as a fully-fledged user of the L2 by others. Lamb and

Budiyanto (2013) further argue that since language is intimately connected to an individual's meaning of self, gaining L2 competence is potentially embedded with varying personal challenges. These challenges may even grow bigger in a foreign language context as learners are basically deprived of their essential tools of self-expression, and yet are confronted with certain elements of the local culture (ibid.). Therefore, their sense of self might be in a state of flux, feeling rather ambivalent about their new community (ibid.). To quote Block's (2007) insightful description, they may be "feeling a part and feeling apart" (p. 864). Indeed, pedagogical emphasis on identity is of equal importance to grammar work or perhaps skill-acquisition, contributing significantly to successful language learning (Lamb and Budiyanto, 2013). Ultimately, pursuing language learning process for a sustained period would enable language learners to feel at ease whilst using the L2 to convey their thoughts and emotions (ibid.). Hence, they are eventually able to develop an L2 identity (ibid.).

Riley (2006) explains how illustrative the expression of 'foreign language learning' is, bringing to our attention that "issues of identity are massively present" (p. 296). Riley further claims that languages are mostly considered by learners as being 'foreign' (ibid.). In a similar vein, Lamb and Budiyanto (2013) believe that identity-related work is evident in mainstream EFL in a governmental school in Indonesia, highlighting its associated emotional impact. Yet, they argue that many teaching practitioners and students tend to strip the language of its cultural meanings to be on the safe track (ibid.). Lamb and Budiyanto (2013) go even further to argue that such pedagogical practices which place heavy emphasis on the linguistics aspects only over identity work may present a largely lost chance to involve students in an effectively engaging process of foreign language learning. Nonetheless, the learning situation is quite different in the European contexts in which English does not resemble a foreign culture, thus carrying less cultural challenges (Block, 2007). Lamb and Budiyanto (2013) appear to lend substantial support to Baker's (2012) intercultural awareness-raising proposal, stating that learners with less exposure to foreign cultures would apparently associate their identification process with superficial stereotypes. In particular, they explain that the Indonesian students in the context-under-investigation tend to perceive western principles and cultural conducts as a possible challenge to their envisioned future English-mediated selves, thus raising emotional reactions (ibid.). These emotional reactions were of particular relevance to my study, as it aims to explore participants' sense of identity from a socio-

cultural and religious context, which could potentially spark strong emotions (for more details, see chapter 5 and 6).

Norton (2000) as well as Pavlenko and Blackledge (2004) present cogent arguments for identity construction and development, being carried out mainly in naturalistic adult migrant contexts in which they struggle to join their new L2 communities. Other investigators, however, introduce examples of identity research conducted in study abroad contexts in which adult students' temporary stay in a foreign country may be confronted with different challenges (Al-Rhyami, 2014; Jackson, 2008; Pellegrino-Aveni, 2005). Currently, though, researchers have started investigating second language learners who study in their countries, thus being probably a way from an authentic community of L2 speakers and being highly obsessed with passing high-stake examinations (Lamb and Budiyo, 2013). Block (2007) even goes further to reflect deep doubts regarding the extent to which students could potentially construct L2 identities, arguing that "there is usually far too much first language-mediated baggage and interference for profound changes to occur in the individual's conceptual system and in his/her sense of self" (p. 144). Lamb and Budiyo (2013) contend that a learner's main identity inside the classroom is that of a student. Still, though, they acknowledge potential changes within that role, being recognised as a star student (*ibid.*). Yet, other facets of his/her identity are not involved or connected, and the L2 is but another school subject quite divorced of an authentic congruence with native-speaking communities (*ibid.*).

House (2003) further claims that most educational systems, which emphasise teaching of English as a lingua franca, are basically asserting the communicative aspects of the language, and rather being oblivious to its primary role as a language for identification. House explains the context of English as a lingua franca, highlighting that it is not a local language but a basic means divorced of cultural meanings (*ibid.*). Admittedly, House recognises its lack of language identification processes since there is a vague community of English native speakers (*ibid.*). It could be argued, though, that the use of English at a personal or perhaps societal standard renders the language less problematic, being essentially considered as a language for personal and national development (Lo-Bianco, 2005).

Lamb and Budiyo (2013) further problematise the notion of self in relation to an individual's age, arguing that early adolescence is characterised by its associated uncertainty.

Citing Côté (2009), Lamb and Budiyanto (2013) explain that individuals at their early adolescence tend to question their childhood selves, try out newly constructed identities, and endeavour to attain a clear meaning of self during a period of typical change and instability stretching into the 20s or even 30s in the modern era. Also, Harklau (2007) critically questions the ethnolinguistic identity of adolescent migrants in Anglophone countries, considering it as one particular aspect of the self. Lamb and Budiyanto (2013) claim that there is a scarcity of research around adolescent identity in diverse international settings, yet much research has been targeting youth development in western settings. Unlike these outlined studies, my research focuses on the identity of young adults, trying to fill that gap by paving the way for future research. In fact, identity work is largely absent in the Omani context, except for one journal article written by Al-Rhyami (2014). This will be picked up further in section 3.12.

3.11 Connecting the Dots: Identity, Motivation, and Autonomy in Language Learning

In this section, I will consider a variety of research, exploring issues pertaining to identity, motivation, and autonomy in language learning. I will also highlight areas of special relevance to my present study, research lacuna, and research methodologies. It should be noted, though, that there is no empirical study which explores the relationship between EFL language learner identity, motivation, and autonomy through social technologies, as compared to traditional modes. Nevertheless, I have decided to review the following studies as they employ a convergent approach to investigate these issues. Van Lier (2010) argues that due to the inextricably intertwined nature of these three constructs, a more concerted approach is required to investigate these issues so as to “lend some coherence to an increasingly fractious research agenda” brought about by “a proliferation of concepts” (p. xvi; cited in Gao and Lamb, 2011, p. 1).

Murray et al. (2011) have edited a volume, synergising data from a variety of research studies around identity, motivation, and autonomy into a more integrative approach to better account for the role that these three distinctive areas play in the language learning process. In recent years, research attempts have begun to examine identity, motivation, and autonomy. Surprisingly, though, few research attempts have been directed at exploring their potential interconnections which could be explained by having their own distinct tradition of inquiry grounded on divergent ontological perspectives, and thus employing different research

methods (Lamb, 2011). Ushioda (2011) cogently argues that these three concepts are interrelated as she explains that by gaining insight into student identity and autonomy, our comprehension of student motivation could be thus enlightened. She makes a concluding remark regarding classroom practices which encourage language learner autonomy, proposing that such practices would potentially develop students' motivations and identities by allowing them to effectively engage their identities and express themselves in the target language (Ushioda, 2011). Ryan and Deci (2003), on the other hand, claim that identities could also satisfy humans' basic requirement for the sense of autonomy as identities could offer a platform through which individuals improve and voice their values and interests although Ryan and Deci's Self-Determination Theory places much emphasis on autonomy as a fundamental psychological need. Such juxtapositioning of views leads Murray (2011) to call for further inquiries to empirically explore the interconnections that exist between these constructs. He goes on to point out that despite the few attempts to investigate the link between motivation and identity in language learning (e.g. Dörnyei and Ushioda, 2009), student autonomy has not appeared conspicuously in their studies (Murray, 2011). Also, such empirical work which has adopted Dörnyei's self-based system is quantitative in design (e.g. Dörnyei and Ushioda, 2009). As such, the greater strength of Murray et al.'s (2011) anthology is that it provides well-balanced discussions of the recent theoretical perspectives and empirical explorations through which we can listen to truthful and insightful voices of students in their classrooms, placing autonomy at the core while discussing identity and motivation in language learning. The links between these three constructs have been explored through the use of qualitative research methods, emphasising their fluidly dynamic and complicated nature. Impressively, this volume covers studies carried out in a broad array of different contexts, encompassing "Brazil, China, Germany, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Japan, Mexico, the Middle East, and the UK" (Gao and Lamb, 2011, p. 1). These studies are conducted in diverse learning situations, encompassing classrooms, self-access and out-of-class contexts.

In this volume, Lamb (2011) discusses the findings of a research study which examines the growing motivations of Indonesian students to learn the English language. Unlike my study, the participants are junior high school students. In his study, Lamb relates students' increasing oral proficiency in English to strong L2 selves and continuous autonomous language learning pursuits. That is, Lamb's study uncovers interconnections between

students' great early motivations, autonomous learning of English outside the classroom, and a gradually developed L2 future selves. What is of special relevance to my research is that Lamb's study sets out to add to the ongoing progress of research studies associating L2 selves with L2 learning (Dörnyei and Ushioda, 2009). However, Lamb questions the stability of these future self-guides in the long-term, and how far they can potentially further encourage autonomous second language learning. Similar to my study, Lamb embraces a qualitative methodology, yet it is a longitudinal study conducted over a six-year period. As it is the case with the implications of my study, Lamb adds further encouragement to elaborate on the existing theoretical frameworks associating second language motivation and autonomy to learners' future self-guides. Lamb (2011) places much emphasis on the significant importance of immediate family context in initially 'developing' and subsequently 'priming' future self-guides, an aspect which was also explored in my study (see section 5.4.3).

Another work which bears some relevance to my study is that of Chik and Breidbach (2011). They particularly report on an exchange project, comparing the language learning experiences of two participating groups of postgraduates and undergraduates situated in Berlin and Hong Kong. While German participants are preparing for their future professions as prospective English instructors, their Hong Kong counterparts are English-major students. Like my study, Chik and Breidbach (2011) employ a qualitative methodology, though, using only language learning histories (LLHs). Yet, students from both countries composed and shared their multimodal LLHs via course wikis along with asynchronously posted replies. However, it is worth mentioning that a wiki website was used only as an avenue for hosting and exchanging participants' LLHs, thus functioning as a communication tool between both groups of participants in the research project in order to collect data pertinent to their L2 learning strategies and experiences. In other words, Chik and Breidbach's (2011) study did not tell us how Web 2.0 help creating L2 identity, autonomy, and motivation, an aspect which was beyond the scope of their study. Both groups of learners would start discussions around the process of second language learning, raising their consciousness about various experiences related to L2 learning in these two divergent cultural and educational settings. Chik and Breidbach investigate participants' language learning experiences based on their autobiographical narratives composed by six students from both groups equally (*ibid.*). Albeit the absence of sustained English-speaking contexts, participants demonstrated great motivations and developed their L2 identities via personal activities. Participants' language

learning narratives unveiled that popular cultural practices serve as the mediating link between identity, motivation, and autonomy, which also appeared in my study during the analysis of my data. Chik and Breidbach draw on Dörnyei's L2 future selves, keeping the third component which is related to L2 learning experience beyond the remit of their study. In my study, though, I took a bottom-up approach in exploring the role of L2 learning experience in the development of L2 future selves (see section 5.7). In their study, Chik and Breidbach illustrate the operation of the ideal L2 and ought-to selves in which participants visualised their future possibilities, and thus acted upon such learning possibilities in order to increase their L2 motivation. A special area of relevance to my study is how learners perceive themselves as English-using selves beyond their language classrooms.

Another study uncovering the interplay between identity, motivation, and autonomy in language learning is that of Murphy (2011). It aims to investigate self-motivation from the standpoint of distance language students who are generally expected to consider their own personal goals, carefully decide on their learning materials, monitor the progress of their learning, and thus sustain their motivation within a programme framework that could perhaps provide a roughly guided structure. Put simply, they could enjoy a greater level of autonomy within their programme. Like my study, Murphy explores the interrelationship between autonomy, motivation, and learner identity in relation to Ryan and Deci's Self-Determination Theory (2002) and Dörnyei's L2 motivational Self System (2009). However, Murphy's study explores these issues in the context of distance language learning. Murphy (2011) examines how these theoretical frameworks translate into practice by analysing the experiences pertaining to distance language students of Spanish, French, and German, who reported the negative motivational factors affecting their studies and how they managed to overcome setbacks. They also jotted down motivational factors within seven months whilst studying with one of the universities in the United Kingdom. The data offers great insights into developing learners' self-motivation based on their reported experiences, thus proposing ways to better design and perhaps develop distance language learning programmes. Murphy's longitudinal study concluded that students' future L2 selves may clash with several ideal selves stemming from varying life contexts. Thus, Murphy proposed those students who took greater control over their learning process by making informed decisions, increased their motivation to achieve their L2 identity regardless of the multiple and potentially conflicting selves.

Another study which bears some relevance to my study is that of Malcom (2011). It is a small-scale exploratory study, employing a qualitative methodology based on interviews with four male medical learners in the Arab Gulf region. Particularly, they are in varying years of studying at a medical college in Bahrain through the medium of English. The author illustrates how the participants dealt with their academic failure as a spur to exercise increased levels of autonomy in pursuing language learning for direct educational purposes concerning their English proficiency, and for their desirably visualised future identities as competent international English-language medical specialists. Malcom (2011) argues that “[f]ailing may have served as a ‘wake-up call’, making these students recognize the importance of English for their academic success, and forcing them to find ways to improve” (p. 210). Malcom’s participants started seeking autonomous language learning once they realised the importance of English, an aspect which was also discussed in my study (see section 5.7). Malcom emphasises the significance of taking longitudinal perspectives on L2 motivation and autonomy.

In a nutshell, each of the above reviewed investigations contributes to our comprehension of the relationship between identity, motivation, and autonomy. These studies lend substantial support to the idea that these three concepts are characterised by three notable qualities: “they change over time, they depend on context and they are socially mediated” (Murray, 2011, p. 248). Significantly, too, these studies unveil the potential of taking a concerted effort into exploring identity, motivation, and autonomy as interconnected constructs.

3.12 Research on L2 Motivation, Identity, and Learner Autonomy in the Omani Context

Now, I will examine a variety of research studies that have investigated matters pertinent to L2 motivation, identity, and learner autonomy in the Omani context, illustrating areas of particular relevance to my study, research gaps, and research methodologies. I have chosen these particular studies due to their connections to the issues they examined to L2 motivation, identity, and learner autonomy. It should be noted, though, that there is no particular study in Oman which investigates the interplay between identity, motivation, and autonomy. As such, I will review studies which investigate these issues as separately distinct constructs.

As it is the case with research on identity, motivation, and autonomy in language learning, research studies entirely dedicated to exploring the relationship between these three

constructs are seriously absent in the Omani context. This is, in fact, due to “the overall paucity of publishing in ELLT in Oman” (Al-Sadi, 2015, p. 53). Generally speaking, research investigating the connections between identity, autonomy, and motivation in language learning has just begun (Murray, 2011). Therefore, I will begin with reviewing L2 motivation research in Oman. Recently, Al-Mahrooqi and Denman (2014) explored motivational types and sources of 100 EFL university-aged students in Oman. The authors investigated students’ motivation in relation to their formal schooling experiences of English language learning by conducting one-on-one interviews in oral and written formats. A total of 100 interviews were carried out in English and designed in an open-ended structure, asking participants to retell their EFL learning experiences with a much emphasis on their attitudes towards the language. A particular focus was also directed at how they studied the English language before and during formal schooling. The authors categorise motivational types, drawing essentially on Gardner’s socio-educational model (1985) as well as Deci and Ryan’s Self-Determination Theory (2000). Thereby, types of motivation were classified into integrative and instrumental forms of motivation, as well as intrinsic and extrinsic motivational tendencies. Another key area of the study was the potential sources of motivation and demotivation which influenced students’ drive to learn English, drawing necessarily on the same theoretical framework mentioned above. The data revealed that instrumental motivation was prevalent amongst Omani EFL students. Manifestations of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation were almost equally palpable. With regard to motivation sources, research findings uncovered that family figures, teachers, and students’ attitudes towards the language were the primary motivational forces. Equally, too, the last two appeared as possibly significant sources of demotivation. Al-Mahrooqi and Denman (2014) stated that contextual elements, encompassing “socio-cultural and school contexts, potential involvement and peer pressure, were also found to have a significant effect on student motivation” (p. 103). The authors also discussed pedagogical implications pertaining to these forms and bases of L2 motivation within the Omani EFL classrooms. One of the limitations of the study is that the research participants are mostly English-majors or specialising in other majors through the medium of English. Therefore, it would be interesting to find out whether participants might have internalised the instrumental value of English as a potential academic currency besides its utilitarian worth in their daily lives. Thus, the data of the research should be carefully considered while trying to apply it and compare it with varying samples or contexts.

Another recent study pertaining to EFL motivation is that of Al-Issa (2014). His study focuses on factors underpinning EFL motivation in relation to the Omani ELT context, examining this phenomenon from a critical perspective. This study triangulates research findings gathered from semi-structured interviews conducted with various participants engaged in English language teaching in the Omani education system, thus reflecting varying academic, social, and cultural backgrounds. This study also refers to the National English Language Policy/Plan, relevant literature, and the nationally-designed English textbook. The data shows different ideologies with regard to the factors affecting EFL motivation, emphasising the need to bridge the ideological discrepancy between theory and practice pertinent to ELT within the Omani context. Most importantly, this study finds out that the Omani education system appears to have neglected the issue of students' motivation. Strikingly, though, I would argue that Al-Issa's study seems to have overlooked the recent perspectives on motivation, with identity issues being absent from discussion around motivation. It claims that the ultimate goal of the Omani English curriculum is the acquisition of English for communicative purposes only, neglecting students' identification processes with the language. Rather, it only explores integrative and instrumental motivation.

Another research study on L2 motivation within the Omani context is that of Dadi (2011), examining factors influencing students' motivation to learn English. Dadi's study offers a local model of second language motivation, adopting newly contextualised perspectives. This model draws on students' socio-cultural backgrounds and their social interactions. This study sets out to achieve three main objectives. First of all, it attempts to figure out the key factors impacting on Omani learners' motivations to learn English. Secondly, it aims to confirm the influence of social exchanges on L2 motivation. Thirdly, it investigates the strategies used by the Omani students which affect their L2 motivation through personal contacts. Dadi (2011) claims that "[s]ince this study views motivation as a complex bundle of constructs, it was more feasible to adopt its most significant factors as determined by the immediate socio-cultural context" (p.v). Interest and self-efficacy were found to be the two major concepts resembling L2 motivations of Omani learners. The importance of this study lies in its representation of a locally contextualised framework to explain the L2 motivation of Omani students. Dadi's (2011) research adopted a mixed method approach. While a quantitative approach was employed to validate the significance of interest and self-efficacy for Omani learners, a qualitative methodology was also used to confirm this and emphasise the used

mechanisms to affect students' motivations. Research question one was addressed through the employment of both quantitative and qualitative data. In an attempt to prove the vitality of interest and self-efficacy, Correlation and Linear Regression Statistics were employed. The first question was also investigated through participants' illustrations of L2 motivated students and the justifications they offered for liking English and pursuing English language learning. The second question examined the role of social interactions in affecting the L2 motivation of Omani learners. The third question investigated the strategies adopted by the Omani students which affect their motivations. The data showed the significance of the affective aspect voiced through the notion of 'closeness', illustrating the strength and type of the effects mediated via social communications. This research ascertained the necessity of taking serious consideration of students' socio-cultural context in developing language programmes and employing language instructors. This study also highlighted the need to encourage students and support them emotionally. The data also provide teachers with useful guidelines on how to design their teaching plans and supportive ideologies. However, I would argue that the absence of virtual socialisation exchanges in this study renders it quite inauthentic as it does not mirror students' increasing social relations within the digital context where much of their life occupied (Ushioda, 2011). Nowadays, the virtual social network lies at the heart of their social interactions, impacting essentially on their L2 motivation as it involves both social and linguistic communications (Little and Al Wahaibi, 2017). Moreover, Dadi's study relied heavily on general conceptualisation describing the social dimension of the Omani society, emphasising its conservative and collective nature. Albeit this seems to be generally acceptable, I would argue that it should be toned-down within the rapidly occurring social changes.

Moving to identity research in the Omani context, there is only one study conducted by Al Rhyami (2014). In her study, she explores identity construction of Omani students in a sojourn study abroad context in an attempt to comprehend their L2 learning process. In other words, this study sets out to shed light on the process of L2 learning of these Omani students, highlighting their identity formation in terms of engaging or rather rejecting involvement in this new environment. This study draws on different theoretical frameworks, including Lave and Wenger's (1991) communities of practice, language socialisation (Watson-Gegeo, 2004), and poststructuralism (Norton, 2000). Within this theoretical framework, L2 learning is perceived as a social practice in which students "struggle to negotiate the language as a

system” (Al Rhyami, 2014, p. 67). Second language learning, particularly within a study abroad environment, is viewed as an intricate process that requires “adapting to new social/cultural conditions, recognizing power relations, struggling between the past and current, and negotiating the differences where paradox can easily occur” (Al Rhyami, 2014, p. 67). In this study, identity is viewed in light of “how a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future” (Norton, 2000, p. 5; cited in Al Rhyami, 2014, p. 65). This study embraces a qualitative methodology through the use of structured interviews with six participants. However, two participants were chosen in line with purposeful sampling, since they project identity construction through two contrasting lenses. The data reveal that students’ identity is manifold, being challenged and thus altered throughout time and space. Reflecting on their language learning in the past, both participants described their lack of a solid background in English due to the traditionally authoritative education system in Oman. Their experience of studying abroad has been considerably influenced by their previous expectations, reciprocal involvement, and constructing a third space within the new context. However, their current self-perceptions influence how they visualise their future. Eventually, this study offers suggestions for Omani authorities, international universities abroad, and students themselves.

Considering research studies around learner autonomy conducted in the Omani context, Al-Sadi (2015) argues that “interest in learner autonomy in the Arabian Gulf region in general and Oman in particular is relatively new, and so it has not yet been thoroughly researched” (p. 53). This can be explained in terms of the stereotypical picture of Omani students held by their teachers, perceiving them as being not autonomous (Al-Kalbani, 2011). Although some educators view autonomous learning as desirably necessary in language education, it is widely held that learner autonomy is still unviable and unachievable by a wider number of students (Shahsavari, 2014). The only empirical substantial research on autonomy conducted in the Omani context from learners’ perspectives is that of Al-Sadi (2015), focusing on *learner autonomy and voice in a tertiary ELT institution in Oman*. In his study, Al-Sadi explores students’ perspectives on learner autonomy, highlighting its meaning, practice, and potential contribution to language learning. In other words, he argues that “research on how Omani learners themselves define their roles in language learning and how their definitions might link to their behaviour in and outside the classroom is seriously lacking” (Al-Sadi,

2015, p. XI). As such, he attempts to investigate these issues within the Omani educational context by carefully listening to the students themselves. Mainly, his study aims to arrive at a robust understanding of how learner autonomy might be represented through their voices. Al-Sadi's study draws on a qualitative methodology, using Arabic focus group conversations and reflective journals. His participants are fifteen post-foundation undergraduates in a tertiary institution in Oman. His research findings reveal that

students' actual capacities for language learning have been largely underestimated and misrepresented. Students *do* appear to be metacognitively aware of the benefits and conduct of autonomy in language learning and *do* exercise their agency in language learning, for example in out-of-class language learning situations. Students' autonomous learning behaviour, however, has been found to be greatly conditioned by the learners' own learning needs and agendas as well as the learning environment itself (Al-Sadi, 2015, p. XI).

Other research studies carried out from the teachers' perspectives are of Borg and Al-Busaidi (2012) as well as that of Al-Busaidi and Al-Mamaari (2014). The first study explored the opinions and practices of EFL instructors on issues pertinent to learner autonomy, highlighting their views on the viability of involving students in setting their own learning goals and choosing their assessment methods. Recruiting the same research participants drawn from the original research of Borg and Al-Busaidi (2012), the second study explored EFL teachers' meanings concerning the notion of autonomous learning and illustrated the bases of their definitions. Drawing on the research results, instructors' definitions of autonomy mirrored essentially their varying experiences derived from educational training programmes and pedagogical practices inside the classrooms as well as their readings around learner autonomy. At a methodological level, while Borg and Al-Busaidi's study (2012) employed a mixed method approach to data collection and analysis, Al-Busaidi and Al-Mamaari (2014) used a qualitative methodology in order to gain a richer understanding of the issues investigated in the previous study. Although some issues have been explored in the earlier study, the uniqueness of the second study lies in its deeper approach to the analyses and interpretations of teachers' perceptions of learner autonomy. While the analysis of the previous study conducted by Borg and Al-Busaidi (2012) shed light on the wider metacognitive dimensions of learner autonomy, the second study of Al-Busaidi and Al-Mamaari (2014) focused primarily on nuanced definitions of learner autonomy, highlighting practical issues pertinent to the educational pedagogy beside its equal focus on

metacognition. That is, the analysis also included pragmatic matters relevant to language curricula, teaching resources, teaching methodologies, and learning strategies.

An empirical research study conducted at one of the Omani public schools is that of Al-Shaqsi (2009). From the standpoint of EFL teachers, Al-Shaqsi surveyed their views regarding autonomous learning. The data revealed that instructors conceived autonomous learning differently, emphasising independent learning, holding responsibility, self-assessment, and interdependence. Besides that, they showed positive feelings towards students' manifestations of autonomous behaviours. Methodologically, this study used a purely quantitative methodology to data collection and analysis. I would argue that the findings of the research should be cautiously interpreted since there were no qualitative data to further expound on the questionnaire results, and thus avoiding misunderstanding. Admittedly, Al-Shaqsi maintained that teachers' responses could have mirrored a policy encouraging the promotion of learner autonomy, though in a theoretical sense, indicating one of the limitations of her study.

Al-Kalbani (2011) as well as Al-Mahrooqi and Asante (2012) are examples of theoretical research around learner autonomy in Oman. To begin with Al-Kalbani's study (2011), she argues for a context-sensitive conceptualisation of learner autonomy, responding to the ongoing debate in the literature concerning the cultural sensitiveness of learner autonomy (Palfreyman, 2003; Smith, 2003). She even goes further to argue that no conscious efforts have been invested into developing learners' autonomous capacities due to the stereotyped image of Omanis as being not autonomous learners. Al-Mahrooqi and Asante (2012) propose different methods to encourage autonomous learning among Omani learners of English by promoting reading habits in the entire Omani culture. These authors claim that Omani students tend to rely completely on their teachers to guide their learning process, therefore, they are inclined to avoiding reading prescribed textbooks independently. Thereby, Al-Mahrooqi and Asante suggest the establishment of public libraries across the country. Within the Language centre at Sultan Qaboos University, they propose establishing an independent learning centre with a greater focus on reading. They also recommend the employment of reading-enhancing strategies throughout EFL courses. Methodologically, both studies of Al-Kalbani (2011) as well as Al-Mahrooqi and Asante (2012) are not empirically supported. Also, the conceptual underpinnings of these studies are not made explicit.

Reflecting critically on the above cited research studies, I would make relevant arguments. Firstly, these few studies attempted to make explicit examinations of issues pertinent to learner autonomy. Apart from Al-Sadi's (2015) research, these studies have been carried out from the standpoint of the instructors, rendering students' perspectives nearly absent in the educational context of Oman. Besides that, I would make a conceptual argument regarding the use of learner autonomy and independent learning as they appear to be used interchangeably in these studies though they are not equally similar in meanings. Drawing on the existing literature on autonomy, albeit not in all cases, distinctions are made between these two constructs. That is, literature differentiates between them, explaining how each form of learning is conducted. For instance, Lamb (2010) argues that independent learning means a student studying independently of his/her teacher, possibly in self-access centres. On the other hand, Lamb maintains that autonomy considers the manner in which independent learning could apparently materialise (ibid.). Put simply, much emphasis is placed on learners' aptitude and willingness to be able to act autonomously. Apart from these studies, Al-Sadi (2015) investigates the construct of autonomy as the learners' capacity to assume responsibility for their own learning process.

3.13 Reflective Concluding Thoughts

Reviewing the literature has informed my research design. First of all, it has enabled me to identify the research lacuna by finding gaps in the existing literature (see section 1.1 and 1.3). I have also gained thoughtful insights into qualitative methodologies I adopted in my research and those used in relevant research in the field. In turn, this has helped me to reflect on different research methodologies employed in the reviewed work, and thus evaluating their strengths and limitations. In addition, I have realised the range of relevant research to my study, and hence rendering it easier for me to draw a comparison between my findings and the prior work in order to contribute genuinely to knowledge. It has also helped me to weave the threads so as to answer the research questions.

This study focuses on the link between L2 identity, motivation, and autonomy through participation in virtual social spaces, as compared to traditional media. To this end, I have presented a revision of historical perspectives on autonomy and motivation, followed by definitions of learner autonomy in language learning. This chapter also introduces definitions of motivation. An illustration of the connection between motivation and autonomy have been

offered, referring specifically to Self-Determination Theory as it relates to my own study. I have also addressed the ontological perspectives underpinning motivation and autonomy research. Afterwards, I have presented recent perspectives on motivation, followed by definitions of identity. I have also elaborated on Dörnyei's self-based system, explaining its connection to my study and relating it to the prior theories of self. This chapter has also critically discussed the notion of identity in the globalisation era and Students' identities in the era of Web 2.0, addressing cultural encounters and identity in EFL classrooms. I have also addressed relevant constructs of identity pertaining to second language learning. Besides that, I have critically reviewed recent work on the relationship between identity, motivation, and autonomy in language learning, discussing the results of these research studies and explaining their close relevance to my research. The last section of this chapter has provided critical reviews of recent studies carried out in the Omani context which focus on L2 motivation, identity, and autonomy, followed by a critique on the research methodologies and discussing the areas of particular relevance to the present study. To recap, this chapter has explained the theoretical frameworks of my study by illustrating the key constructs, locating them within the larger areas of research as well as elucidating their criticality and links to my research questions and aims.

Chapter Four

Looking for Ways Forward: Research Methodology and Methods

4. Introduction

This methodology chapter will explain how I went about generating data in relation to my research questions. This research study aims to respond to the following research questions:

1. What role does participation in virtual social spaces play in the development of female and male Omani EFL student-teachers' identity, autonomy, and motivation, as opposed to traditional language learning experiences?
2. How do virtual social spaces facilitate the expression of female and male Omani student-teachers' identities, as compared to offline contexts?
3. How do female and male participants self-report the impact of this study on their understanding of English language, identity, motivation (autonomy, competence, and relatedness)?

I will start this chapter by elaborating on key philosophical issues, hence describing the theoretical framework of my study. I will throw light on my philosophical position concerning epistemology and ontology, leading to the justification of embracing qualitative methodology and the research methods I employed for my data collection. I will also explain the decision I made for adopting a qualitative inquiry, drawing on a constructivist epistemology. Such an epistemology, along with the current public awareness of autonomy in Oman, which I explained previously in chapter two, constitutes the basis for selecting the focus group discussions and language learning histories as data collection methods. Outlining the reasoning and considerations behind the methodology is considered a significant aspect of any research so that the readership can fully understand the researcher's intentions and assumptions (Crotty, 1998). In this respect, Holloway and Fulbrook (2001) stress the importance of questioning the research methodology and methods employed, and thus being able to provide a rationale behind such choices. They further explain that provision of reasonable responses is pivotal in order for the findings to be credited and to be taken seriously.

In the next section, I will describe the particular procedures I followed for gaining access to the fieldwork, giving details about the process of recruiting the research participants and sampling methods. Other sections of this chapter will detail the actual conduct of the two research methods, namely, the focus group discussions and the language learning histories. Besides that, consideration of data transcription and data analysis will be highlighted in accordance with the theoretical and methodological frameworks adopted, as well as the procedures followed in each stage. Interpretations of findings and methods of data reporting will also be explained. Other parts of this chapter will also discuss the trustworthiness of this research and its ethical considerations. Finally, I will wrap up the chapter by providing reflective concluding thoughts on my research design as well as relevant issues discussed in this chapter, reflecting essentially upon what I have learned by being theoretically and empirically engaged in qualitative research. In particular, I will reflect on lessons learned from reading around and employing qualitative research methods, as well as engaging in qualitative data transcription, data analysis, and data reporting.

4.1 Methodological Considerations

4.1.1 Epistemological and Ontological assumptions

The development of my research methodology is informed by my epistemological and ontological stances. Therefore, I shall reflect on the nature of knowledge and reality.

The focus of epistemology lies primarily in studying, theorising and justifying knowledge as identified by Carter and Little (2007). It is concerned about investigating how we build knowledge (Dillon and Wals, 2006). Epistemology is an examination of specific questions concerning knowledge, for example, what knowledge is, how individuals gain it, how they identify it, how knowledge is related to reality, how knowledge is intertwined with the relations of power, how they recognise which philosophy of knowledge is the correct one (Sikes, 1998). Thus, knowledge can be first determined by identifying its distinct features, and second, its uses and meanings attached to by the individuals, as well as its influence on people's behaviour (Schmidt, 2001). Positivists tend to consider knowledge as being rigid, detached, and concrete, in contrast, interpretivists view it as being subjective, personal, and distinct (Cohen et al., 2011).

Ontology, on the other hand, tends to generally examine the nature of reality (Ramey and Grubb, 2009). Constructivism and objectivism are two major opposing categories derived

from the ontological theories. The question of whether or not reality can exist independently of human beliefs and perceptions is at the heart of such a debate. Objectivism adheres to the belief in a universally one objective truth which can be identified, explained, and predicted by the laws of science (Lincoln et al., 2011). Referring to Kerlinger (1986), Cutcliffe and McKenna (2002, p. 612) explain that “the way to truth is through rigorous research, involving the identification of variables within hypotheses and subjecting them to experimental manipulation”. Thus, objectivity is asserted by the objectivist ontology, highlighting that truth is independent of the researchers (Lincoln et al., 2011). Nevertheless, the constructivist ontology affirms that reality is multiple which can be explored through subjective approaches, depending on people’s perceptions and experiences (Cutcliffe and McKenna, 2002). From this perspective, a shared understanding is critical in shaping humans’ behaviours (Walter, 2010). As such, it is crucially important to understand that the core of all qualitative research in this area is “participants’ own perceptions, experiences, and perspectives” in a particular context (Holloway and Fulbrook, 2001, p. 540). Within the spirit of qualitative inquiry, interpretivism/constructivism entails different research procedures from the positivist/objectivist tradition.

Within the area of second language motivation, quantitative methodology was predominantly embraced in the past decades (Ushioda, 2011). Anchored in quantitatively positivist paradigm, motivation research has been currently criticised for relying heavily on linear cause and effect models (Ushioda, 2009). She explains that such generalisable models of learner motivation are not useful in understanding the unique identities and motivations of a particular individual (ibid.). In order to comprehend the intricate relationship between language learner identity, autonomy, and motivation, a philosophical position which is concerned with the perceptions and interpretations of an individual in a specific context should be considered. Accordingly, I embraced a qualitatively interpretivist/constructivist paradigm to frame this research.

Epistemologically and ontologically, my research methodology, therefore, rests upon the assumptions that a social issue is viewed subjectively rather than objectively, highlighting primarily the lived experiences of individuals within specific contexts, and hence social reality is understood through participants’ eyes (Cohen et al., 2011). Within this view, individuals seek to interpret their surrounding social context, thus developing subjective

understandings relevant to their experiences (Creswell, 2014). Their varied understandings lead constructivist researchers to search for the intricacies of perceptions instead of reducing them into narrowed categories (ibid.). Constructivist researchers are also concerned with the research context whereby participants live, study, and work so as to facilitate the researchers' understanding of the cultural and historical background of the participants (ibid.). Simultaneously, constructivist investigators should have critical awareness of their own backgrounds which can influence the process of interpreting their research data (see section 4.1.4). Holding the constructivist stance, the research methods adopted by the present research set out to investigate participants' conceptions and experiences, illustrating how they construe the social world in which they live (Sikes, 2004). As such, my constructivist position rejects the notion that knowledge exists in a state awaiting to be discovered (Gordon, 2009). I do believe that knowledge is produced by people through networking purposively with their social world (Morcol, 2001). My present study, thus, aims to examine the connection between language learners' identity, autonomy, and motivation through participation in social technologies, as compared to traditional modes. I do believe that understanding people's explanations of their social world must "come from the inside, not the outside" (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 19). This statement corresponds to the constructivist position which considers individuals' views on particular social topics as a way of constructing their world.

Social scientists tend to approach their participants with their assumptions, which can be either implicit or explicit, regarding the nature of the social issue or the world at large and how it might be studied (Burrell and Morgan, 1979). However, it is worth mentioning that my research philosophy draws largely on my autobiographical reflection, thus, I agree with Sikes' view (2004) that knowledge is built socially, experienced personally, and is a consequence of the individual's thoughts, voiced through the medium of language. This indicates that reality is perceived in various ways, as individuals tend to develop subjective meanings pertaining to their experiences of the social world they live in, and thus the researcher is ethically committed to examine such complexity of perceptions since the main goal of research largely depends on the participants' opinions of the issue being investigated (Creswell, 2014). In my study, the notion of truth in my participants' stories is quite tricky as memories are always faded just as all stories are. In turn, such knowledge is flexible, in that it allows for continuous enhancements or criticisms raised by members of a society.

4.1.2 Choosing a Suitable Research Methodology: Qualitative Inquiry

Research Methodology is the reflective activity of selecting, appraising and justifying the methods you employ (Wellington, 2015; Wellington and Szczerbinski, 2007). Hence, the point of departure in any research endeavour commences with the research questions as they determine research methodology (Stake, 2010; Kim, 2003). As pointed out previously, the present study aims primarily to investigate the complex relationship between language learners' identity, autonomy, and motivation through their participation in the virtual social world, as compared to traditional modes. Therefore, this qualitative research aims to gain thick accounts from the focus group discussions and the language learning histories to offer diversity. According to Lanvers (2016), qualitative data elicitation encourages "free discussion, permitting participants to contribute (novel) aspects that might go undetected in questionnaire-style instruments" (p. 84). Also, Patton (2002) emphasises the distinct strengths of the qualitative paradigm which yield rich data. Another significant feature of the qualitative methodology is that it allows investigators to examine the intricate nature of the social world (Little and Al Wahaibi, 2017). Researchers can, thus, embrace a person-centred approach, offering varied opinions which elevate epistemology (Richards, 2003). Even more importantly, it gives the researcher the chance to address his/her role with regard to the context (ibid.). Roberts (2004) further elaborates on the outstanding feature of qualitative research as it deepens a researcher's understanding of a specific social issue by gaining a detailed description through investigating matters in their real context and by using naturalistic data collection methods like in-depth interviews. It is worth re-iterating the niche in relation to qualitative research in Oman as it is quite often ignored (Al-Sadi, 2015). As such, this study would hopefully promote further qualitative investigations within the remit of language learner identity, autonomy and motivation, as well as digital social media in Oman.

The reasons behind adopting a qualitative research approach for my study is that such an investigation, which is of a social nature, requires the understanding of qualities which cannot be illustrated through numbers (Kincheloe, 2003). Also, qualitative data tends to generously bestow thick description for the issue under exploration in its natural setting (Miles and Huberman, 1994). That is, qualitative research aims at exploring detailed accounts of individuals' perceptions and experiences since it is grounded on a constructivist model of reality (Silverman, 2005). Drawing on Stake (1994), Hyde (2000, p. 84) states that the "[d]epth of understanding in qualitative research is based on a detailed knowledge of the

particular, and its nuances in each context”. As a qualitative researcher, I am aiming at holistic interpretations elicited in a natural setting, emphasising a person-centred approach.

Nonetheless, it must be recognised that qualitative research is not unproblematic. Although the purpose of qualitative inquiry is to hear participants’ voices in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the issue under question from their perspectives, it should be understood that “the thoughts and feelings of participants are not always based on facts or objective, but are merely their accounts of how they experience, interpret and construct their social world” (Holloway and Fulbrook, 2001, p. 542). Webb (1992) further argues that the qualitative interpretive approach entails personal judgements, rendering such type of inquiry highly subjective. Similarly, Morrow (2005) acknowledges that qualitative research is grounded in subjectivity, highlighting that this type of study is “subject to researcher bias” (p. 254). However, it is argued that the researcher’s understanding of the contextual and cultural grounding of the context under study is vital in comprehending “the meanings that participants make of their experiences” (Al-Sadi, 2015, p. 99). As such, qualitative data is “context-dependent and situation-related, and researchers need to be context-intelligent and sensitive to the social and personal environment of [participants]” (Holloway and Fulbrook, 2001, p. 540). Whilst conducting data analysis, I endeavoured to reduce the possibility of misunderstanding the meanings that the research participants referred to given my prior knowledge of the research context and culture (for further details about my status as an insider researcher and the risk of halo effect, see section 4.1.4). Another major limitation is the time-consuming process of qualitative data analysis (Denscombe, 2007). As a result, investigators might be confronted by an overwhelming amount of data (Bryman, 2012). However, I overcame such setback by managing my time and continuously setting my agendas throughout the entire process of research.

4.1.3 Searching for Research Methods

Research methods are activities, procedures, or techniques that the researcher critically decides to employ in order to gain data and analyse it (Bryman, 2016). These research methods or techniques may be grounded on the researcher’s ontological and epistemological stances, while simultaneously responding to the research questions in an adequate and cogent manner. Thereby, selecting appropriate research methods for gathering data and analysing it later, provided by convincing justifications behind such choices, are deemed pivotal steps in

any research endeavour (Crotty, 1998). Nonetheless, it is not always possible to identify research methods that can accommodate such concerns. According to Ormston et al. (2014), it is far more essential for a researcher to decide on a research method that responds to the research questions convincingly irrespective of its alignment with a particular epistemological view. I was keen, however, to addressing my research questions and accommodating my epistemological stance, as well as being sensitive to my context. As such, I decided to conduct focus group discussions instead of individual interviews or questionnaires to allow participants to voice their concerns and express themselves, and thus encouraging an increased level of autonomy. In this regard, Lamb (2005) ascertains that learners' voices provide insightful understanding of how learning and teaching can be improved, promoting greater levels of autonomy. Likewise, Canagarajah (2004) maintains that students' voices are representations of their agency voiced through the medium of language, mirroring essentially their self-perceptions negotiated in the light of their roles and identities. Relating the construct of voice to the pedagogical context, it is deemed as a platform for reflective practices, leading to an effective learning (Fox, 1993). In the words of Al-Sadi (2015), "[e]ngaging learners and allowing them a greater voice and role to play in the learning process is gathering momentum as a key way to improve teaching and learning" (p. 30), thus contributing to the educational transformation. In practice, though, students' voices are largely neglected in diverse educational settings, including the Omani context (Al Riyami, 2016; Al-Sadi, 2015; Rudd et al., 2006; Lamb, 2005). Al-Sadi (2015) concludes that students are capable of articulating their voices and hence affect pedagogical practices. However, they are not usually given the chance to voice their concerns (ibid.).

In turn, I would assume that such an active process would help both the participants and the researcher. In other words, I selected research methods which could enable the research participants to reflect and raise their consciousness of themselves as individuals and EFL students as well as prospective EFL teachers, mirroring their developing awareness about their learning and teaching context. Hopefully, this would result in an effective language learning process. This point will be expounded on thoroughly in the following section as it constitutes a focal aspect of my present study (see also chapter seven for more details). Overall, I was looking for research methods which could explore participants' deep-lying experiences and self-perceptions about English language learning through traditional and digital modes, thus offering an insider view on the issue under investigation.

The research participants decided to take part in the research due to the fact that the exploration would be through group discussions instead of individual interviews or questionnaires, exhibiting a great motivation to express their identities and voices. As pointed out earlier, qualitative explorations which aim at eliciting participants' students' voices in Oman are scarce (Al-Sadi, 2015), thus participants seized this opportunity to raise their concerns. The participants had issues of valid concerns about their traditional formal learning context as well as their online social practices, therefore, they anticipated that the study would serve as a platform to articulate such challenges and opportunities, offering possibilities for greater involvement on the part of the students (Al-Sadi, 2015). As a matter of fact, this seemed to resonate with the current social and political movements witnessed in the Arab Middle Eastern region generally and Oman particularly (Al Riyami, 2016; Al-Sadi, 2015; Worrall, 2012; Al-Hashmi, 2011). As elucidated in chapter two, those changes had raised students' awareness as they required serious improvements pertaining to the Omani education system. Thereby, I would claim that the strength of the present study stems from its flexibility to accommodate the distinctiveness of the context under investigation, catering to the participants' expectations, and facilitating a higher engagement in the study. Most importantly, participants' needs and expectations are attended to and included within the research design. That is, the research methods provide participants with a greater opportunity to take an increasing role in the investigation. In this respect, Al-Sadi (2015) argues that:

Within a broader institutional and educational context, voice very much lends itself to concepts such as freedom, empowerment and agency which individuals possess (or should possess) as part of their civil rights (p. 27).

Thereby, I decided to adopt qualitative research methods, including focus group discussions and language learning histories. These will be further elaborated on later (see section 4.2.4). Within my present study, I have ethically committed myself to accommodate the expectations of my research participants to have an increasing space for self-expression, thus valuing their contributions, experiences, and suggestions. This is in line with the argument raised by Kirpitchenko and Voloder (2014) that researchers should "advocate great transparency of the interests and expectations of research held by participants" (p. 13). For example, my participants took the lead regarding the language and manner of expression, gender-based groups, timing and venue. This will be further explained later (see section 4.2.4.1).

Importantly, too, given the multi-faceted nature of second language motivation, identity, and autonomy in language learning (Lamb and Little, 2016; Benson, 2011; Ushioda, 2011; Dörnyei, 2009), I would contend that exploring these constructs, which the present study is set to research, entails methods that can capture the complexities of these concepts. Arguably, it is beyond the pragmatic capacity of quantitative methods.

4.1.3.1 Reflection as an awareness-raising tool

Reflection constitutes a significant part of my present study, functioning as an awareness-raising tool so as to develop learner future selves, promote learner autonomy, and increase learner motivation. Lamb and Little (2016) argue that awareness-raising is important for fostering learner identity, developing learner autonomy, and increasing learner motivation. They even go further to argue for the necessity to encourage students to thoughtfully reflect on their desired future visions, maintaining that awareness-raising does not only mean “being aware of themselves as learners with specific goals and motivations but also being willing and able to critically reflect on their learning” (p. 201), encapsulating their goals and ways for boosting their motivation. In fact, this resonates with the aim of my research in relation to exploring participants’ consciousness of their L2 identities and motivations by stimulating their reflection through thoughtful consideration of significant dimensions pertinent to their language learning and teaching process (see chapter seven for detailed explanations). In this regard, Dörnyei and Kubanyiova (2014) argue that in order for the EFL learners to realise their future-selves, it is vitally important to increase their “mindfulness of the significance of desired self-images” (p. 35). Citing Oyserman et al. (2002), Dörnyei and Kubanyiova (2014, p. 35) further emphasise

the importance of helping students to personalise the emerging preferred self-images, that is, to build into them as much as they can of what they know about themselves in order to capitalise on their own existing strengths and unique features.

For these reasons, I explored the affordance of reflection as an awareness-raising tool whilst employing my research methods (Lamb and Little, 2016). For instance, the narrative design of the focus group discussions and language learning histories encourages awareness-raising (Na Nongkhai, 2018; Benson et al., 2013). I embraced this approach to explore participants’ awareness regarding their L2 identities and motivations so as to become reflective students and teachers. In this respect, Al-Sadi (2015) postulates that:

the very activity of helping learners to develop awareness of themselves as learners, the learning process as well as their immediate learning context (including its opportunities and challenges) has the potential for creating better and sustained learning (p. 109).

I devoted the third research question to investigating participants' self-reported evaluations concerning the exploration of awareness as part of their participation in the study, adding to their professional identity since reflective pedagogical practices are not common in Oman (Al Riyami, 2016). As explained earlier, Dörnyei (2009) ascertains that awareness-raising is fundamental in nurturing, and thus attaining participants' future-selves. To this end, participants were constantly encouraged to reflect on themselves and their immediate learning situation. By the end of the research investigation, it was hoped that the participants would have become reflective individuals, developing awareness about themselves as learners and future teachers by reflecting on relevant issues. Equally, too, language learning histories can incredibly help participants raise their awareness about their language learning experiences by critically reflecting on their personal stories (Benson et al., 2013; Oxford, 1995). This point will be further explained in section 4.2.4.2.

4.1.4 Identifying my Role as a Researcher and the Risk of a Halo Effect

The purpose of this section is to provide a critical self-reflection, identifying my role as a researcher and the risk of a halo effect associated with that role throughout the research process. I will first outline these areas, followed by relevant explanations regarding the preventative steps taken to address this problematic issue.

It is vitally important for qualitative researchers to identify their roles in the research in an attempt to ensure the credibility of their findings (Unluer, 2012). Within the intricacies of the interpretive paradigm, researchers cannot be fully detached from the research context and the issue under investigation (Mercer, 2007). Undertaking the present study in my place of work, I thus hold an insider status (Kanuha, 2000), which inevitably brings the potential of a halo effect into focus.

The existing literature on insider research point to varying definitions of insiderness. In general, "insider-researchers are those who choose to study a group to which they belong" (Unluer, 2012, p. 1). Sharing the same linguistic, cultural, and religious identity with my research participants, I have to demonstrate critical awareness of my role, positionality, and my previous experiences. In this regard, Kirpitchenko and Voloder (2014) argue that the

identity of the researcher is crucially vital “because this bears not only personal socio-demographic characteristics, but also accompanying assumptions, biases, beliefs and expectations” (p. 3). Therefore, I have to be reflective and reflexive regarding my deep-seated values, preconceptions, and prejudices at all stages of the research (Wellington, 2015) to critically address the risk of a halo effect. Many researchers discuss the advantages of conducting insider research such as gaining access to the research context, having an extensive understanding of the cultural context, and establishing great rapport with the participants which relatively facilitates both narration and judgement of truth (Unluer, 2012). Nevertheless, Mercer (2007) considers insider research as “wielding a double-edged sword” (p.7). As such, researchers should be aware of the ‘delicate dilemmas’ surrounding insiderness (ibid.), thus reflecting thoughtfully on the potential of a halo effect which may creep into the research.

One of these intricate challenges is related to the preunderstanding of the issue under question (Brannick and Coghlan, 2007). Insider researchers’ deep knowledge of the cultural context may hinder their development of a critical understanding of the topic being investigated (ibid.). Unluer (2012) argues that being closely familiar with the cultural setting may result in lacking objectivity. In this respect, Kanuha (2002, p. 444) flags up issues of “objectivity, reflexivity, authenticity of a research project” due to the closeness to the social setting. Unluer (2012) explains that insider researchers may not pay attention to the important aspect of the familiar social context being studied, considering them as unquestionable realities. DeLyster (2001) refers to this problematic issue as a bias, resulting essentially from the researchers’ unconscious assumptions grounded on their previous knowledge. It is held that such heightened familiarity with the culture being examined may contribute to the development of ‘myopia’ (Mercer, 2007). It refers to the situation whereby the insider researchers lose sight of the important aspects, presuming that their perceptions are far more common than it realistically is (ibid.). Mercer (2007, p. 6) draws on several perspectives stated by many researchers to expound on this situation in which

the virtual significance of the ‘unmarked’ (Brekhus, 1998) might not be noticed; the ‘obvious’ question might not be asked (Hockey, 1993, p. 206); the ‘sensitive’ topic might not be raised (Preedy & Riches, 1988); shared prior experiences might not be explained (Powney & Watts, 1987, p. 186; Kanuha, 2000, p. 442); assumptions might not be challenged (Hockey, 1993, p. 202); seemingly shared norms might not be articulated (Platt, 1981, p. 82); and data might be thinner as a result.

Taking a preventative approach, I embraced a reflexive approach to evaluate my strengths and limitations of my pre-assumptions concerning the social setting, drawing essentially on relevant theory-driven knowledge as well as experience-based knowledge (Brannick and Coghlan, 2007). To be more precise, I avoid asking leading questions as value-laden words could generate biases (Burns and Grove, 1987). I was also concerned about allowing freedom of expression and giving participants an increased control. Thus, I refrained from restricting my participants' responses. To achieve this purpose, I formed open-ended questions to permit further explanation of their answers or the examination of new aspects which I had not thought about before (Polit and Hungler, 1995). Drawing on Lofland and Lofland (1995), Holloway and Fulbrook maintain that using "questions in an interview helps focus the interview and reduces the 'dross rate', that is, information extraneous to the study" (2001, p. 543). It is also argued that the questions developed for the interview guide allows standard procedures to be followed in each interview (Na Nongkhai, 2018; Creswell, 2014). For further details about the prompts used for focus group discussions, see Appendix 5. Whilst conducting my focus group discussions, I was mindful of my language, therefore, I avoided making intervention comments. Another preventive step taken was to be critically aware of my pre-conceptions, and hence I avoided suggestive comments throughout the focus group discussions. In this regard, Holloway and Fulbrook (2001) argue that interviewing researchers need to be "aware of their own mind set regarding the research topic, particularly when interview questions are being developed, because personal knowledge and experience inevitably shape them" (p. 543). Throughout focus group discussions, I embraced a non-judgemental approach, avoiding the tendency to give value to their answers in order to help them articulate their experiences and perceptions without challenge. However, I sought further clarification, when needed, by simply asking them to clarify their answers.

Another delicate issue pertinent to insider research is related to 'role duality' (Unluer, 2012). Undertaking insider research within a researcher's place of employment may lead to possible role and value conflicts (Brannick and Coghlan, 2007). They explain that "insider researchers are likely to encounter role conflict and find themselves caught between loyalty tugs, behavioural claims, and identification dilemmas" (Brannick and Coghlan, 2007, p. 70). Insider researchers may hold academic or managerial positions in the context under investigation, thus potentially influencing the research data in terms of data interpretation and data reporting (Unluer, 2012). In an attempt to overcome role duality in my research, I

explicitly informed my participants of my researcher status as a full-time PhD student with no position of academic responsibility at the time of investigation. Therefore, I had no authoritative power over their academic assessment.

Another potential challenge related to insider research revolves around ‘informant bias’ (Mercer, 2007). Participants’ biases refer essentially to their views and expectations of the researcher (ibid.). Brannick and Coghlan (2007) explain the manner in which information is produced and communicated between the researcher and participants which might vary from being open to very limited. This can be justified by the fact that participants’ willingness to share their views may be affected by who they believe you are (Drever, 1995). For instance, Mercer (2007) discusses her own experiences in examining faculty appraisal at two tertiary institutions in which she worked, explaining that her participants differed in their openness. That is, her participants at one institution were not quite open to reveal their true viewpoints as they were familiar with her stance on the issue under question whereas her participants in the other institution showed a great level of candour as they were not aware of her opinions. Similarly, Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) caution researchers against the danger of self-disclosure, particularly when their opinions are opposed to those of the research participants. Considering the risk of a halo effect, I was very conscious not to articulate my perspectives on the topic under question, otherwise, they may have tailored their responses to match mine. However, I briefly explained the purpose of my study as lengthy details could urge participants to be in line with my thoughts, rendering their answers to be less spontaneous. In this respect, Holloway and Fulbrook (2001) maintain that extensive information about the research might make participants “respond ‘in the right way’ or say ‘the right thing’ because they want to be perceived in a favourable light – the ‘halo’ effect” (p. 543). Another reason not to share my perspectives with the research participants was to ethically avoid co-construction of meanings, which was clearly beyond the remit of my research. My role was mainly to facilitate the focus group discussions. At times, I would smile or nod to encourage the flow of conversations. At other times, I asked clarification questions or follow up questions rather than sharing my own personal stories in order to avoid data contamination. Importantly, too, Smyth and Holian (2008) highlight the importance of taking ethical considerations into account throughout the entire research process to maximise the trustworthiness of the insider research. In this regard, I endeavoured to establish trust,

reassuring participants' safety to help them disclose information openly. Ethical issues will be further discussed in section 4.5.

Equally, too, the role of insider researcher is vital in the process of data analysis just as it is in the process of data collection in order to critically address the risk of a halo effect. In a qualitative inquiry, the insider researchers should critically scrutinise their personal and cultural baggage they carry with them as it can potentially influence their interpretations on how individuals perceive their social world (Creswell, 2013). Qualitative researchers cannot completely separate themselves from the knowledge and findings they are producing (Bryman, 2016). This brings into focus the process of reflexivity which should be embraced in qualitative research. Thereby, qualitative researchers should always identify their status and roles at all stages of the entire research process. According to Unluer (2012), subjectivity inherently characterises qualitative inquiry. As an insider researcher, I could not detach myself from the research process. For example, recruiting a purposive sample indicates a potential of researcher bias. Thus, I did not approach potential participants in a direct way. Instead, I followed formal channels of communication by advertising for it through the Dean of the School of Education who liaised with a teaching academic to organise a meeting for the full cohort of trainee teachers in a seminar room, allowing me to introduce my research and asking for voluntary participation. Also, at the initial stages of data collection, I endeavoured to establish a friendly rapport with my research participants so as to increase the level of candour, and thus generating thick data (Lamb and Little, 2016; Mercer, 2007; Rooney, 2005). Later, at the stage of data analysis, I took the role of an interpretive researcher, meaning that the research findings would be inevitably influenced by my subjective perspectives which were essentially shaped by my religious and cultural identity. Nevertheless, I was self-aware about making my own value judgements in order to be objective. Therefore, I prioritised participants' data, being analysed in a critical manner without prejudice. I also made conscious efforts to increase the research rigour and maximise the trustworthiness of research by using the *member checking technique* or *participant validation* (Cutcliffe and McKenna, 2002). It is a technique for "involving the research participant in checking and confirming the results" (Brit et al., 2016, p. 1802). After completing my analysis, I sent a summary of each session to the relevant group, along with my own interpretations, to the research participants for checking and making necessary

amendments in order to reduce the risk of a halo effect. In this respect, Lichtman (2010) cautions researchers to avoid misinterpretations that could occur in data analysis.

In summary, I am aware that halo effect in qualitative research cannot be eradicated. Also, the halo effect goes beyond data collection. It is linked to the way we view, code and analyse the data, interpret the data, and write up the data. However, the risk of a halo effect can be minimised by taking the preventive steps discussed above.

4.2 Data Collection Procedures

4.2.1 Gaining Access to the Fieldwork

Cohen et al. (2011) maintain that getting acceptance to the research place cannot be taken for granted, and hence must not be considered as a guaranteed right. Therefore, a researcher should seek official permission from the research location. Gaining local endorsement for the research project is an essential aspect of any research which must be planned for and sought early. This entails providing relevant information about the research aims, data collection methods and procedures, recruitment of participants, commitments to ethical considerations in terms of privacy and anonymity (Hennink et al., 2011). As such, researchers should present good accounts of themselves as rigorous investigators, and thus holding strong ethics pertinent to their proposed research projects even if they are members of the organisation in which their studies are conducted (Cohen et al., 2011). In my case, I sought official access from the Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Academic Affairs in order to meet the Education students in their college (see appendix 2). I submitted a covering letter along with the ethical approval of the research from the University of Sheffield (see appendix 1), writing the topic and aims of my research as well as explaining the process of recruiting participants and collecting data. I also explained the ethical issues. This point is further outlined in this thesis in section 4.5.

My access to the research location went smoothly due to the fact that I am an academic staff at the same university in which the research was conducted. Indeed, the concerned parties were cooperative as this academic institution has been striving to raise its research profile, thus establishing itself as a research community which promotes research studies on different dimensions of language learning and teaching. As such, I presented my credentials as a rigorous researcher, thus establishing my ethical commitments towards the proposed research study. The ethical implications of this will be explained later (see section 4.5).

4.2.2 Recruitment of Participants: Study Population and Sampling Methods

With regard to sampling methods, it is a ‘purposive sampling’ in terms of selecting the research population (Cohen et al., 2011). It was crucial that all participants were final year EFL student-teachers, doing their teaching practicum. In this regard, Holloway and Fulbrook (2001) maintain that “the interpretive approach allows the researcher to select participants on the basis of suitability and their experience with the phenomenon under study” (p. 544). Similarly, Morrow (2005) states that qualitative studies tend to be purposeful, for research participants are purposely chosen to offer information-rich data on the issue under question. In this regard, Bryman (2016) argues that purposive sampling does not entail random selection of participants. Rather, researchers are required to recruit participants who are thought to be suitable to the questions being examined by the study (ibid.). Therefore, purposive sampling does not aim to generalise the research findings in relation to the research population (Bryman, 2012).

My rationale behind locating my research in the college of education, which is in charge of training prospective EFL instructors, is to gain an insightful understanding of their dual identities as EFL students and future EFL instructors (Little and Al Wahaibi, 2017). Also, at university, students have sufficient levels of English to navigate social spaces, and are not subject to parental gatekeepers. Besides that, Dörnyei (2009) proposes that the self perspective might not be suitable for elementary pupils. University-aged students are deemed quite mature to elaborate on their L2 future visions, and thus better articulate their views regarding the value of English in their real lives. Such grown up students are supposed to have a solid ground to adequately express their desires to learn English based on their long-term exposure to EFL learning at both school and university levels as well as their perceived needs for future professions. According to Zenter and Renaud (2007), learners at this age are presumed to have a much more complex understanding of the wider social and cultural factor influencing their second language motivation and future selves in comparison to younger learners. A secondary reason is that sound images of one’s future self cannot be clearly formulated before the period of adolescence, as claimed by Zenter and Renaud (2007), thus university-aged students are considered suitable to be recruited for such an exploratory study.

After receiving official permission to gain access to the research location from the Deputy Vice-Chancellor, the Dean of the School of Education appointed a teaching academic to

organise a meeting, on the 31st of January 2016, for the full cohort of EFL student-teachers, and hence allowing me to introduce my research. I met the full cohort at 10 am in a seminar room in the college of Education. It took me around 15 minutes to introduce myself as a researcher, briefly explain my research area and the objectives of my research. I also discussed what voluntary participation meant, and hence what would be expected from participants if deciding to take part in the research (for more details, see section 4.5.1). Also, I encouraged students to ask questions concerning the research participation. Finally, I handed in the Participant Information Sheet and Participant Consent Form to the students to read and sign if they wished to do so. I also asked them to provide their e-mail addresses if they decided to participate in the study.

The total number of participants is fourteen, including eleven females and three male students. At the recruitment stage, I sought equal gender representation. However, gender distribution was not even due to the fact that the full cohort of Omani EFL student-teachers comprises of ninety female participants and seven male participants only. Four males initially expressed their keen interests to participate in the research. Recruiting participants was grounded on their voluntary participation. Originally, sixteen students decided to participate in this research study. Subsequently, two participants, one female and one male, withdrew because of academic pressures.

With reference to the features of the research sample, it was nearly homogenous. The research participants were all Omanis, aged about twenty-one to twenty-two years old. Before enrolling in tertiary education, they completed twelve years of school education. The reason behind choosing a homogeneous group of participants was to encourage them to develop rapport with each other while discussing in focus groups, hoping they would be at ease exchanging their perceptions through group conversations. Also, I divided the participants into three single-sex groups as they asked for that themselves, including two groups of female participants and one group of male participants. Al-Sadi (2015) claims that mixed-gender groups would potentially influence the “dynamism of the group conversations and hence the richness of the data collected” (p. 87), drawing on his familiarity with the Omani context as an insider researcher and the findings of his research. In a similar vein, Schensul (1999) argues that gendered focus groups are commonly preferable in the cases of discussing sensitive issues related to power, family affairs, and inter-gender relations. Similarly, Finch et

al. (2014) ascertain the importance of group homogeneity based on gender, as well as other shared characteristics such as age, and the similarity of educational level and learning experience. They further argue that it would be hard to thoroughly discuss key issues while the group members are dissimilar (ibid.). In this regard, Hennink et al. (2011) emphasise that a homogeneous group can yield dynamic and fruitful discussions, whereas group heterogeneity can hinder communication and discussion.

After receiving Participant Consent Forms, I sent e-mails to the research participants. Thus, I started to arrange the focus group discussions, allowing participants to choose convenient meeting times based on their free time and preferences. Determining the time for focus group discussions took a long time, as I had to change the timing several times to be suitable for most of the participating members. Due to the qualitative design of my research, I thought that such a small number of participants was quite manageable and reasonable so as to get an insightful understanding of the issue under review and maintain a relaxed and congenial ambience within the group discussions. In this regard, Holloway and Fulbrook (2001) maintain that “six to 10 participants suffice when the sample is homogeneous (individuals who are similar to each other in important aspects relating to the study)” (p. 544). Although it is imperative to have an adequate number of participants, sample size does not automatically correlate to the quality of data gathered (Morrow, 2005). Morrow elucidates that what is much more essential than the numbers of participants is, in fact, the quality of data obtained in the sense of its length and depth (ibid.). She also points to the importance of diversity of evidence in the findings (ibid.).

4.2.3 Piloting the Focus Group Discussions

In research, piloting is advisable to ensure robustness. According to Bryman (2016), piloting is deemed desirable to make sure that the questions posed by the researcher are clear and to confirm that all methods of data collection work well. Therefore, I piloted the use of focus group discussion with six Omani MA students, who were studying at the University of Sheffield, to assess its feasibility in gathering data. The focus group discussion was piloted on the 10th of December 2015, taking place in the Information Commons at the University of Sheffield. Simultaneously, I piloted the open-ended questions developed as prompts for focus group discussions with those MA students to ensure that the questions were clearly formed. It was hoped that participants could easily understand those questions, eliciting their views at a

great extent and a deep level. The rationale behind selecting those MA students was the fact that they were familiar with the context under investigation, since they did their undergraduate studies in the same place as the participants of the present research. Therefore, they could provide invaluable comments. The advantages gained from the pilot focus group discussions could be identified as follows:

- As a novice researcher, piloting gave me the opportunity to experience the situation first-hand, thus I learned how to organise and conduct focus group discussions.
- I realised the importance of giving participants ample time to go through the information sheet before commencing focus group discussions to make them feel comfortable.
- I gained lessons in improving the techniques used in moderating group discussions, beginning with the preparation stage which would inevitably affect the quality of the data (Punch, 2014). For example, I came to acknowledge the importance of conducting the group discussions in a friendly environment by choosing a suitable location (Lamb, 2005). Also, I realised the necessity to begin the discussion with straightforward questions, which could help in building participants' confidence in themselves and the researcher (ibid.).
- Piloting provided invaluable information to ensure that the questions developed for focus groups could adequately produce the type of data needed to address the research questions and to remove any ambiguous questions (Al Riyami, 2016).
- I understood the significance of commencing the transcription process whilst collecting data, and not to postpone it until the end of the fieldwork (Al Sadi, 2015).

It should be noted, though, that at the actual stage of data collection in the context under study, all my three participating groups differed enormously from one another in terms of length and pace of each meeting. Participants varied in their interpretation of the questions, and hence my follow-up questions differed. Accordingly, I adopted a flexible research design, thus embracing a reflexive approach to my discussions with “an implicit ‘pilot-as-

you-go' form of piloting" (Al-Sadi, 2015, p. 94), whilst conducting my first meetings with each group. I jotted down notes relevant to the length of each session, sequence of topics, and flow of discussions. Upon reflection, I considered those emergent issues in the initial series of discussions and handled them carefully in the subsequent meetings. Thereby, in the following sessions, I would have the chance to illuminate points, follow up questions, and perhaps address the same issue differently if the initial approach was found incomprehensible by participants. In fact, such a strategy proved useful, allowing me to make necessary adjustments, when needed.

4.2.4 Employing the Research Methods

As mentioned earlier, the present research study employs qualitative research methods, encompassing reflective focus group discussions and language learning histories.

4.2.4.1 Conducting Reflective Focus group discussions

Focus group discussions resonate with my epistemological and ontological positions stated earlier. Also, such discussions are in alignment with the nature and purpose of qualitative research paradigm adopted by this present study. That is, focus group discussions are geared towards generating a congenial ambience which embraces a variety of insights, leading to a much more increased understanding of the situation being explored to arrive at a comprehensive view (Vaughn et al., 1996). Denscombe (2007) expounds on the significant characteristics pertaining to the focus group discussions:

- Each focus group interview sheds light on particular experiences relevant to all participants who may share similar information.
- Group communication is specifically emphasised to gather relevant data.
- Group conversation is moderated by the researcher/investigator.

For these reasons, I believe that focus group discussions would richly respond to my specific research questions. Importantly, researchers should be warned against forming a single focus group to avoid the consequence of a 'cold' group that Krueger (1994) referred to, where its members tend to behave quietly and perhaps hesitant to be engaged in the group discussion. Thus, I formed three focus groups in my research study as a minimum standard suggested by Krueger (*ibid.*). As pointed out earlier, these groups comprised two female groups and one

male group. With regard to the size of the focus group members, it has been proposed that the appropriate number often ranges from six to ten (Denscombe, 2007). Thus, I initially planned to have six participants in each group in order to give every member a fair chance to exchange her/his views and experiences. However, given the limited number of male participants, three participants only constituted the male group. The other two female groups included five and six members respectively. Although there were differences in size, all groups produced valuable data.

Moving to the actual conduct of the focus group discussions, I encouraged my research participants to critically ponder on their experiences of learning EFL, thus revisiting their learning and teaching situation that could have potentially shaped their L2 future selves. Focus group discussions were conducted over three months although I initially planned to meet them once monthly for the period of six months. However, plans were changed during the fieldwork as the participants wanted to meet more frequently, over a shorter period of time.

Turning to the features of the focus group discussions, they were profoundly reflective and thought-provoking, thus maintaining participants' motivation for effective engagement in the research. I put much effort into moderating those discussions by promoting stimulating talks around relevant experiences of language learning, giving them the opportunities to articulate their opinions on both opportunities and challenges in their learning context. Also, I encouraged them to reflect on issues through posing challenging and engaging questions. However, I was mindful of my language, avoiding technical words or jargon during the conversation. I believe such measures helped in sustaining participants' active involvement in the research.

Another unique characteristic of those discussions was their developmental nature, as suggested by Lamb (2005). As the discussions progress, each session of the focus groups shed light on a particular topic such as (1) Traditional English language learning experiences in formal educational contexts, (2) Virtual English language learning through social technologies, (3) L2 future selves and expressions of identities in online and Offline contexts, (4) Affordances of cyberspace, (5) reflections on teaching practicum, and finally (6) Self-reported judgements about the impact of this study on participants' understanding of their English language, identity, motivation (autonomy, competence, and relatedness) (Little and

Al Wahaibi, 2017). Those discussions were guided by the research questions and the theoretical underpinnings of the study as well as relevant literature, progressing in breadth and depth (for further details about the discussion protocol, see appendix 5). Al-Sadi (2015) argues that progressive focusing of the discussions help participants to sustain their motivation and encourage active involvement in the research, and thus resulting in an increasingly comfortable atmosphere over time. Thus, it would lead to a more in-depth investigation of the issue under review in a friendly environment of respect and trust (ibid.). I took the role of a facilitator, establishing an autonomy-supportive environment in which participants decided upon possible meeting times, organisation of single-sex groups, and other aspects which will be discussed later. It was a friendly environment in which their voices were listened to and privileged. Employing such a dynamic and interactive method proved successful, demonstrating its great potential (Lamb and Little, 2016).

Another prominent feature of focus group discussion was its developmental design which targeted awareness-raising (Lamb and Little, 2016). I used this approach to help participants raise their consciousness of their L2 identities and motivations in order to become reflective learners and teachers (see section 4.1.3.1). For more details, see chapter seven.

Six group discussions were arranged for each group for a three-month period, comprising eighteen discussions in total. I asked my research participants to choose between Arabic or English as the language of communication. They chose to communicate in English, reflecting their high-motivations to speak in the target language. However, Sinclair (1999) advises researchers to use participants' mother tongue so as to generate thick data, arguing that participants cannot be expected to eloquently articulate their knowledge pertinent to language learning in the target language. By the same token, Hennink et al. (2011) claim that it is quite hard to guess how the participants may understand the research questions if the target language is used as a medium of expression. In my research, though, participants happily opted to discuss in English, reflecting their "English-mediated identity" (Block, 2007, p. 144). In fact, they spoke fluently, representing their competence in English, its relatedness to their life, and hence used it autonomously and authentically (Ryan and Deci, 2002).

Using a digital voice recorder, all eighteen discussions were audio-recorded. I made sure to have a high-quality recording device which was truly reliable, as suggested by Lamb (2005). Therefore, I was neither confronted with any technical problems, nor were there any

misrecorded discussions. From an ethical standpoint (Wellington, 2015), I informed my research participants about the possibility of getting their discussions audio-recorded via the Participant Information Sheet (see appendix 3). Prior to the investigation, I asked for their written Informed Consent for recording, which they signed after reading the sheet and having the opportunity to ask questions (see appendix 4). After the first session, immediately, I ensured, once again, that the audio recording was of a high-quality.

Heeding Lamb's (2005) suggestion, the audio recording was indeed beneficial. Significantly, it facilitated the moderation of the discussions, helping me to primarily give full attention to the interaction in the groups instead of focusing on note-taking. In this respect, Arthur et al. (2014) maintain that the recording of the research data helps the researcher to listen to his participants attentively, and thus asking appropriate follow-up questions if necessary. They further argue that the researcher would be able to clearly notice the dynamic of the group with its development and change, providing a precise account of what was expressed verbally and non-verbally as well as reporting group interactions (*ibid.*).

Following Al-Sadi's (2015) proposition, recording the entire discussions helped me listen to the recordings over and over so that I could document group interactions precisely. In turn, this allowed me to deeply dive into the data and familiarise myself with its content (Braun and Clarke, 2006), leading to preliminary data analysis. Also, it helped me to interpret what the research participants have reported. Importantly, too, it helped me check my own interpretation and understanding what was reported during each group discussion with the same participants in the subsequent discussions.

4.2.4.1.1 The Discussion Guide and the Role of Theory

Badwan (2015) asserts the role of theory in formulating a set of questions for the group discussions. She maintains that the guiding literature can provide "guidance on what to address and how to interpret what is addressed" (Badwan, 2015, p. 101). While developing the prompts for focus group discussions, I referred to the existing literature to identify relevant topics to my research questions. In particular, I referred to the main theoretical frameworks guiding this study, including Dörnyei's (2009) L2 Motivation Self System and the Self-Determination Theory (Deci and Ryan, 2002). I also referred to the construct of integrativeness (Gardner, 1985) and Yashima's (2009) international posture. Prior to the

fieldwork, I was aware of how to phrase straightforward questions. To quote Badwan (2015), “big questions needed to be put in simpler terms, addressed through many sub-questions, and introduced at different intervals for consistency and evidence” (p. 101). Basically, the topics discussed in the focus groups were guided by the three research questions which informed the study. These three questions include the following areas:

1. The link between language learner identity, autonomy, and motivation through participation in virtual social spaces, as opposed to traditional language learning experiences.

2. Expressions of identities through cyberspace, as compared to offline contexts.

3. Self-reported judgements about the impact of this study on participants’ understanding of their English language, identity, and motivation (Autonomy, Competence, Relatedness).

In order to investigate these three areas in detail, I decided to divide each area into researchable questions to be asked in different sessions (see appendix 5 for the open-ended questions asked during focus group discussions). Therefore, I made a decision to conduct six focus group discussions with each group to investigate these issues with the research participants. The following discussion guide provides a summary of the six sessions and the topics featured in each session;

Topic	Session 1: Traditional English Language Learning Experiences in Formal Educational Contexts
Issues Discussed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Previous Schools <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Learning English at school 2. Students’ roles 3. Teachers’ roles 4. Peers’ roles 5. Learning conditions 6. Classroom facilities 7. Teaching methods 8. English language curriculum 9. Learning goals 10. Constraints

	<p>11. Behaviour in the Classroom</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • University <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Reasons for learning English at the university 2. Evaluation of university language learning experience 3. Comparison between English language experiences at school and the university. 4. Learning English outside the classroom • Attitudes to the English Language, EFL Teachers, and Immediate Family Context <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Attitudes to the English language 2. Investigation of whether teachers play a motivational role for participants to learn English or not 3. Investigation of whether participants belong to an English-speaking family or not 4. Investigation of whether participants speak English with their family or not
Topic	Session 2: Virtual English Language Learning through Social Technologies: Autonomy, Competence, and Relatedness
Issues Discussed	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Comfort level with technology 2. Learning English online: personal goals & learning agendas 3. Social technologies used and learning activities 4. Students' roles and responsibilities in the digital context 5. Evaluating online English language learning and monitoring learning progress 6. Communication with peers via online social spaces 7. Membership in online communities 8. Differences between online language learning and traditional classroom learning 9. Views on autonomy and responsibility through online social spaces
Topic	Session 3: Future L2 Selves (ideal and ought-to) and Expressions of Identities Online and Offline
Issues Discussed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ideal and ought-to <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Students' ideal Future Self 2. Investigation of possible uses of English in the future 3. Examples of English-using selves 4. Investigation of participants' L2 future selves (ideal and ought-to) and their potential influences on learning behaviours 5. Investigation of students' participation in Web 2.0 platforms in relation to their future L2 selves (ideal and ought-to) 6. Investigation of whether there is any obligation imposed on participants to learn English 7. Investigation of whether family/teachers/friends influence participants' learning of English

	<p>8. Investigation of participants' strategies used to achieve their future selves (ideal and ought-to)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Progress <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 9. Role of English in Oman 10. Investigation of whether English poses threats to participants' religious and national identities. 11. Investigation of whether it is essential for Omani nationals to learn English 12. Investigation of whether participation in English-speaking social technologies help or constrain participants' contribution to the national development of Oman 13. Investigation of whether there is any influence of the Omani culture in the English language 14. Status of technology in Oman 15. Participants' reasons to engage in social technologies 16. Investigation of whether social technologies support/constrain participants' expression of identities • International Posture <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 17. Status of English in the world 18. Investigation of whether participants prefer to communicate with English native speakers or with international speakers of English 19. Investigation of whether participation in English-speaking social technology limit/encourage students to communicate their ideas at an international level
Topic	Session 4: Affordances of Cyberspace
Issues Discussed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Giving participants the choice of a specific social technology that they are interested in to discuss its affordances. For example, group (A) chose Blogs, group (B) chose Twitter, and group (C) chose YouTube. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Investigation of whether participants have their personal Blog/Twitter/YouTube or not. Why/Why not? 2. Investigation of how they represent their personal digital platform. 3. Investigation of whether they keep academic Blog/Twitter/YouTube or not. Why/Why not? 4. Type of activities which participants engage in through blogging/tweeting/youtubing? 5. Advantages of Blogs/Twitter/YouTube 6. Investigation of whether these social platforms facilitate the expression of participants' identities. If so, how? 7. Investigation of whether these social technologies facilitate social communications and reflective discussions. If so, how? 8. Investigation of whether these social platforms generate critical thinking. If so, in what ways? 9. Views on peers' comments. 10. Investigation of whether participants integrate social technologies into their teaching practice. If so, how and why? 11. Investigation of whether these social technologies facilitate reflective teaching practice. If so, how? 12. Investigation of whether these social technologies help

	<p>participants develop their motivation. If so, how?</p> <p>13. Investigation of whether these social platforms are appropriate for language learning and teaching.</p>
Topic	Session 5: Reflections on Teaching Practicum
Issues Discussed	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Investigation of how participants visualise themselves as future EFL teachers 2. Investigation of whether participants integrate social technologies into their teaching practice 3. Investigate whether social technologies encourage or discourage participants' critical reflection on their teaching practices and learning strategies. 4. Views on the research methods being used in this study 5. Investigate whether participants would like to integrate the research methods in their future classrooms as teaching methods or not: why/why not? 6. Investigate whether participants would like to help their students realise their possible future selves (ideal and ought-to): how and why? 7. Investigate whether participants would like to contribute to the shaping of the technological applications for language learning in Oman: how and why? 8. Investigate whether participants encourage/discourage the integration of Web 2.0 technologies into language and teaching at a tertiary level: why or why not? 9. Investigate how online language learning could be linked to classroom learning 10. Investigate whether participants would like to recommend alternative ways of teaching and learning English in Oman: how and why?
Topic	Session 6: Self-reported judgements about the impact of this study on participants' understanding of their English language, identity, motivation (Autonomy, Competence, and Relatedness).
Issues Discussed	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Investigate how the present study could have influenced participants' sense of autonomy, relatedness, and competence 2. Investigate how the present study could have influenced participants' visions of their L2 future selves (ideal and ought-to) 3. Investigate participants' initial expectations of the research project before conducting the first conversational session 4. Investigate whether their expectations were similar or different from what they have actually experienced during the sessions 5. Investigate whether participants have gained any advantages by participating in these conversational discussions 6. Investigate whether participants have gained any advantages by writing their reflective language learning histories 7. Participants' evaluation of their participation in this research project 8. Investigate whether participants would like to participate in future research studies: why/why not? 9. Investigate whether participants would like to continue developing their language learning and teaching methodologies online

Table 4.1: Thematic Representation of the Discussion Guide

4.2.4.2 Collecting Introspective Language Learning Histories

This present study employs language learning histories (LLHs) as a research method so as to gain an insightful understanding of the participants' cognitive, emotional, and social aspects of their language learning experience (Little and Al Wahaibi, 2017). It should be noted that LLHs are employed to go over similar ground to the focus group, being used as triangulation. According to Holloway and Fulbrook (2001), triangulation can be "another form of establishing truth value" (p. 547). Issues of trustworthiness will be outlined in section 4.4.

Little and Al Wahaibi (2017) explain that "these histories are introspective research narratives written by language learners, reflecting critically on their past learning experiences and expressing their feelings with regard to these experiences" (p. 180). According to Weinglass (1990), feelings refer to "the general quality of mental, emotional, or physiological awareness" (p. 367; cited in Oxford, 1995, p. 583). Typically, feelings are neglected variables within the context of teaching and learning (*ibid.*). As such, utilising LLHs as a research method may help participants articulate their inner emotions (Richardson, 1994). Drawing on constructivism, the emotional responses expressed by language students' pertaining to their learning experiences can powerfully support them in building their meanings (*ibid.*). Importantly, too, language learning histories conjure up learners' critical reflection on their assumptions, including their false ones in order to rectify them (Mezirow, 1990).

Inevitably, introspective language learning histories through self-reflection encompass all forms of verbal reports to explore learners' cognitive processes (Matsumoto, 1994), capturing fundamentally affective and cognitive states. Also, these histories consider the contextual factor as a significant aspect of learners' narratives (Oxford, 1995). This view is supported by Rogoff's argument (1984) regarding the vitality of context in the mental events. In addition, language histories richly portray the culture of learning and the key roles of its participants (Oxford, 1995). Another significant aspect is the collective building of knowledge based on 'Vygotskyian social-interactive learning theory', which stresses the significance of support provided by others to construct meaning via interactive social communication (1981; cited in Little and Al Wahaibi, 2017). Therefore, language learning histories can vibrantly accentuate various dimensions related to participants' context, culture, and social communication.

According to Benson et al. (2013), learners' narratives are "a means of organising pieces of information that would otherwise lack coherence into meaningful sequences of events" (p.

24). They describe learners' stories as a glue which sticks together different fragmented dimensions of their identities. They affirm that a language student holds a unique narrative about his/her former experiences of learning, playing a vital role in determining his/her future learning possibilities and results (ibid.). They recommend that language educators and practitioners should raise students' awareness about their personal stories, identifying the similarities and differences between their stories and that of others, and thus support them to revisit or amend their stories in light of realising their desired results (ibid.).

Initially, I planned to use diaries, however, I finally decided to employ language histories as they provoke a wealth of emotions, since they mainly focus on the past instead of the present. "These histories often give a rich, multifaceted perspective and provide the distance of time that can lend wisdom" (Oxford, 1995, p. 583). Moreover, histories can powerfully raise learners' awareness regarding their language learning strategies (ibid.).

It is worth noting that all participants critically pondered upon their language learning histories. Fourteen language learning histories were composed by the research participants. Participants started composing their language learning histories following each discussion, and thus submitted their LLHs after the completion of their focus groups. Participating members of Group (A) submitted their language learning histories on the 3rd of May 2016 whereas members of group (B) submitted their LLHs on the 4th of May 2016. Participating members of group (C) submitted their histories on the 5th of May 2016. Participants were not restricted to particular guidelines. Importantly, participants were allowed to freely construct and own their stories, in congruence "with Ushioda's argument for placing the locus of control with the learner" (2011; cited in Little and Al Wahaibi, 2017, p. 180). In total, there were 36,411 words of written language learning histories (LLHs). The following table summarises the timeline of LLHs, indicating word length and chronological duration of the data:

Participants	Word Length	Chronological Duration of Data
FP1	1737	3/May /2016
FP2	1400	3/May /2016
FP3	1418	3/May /2016

FP4	1200	3/May /2016
FP5	4426	3/May /2016
FP6	2515	3/May /2016
FP7	4193	4/May /2016
FP8	1998	4/May /2016
FP9	2648	4/May /2016
FP10	1800	4/May /2016
FP11	1496	4/May /2016
MP12	5685	5/May /2016
MP13	1446	5/May /2016
MP14	4449	5/May /2016

Table 4.2: The Timeline of the Language Learning Histories

4.3 Searching for Ways Forward: Considering the Process of Data Analysis

In my research, the process of data collection and data analysis were concurrent during my fieldwork. Wellington (2015) postulates that the tasks of collecting and analysing the data need to be ongoing, rather than dividing the process into separate stages. Whilst considering my research questions, I was alert from the outset to the issue of forming searchable and analysable questions. As such, my qualitative and interpretive framework applies to the process of data collection and data analysis. Cohen et al. (2011) argue that the type of data analysis employed should fit the purpose of the research, because any framework adopted for data analysis will be essentially affected by the research aims, size of sample, and the adequacy of data obtained.

Initially, I researched a narrative analysis as an option of data analysis before settling on the current one. I decided on a thematic analysis to do justice to the considerable amount of data I

obtained and hence I avoided wasting my invaluable data, which could have been ethically problematic. For future publications, I will re-analyse my data from the narrative perspective, drawing out unique individual stories.

Due to the nature of my research study and its aims, I have considered qualitative thematic analysis (TA) (Clarke and Braun, 2017) as a suitable approach since it is quite flexible. This will be further discussed in section 4.3.2.

4.3.1 Considering Qualitative Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis includes organisation and explanation of the data obtained (Cohen et al., 2011). Put simply, the task of qualitative data analysis entails comprehending what the data means in relation to the phenomenon under exploration. Thus, I had to acquaint myself with the data, identifying recurring themes and categories. In a similar vein, Ritchie and Spencer (2002) maintain that the researcher's role with regard to data analysis is to essentially define, categorise, theorise, explain, explore, and map his/her data. In my case, I read my data from the two sources several times, so as to familiarise myself with the data, thus gaining an insightful understanding of my data.

Much has been written on qualitative research, offering researchers an abundance of ways to analyse qualitative data due to the fact that there is no singular, particular type of qualitative research (Cohen et al., 2011). This is, in turn, the greatest strength of qualitative research, as it employs various methods to gain an exhaustive understanding of the issue being investigated (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). Therefore, I decided to embrace a qualitative interpretive approach, using thematic analysis to analyse my data, which will be further elucidated in the following section.

4.3.2 Selecting Qualitative Thematic Analysis (TA)

The term analysis indicates separating a whole into its core elements (Wellington, 2015). Data analysis includes the application of a variety of systematic steps, like assembling of data, coding of data, comparison of data, interpretation of data, and reporting the findings (Burns, 2010). Thereby, a researcher should have a theoretically and empirically robust method for applying such processes. In this respect, Attride-Stirling (2001) maintains that it is important to carry out data analysis in a methodological way so as to generate meaningful findings. Considering the aims of my research, I employed a method of data analysis,

offering precise and meaningful accounts of participants' language learning experiences, and highlighting the expressions of L2 future selves as well as providing accounts of their autonomous efforts to engage in English-speaking social technologies. In this respect, I explored my data for important themes and recurring constructs pertaining to the research questions and the theoretical frameworks adopted as well as other relevant literature. This will be detailed later (see section 4.3.5). As such, I employed a qualitative thematic analysis to sensibly understand my data, thus better addressing my research questions. In this respect, Clarke and Braun (2017) maintain that thematic analysis

provides accessible and systematic procedures for generating codes and themes from qualitative data ... The aim of TA is not simply to summarize the data content, but to identify, and interpret, key, but not necessarily all, features of the data, guided by the research question ... The emphasis is on producing rigorous and high-quality analysis; TA has in-built quality procedures such as a two-stage review process (where candidate themes are reviewed against the coded data and the entire data-set... TA can be used to identify patterns within and across data in relation to participants' lived experience, views and perspectives, behavior and practices (p. 297).

According to Clarke and Braun (2017) as well as Bryman (2016), thematic analysis is a commonly adopted method in qualitative enquiry, providing a flexible and accessible analytic approach. Its flexibility can be seen through its capacity to allow the investigator to pinpoint the recurring themes in diverse ways. As identified by Bernard et al. (2016), a theme is an abstract concept which combines similarly relevant expressions in the data. According to Attride-Stirling (2001), thematic analyses help explore salient themes in written forms, describing various categories in the data obtained (Clarke and Braun, 2014). Also, the process of thematic data analysis includes the categorisation and organisation of themes in a meaningful manner, thus inferring new theories and valid justifications from them. Thematic analysis could also be employed for both deductive (theory-driven) and inductive (data-driven) approaches to data analysis (Clarke and Braun, 2017).

It is worth mentioning, though, this is not solely unique to the analytic thematic approach. For instance, Bryman (2012) states that most qualitative approaches to data analysis involve exploring themes which can be similarly conducted in narrative analysis, content analysis, critical discourse analysis, and grounded theory. In this regard, he maintains that thematic analysis is not an analytic method in its own right. Put simply, most analytical methods include thematic analysis, albeit without being specifically named (Braun and Clarke, 2013).

These writers maintain that qualitative thematic analysis is a rigorous approach to data analysis since it presents robust guidelines for the analysis and interpretation of qualitative data (Braun and Clarke, 2012).

The analytical method I used is not only concerned with participants' reported experiences, but is also concerned with the exploration and interpretation of such experiences to comprehend them through the eye of the research participants in their immediate social world. A good thematic analysis tries to make participants' constructions of their social context explicit.

In summary, Braun and Clarke (2006) explain that thematic analysis comprises of six important phases. First of all, the researchers should get familiar with their data. Second, they should identify initial codes. Third, they should further explore recurring themes. Fourth, they should revise themes. Fifth, they should define, describe, and term their themes. Sixth, they should write their reports. Getting familiar with the data requires initially transcribing them, which will be further outlined in the following section. It also entails thorough readings, and then jotting down initial views. Thus, I first transcribed and then coded the data gathered from the focus groups and the language learning histories (LLHs). Data coding and theme development will be further illustrated later (see section 4.3.5).

4.3.3 Transcribing the Focus Group Discussions

After recording the group discussions, it was imperative to carry on data transcription of the verbal records before conducting data interpretation. From my own perspective, data transcription constitutes a fundamental phase in the broader process of data analysis instead of viewing it as a separate phase in its own right. According to Polkinghorne (2005), changing the original recorded speech into written texts through the process of transcription aims to provide rich details and "to-and- fro reading" entailed in analysing qualitative data (p. 142). Nevertheless, Gibbs (2007) argues that such conversion of forms brings about valid concerns regarding the fidelity of the converted data, and thus questioning how accurate such interpretations of data are. Gibbs goes on even further to argue that the core issue does not lie in the accuracy of data transcription, but rather in whether it presents a meticulously sincere effort to mirror some dimensions of the interview or not (ibid.). Albeit transcribing qualitative data provides nuanced investigation of participants' responses, it necessarily consumes considerable effort and time (Gibbs, 2007). Thereby, investigators should wisely

decide if their research demands a fully transcribed data, or rather target specific aspects of the data. Making this decision is driven by how congruent it is with the purpose of the study. There is no specific standard of qualitative data transcription although some authors have introduced particular transcription (Flick, 2014). Some analysis only requires selected phrases, sentences, or passages pertinent to the research questions or the theoretical framework adopted (McLellan et al., 2003). This is in congruence with the view of Strauss (1987), maintaining that it is quite reasonable to only transcribe the needed parts which are guided by the research question. Nonetheless, McLellan et al. (2003) argue that if an analysis entails the provision of a rich description of individuals' experiences, lengthy texts are, thus, required in the transcript. In my case, I opted for a full transcription of the focus group discussions, since the purpose of my research is to mirror the participants' experiences and interpretations of their language learning experiences. It should be noted that I left participants' quotes intact, including their grammatical and spelling mistakes.

Although data transcription was such a long and arduous process, it was fruitful, as it allowed me to get close to my data. To achieve accurate transcription, I had to listen to each discussion record, at least, three times. In case of low volume or unclear pronunciation, I needed to play back the recording more than three times in order to avoid mishearing or misinterpreting of words, as altering one word can change the meaning of the entire phrase, which leads to missing significant themes or rather including non-existent themes (Easton et al., 2000). Accordingly, I decided to conduct the task of data transcription myself to prevent unnecessary pitfalls of transcription. This was to guarantee that all details of the focus group discussions were included and given sufficient attention. This is in alignment with the suggestion made by Easton et al. (2000) that the investigator should ideally conduct the task of interviewing and transcription themselves. Importantly, too, I decided to conduct data transcription myself because of my ethical commitment towards my participants in terms of confidentiality and anonymity. Another reason for transcribing my data is to be familiar with its content by listening carefully to the recordings and checking the accuracy of the transcripts, thus functioning as an initial stage of my data analysis (see section 4.3.4). By the same token, Gibbs (2007) maintains that by carrying out the task of transcription, researchers get the chance to commence data analysis. Another potential benefit of not assigning the task of transcription to another transcriber is to minimise issues of misunderstanding the Omani-English accent used by some participants, or perhaps misunderstanding the context under

study as well as the topic under investigation. In this respect, Na Nongkhai (2018) maintains that transcription entails a robust understanding of the “contextual background” (p. 120).

As stated earlier, I fully transcribed my eighteen focus group discussions, making a detailed account of spoken utterances. In total, there were (180,226) words of transcript from all focus group discussions, without the data collected from the language learning histories. I also decided to transcribe the discussions in their chronological order in which they were carried out with the groups, thus providing me with a clear picture of how these discussions progressed over time in their breadth and depth. Besides that, it enabled me to see how similar and different the experiences of my participants are, thus creating links between such experiences, within each group session and across group discussions. Accordingly, I believe that my transcripts carried unique narratives about each discussion I had with my research participants, hence those stories deserved to be narrated. The following tables summarise the timeline of the discussions held for each focus group, indicating the number of session, duration, date, and word length:

- Group (A)

Number of Session	Duration	Date	Word Length
Fist Session	02:33:96	1/Feb/2016	18107
Second Session	03:07:19	15/Feb/2016	18698
Third Session	02:46:21	29/Feb/2016	16567
Fourth Session	01:28:16	14/March/2016	8529
Fifth Session	01:48:24	28/March/2016	11952
Sixth Session	01:07:32	25/April/2016	6910

Table 4.3: The Timeline of the Focus Group Discussions (Group A).

- Group (B)

Number of Session	Duration	Date	Word Length
First Session	01:49:44	4/Feb/2016	13577
Second Session	01:29:35	18/Feb/2016	10542
Third Session	00:52:50	3/March/2016	6440
Fourth Session	01:03:50	17/March/2016	7190
Fifth Session	00:57:24	31/March/2016	7188
Sixth Session	00:46:28	27/April/2016	5169

Table 4.4: The Timeline of the Focus Group discussions (Group B).

- Group C

Number of Session	Duration	Date	Word Length
First Session	01:55:40	8/Feb/2016	10674
Second Session	02:24:55	22/Feb/2016	11397
Third Session	02:05:46	7/March/2016	9747
Fourth Session	01:09:11	21/March/2016	6990
Fifth Session	01:11:57	4/April/2016	6921
Sixth Session	00:35:31	28/April/2016	3628

Table 4.5: The Timeline of the Focus Group Discussions (Group C).

4.3.4 Data Immersion: Initial Procedures for Data Analysis

As mentioned earlier, I initially started my data analysis during each group discussion, jotting down key themes immediately. Also, my initial data analysis took place after each discussion, making notes of pre-defined themes and their subcategories. In fact, it took place much earlier than the supposedly formal phase of data analysis. I was genuinely eager to listen to

the recordings of the group discussions, thus familiarising myself with the data and becoming aware of the recurring issues expressed by participants. This also helped me to ponder upon what was articulated by the research participants after each session. In this sense, Wellington (2015) stresses the importance of carrying out the process of data analysis early so as to potentially shape subsequent data collection, and perhaps affect the emergent design of the research. This is in congruence with Bryman (2016) and Gibbs (2007), pointing to the interconnection between the collection of data and its analysis where initial analysis of data inevitably results in influencing future collection of data. Indeed, reflecting on my data at a very early stage helped me check my interpretation and understanding of the data with the research participants whilst being in the fieldwork, and thus directing and shaping the following group discussions.

Whilst immersing myself in the data (Willis, 2010), I was able to see how my participants were constructing their social world by sharing stories about their language learning, and essentially reflecting on such experiences. Also, I started identifying the key patterns of meaningful issues in my data which functioned as a helpful step towards the coding process. Data coding will be explained in the following section.

4.3.5 Phases of Data Coding and Theme Development

Following data transcription, I undertook a thorough procedure for coding data and developing themes to ensure a rigorous approach to thematic data analysis. First of all, I read my transcripts word for word to closely connect with my data and thoroughly understand my participants' views. Second, I summarised my data from both focus group discussions and language learning histories. I summarised each transcript by identifying the ideas stated by the research participants in relation to the questions posed by the researcher during the focus group discussions (for further details on the discussion protocol, see appendix 5). It should be noted that all participants' ideas were considered equally valuable. This process of summarising each transcript helped me to make sense of the raw data, thus jotting down potential themes. In the third phase, I started breaking down my data, categorising them, and coding them accordingly.

In qualitative research, coding is regarded a pivotal phase of data analysis (Bryman, 2016). It defines what aspects of the analysed data are exactly about. According to Punch (2014), codes are mainly labels used to meaningfully describe the elicited data. Hennink et al. (2011)

view them as the topics or opinions referred to by the participants. The coding process is illustrated by Auerbach and Silverstein (2003) as an organisational technique used for categorising the written texts in accordance with the recurring designs identified in that structure. Therefore, coding includes identifying and indexing the data which are relevant to the same idea (Gibbs, 2007). Drawing on Braun and Clarke (2006), “a qualitative thematic analysis approach was employed so that themes were identified and classified into initial broad categories” (Little and Al Wahaibi, 2017, p. 181). It should be noted, however, that themes and codes are not similar although they are used interchangeably in some studies. According to Clarke and Braun (2017), themes are broader than codes in terms of scope. To be more precise, they perceive codes as

the smallest units of analysis that capture interesting features of the data (potentially) relevant to the research question. Codes are the building blocks for themes, (larger) patterns of meaning, underpinned by a central organizing concept—a shared core idea. Themes provide a framework for organizing and reporting the researcher’s analytic observations (Braun and Clarke, 2017, p. 297).

After categorising my data into codes, I started the fourth phase by merging codes to form key themes. That is, I connected the codes and identified themes in both sources of data, using the three research questions (RQs) as headings. The process of clustering codes and developing themes under headings that are closely connected to the RQs will be exemplified later (see section 4.3.5.1). In the fifth phase, I further clustered the pre-determined themes. Crabtree and Miller (1999, p. 170) use the word “corroborate” to illustrate the conformation process to approve the research findings in order to avoid unintentional fabrication of evidence which could commonly occur during data interpretation in which researchers unconsciously see results that they expect to see. In this phase, I examined the earlier phases to confirm that “the clustered themes were representative of the initial data analysis and assigned codes” (Fereday and Muir-Cochrane, 2006, p. 90). Although the procedure for coding data and developing themes was described as a linear process, it was iterative in reality. It included many repetitions before proceeding to the interpretive stage where codes were mapped onto the theoretical frameworks adopted by the study. Wellington (2015) describes the coding process as a creative activity in the sense of making a decision regarding how to categorise and index overarching themes through the analysis. This process entails thorough readings and re-readings of the raw data to identify and develop themes (Fereday and Muir-Cochrane, 2006). Upon reflection, managing the process of data coding and theme

development was laborious and time-consuming. My initial codes were further modified and other codes were added, as I kept reading my transcripts over and over. Organisation and development of themes was also overwhelming. I continued reviewing, classifying, and changing my themes throughout the process of data analysis. Afterwards, I searched for overlapping codes and themes, merging them into core themes. It is worth mentioning that my research did not aim to generate a new theory, rather, I built on existing theories. Thus, I looked for relevant recurring themes to evaluate their relevance to the Omani context and extend their boundaries into the realm of L2 identity, motivation, and autonomy.

In the actual conduct of data coding, I decided not to use computer-assisted analysis for coding my data for different reasons. Personally, I felt happier analysing my data manually. I entirely agree that qualitative data analysis software programmes help researchers in organising and categorising their data in an accessible and easy manner (Rademaker et al., 2012), and thus rendering “the coding and retrieval process faster and more efficient” (Bryman, 2012, p. 593). However, I believe that software packages cannot meet the scope and depth of qualitative analysis I aimed to perform in my research data. Such analysis packages cannot perform the essential tasks of critical reading and interpreting on behalf of the investigator (Wellington, 2015; Gibbs, 2007). Besides that, they cannot identify relevant and significant themes voiced by the participants through diverse modes of expressions, including contradictions of thoughts. Thereby, human intelligence cannot be replaced by such software as they handle data analysis in a mechanical way. Rather, they could be of help in terms of indexing and preparing reports. In this respect, Wellington (2015) maintains that human input lies in exploring important patterns in the research data, looking for contrasting opinions. Also, using software programmes requires great attention to “follow the software’s procedures and terminology. Such attention may detract from the desired analytic thinking, energy, and decisions that are needed to carry out a strong analysis” (Yin, 2011, p. 176).

4.3.5.1 Evolution of the Coding Structure: Adopting a Deductive Approach

In my study, I mainly relied on the deductive approach, in which the coding of themes is informed by the research questions and the theoretical frameworks referred to, as well as the pre-defined questions developed as prompts for the focus group discussions, as will be outlined later. In this regard, Gibbs (2007) refers to such type of coding as ‘concept/analyst-driven coding’ or ‘conceptual coding’ whereas Wellington (2015) as well as Willis (2014)

refer to it as ‘a priori coding’. Hyde (2000) argues that the employment of a deductively theory-driven approach in a qualitative enquiry “can represent an important step towards assuring conviction in qualitative research findings” (p. 84).

As pointed out earlier, the major guiding themes identified in my present study are basically grounded on my research questions, thus drawing out three conceptual codes as follows:

1. The Link between Language Learner Identity, Autonomy, and Motivation through Participation in Virtual Social Spaces, as Opposed to Traditional Language Learning Experiences.
2. Expressions of Identities through Cyberspace, as Compared to Offline Contexts.
3. Self-reported Judgements about the Impact of this Study on Participants’ Understanding of their English language, Identity, and Motivation (Autonomy, Competence, Relatedness).

After checking the three listed coding themes and comparing them with my research questions, I dived into my data by thoroughly reading the complete data sets. As such, I continued categorising my data under those three relevant categories identified earlier. Whilst I was immersed in my data corpus, I started to see how the core three themes were branching out into sub-themes. Accordingly, I developed further categories at two-sub levels. These sub-categories were driven by the pre-formulated questions developed for the focus group discussions, which were in turn informed by relevant literature. Qualitative data collected from the focus groups and the language learning histories were also mapped onto the theoretical frameworks referred to in my study, namely, Dörnyei’s L2 Motivational Self System (2009) and the Self-Determination Theory (Deci and Ryan, 2002). Yashima’s (2009) International Posture was referred to in the second research question to investigate its relevance to the context-under-study in Oman. The following sub-themes were listed under the overarching three themes:

- 1. The Link between Language Learner Identity, Autonomy, and Motivation through Participation in Virtual Social Spaces, as Opposed to Traditional Language Learning Experiences.**

- This theme was driven by research question one, and further divided into the following sub-theme, with origin of codes given in bullet points.

1.1 Language Learning Experience

- This was based on Dörnyei's Self Motivational System

1.1.1 Traditional Language Learning Experience in a Formal Educational Context

1.1.2 Teaching Methodology and Learning Scenario

1.1.3 English Language Curriculum: High vs. Low Achievers

1.1.4 Teachers' and Students' Roles: Authority vs. Passivity

1.1.5 Assessment and Evaluation Methods

- These sub-themes, including 1.1.1, 1.1.2, 1.1.3, 1.1.4 and 1.1.5, were driven by the the prompts for focus group discussion, session 1.

1.2 Comparative Experiences concerning Language Learning Contexts between School and Tertiary Education

- This was driven by the propmts for focus group discussion, session 1.

1.2.1 Curriculum and Teaching Methodology: Teachers' and Students' Roles

1.2.2 Evaluation and Assessment Methods: Teachers' and Students' Roles

1.2.3 Language Learning Resources: Students' Role

- These sub-themes, including 1.2.1, 1.2.2, 1.2.3, were also based on the prompts for focus group discussion, session 1.

1.3 Virtual Language Learning Experiences through Social Technologies: Autonomy, Relatedness, and Competence

- This theme was partly informed by research question one and the Self-Determination Theory.

1.3.1 Autonomy

1.3.2 Relatedness

1.3.3 Competence

- These sub-themes, including 1.3.1, 1.3.2, 1.3.3, were also driven by the Self-Determination Theory and the prompts for focus group discussion, session 2.

1.4 Learners' Attitudes Towards English Language throughout their Learning Experiences

- This was informed by Dörnyei's Self Motivational System and the prompts for focus group discussion, session 1.

1.4.1 Affective Disposition towards the English Language

1.4.2 Some Omani English Teachers as Role Models

1.4.3 Immediate Family Context: Social and Digital Milieu

- These sub-themes, including 1.4.1, 1.4.2, and 1.4.3 were informed by the prompts for focus group discussion, session 1.

1.5 Future Visions: L2 Self-Guides

- This was driven by research question one and Dörnyei's Self Motivational System.

1.5.1 Representations of Ideal L2 Selves

1.5.2 Ideal L2 Future Selves: Representations of their Realistic and Pragmatic Dimensions

1.5.3 Representations of Ought-to L2 Selves

1.5.4 Ideal and Ought-to: Reciprocal Relationship between L2 Future Selves

- These sub-themes, including 1.5.1, 1.5.2, 1.5.3 and 1.5.4 are guided by Dörnyei's Self Motivational System and the prompts for focus group discussion, session, 3, which was informed by relevant literature.

2. Expressions of Identities through Cyberspace, as Compared to Offline Contexts

- This Theme was based on research question two, and further divided into the following sub-theme, with origin of codes given in bullet points.

- 2.1 Expression of the Omani Identity and the Omani variety of English in Offline Contexts
- 2.2 Expression of a Bicultural Identity: National Progress of Oman through English in Offline Contexts
- 2.3 Identity Curatorship: Representation of the Omani-Islamic Identities through Cyberspace
- 2.4 Cultural and Religious Emissaries: Forming Ideal L2 Selves in relation to the Omani-Islamic Affiliations
- 2.5 Representation of Virtual Multicultural and Multifaith Communications: Engaging Omani-Islamic Identities
- 2.6 International Posture: Imposed and Displayed Selves in the context of Web 2.0

- The sub-themes, including 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4, 2.5 and 2.6 were driven by the theoretical frameworks, Yashima's (2009) International Posture, and the prompts for focus group discussions, session 3 & 4.

3. Self-reported Judgements about the Impact of this Study on Participants' Understanding of their English language, Identity, and Motivation (Autonomy, Competence, and Relatedness).

- This theme was guided by research question three, and further divided into the following sub-theme, with origin of codes given in bullet points.

- 3.1 Participants' developing sense of autonomy, relatedness, and competence
- 3.2 Motivation Development in relation to participants' English future selves
- 3.3 Motivation Development: participants' reflection on their teaching practicum and perspectives on improvements

- These sub-themes were driven by both theoretical frameworks and the prompts for focus group discussions, session 5 & session 6.

It should be noted that these themes re-appear as headings in chapter five, six, and seven, following the same format. At this stage, both data sets collected from the focus groups and the language learning histories coded under the three core themes and their subcategories presented above were readily organised for data analysis. The process of analysis followed

systematic stages. First of all, I arranged my entire data sets into themes and printed them off. Then, I started to scrutinise each set of data, noting participants' responses and jotting down any agreements or disagreements in their discussions. I finally reported their answers by a coding system of letters and numbers (see section 4.3.6), which was very helpful for extracting direct quotations during the write up stage.

4.3.6 Interpretations of Findings and Methods of Data Reporting

Building meaning is the key task of qualitative data analysis for interpreting and discussing what the data clearly states or what meaning is indirectly there to be explained (Flick, 2014). Therefore, I critically reflected on the implicit meanings of the data. At this stage, I gathered all themes and subthemes, including all relevant quotations from the raw data in separate Microsoft Word files to construct meanings, make links and develop interpretations. Initially, I described the themes and subcategories at a descriptive level. Later, I progressed to the interpretive level in which I connected those descriptive themes and subthemes to the wider sociocultural context of the research and the existing literature (Patton, 2002). Nevertheless, I am aware that by interpreting those themes in light of my deep knowledge of the cultural context of the study, there is a risk of a halo effect (Brannick and Coghlan, 2007). However, I addressed this issue during data analysis, and thus being constantly engaged in critical self-reflection (see section 4.1.4).

The last stage of data analysis includes thinking about how to coherently report the outcomes of the research so that the reader is able to follow the lines of argument (Burns, 2010). The existing body of literature points to various ways of introducing the findings of qualitative research. For example, Cohen et al. (2011) propose the following five methods of analysing and reporting qualitative data in congruence with the research aims: by groups, by individuals, by instrument, by research theme/issue, or by research questions. I will first explain data presentation by groups, indicating that the analysis focuses on the collective responses of each group and how such responses differ from those of other groups. In contrast, if the analysis focuses on presenting the responses of each participant pertinent to the issues being investigated, then the method of reporting is arranged by individuals. This type of analysis allows the investigator to introduce a full picture of an individual participant, and possibly aiming at presenting contrasting responses of an individual with those of other participating members. Also, analysis of data and reporting of the results can be conducted by

individual research instrument, thus requiring all related data collected through a specific instrument. In my research, I organised and presented my research findings by research questions and research issues. If the analysis, and so the reporting of results, is guided by research issue or theme, the researcher aims at including representative quotes from the data sets of individuals' answers concerning the research themes. Likewise, when the analysis and presentation of findings is driven by the research questions, the investigator is concerned with collecting different data sets to report a representative answer to each individual question posed by the research. Given the fact that my study is qualitative, thus reporting of data focuses on individuals' stories, rather than numbers. Surely, I did not present the whole data, yet I selected representative quotes across both sets of data.

It is worth noting, though, that some of these approaches to data reporting may risk losing the wholeness and integrity of answers articulated by an individual participant or a group since they focus on a collective response (Cohen et al., 2011). Accordingly, Wellington (2015) stresses the significance of investigator reflexivity. The investigator needs to exert great self-awareness regarding the research aims, the issue under investigation, the used methods for analysis and presentation of findings, as well as being cautious about his/her predilections and biases (for more details, see section 4.1.4).

Whilst collecting all related data pertinent to the research issue, such approach of data analysis and data reporting maintained the integrity and coherence of the data obtained. All relevant data drawn together from the focus group discussions and the language learning histories to give a collective answer to each research question. Hopefully, this method of data analysis and data presentation would remind the readership of the underlying motives behind the present study elucidated at the beginning of my thesis.

For data reporting, I began my analysis by anonymising my participants' names and using identifiers instead (Pfitzman and Köhntopp, 2001). As mentioned earlier, I had three single-sex groups, comprising of two female groups and one male group based on voluntary participation (for more details see section 4.2.2). Female participants were denoted by **FP** and male participants were referred to by **MP**. Each group were denoted by an alphabet as follows: **A**, **B**, and **C**. Group (**A**) included six female members identified by the following identifiers: *FP1*, *FP2*, *FP3*, *FP4*, *FP5*, and *FP6*. Group (**B**) consisted of five female members as follows: *FP7*, *FP8*, *FP9*, *FP10*, and *FP11*. Group (**C**) included three male

members as follows: *MP12, MP13, and MP14*. The researcher is referred to by the letter **R**. **LLH** denotes language learning histories written by participants. Focus group discussions are denoted as follows: **FGD**. I also used the numbers ranging from **(1)** to **(6)** to denote the chronological order of the thematic sessions arranged for the focus group discussions.

4.4 Characteristics of the Study Design: Trustworthiness

Reliability is deemed problematic in social sciences, as human actions are always in a state of change (Merriam, 1998). Therefore, the experiences of people are not essentially far more reliable than the experience of an individual person (*ibid.*). Replicating qualitative research does not guarantee similar results since the same data, with different people, or at different points in time, can be interpreted differently. Yet, this does not discredit the findings of any research (*ibid.*). Morgan (1983; cited in Guba and Lincoln, 1985) maintains that the quality criterion of a research is grounded on the assumptions of its paradigm, therefore, positivist criteria do not apply to constructivist research. Accordingly, it is imperative for researchers to state clearly what criteria are applicable to evaluate the quality of the research.

Since the present research is underpinned by a constructivist paradigm, the quality criteria referred to so as to evaluate positivist research are not appropriate for judging its quality. Thereby, trustworthiness is considered a quality parameter for making judgement of qualitative research, highlighting the issue of subjectivity and reflexivity as well as obtaining adequate data as essential criteria for judging qualitative studies (Morrow, 2005). Lincoln and Guba (1985) emphasise issues of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. In order to ensure the credibility of my research at the data collection stage, I validated my interpretations of the discussions I had with my participants at the beginning of each session by providing a summary of what they had discussed in the previous meeting so that misinterpretations of their responses could be avoided, thus ensuring a precise summary of their discussions and maximising the trustworthiness of my research (Bryman, 2016). I avoided asking leading questions, instead asking them to elaborate on meanings of words where appropriate. I also used member checks postanalysis (Cutcliffe and McKenna, 2002) after completing the analysis stage to validate participants' answers to my conclusions about them. Participants were invited to check my interpretations and make the needed modifications (see section 4.1.4). Holloway and Fulbrook (2001) argue that participants should be "given the opportunity to read the completed interview or a summary of the data to

check whether it represents their social reality” (p. 547). To ensure the credibility of my findings during the process of data analysis, I supported the coded themes with direct quotations derived from the raw data to confirm that interpretations of data are closely connected with the words of the research participants, as suggested by Feredy and Muir-Cochrane (2006). Drawing on Patton (2002), Feredy and Muir-Cochrane (2006) argue that “participants’ reflections, conveyed in their own words, strengthen the face validity and credibility of the research” (p. 82).

In the constructivist approach, transferability is equally valuable to generalisability or external validation in the positivist approach (Guba and Lincoln, 1985). According to Holloway and Fulbrook (2001), transferability indicates that “the findings or theoretical ideas emerging from one setting can be transferred to similar situations or participants” (p. 547). As such, it is vital to contextualise the research data and theories, meaning that they are presented within a particular context (ibid.). To this end, the present research offered thick description and nuanced details to allow any researcher who would like to make a transfer in order to reach a conclusion regarding whether transferability is possible or not.

Dependability indicates the stability of research outcomes over time (Guba and Lincoln, 1985). These researchers argue that credibility can adequately establish dependability, for there is no credibility if the research findings are not dependable (Guba and Lincoln, 1989). Put simply, having demonstrated that the research is credible, there is no need to manifest the criterion of dependability separately (ibid.).

Confirmability indicates that the research findings are basically based on the data (Guba and Lincoln, 1989). Thus, the integrity of this research is ensured through referring to the raw data upon which it is grounded, including focus group discussions and the language learning histories.

I embraced a reflexive and rigorous approach to increase the trustworthiness of my study. Throughout my research journey, I kept a personal diary, documenting different information about myself and the methodological decisions I made along with their justifications. Borg (2001) argues that a reflective research journal helps researchers better grasp various phases of the entire research process, airing their intellectual and affective dimensions such as opinions, excitements, anxieties, and ambiguities, as suggested by Merriam (1998). Drawing

on Walford (2000), Lamb (2007) emphasises the value of keeping a research journal “as a record of events or conversations, as a planner of future activity, and as a receptacle of ideas and thoughts, sometimes of feelings” (p. 107). It is worth noting, though, that I did not use my journal as a method for data collection. In fact, I used it to explicitly express any concerns, challenges or dilemmas I was confronted with, thus addressing them by investigating potential solutions and bringing them forward. My reflective journal also helped me further develop my preliminary thoughts, and thus being tangibly shaped to facilitate in-depth analysis, as proposed by Borg (2001). Importantly, too, research journals could assist the researchers in writing their methodology chapters, reminding them of the justifications behind their methodological choices decided upon earlier (Silverman, 2000). I also applied particular measures to further ensure the quality of my research, ensuring its rigour and credibility. For example, I used ‘method triangulation’ to increase the credibility of the research findings (Brown, 2014). That is, I gathered data from two sources, including focus group discussions and language learning histories. Wallace (1998) states that collecting data from more than one source can increase the credibility of a study. It should be noted that triangulation was not implemented in this study to “confirm any truth” (Al Riyami, 2016, p. 210). Instead, I used triangulation to get a thick description of the issue under question (Holliday, 2010). Besides that, the study provided authentic data on the topic under review through exploratory design, hence retaining a sense of interactivity, dynamism, and spontaneity, as argued by Al-Sadi (2015). I believe that this research can be replicated and adapted by other investigators in diverse settings since it “describes in detail the decision-making processes of the researcher as well as the context and setting, and enables readers of the research to judge its credibility, rigour and quality” (Holloway and Fulbrook, 2001, p. 548). This study demonstrates rigour by offering cogent arguments, thus justifying my methodological choices with insight and balance, as suggested by Higgs (2001). Rigour is also demonstrated by “preserving the participants subjective point of view and acknowledging the context within which the phenomenon was studied” (Fereday and Muir-Cochrane, 2006, p. 82). As a researcher, I believe that I have showed ‘transparency’, revealing to the reader how the study was conducted from the outset (Holliday, 2010). I have detailed the decision-making process regarding data collection and analysis (ibid.). I have also explained the stages of carrying out the study, from the selection of research methods, how they were employed and analysed (ibid.). Relatedly, the present research aimed at reaching ‘substantive validation’ which indicates the researcher’s extensive understanding of

his/her topic based on relevant studies, and thus documenting this process in his/her research (Creswell, 2013). That is, I began my research by reviewing the existing body of literature on L2 identity, motivation, autonomy, and cyberspace. Thus, I built on these studies through critical reading and managed to identify the research lacuna.

Now, I turn to the overall qualities of my study design, believing that they have significantly added to the improvement of the research quality. For instance, I established rapport with my research participants, allowing them to ask questions about myself and the conduct of study. Additionally, I encouraged my research participants to ask for further explanation of any construct or question which they could not fully comprehend. Moreover, I put efforts to help participants see the relatedness of the topic under review to their own life by reflecting on relevant issues. Given the fact that I did not hold a teaching position at the time of investigation or rather I was not their instructor may have prevented participants' fear or reluctance of raising issues related to their immediate learning and teaching situation. Finally, the research was carried out in an ethical manner, as will be further outlined below.

4.5 Ethical Considerations

Certain measures are to be carefully considered to confirm that the research study is carried out in an ethical manner, beginning from the study design, to data analysis, to the write-up and dissemination of the findings. According to May (2001), ethics is about establishing codes and formulating principles of moral behaviour. Similarly, Borg and Gall (1983) emphasise that, while planning a research study, the researcher assumes the responsibility to evaluate its ethical acceptability.

4.5.1 Informed Consent

It is also ethically essential to take into consideration certain procedures while embarking on a research study that includes human participants. The first step is thus concerned with obtaining an official permission to undertake a specific research in the target community (Cohen et al., 2011). Therefore, I asked for official permission from the Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Academic Affairs to be allowed to meet the Education students in their college, after introducing a general picture of my research aims and its benefits. Second, the researcher must gain the participants' consent before gathering information from them (Borg and Gall, 1983). Burgess (1989) illustrates that informed consent implies that the participants have a full understanding of what the study is about, and will involve. Therefore, the

participants of the present research were asked if they were willing to take part in this study or not. I clearly informed them about their right to withdraw from the study at any time if they wish to do so due to any kind of unexpected reasons. Accordingly, they were given consent forms to be signed after giving them a full disclosure of the nature of the research (see appendix 4). In particular, I addressed the significance of my research and its potential results without declaring any promises during focus group discussions. I emphasised clearly that no one would have access to data except myself and my supervisor (Borg and Gall, 1983). Thus, the participants' right to confidentiality was ensured. In terms of anonymity, participants' names were not disclosed, nonetheless, they were identified by identifiers. Third, another ethical concern was the research context. Henn et al. (2006) maintain that the issue of power which some people exert to resist an investigator's research may also influence the results of any study. Thus, if a researcher exercises a powerful influence on his participants, the findings of the research will be affected. Since the relations of power is quite inequitable in the Omani educational system, I sought voluntary participation, where students did not feel obliged towards the research, by explaining explicitly to them that I am only a researcher with no influential power over their academic assessment. As mentioned earlier, participants were not forced in any way to participate in the study. I also clarified to them that there were neither right nor wrong responses in order to prevent any inhibition of contributions which may lead to impoverished quality of the data I aimed to elicit. They were encouraged to express their perceptions freely and openly without feeling pressured to speak or act according to what is considered acceptable within the Omani educational context. More importantly, they were made aware that they would not be harmed in any way. I also gave them the choice of whether to form mixed or gendered focus groups.

4.5.2 Ownership and Voice

Besides ensuring that the research procedures were conducted rigorously, another ethical consideration was related to the ownership of participants' stories and the influence of representation (Little and Al Wahaibi, 2017). Who basically owns the narratives? The research inevitably led to a collective experience given its constructivist approach. That is, participants' experiences were co-constructed. Thus, were the narratives to be collectively shared? As such, I amalgamated each group's stories. The analysis occasionally represents participants' narratives "as groups, emphasising the group as a unit of analysis" (Little and Al Wahaibi, 2017, p. 181). At times, though, I illustrated unique individual stories, focusing on

the participant as a unit of analysis. Even more importantly, my identity and experiences perhaps shaped my interpretations, and hence constituted a significant aspect of the general result of data analysis. To this end, in order to understand my role as a researcher, I was reflective and reflexive, maintaining self-awareness of my own perceptions and what the research set out to explore (see section 4.1.4). I was also committed ethically to represent the participants' diverse perspectives as truthfully as possible for reality is multiple. According to Gibbs (2007), individuals differ in their perceptions and interpretations of their social world as they try to sensibly comprehend their varied experiences.

In a nutshell, "ethical considerations override all others" as emphasised by Wellington (2015, p. 113). Thus, a researcher is held accountable for abiding by the research ethics. Generally, the present research conformed to the key ethical principles in relation to anonymity, confidentiality and informed consent (Burgess, 1989).

4.6 Reflective Concluding Thoughts

This chapter is deemed significant in any research, pointing to the value of embracing a transparent approach to the overall research design, my epistemological and ontological position, data analysis, and data reporting. As such, this chapter has aimed at maintaining such a clarity and transparency, thus describing and justifying my theoretical framework which underpins the process of data collection, data analysis, and data presentation. I have also attempted to explicitly describe and explain the research methods employed for data collection and the procedures I followed to gain access to the research location, detailing the actual conduct of the focus group discussions and the language learning histories. I have also pointed to important ethical considerations and trustworthiness of the research.

Indeed, the process of writing this chapter has been informative. That is, it has broadened and deepened my understanding of the basic questions regarding what I need to research and why, allowing me to reasonably decide on my research methods and thus justify my decisions. Writing this chapter has also contributed significantly to my understanding of the fundamental philosophical issues which I became truly interested in after embarking on my research. Importantly, too, writing this chapter has raised my understanding of the technical dimensions pertinent to data analysis and ethical considerations, making them clearly explicit to form the foundation for the readership to evaluate the quality of my research. Therefore, I have attempted to establish a constructive and critical dialogue regarding the possibly diverse

ways in which the issue under investigation can be explored. Different dimensions of my research design and application could potentially be replicated elsewhere and even evaluated.

Chapter Five

The Link between Language Learner Identity, Autonomy, and Motivation through Participation in Virtual Social Spaces

5. Introduction

This chapter addresses the first research question concerning learners' identities, motivation, and autonomy with reference to Dörnyei's (2009) L2 motivational Self System (L2MSS), as well as Deci and Ryan's (2002) Self-Determination Theory (SDT). The question is formulated as follows: what role does participation through virtual social spaces play in the development of female and male Omani EFL student-teachers' identity, autonomy, and motivation, as opposed to traditional language learning experiences?

To be more precise, this present study sets out to integrate the key principles of SDT into Dörnyei's L2 Motivational Self System grounded on the premise that autonomy is universally the foundation of motivation (Noels, 2009). According to Lanvers (2017a),

the L2 Motivational Self System, together with key SDT concepts, can provide an appropriate theoretical framework for incorporating different dimensions influencing the learner, from the very individual, to the macro-level, such as socio-linguistic and political dimensions (p. 224).

Lanvers (2017a) explains the overlaps between L2MSS and SDT, highlighting that the Ideal L2 Self is connected with "intrinsically regulated motivation" and Ought-to L2 Self is connected with "extrinsically regulated motivation" (p. 224). In her study, Lanvers (2016) focuses on the developmental dimensions of motivation, investigating the "continuum of intrinsic-extrinsic determination" (p. 83). In my study, though, SDT key concepts of autonomy, competence, and relatedness would be integrated into the L2 Motivational Self System, aiming to gain nuanced experiences of language learners with respect to their fundamental human needs within their language learning context. The considerable contribution of the learning context to learners' motivation has been stressed by many authors (Lanvers, 2017a, 2016; Murphy, 2014; Dörnyei, 2009; Clément et al., 2007). According to Noels (2009), various contextual dimensions can profoundly shape students' learning experiences, and, mutually, students can shape their learning context so as to fulfil their needs and aspirations. In essence, these innate needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness would feed reciprocally into students' learning experiences. The more the learners feel that their basic tendencies are satisfied, the more they exhibit motivated engagement in language

learning (ibid.). With that particular reference to autonomy in language learning, both models are deemed suitable for this research which explores the relationship between language learner identity, autonomy, and motivation through participation in virtual social spaces, as opposed to traditional language learning experiences. The digital context affords higher level of autonomy than traditional educational contexts, as students have increased control over what, how, and when to study.

To respond to the first research question, I will commence with analysing and interpreting learners' L2 learning experience which forms a significant aspect of Dörnyei's self-based model to better account for motivational and (de)motivational influences of contextual factors, and hence explore what necessarily encourages them to participate in virtual social spaces. Conceptually, the construct of L2 learning experience diverges considerably from the two self-guides since they are future-oriented (Moskovsky et al., 2016). Thereby, Dörnyei (2009) encourages future researchers to expound on the two self-guides through a bottom-up process. Secondly, I will explore participants' future selves. The first focus group discussion was devoted to exploring traditional language learning experience in a formal educational context, whereas the second focus group discussion was geared towards addressing virtual language learning experience through social technologies. Participants' future selves were explored in the third focus group discussion.

This chapter is structured according to the coding framework presented in chapter four. To begin with, a general introduction to language learning experience is offered, followed by a discussion on traditional language learning experience in a formal educational context. Comparative experiences concerning language learning contexts between school and tertiary education is presented. Afterwards, I will present the virtual language learning experiences through social technologies. I will also discuss learners' attitudes towards English language throughout their learning experiences, followed by a discussion on affective disposition towards the English language. An illustration of some Omani English teachers as role models is offered afterwards. I will also discuss immediate family context. Discussion of the qualitative differences between participants' language learning experiences in traditional and virtual contexts is presented, followed by a discussion around future L2 selves. The last section concludes with comparative concluding thoughts on the topic.

5.1 Language Learning Experience

Although the present study is mainly concerned with students' participation in the digital social space to explore the connection between language learner identity, autonomy, and motivation, I would argue for the vitality of exploring their experiences at the wider institutional level to understand what essentially motivates them to engage in the virtual world, and hence allow a comparison of instances of identity expression, autonomy and motivation evidenced via Web 2.0 engagement, and via traditional media. Also, participants' experiences at school could be deemed as insightful grounds for further exploring and comprehending their current motivations and experiences at the tertiary level (Na Nongkhai, 2018). Therefore, it seemed reasonable to trace back their earlier experiences of language learning at school level because self-concept is usually associated with information stemmed from one's past experiences (Dörnyei and Kubanyiova, 2014; Dörnyei, 2009). According to Thompson and Liu (2018), "[t]he learning experience is a compilation of past and current experiences of a language learner, which affect the language learning process" (p. 2). As pointed out earlier, crucial components of Self-Determination Theory were also referred to, probing its potential link to the current research on identity and self, and pursuing its relevance to the developing EFL settings. Self-Determination Theory associates self-identity with the social context by implying that learning situations which help satisfy three assumed innate human needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness, can also function to support internalising external regulations into the self (McClelland, 2013). Thereby, such internalisations can result in improved functioning and increased wellbeing in diverse contexts (Reeve et al., 2004). To me, it seems evident that the socio-cultural context plays a vital role in shaping the motivational orientations of learners in relation to this theoretical framework.

As such, the theme of the first focus group discussion was pertinent to their traditional language learning experiences at institutional levels, encompassing teaching methodology, curriculum, evaluation methods, students' and teachers' roles. Besides that, their autonomous efforts outside classroom confines through digital social spaces were also highlighted and discussed in the second group session. Inseparably, too, the data unfolded participants' attitudes towards English language learning, representing an essential component of Dörnyei's tripartite model (2009) which examines participants' experiences of immediate learning context in an effort to eventually gain a better grip on their L2 learning experience,

therefore, how such experience might affect their motivation, identity, and autonomy. Interestingly, though, the data revealed an interesting sub-theme regarding the immediate family context, subsuming immediate social milieu and digital global milieu which inevitably played a motivational role in the participants' language learning experiences.

It seems pertinent to mention, herein, that my participants aspired to be heard in an effort to make changes to the current Omani educational system, which was discussed in-depth in chapter two. Therefore, I left long quotes intact, where it appeared necessary to do so, to maintain the narrative of the original voice. Overall, though, I occasionally tended to argue across participants. Generally, participants exhibited similar tendencies, yet each of them had a very distinct and unique language learning experience.

5.1.1 Traditional Language Learning Experience in a Formal Educational Context

Many authors emphasise the contribution of the learning context to the overall language learning process (Alqahtani, 2018; Na Nongkhai, 2018; Al-Mahrooqi and Denman, 2014). According to Freeman and Johnson (1998), the teaching and learning context can be regarded as a socio-cultural terrain. Thus, exploring students' formal language learning situation is an indispensable part of the holistic portrait of their overall language learning experiences. The underlying claim was that their current experiences at the tertiary education are considerably affected by their various experiences at the school education, and hence such practices are anticipated to be developed out of those past experiences. As such, it appeared sensible to first explore their past experiences at school to see how they influentially shaped their motivation towards language learning at tertiary education.

The findings showed that the participants across all the three groups did not begin learning English at the same age due to the two concurrent educational systems running throughout the sultanate of Oman, namely, the General Education System and the Basic Education System. The first one introduced the English subject at grade four onwards whereas the latter introduced English right from grade one. The justification behind applying two systems simultaneously was that the Basic Education System was introduced at different phases throughout the country. As such, it was applied gradually at the Omani schools in all the regions. Nevertheless, the data unfolded almost the same concerns regarding the teaching methodology and learning scenario, the English language curriculum, teachers' and students'

roles, as well as assessment and evaluation methods. These elements will be discussed respectively in the following sections.

To begin with, it is important to illustrate the physical learning conditions, as it is considered a significant part of the language learning experience in Dörnyei's L2MSS (2009), encompassing classroom and curriculum, etc. In fact, participants expressed general comments in this regard as a backdrop to the existing situation, presenting over-crowded classes as a justification behind some overlapping pedagogical issues. The following conversational excerpt further illustrates such environment;

In a school, you would find maximum of four students who knew little English and most of them did not even know how to write their names in English. With regard to the classroom conditions, it was really horrible. You would find forty students in a class. So, it was really devastating for some areas (MP13, group C, 1 FGD).

This finding is congruent with that of Al-Jadidi (2009), indicating that classrooms in Oman are very large with an average number of varied ability students between thirty to thirty-five. She explains that such learning and teaching situation negatively influence students' motivation and performance since they cannot view the intrinsic value of the English language. This is clearly illustrated in the following quote; "there were not many reasons to improve yourself in English as the learning environment was very poor" (MP13, group C, 1 FGD). This finding further supports the argument made by Al-Mahrooqi et al. (2016), arguing that language learning context exerts significant effects on language learning in different ways.

It should be noted here that different elements of the teaching and learning context are inevitably overlapping due to its interwoven nature, however, I tried to present them in separate sections for the sake of clarification. Still, though, some interrelated issues appeared as interpretation of the data took place.

5.1.1.1 Teaching Methodology and Learning Scenario

The data revealed that the participants seemed to comprehend the significance of the broader learning context in the learning process as they critically described and criticised the teaching and learning situation, highlighting its varying dimensions and roles. For example, a female participant expressed such concerns through her language learning history, being critical of

the whole learning context and, in particular, the use of Arabic in the English lessons (FP8, LLH). She wrote eloquently;

At school, we were taught to get the grammar of the language. Most of the instruction was concerning grammar and little bit of emphasis on vocabulary (but it was delivered in non-authentic way through drilling). Many of the teachers followed the Grammar Translation method and that disadvantaged us a lot. They refer to L1 very often and their pronunciation was not correct in many cases (FP8, LLH).

Another female participant seemed very concerned about the heavy emphasis placed on teaching the tightly prescribed curriculum rather than on the learning gains, stating that; “our teachers were not very creative in giving their lessons. Their main duty was to cover the content of the curriculum” (FP3, LLH). Likewise, a female participant reported that teaching methodology was solely restricted to the textbook (FP9, LLH). She also criticised her unqualified teacher; “the teaching methods were primarily dependent on the book. Facilities were not provided and even if there is a way to bring them, the teacher had no idea how to use them and for what” (FP9, LLH). These findings chime with that of Al-Mahrooqi and Denman (2018), as well as that of Al Riyami (2016), criticising the prevalent practices of EFL situation in the Omani education system and discussing serious issues pertaining to the language curriculum and teacher training (see chapter one, section 1.1, for more details). However, this seems to run counter to the aims of ELT reform in Oman which sets out to promote learner-centred teaching methodology, and thus allowing learners to exercise increasing roles for their learning process (Borg, 2006).

Again, similar expressions were echoed by the male group, depicting various dimensions of the teaching methodology and learning scenario in the Sultanate. English language was taught as a subject, neglecting its communicative function. The following conversation extract reveals part of the scene;

(MP13) teachers do not focus on the communicative aspect of English. The teaching method was more of a lecturing by the teacher and students listening. Students did not talk. The teacher made 90% of the talk.

(MP14) learning conditions were very poor and the teacher was following the syllabus, trying only to spoon-feed the students. They were only giving students information without actually interacting with them (Group C, 1 FGD).

Participants' selected quotes are representative, reflecting similar trends across all the three groups. For example, participants depicted, over and over, detailed and critical pictures of the learning and teaching context in Oman. In particular, they criticised the teaching of English as a school subject instead of being taught as a communicative language. They were also displeased about teachers' over-dominance over the learning process, resulting inevitably in their sheer boredom. This finding is in tune with Al-Sadi's (2015) study in the Omani context. The following quote further emphasises this reality; "I did not like learning English at school because we were taught English as a curriculum only and not as a way of interaction" (FP4, group A, 1FGD). Participants also seemed critical of the rigid and weak curriculum, indicating absence of robust awareness regarding learning goals and importance of English and, overall, poor teaching and learning conditions, as is expressed in the following extract; "there was no variation in the use of the book or the teaching methods and even they didn't give us a purpose why do we have to learn English" (FP5, group A, 1FGD).

In general, the participants appeared to be very critical about the inflexible curriculum as they engaged in reflective conversations and pinpointed varying justifications for the existing situation of language learning and teaching, a finding in line with that of Al Mahrooqi and Denman (2014) as well as Al-Sadi (2015). My personal and professional experience attests to this grim reality as I can pictorially recall my very conventional classrooms. My authoritative knowledgeable teachers tended to thoroughly follow the tightly prescribed curriculum, with their eyes fixed on the textbook as they tried to go through inauthentic reading passages, comprehension tasks, rigid grammar and vocabulary activities.

5.1.1.2 English Language Curriculum: High vs. Low Achievers

A female participant criticised the English curriculum she was taught at school since it did not provide her with challenging tasks that matched her level (FP7, LLH). Besides, it provided very rare opportunities for practice. She raised the issue confronting both high achievers and low achievers, interpreting the teaching and learning scenario in Oman (ibid.). She wrote that:

The curriculum was too easy with little challenges. Speaking was my favourite part and, unfortunately, it was the rarest part. Grammar, however, was very structured and not much effective exercises were given. The teachers did not pay much attention to the students who needed intensive help, nor did they provide challenges for the high achievers. I was one of the high achievers and I did not find much challenges. I was actually demotivated (FP7, LLH).

A male participant expressed similar concerns towards the issue facing him as a high achiever, emphasising the impact of the inauthentic curriculum and the very limited timing for the English lessons as well as the crowded classes (MP12, LLH). He reported that:

Each class had two or three students who are of a really high level in English. I was one of these and I had to take a step back when it comes to participating in English classes to give a chance for my classmates to participate more. Most classrooms had over 34 students and a lot of the time the period was less than 40 minutes, so the teacher had a lot of students to teach but not a lot of time to be flexible and give each student an activity that is suitable to his level. The examples in the classroom were not real and they were simply boring. Overall, the material was from a lower level than mine and it did not create a challenge (MP12, LLH).

Such findings are congruent with that of Al-Mahrooqi and Denman (2018), attributing graduates' incompetence in English due to the theoretical and practical challenges prevailing the EFL context in Oman. Interestingly, a female participant voiced her concerns regarding the English curriculum at school in an interpretive tone (FP9, LLH). She profoundly attributed her 'maladaptive behaviour' to her lack of interest in the English curriculum since it did not correspond to her real-life situation. Most importantly, too, the teacher neither shared with her students the learning goals nor did she draw their attention to the importance of learning English in an authentic fashion. Again, heavy emphasis was directed towards completing the language syllabus regardless of the learning outcomes, as is evident in the following quotes;

I started to have maladaptive behaviours during English classes like moving from my place and playing with my notebooks. I think this happened because I lost interest in the subject because I did not feel it was relevant to my life. The teacher did not explain to us why we are learning English! We were dependant on finishing the curriculum and getting high grades, but with no clear future goals (FP9, LLH).

Importantly, too, participants pointed that their needs should be put into consideration while designing the English curriculum, since there was an obvious gap between their actual level and the prescribed curriculum, as is evident in the following excerpt with my female group. One of the participants stated that the real problem could be the curriculum designers as they do not refer to the field "when they design the curriculum because the tasks in the books do neither match students' levels, nor do they match students' needs" (FP4, group A, 1FGD).

Overall, the findings seem to be similar to the existing body of literature on the Omani educational context, most notably the empirically substantial work of Al-Sadi (2015). Such findings also accord with the recent results published by Al-Mahrooqi and Denman (2014) as well as the prior work of Al-Issa and Al-Bulushi (2011), explaining that students lack adequate linguistic and communicative skills because of the language curriculum which does not take into consideration students' needs and interests.

5.1.1.3 Teachers' and Students' Roles: Authority vs. Passivity

A female participant appeared to be acutely aware of the key elements of the learning process as she was able to pinpoint its drawbacks and hindrances, implying the influence of what essentially featured in an authoritative context (FP9, LLH). She narrated her concerns in a quite confident and resolute manner;

I did not enjoy learning the language in school. English subject was just an additional weight to my bag only. The teacher had all the authority in the classroom. She was the one who spoke all the time and gave orders to the students who were only listening and obeying. We were working individually and rarely had group work. We were passive students. We were asked to memorise the grammatical rules and use them in grammar. We did not have the chance to speak and express our thoughts about anything. The classroom was dull with a white board that was only owned by the teacher. I cannot recall a moment in which I wrote something in the board during the English class! (FP9, LLH).

The illustrative and interpretive approach embraced by the participant in writing her story spoke much of the grim realities of the learning and teaching scenario in the Omani context, mirroring lucidly teachers' vs. learners' roles. I chose to introduce her story, representing overall similar trends in her peers' stories. She criticised the pedagogical practices for being anachronistic. Reflecting on her role, she basically depicted herself as a passive learner at school. Thereby, she was displeased about not playing an active role in her learning process. Moreover, she pointed to the absence of collaborative work. Her choice of words like "a white board that was only owned by the teacher" was illustrative of such an annoying scene laden with a heavy passivity on the part of the students. In a similar vein, the following conversational exchange with the male participants revealed the disparity between theory and practice. The data showed students' memories of perceptions regarding practices of learning and teaching in the Omani schools, emphasising the students' need to take part in their learning process through exercising their roles and being truly involved in their learning, as is evident in the conversational extract below;

(MP12) I cannot really remember an instance where I did choose one thing to learn. In my twelfth grade, the teacher had to give everyone a book to write about, so he had all of the books and I chose one. I was the only one who chose the book, so that was the only time I chose what I wanted to learn.

(MP13) we were like passive students and not active which made us really disappointed. Giving a chance to the students would make a difference. But, they did not make any attempts to do that.

(MP14) I was a passive learner and classes became boring. The information could not even enter my ears (Group C, 1FGD).

Again, similar concerns were echoed by female participants, voicing their innate need to seriously practise their roles as autonomous learners. The following conversational excerpt illustrates this issue;

We were passive students, so we have not learnt that much at school and as time goes on we start to think about other ways. So, we kept telling our teachers can we use this way? Can we have some games? I think we have to be active students. We have to participate and we have to give our voice. We have to say what kind of tasks we like for learning to take place (FP5, group A, 1FGD).

They also seemed to be rebelling against the current situation, demanding a greater role in the sense of selecting what to learn and reflecting on what to learn. That is to say, they wanted to choose the content of the curriculum, as is clear in the following conversational excerpt with my female group. One of the participants stated that “we need to reflect on what we were taught, for example, to say what do we think about this or even do we agree to have this task or not. I felt bored at classroom” (FP1, group A, 1FGD).

Apparently, the discussion exchanges precisely portrayed the common practices prevailing the Omani educational system at school level, highlighting obvious lack of invaluable chances for learners’ choices and control. Such concerns figured notably in Al-Sadi’s (2015) study, with the students being seemingly desperate about their complete passivity regarding their language learning process. I will wrap up this section by a very briefly indicative quote expressed by a female participant; “the teacher dominates the discussions and most of the students were merely passive” (FP9, LLH).

5.1.1.4 Assessment and Evaluation Methods

The Research participants discussed the problem of memorisation, criticising essentially the assessment and evaluation methods, as such methods basically emphasised rote learning and

retention of information. They also indicated their desire to negotiate with their teachers how to be assessed. The following discussion extract further delineates this point;

It was only memorisation especially with the vocabulary. They were not testing our ability in the language itself. They were giving us a paragraph and were asked to complete it. I think that was not the right way of testing or assessing our performance or our language capacity (FP4, group A, 1FGD).

To further elaborate on the function of the evaluation methods at school as experienced by students, a female participant specified the focus of the assessment methods; “English as a school subject was mainly taught and assessed mechanically and basically through memorising grammatical rules and vocabulary items” (FP1, LLH), a finding in line with that of Al Riyami (2016). Furthermore, participants expressed their dissatisfaction with the school exam system because they maintained that the tests targeted memorisation of the learned input rather than comprehension and production of the language. They also indicated that there were no varieties of assessment methods, as the following extract reflects the essence of the evaluation methods used at school;

The writing test depended on memorising the writing models [the teacher] provided in the class. There was not much of speaking activities except for the presentation that lasted for two or five minutes and it was the weakest skill among the students because we memorised all the grammar rules, so the students were not able to apply them because we did not understand when we should have used this and that (FP9, group A, 1FGD).

Additionally, they believed that their results did not gauge their real proficiency in the language as the following conversational exchange reveals; “there has to be different kinds of assessment that are suitable for the course and for the students. Also, assess their ability to reflect on what they have learned in the course” (FP1, group A, 1FGD). Interestingly, the participants appeared to have a well-rounded repertoire of knowledge pertaining to the evaluation methods as they critically exchanged reflective discussions around the core function of the assessment methods drawing on their past experiences. As such, they believed that assessment methods should be meaningful in the sense of being connected to real life. They also maintained that such methods should fit in well with the learning goals. The following exchange revolves around participants’ interpretations and perspectives on improving the evaluation methods;

(FP3) if we talk about tests, we should consider whether they use this in their daily life or not.

(FP3) assessment has to be matching learning goals and to be direct to help them achieve their goals to use the language as a communicative tool.

(FP4) Whenever the student feels that there is meaningfulness in what they are studying or what the teachers are assessing them on, they exert more efforts to acquire the knowledge or to get the skills they are supposed to acquire (group A, 1FGD).

Significantly, too, the participants demanded to be allowed a greater role in negotiating with the teacher on what to be assessed on, as is evident in the following conversational exchange;

(FP4) The teachers should be very selective in choosing what to assess students. They have to be more student-centred even in the assessment itself and one of the ways to do so is using rubrics and involving students in this.

(FP2) Students have to be aware of the goals of the course because if they are given the goals, they can adapt their own autonomous ways of learning them. They can go back to Wikis, blogs, and so on to achieve these goals not waiting for the teachers to test them in these things in a traditional way of testing to achieve these goals.

(FP1) In the writing assessment, students can be asked to write e-mails because it will be much useful for them and in their daily life. If we are using e-mails as a way of assessment, you are not only assessing the students' ideas, you are also checking punctuation, checking grammar, words' selection (Group A, 1FGD).

Such results are in harmony with previous research on the Omani context, amongst which is the recent work of Al Mahrooqi and Denman (2018), Al Riyami (2016), and Al-Sadi (2015), as well as the prior work of Al-Issa and Al-Bulushi (2011). These authors problematise the value of the ELT reform, indicating a clear gap between theory and practice (Al Mahrooqi and Denman, 2018; Al Riyami, 2016; Al-Sadi, 2015; Al-Issa and Al-Bulushi, 2011). Examples of such discrepancy can be seen in overemphasising rote learning over reasoning skills, and overstressing high-stake exams at the detriment of the learning process (see chapter one, section 1.1, for more details).

5.2 Comparative Experiences concerning Language Learning Contexts between School and Tertiary Education

It is vital to reiterate that the present study sets out to investigate the intricate link between language learner identity, autonomy, and motivation through engaging in the virtual social space. Nevertheless, it is crucially important to explore their broader traditional language

learning experiences at the institutional level to gain a fine-grained understanding of their motivations to autonomously navigate the cyberspace. There was evident consensus among participants across the three groups about the drastic differences between EFL teaching and learning at both the school and tertiary levels grounded on their actual experiences. Generally, the reported stark contrast encapsulated the contents and ways of learning and teaching at both levels. Nonetheless, exploring their experiences in-depth and delving into their actual realities uncovered serious issues of concern regarding key dimensions of language teaching and learning in their immediate environment, highlighting challenges and opportunities pertinent to the curriculum and teaching methodology, assessment methods, language learning resources. Students' and teachers' roles were seen through all aspects of the language learning experience. However, it is necessary to indicate that the present study focuses mostly on the digital context, with only a few citations to the traditional context. The research findings highlight the virtual world to a wider extent, thus restricting the analysis of the real-world influences. Therefore, I would call for future explorations to examine this distinctive issue.

First of all, I will commence the discussion, herein, by focusing the analyses on the apparently superficial comparison between language learning and teaching at school and university levels. A female participant experienced the difference in terms of the amount of exposure to the English language; “the amount of exposure to the English language at the university is dense as all of the classes are in English. Also, our teachers are mostly native-speakers, so we have to speak to native-speakers” (FP1, group A, 1FGD). Another female participant defined her active role at the university as being limited to attending lectures away from her parents' supervision in comparison to the school; “at [the university], we are responsible for our learning if you attend the lecture or not. Our parents are far away from us. We are living here, so we are responsible for our learning” (FP9, group A, 1FGD).

Further on the general differences between language learning experiences at the school and university are demonstrated in the following quotes written by a female participant;

Almost all of the teachers we met were highly qualified to be language teachers and linguists. Moreover, in the university, students are offered many opportunities to improve their English language such as the moodle, Mreader, the Tutorial Centre, the Writing Centre and the Extra-Curricular Activities Club. All of these services have great impact on strengthening our language proficiency (FP8, LLH).

This finding runs counter to that of Al-Issa and Al-Bulushi (2011), reporting university students' limited exposure to the authentic use of the English language and the scarce opportunities to practise it in meaningful and relevant ways. However, helping participants to dive into the ocean of their university language learning experiences through engaging in reflective group discussions uncovered a much more complicated reality than what they had reported earlier in a quite intuitive and spontaneous tone. Initially, they tended to describe their experiences in a rather superficial manner. In fact, the deep-thinking approach they exerted whilst discussing with their peers through those reflective conversations facilitated the development of their awareness in relation to their language learning process and equally raise their consciousness about themselves as language learners, a finding in line with the essence of the argument made by Lamb and Little (2016) pertaining to the role of focused group conversations in stimulating reflection. This is also congruent with that of Al-Sadi (2015), arguing that focus group conversations facilitate reflection as an awareness-raising tool. That is, they became reflexive and reflective as the discussions developed in depth and breadth. This will be discussed in greater details in the next sections.

5.2.1 Curriculum and Teaching Methodology: Teachers' and Students' Roles

Turning to the curriculum and teaching methodology, a female participant seemed pleased about this aspect at the earlier stage of the university (FP8, LLH). She highlighted the authenticity of the language taught, appearing relevant to her life and, therefore, provoking her interest and motivation. She reported that:

At the university, the situation was almost the opposite. We were taught the language authentically. We were taught many different functions of the language so that we can recycle them in our daily life. They followed various teaching methods and used material that made us interested in learning English (FP8, LLH).

Further on university language learning experience, my male group participants initially expressed their views on the holistic experience as a response to my question of whether they felt bored with learning English at the university. Therefore, I further inquired about their own evaluation of their university English language learning experience, channelling their conversation towards specific aspects of their learning process. They gradually focused their conversation on teaching methodology. Again, though, the issue of memorisation did figure as a frequent challenge confronting the students as the following extract demonstrates;

English is a new language for us. So, it is very interesting for us. So, we cannot say that learning English is boring. But, how the teacher presents it can be boring. For example, we have linguistics courses like phonetics and phonology. These courses are really interesting and you feel that you are learning new things about the language. But, how the teacher presents these materials can be sometimes boring. It can be a passive process as the teacher gives the information only and you have to memorise (MP14, group C, 1FGD).

Apparently, teachers vary in their teaching methodologies at the university and students were more likely to engage with the subject if they enjoyed the instructional method. Also, students seemed to value comprehension rather than memorisation. This result also featured remarkably in Al-Sadi's (2015) empirical work on students' voice in the Omani tertiary education, criticising similar issues pertinent to the overemphasis of rote learning over reflective thinking which essentially results in sheer boredom. Al-Issa and Al-Bulushi's study (2011) found similar results, and thus they problematised the issue of motivation in the Omani EFL context as students did not perceive the intrinsic value of the English language due to different theoretical and methodological shortcomings prevailing the Omani educational system. Students' views on the language use are neither personally meaningful nor socially relevant to their real-life experiences beyond the classroom. It is pertinent to mention, once again, the overlapping nature of some aspects of the overall language learning experience that inevitably figured during the process of data presentation and data interpretation.

My first female group seemed very critical about the English language curriculum and teaching methodologies at the university as they reflected on the existing challenges and pitfalls in an effort to figure out the root issue. They also mirrored their roles besides their teachers' roles, as is obvious in the following exchange with them;

(FP4) It is only lecture-based. They give lectures without integrating any kind of videos or any kind of group discussion. It is only spoon-feeding students.

R. why do you think that happens?

(FP1) Some of the teachers believe strongly on the old methods of teaching like lecturing. But, teaching these courses for many years, they could have done some changes to have a new curriculum, an interactive curriculum for the students!

(FP4) I actually appreciate having articles as the main materials for the curriculum. Articles are updated unlike the old books from 1991. What makes you very nervous is that those teachers are giving speeches and doing research in these areas, so they are not giving their students the chance to read their articles. They have the time and materials ready to share with the students, but they are lazy (Group A, 1FGD).

Such findings chime with the prior work of Al-Mahrooqi and Denman's study (2014), inquiring into dominant sources of demotivation among EFL university-age students. They found that curriculum and textbooks as being demotivating, boring, and lacking communicative practices. Nevertheless, students' perceptions on the teachers' roles at the university seem to clash with those of Al-Mekhlafi (2007) who viewed teachers as reform agents, playing an active role in the teaching process and facilitating students' engagement in their learning process. This point will be further discussed below in relation to the evaluation and assessment methods.

5.2.2 Evaluation and Assessment Methods: Teachers' and Students' Roles

Focusing on the evaluation and assessment methods at the university, a female participant wrote a general comparative comment about this specific aspect of her language learning experience; "the assessment procedures followed in the university are strict and more valid compared to the ones at school" (FP8, LLH).

On the contrary, the following conversational exchange reveals a very sophisticated picture about the evaluation and assessment methods at the university; "it was difficult for me in the beginning because I am not good at memorising. I wanted even to change my major at some point" (FP1, group A, 1FGD). Similarly, another female participant reinforced such view; "it was very hard for us to memorise" (FP4, group A, 1FGD). Generally, such results accord with the Omani studies conducted by Al-Mahrooqi and Denman (2018), as well as Al Riyami (2016), highlighting the issue of the traditional methods used for evaluation and assessment which particularly emphasised retention of information.

As the discussion progressed, the same participants raised an important issue that seemed to be missing in their current experiences at the university, which is of particular relevance to the evaluation methods, as is evident in the following conversational exchange with the same group;

(FP2) although we are in a co-educational system, we do not debate and chat with the other gender and disagreeing with them. I really like discussing and fighting with them (Laughing).

(FP3) yes, I was really astonished by their comments. Sometimes, they post better comments than ours. Their points of views are stimulating.

(FP4) yes, you see the other side.

(FP1) they express different comments, but it is not better than girls.

(FP4) it is also because of the differences in the cognition of both genders. You can see how your piece of paper can be viewed by someone who is totally different than you. He is from the same culture, but physically and psychologically he thinks differently. You are not targeting female readers only; you are targeting readers as readers regardless of gender (Group A, 1FGD).

Inquiring further about the evaluation and assessment methods at the university, the participants appeared to appreciate the rare opportunities they got to play a role in their leaning either by choosing a specific topic for a research project or selecting a way of assessment, mirroring essentially their roles. There were a few exceptional teachers who varied their assessment methods, and hence were hugely appreciated by the students. Interestingly, they appeared to associate their experience at the university with their sense of success and competence. The following discussion unfolds part of the evaluation methods at the university;

(MP13) We have been interested in being successful at the university. It was also boring at some cases and it was mainly difficult because I am a student who does not memorise and I can't even memorise a page.

(MP12) Some courses are interesting, but the teachers are not passionate. They just keep throwing stuff and they are spoon-feeding us. One of the most useful courses that I enjoyed was the research project. We were independent. First of all, I chose a topic. Then, I worked on it. I spent a lot of time with the teacher, so he saw how much efforts I made into this project. It was not only about getting information, but also applying it and using higher thinking skills.

(MP13) I think some assignments did not help the students to improve the aspects they are supposed to improve. We did not have a chance to choose a specific assessment that appealed to us. We are generally forced (Group C, 1FGD).

These findings seem to mesh well with those of Al-Sadi (2015) concerning students' needs for a greater role in their evaluation, and thus targeting self-assessment methods. Such

findings lend further support to Lamb and Little's (2016) argument to facilitate assessment for autonomy so as to boost students' motivation, and thus foster their identities.

5.2.3 Language Learning Resources: Students' Role

One of the salient differences between the two institutional levels is the opportunities offered for language practice at the university, highlighting the authenticity and meaningfulness of the language as it is used in real life contexts. A female participant expressed her thoughts on that regard;

being a [university] student makes me very grateful because it has provided me with so many opportunities to improving and using English outside classroom. There are clubs like English and Translation Society (ETS), Toastmasters club and the Tutorial Centre. These clubs provided me with such a positive and supporting environment. Through the clubs, too, I met students who share similar interests and goals as I. They help me to be concentrated on my goals and push me further to improve and develop as a person and as a student (FP7, LLH).

By the same token, a female participant echoed similar appreciation towards opportunities for authentic language practice at the university, valuing essentially her autonomy in EFL learning, as is palpable in her statements below;

Only when I joined the [university], I was able to learn the English I dreamed of. Not because I specialised in English education, but because I got to know how to make the surroundings serving my quests of something. I realised that sticking to teachers or being spoon-fed is going to give me no privileges and my English is going to fossilise and be more of a bookish academic one rather than a communicative tool of communication (FP4, LLH).

This finding resonates with the essence of Little's (2007) argument concerning the use of language in an authentic and autonomous manner. A female participant shared a similar experience at the university as her peers, summarising the comparison in the sense that "learning the language in the university is far away different than the school. All the teaching and learning resources are available to you" (FP11, group B, 1FGD). Further on the use of English as a communicative tool, another female participant reported her actual language learning at the university as being rich as it provided her with a myriad of opportunities to contact and converse with the native speakers of English as well as other international English speakers, consolidating her strong need for communicative competence (Deci and Ryan, 1982) to boost her confidence, as is palpable in the following statements;

In the university, my experience in learning English has been enriched. I loved that language because of the programme prepared for us as English Education students. I had and still have so many chances to learn and practise the language with native speakers or other speakers of the language. This kind of communication raised my confidence (FP5, LLH).

A female participant described her experience at the university as being rewarding for allowing her to interact with others, and eventually achieving good English competence, reporting that; “my experience at the [university] is very rewarding. My studies, interaction with native speakers and peers and teaching practice have all paved the way for me to have a good language proficiency level” (FP1, LLH). This relates to the notions of relatedness and competence, establishing fundamental parts of the Self-Determination Theory (Ryan and Deci, 2002). Again, a female participant reported on her language learning experience at the university in terms of having great opportunities and facilities in comparison with her poor experience at school, stating that:

Once I joined the university, I felt more unstressed as if all the doors were opened to me. All the things we had been deprived of at school, we could see them in front of our eyes at the [the university]. The huge libraries, the big comfortable classes, the best teachers, integration of technology, more chances, more choices, different students, different genders and all of which serve us. Learning English at the university is like a dream comes true (FP10, LLH).

Surprisingly, as the discussions further developed and went deeper, the stark contrast between the two institutional levels featured mainly in what Web 2.0 has bestowed on students, meaning the huge opportunities for language practice. As such, students have exhibited an actively autonomous role to decide on what to learn and how to learn, as is evident in the following statements;

I think the difference can be attributed to the current time. We have now more opportunities not because of the university itself. It is mainly because of the digital world. In this world, we can use technology freely and we are able to use it and get access to the net for free. So, this is why we enjoy our learning experience. We can develop ourselves in the language itself (FP10, group B, 1FGD).

The research findings present evidence for ‘Autonomy’, as introduced by Ryan and Deci (2002), with participants re-counting their autonomous participation and interactions through cyberspace beyond the classroom. This thematic point will be discussed in detail in the next section, for I believe it constitutes a focal point of my research study. It should be noted, though, that participants neither exercised their innate capacity for autonomy, nor did they

make conscious decisions regarding their learning throughout their traditional institutional language learning experience. They reported a lack of interest in the topics covered in the classroom, resulting in undermined motivation. They found classroom lessons very tedious and mundane because their interests were not engaged. Their sense of being controlled seriously diminished their motivation in language learning. They did not experience optimal challenges for English lessons, and hence lacked feelings of competence as well as relatedness (Ryan and Deci, 2002) to both personal goals and peers through constructive feedback necessary for positive self-evaluation which could boost their intrinsic motivation, feeding into their boredom of the English language learning as illustrated by Murphy (2014) and Yashima (2014) as well as Noels (2009). Accordingly, they were rendered frustrated. Such fundamental psychological needs will be highlighted in the next section, exploring what encourages participants to seek virtual paths alternatively.

5.3 Virtual Language Learning Experiences through Social Technologies: Autonomy, Relatedness, and Competence.

According to Hill (2011), Self-Determination Theory (SDT) is described as a humanistic theory of motivation grounded on the notion that people strive to satisfy their innate desires pertaining to their personal growth that are either facilitated or impeded by the learning context. As I mentioned earlier, students appeared appreciative of the massive educational affordances ushered in by the digital context featuring Web 2.0 technologies. Thereby, they independently took the decision to extend their learning beyond the confines of conventional classrooms. It is worth noting, though, that such learning opportunities are freely available at their disposal throughout their learning journey at the university. Fortunately, since they joined the university, the Omani government has already started transiting to E-government, with all official documents and public services being processed electronically. Therefore, the Omani government has placed huge financial investments on this direction. Nevertheless, such virtual pedagogical opportunities were not available whilst they were at school. Thus, it seems a valid justification for describing their university language learning experience as a vibrant area to practically rehearse and exercise their linguistic skills in English which are available through digital social spaces. They sought alternative digital avenues to further develop their English language proficiency instead of relying solely on controlled and often frustrating classroom-based learning. The following statements reveal part of the situation;

I survived my school years and got the chance to join the university as a future English teacher. Learning the language in the university is far away different than the school. All the teaching and learning resources are available to you. Our life condition has also improved at home. Now I own my own laptop. This has helped me to seek opportunities to learn English online. I have started to use YouTube videos, blogs, web pages, wikis, educational websites and social media programmes to widen my knowledge in English and got the chance to share others my learning experiences and benefit from theirs (FP11, LLH).

Drawing on the SDT framework, Benson (2007) asserts the inextricable connection between the exercise of autonomy and language learning motivation. Equally, too, the L2 Motivational Self System, along the lines of Self-Determination Theory, places emphasis on the self, highlighting the learners' need for achievement, self-confidence, self-esteem, and self-efficacy in their language learning (Dörnyei, 1994). A multitude of social and cultural dimensions impinging on second language motivation are also emphasised by Dörnyei (ibid.). In my study, this was expressed by many participants who reported that their online initiative efforts were considered as a compensation for their rigid and authoritative classroom environment. It can also be seen, in fact, as a reaction against poor teaching methods or boring materials, as illustrated in the following quotes;

I know that I have had some bad experiences at school, and there were many things that schools should have given us, but we survived and we are here at [the university] continuing the journey. Do you know why have we survived? Because once you like something, no matter what the conditions are, you have got to do it for the sake of it, and for the sake of yourself (FP10, LLH).

Literally, participants voiced their sheer happiness for being able to overlook their poor learning conditions and discount such challenges, characterising their overall language learning experience. This finding is line with that of Murphy (2014), demonstrating the significance of intrinsic motivation in the form of pleasure, enjoyment, and satisfaction derived from one's learning process due to the fulfilment of the basic psychological needs for developing competence, relatedness, and autonomy.

5.3.1 Autonomy

According to Deci and Ryan (1994), when intrinsic motivation is accompanied by greater learner autonomy and interesting activities, results can be seen in terms of higher levels of cognitive and affective capacities. In Ushioda's view (2011), as cited in Little and Al Wahaibi (2017), promotion of autonomy is essentially a matter of encouraging learners to

experience that feelings of self-determination, leading to increased self-motivation. This seems to correspond to Little's (2007) argument that language programmes should primarily aim at promoting authentic and autonomous language use. At this stage, it seems appropriate to draw a comparison between autonomy as theorised in Self-Determination Theory and learner autonomy. The first one centres on self-initiated behaviour, as explained by Ryan and Deci (2004); autonomy is concerned with the difference between an individual's participatory behaviour which resonates with his/her interests, values, and needs in comparison with an individual's passive or reactive behaviour who perhaps tend to be isolated, submissive, or possibly rebellious. The research findings show representations of 'Autonomy', as termed by Ryan and Deci (2002), where participants describe their autonomous participation and initiative efforts in greater depth, a finding in line with Murphy's (2014) study, conceptualising autonomy as the scope to make appropriate decisions and take charge over one's own learning process. In my study, this was expressed by a female participant, illustrating how she decided upon what to learn and how to learn in order to be a successful English learner;

at [the university], we do what we have wanted to do, filling our time with things that would make us better successful learners. Being at [the university] has made me feel good about myself. I got to know many things that I am personally interested in. You feel you are entirely responsible for your education and that you have to make it out for the sake of yourself (FP10, LLH).

Participants' selected quotes are representative, mirroring similar trends across the three groups. Within SDT, autonomy means that an individual is the one who takes the initiative and makes the decision to perform an action (Yashima, 2014). However, autonomy does not suggest that an individual behaves independently of contextual effects, nor does he act against the demands of particular individuals (Noels, 2009). Thereby, the individual would behave autonomously if such demands fit in with their interests and values. Accordingly, autonomy-supportive environments would offer suitable options, promote self-initiation, reduce authoritative commands, and so forth (ibid.). In my study, for example, a female participant described her virtual language learning experience at the university as a happy journey, as it allowed her an independent role to navigate the cyberspace to seek further understanding of issues that she could not grasp well during her class time;

When I joined [the university] as an English major education student, I became very much independent to learn as I felt that there was always a need for extra understanding about the learned topic.

Technology was my helpful reference away from teachers to learn better. I enjoyed learning English but technology made it even more pleasing to do so (FP3, LLH).

By contrast, learner autonomy refers to the notion of self-regulation (Yashima, 2014; Benson, 2011). That is, learner autonomy has been conventionally conceived as the capacity of self-regulation which allows an individual to exercise control over his/her learning process, heeding Holec's theorisation of it (1981). Thus, determining objectives, choosing appropriate methods to be deployed, checking progress, and assessing one's performance are deemed fundamental (*ibid.*). In my study, this was expressed by a female participant, pointing to the motivational role of personal interest in pursuing out-of-class language learning opportunities via social digital spaces. Success in language learning was grounded in autonomous learning pursuits via these social technologies, as the following quotes reveal;

One of the things I have started doing since the beginning of my study at [the university] is participating in online activities which I am interested in to seek learning of English. I always think of how to make myself a better and successful learner and enjoy myself at the same time. That is why I usually watch movies, read online stories, search for new things and communicate with others. Without knowing, all these things have made me practise English more and have fun at the same time. Sometimes, I look into different sites and search for specific information. Other times, I form a forum in which I share my ideas and thoughts with my peers. I always like doing online stuff since technology always offer for us ways to do things better with less efforts and less time. Sometimes, when I feel I don't understand something, I go straight away to the internet to find solutions or answer my questions (FP10, LLH).

According to Benson (2001), self-regulation denotes the cognitive dimensions of control over the learning process, encompassing "meta-cognition, goal-setting, and self-reflection" (Yashima, 2014, p. 64). This study also refers to the construct of autonomy as a cognitively self-regulatory capacity. For instance, signs of autonomy development were clearly evident among the data, with participants carefully setting goals, monitoring progress, and evaluating their performance. For example, a female participant pinpointed evidence for her growing autonomy through digital social spaces, as the following quotes uncovered the prominent representations of autonomy;

Using social technologies has helped me a lot to improve my English language competence. The first thing I do before involving in these programmes is setting goals. I ask myself what do I want to know or learn today and where can I find this information? When I start searching, I might find other interesting things or places to learn in, so I modify my plan. I am the only person who can control it. I

have also the choice on what to post online and who to follow. All this depends on my interests and needs. I can never do this in a formal classroom. Through virtual spaces, I can also be in contact with other people and share our experiences, feelings and get feedback from them, which motivate me to keep learning and searching for interesting things to share with them. I can also develop a sense of success and achievements by looking at my old posts and recent posts and see how they have changed over years and how my language has developed (FP11, LLH).

Again and again, the data revealed autonomy representations, with participants **consciously choosing** their preferred social applications and **monitoring** their progress. The following quotes written by a female participant manifest these aspects of autonomy;

I chose Twitter because it gives us the chance to think critically and put our thoughts in 140 characters. I have always been stunned how a single post can change a life and make tables turn upside down. It is something amazing how you can scroll down your tweets and see the difference you have made and the progress your choice of words has reached (FP9, LLH).

A male participant illustrated the **social dimension of autonomy development** that he engaged in through digital technologies (MP14, LLH). He appeared enthusiastic about interdependent language learning which mainly took place through social cyberspaces, as is evident in these excerpts;

At the university, I have the chance of learning English outside the classroom through the virtual world. It makes the learning of the language more authentic. For instance, discussing different language issues with peers online, outside the classroom, which was enjoyable and more relevant (MP14, LLH).

He further expounded on the advantages of social autonomy or interdependence through social technologies, emphasising the value of peers' constructive feedback in his language learning process and the value of relating to them through their shared communities, as is evident in his written statements;

My communication with peers in social online spaces takes place through the discussion function on Moodle and Wikispaces. Getting online feedback from peers is helpful, I feel that communicating with fellow students is important because they are living the situations I live in and I think it's a good opportunity to exchange knowledge and experiences in different areas like learning strategies, teaching practices and different academic activities. Also, contacting English speakers online is useful as they will help me with the corrections to my mistakes by providing the correct examples (which I think prevents fossilisation!). I think that joining an ELT community online is important in order to exchange experiences and know more about the trends in the field of language learning and teaching (MP14, LLH).

As outlined earlier, the concept of social autonomy or interdependence (Murphy, 2014) clearly appeared in my data, featuring participants' virtual learning experience at the university. They appreciated the key role of their peers for language practice, demonstrating critical reflection and interdependence in a meaningful and authentic social interaction (Yashima, 2014) which are deemed fundamental to autonomy. This perspective is also in tune with that of Chik and Breidbach (2014), emphasising the notion of interdependence in digital spaces as they explored the development of language learner autonomy amongst their participants from Hong Kong and Berlin, and thus demonstrating the potential of social technologies as language learning tools.

In fact, my research participants seemed to have various reasons for engaging autonomously with the digital social technologies. For example, a female participant shared her story of online language learning experience with the other female participants in her group. She resorted to the virtual platforms due to her serious medical conditions since she was not able to attend university classes. Upon this, she relied on those platforms to search for materials and contents on topics related to her curriculum, which she found very useful. The following conversational exchange further depicts the picture;

When I joined the university, I was admitted to the hospital after a while. I faced some difficulties learning grammar from a modern grammar course and teachers. I did not depend on the book because it was difficult for me to read. My friends were not collaborative with me because they had a different timetable than mine. So, what I did was that I searched on facebook and found an English teacher. She was specialised in online teaching and she had a group for teaching grammar. So, I learned the course via facebook. Then, I shifted to twitter. I believe that learning online is truly a good thing (FP9, group B, 2FGD).

She further added that “English language comes along with technology and that for me is a miracle” (FP9, group B, 2FGD). Unequivocally, participants appeared well-informed about the pedagogical affordances of the digital space as they capitalised on such learning opportunities and exercised great control through making conscious choices, critical reflection, and collaborative interdependence. In essence, they exemplified autonomous efforts in an authentic context by speaking genuinely to their passions, interests, and concerns (Little, 2007).

5.3.2 Relatedness

Within SDT framework, relatedness is concerned with the desire for connecting with others in one's society, feeling cared about and secured (Murphy, 2014; Noels, 2009; Ushioda, 1996). Being sensitive and responsive to the concerns of others in terms of providing them with sufficient time and resources would make them feel accepted, and hence behave spontaneously and authentically (Grolnic et al., 1997). Surely, the sense of belonging satisfies a fundamental need for encouraging interaction with others reinforced by constructive feedback on one's performance (Murphy, 2014). The concept of 'relatedness' comes to the fore, with the participants showing lucid understandings of their roles within the social cyberspace they navigated (Ryan and Deci, 2002). They exhibited identification with the digital context as being meaningfully relevant to their lives and interests. They also identified with the significant others through virtual social spaces, fostering a sense of relatedness. This finding is congruent with Murphy's (2014) study. The following quotes further illustrate this argument;

Some online applications like YouTube help us be current with the rapid changes in the world. Even English songs talk about some themes that we can relate to with the new world. I believe that technology is a strong role that helps us learn autonomously even if we are within a group. One has to find his own interests and then join the herd that he belongs to. I chose Twitter to be my inspiration and my online learning battle. A battle that you have to go through every time you manage to think of something and post it. A battle in which you hold in your hand your mind and your heart and start to fight the unknown, to untie things that used to be incomprehensible (FP10, LLH).

Likewise, a female participant voiced her happiness, resulting from connecting with her peers within the digital social context, as is evident in the following quotes; "tweeting in English, communicating with my peers via LinkedIn or posting writings in blogs were really sorts of happiness for me" (FP3, LLH). However, the sense of relatedness seems to be neglected at the institutional level in the Omani context, as reported by Al-Mahrooqi and Denman (2014). Their study indicated students' sources of demotivation, amongst which was their lack of belonging to their peers and irrelevance of English to their real-life experiences outside the classroom environment.

Interestingly, a female participant confessed her innate need to relate to the opposite gender through meaningfully relevant discussions and topics of mutual interests (FP10, LLH). She depicted the oppressing aspect of the cultural taboo that is culturally understood in some

conservative parts of the Omani society, which is the issue of gender-separation. It should be noted, though, that gender-segregation is not encouraged by the government. She acknowledged the influential power of these social technologies to break that cultural restriction concerning the pre-guided role of female to male interaction. The following excerpt uncovers part of a commonly cultural practice, highlighting the issue of generation gap and its associated struggle in the contemporary Omani society. She wrote;

Learning English through Twitter makes me able to communicate with others. Our society and our traditions that don't encourage males and females' face to face interaction have been solved by the new technologies. Now, the two genders can share their ideas and thoughts through Twitter and all other applications freely. Regardless the fact that I myself still a conservative person who hides her real identity from other users, I can still contact and share my thoughts without constrains. Thanks to these applications that secure my private information (FP10, LLH).

In this respect, Sharif and Al-Kandari's (2010) study reported that the individuals who navigated the digital world were inclined to support equal gender roles in the Arab Gulf Countries. Specifically, the research study which was conducted by Hasanen et al. (2014) examined *the role of English language and international media as agents of cultural globalisation and their impact on identity formation in Kuwait*, exploring vitally the effect of globalisation on an Arab culture. What is of special interest in the aforementioned studies is the emergence of equal gender roles perceived by the frequent users of the virtual space. In the Omani context, there is no research which explores students' perspectives on gender-segregation practices. Therefore, I would recommend investigating this issue in greater depth to unfold gendered practices in the Omani society, in general, and the educational institutions, in particular. Considering the L2 motivational self system and gender inequalities, I would suggest to further explore the link between females and males' L2 future selves and the gendered practices they tend to adopt in the social and cultural context of Oman.

5.3.3 Competence

Within SDT framework, competence is concerned with the sense that individuals have the abilities to skilfully perform certain actions (Murphy, 2014; Noels, 2009; Ushioda, 1996). Due to their need for competence, people look for challenging chances to improve their capabilities (Noels, 2009; Ushioda, 1996). Thereby, working on achievable goals can help learners extend their developing capacities as long as they are supported with reinforcing feedback so as to evaluate their performance positively (Murphy, 2014). The data revealed

the concept of ‘competence’ as an important constituent of the Self-Determination Theory (Ryan and Deci, 2002). The participants exhibited their competence whilst clearly determining their pathways within the social cyberspace and identifying technical and linguistic competence essential for a successful participatory engagement. For example, a female participant perceived herself as a successful individual, presenting her developing competence in the English language through her effective engagement with the social technologies;

The good thing about technology is that it always fosters English learning than hindering it. Every online source you go to; you can always find something that will help you master English. I believe that learning English now is becoming a very essential part in everyone’s life who seeks professional success. I, myself, who is becoming close to my future career to be an English teacher, I can say that I’m proud to to speak English, to connect with others around the world and achieve my dreams of travelling around the world (FP10, LLH).

Another female participant associated her growing confidence and competence with her autonomous language learning efforts through social technologies (FP4, LLH). The notion of ‘self-efficacy’ (Graham et al., 2016; Bandura, 2012) is evident among the data, with the participant being optimistic about her progress which positively boosts her motivation. She reported her experience with virtual language learning as being exploratory in nature, highlighting its flexibility, successfulness, as well as its awareness-raising orientation. She stated that:

I explored many ways for developing my English through digital social spaces. I started to use various techniques starting from using YouTube ending with having online courses. I can say that I have been an autonomous learner because I have used technology to serve the way I learn and use the language. Using twitter or Facebook in English boosted my confidence and develop my competence in the language more than using English orally in class while being lectured. That is why I tend to adopt these kinds of apps to help me in improving my English and developing it. As for the blogs, I like them very much especially the WordPress. I used to write some pieces of my own and post them there. It is really something I am proud of. Sometimes, I can say frankly to myself that I am a successful learner and I am going to be successful teacher (FP4, LLH).

Significantly, too, a male participant seemed very keen on virtual language learning as it facilitated the development of his competence, reporting his effective engagement with these social technologies (MP14, LLH). This finding seems to mesh well with those of Mills et al. (2007), indicating a positive connection between learners' self-efficacy and self-regulation. In

their study, learners of French who viewed themselves capable of self-regulating their academic studies reported successful results in learning French. In my study, a male participant acknowledged his key role in the learning process, emphasising the concept of autonomy which essentially characterise online language learning (MP14, LLH). The following quotes reveal part of the picture;

My online language learning experience differs from my school learning experience in many ways, for example, there is no structured plan for it and it happens in authentic contexts. This promotes learners' autonomy and responsibility in language learning in a way that a person seeks knowledge on his/her own without anyone nudging them, like a teacher or a parent. Also, participating in social technologies has helped me to develop my learning strategies that I used to improve my English language skills which have led to my successful language learning experience (MP14, LLH).

Moreover, he was also aware of the differences between formal classroom learning and informal online learning in the sense of authenticity and autonomy, and hence he proposed the integration of technology into classroom. He stated that “online language teaching tools can assist in-class learning by using YouTube video as a warmer to a lesson or as a tool to consolidate what the lesson was about after teaching the lesson” (MP14, LLH)

A female participant echoed similar expressions in the sense of developing awareness about her competence relating to herself as a language student, her language learning strategies, and overall learning process (FP5, LLH). As reported by the participant herself, this knowledge was a result of her engagement with these social spaces. She described her autonomous virtual learning as a successful endeavour, highlighting her developing sense of competence, as is evident in the following quotes;

During the past years at [the university], I have learned so many things, not only about the language or my study, but also, about myself and what I can do. Sometimes, I felt that this experience is overwhelming, but then, I have realised that it was all for my benefit if I want to be the person and the teacher I want to be. I use YouTube to find out more about the world around me and search for something that will help me improve myself and my proficiency in the language. My experience at [the university] will remain memorable and successful because it shows me that I am a successful learner and person and that I can do whatever I want just if I believe and work hard (FP5, LLH).

The concept of curatorship (Potter, 2012) is manifested among the data, where the participant purposively choosing her technological applications and deciding on what to learn through participating in cyberspace. This point will be further explored in chapter seven. It is quite

noteworthy that participants exhibited their developing awareness of various learning strategies that they were able to lucidly pinpoint through their experiments with varying technological applications and effective engagement with the virtual space to improve their English proficiency level. They were genuinely pleased to take charge of their learning process at the university through the digital world as compared to their experience at school in a traditional learning context, feeding into their enjoyment of learning English. Therefore, the core focus of the following section will be on participants' attitudes towards learning English, essentially investigating if they enjoy their L2 learning experience or not.

5.4 Learners' Attitudes towards English Language throughout their Learning Experiences

As outlined earlier, participants' attitudes towards English language learning represents a significant component of Dörnyei's L2 Motivational Self System, exploring whether they enjoy their L2 learning experience or not. It should be noted, herein, that attitudes to L2 learning is particularly regarded as a central aspect of L2 learning experience in Dörnyei's (2005) three level framework of L2 motivation (Alqahtani, 2018). As such, it seemed to be an important dimension whilst exploring students' motivation from the self-perspective. Also, the data revealed varying attitudes towards learning English according to participants' realisation and developing awareness of its importance throughout different phases of their language learning experience. To begin with, almost all of my research participants defined themselves at the initial phases of their school as being careless for they did not take English seriously, and hence developed some kind of hatred and boredom towards learning the language. They provided different reasons behind such predominant sense of apathy, characterising the language learning experience at their previous schools in traditional learning contexts. First and foremost, they did not realise the significant status of English at the early stages of school, thus they lacked purpose in learning English. This is palpable in the following conversational exchange;

(MP14) my learning of English at school have steps. For example, from grade 1 to grade 3, I felt bored and hated English because I did not understand why English was important, so I was not good at English at all.

(MP13) for me, I only remember my time at grade 7. Before that, I do not actually remember enjoying English maybe because I did not know why we had to study English and the class was very tedious (Group C, 1FGD).

Another female participant held a similar attitude as she perceived English as being difficult. Also, she stated that she was only learning English for the sake of grades. However, once she started realising its importance at the later stages of schooling, she exhibited a genuine interest into learning English. Such finding is also in line with the results of AL-Mahrooqi and Denman's (2014) study that inquired into motivation types and sources of Omani EFL learners, mirroring participants' attitude towards English as a highly influential motivator. In my study, a female participant expressed such attitudes as follows:

At first, I didn't like English because I felt its difficulty and I lost hope of mastering it. Maybe that was because I only started learning English in the fourth grade. So, I spent my time playing around rather than studying for it to the extent that I waited for the English exams to only take it as a holiday. I didn't really enjoy it and I didn't like the English foreign teachers as well. The only thing I cared for was grades. However, growing up, I realised how I started looking at English differently and how it has become such a fascination for me. I started listening to some English speakers and deep inside myself I wished I could speak like them. I don't know when was the time I decided to give English a try but I did it in a way or another (FP10, LLH).

The following quotes from a language learning history of a female participant uncovered a very complicated picture of the learning scenario, providing a cogent argument for such a careless attitude towards learning English like holding negative perceptions of English as being strange. Nevertheless, once she recognised its significance as a gate to achieve her dream as a prospective English teacher, she showed a serious and, perhaps, conscious attitude towards learning English, overlooking the rudimentary learning conditions and traditional resources in her challenging environment. This result also accords with Lamb's (2012) study, acknowledging the most significant contribution of positive attitude towards L2 learning experience on students' motivated learning efforts regardless of the poor classroom conditions and very traditional teaching methodology. In my study, a female participant further illustrates this point as follows:

I was in grade four when English language was first introduced to me. It was absolutely an alien language to me. I really struggled to learn it because there was little help offered to me to foster the language acquisition. Even though I developed a passion to learn it, the surrounding environment didn't encourage me to learn the language. The teachers used poor teaching methods and never encouraged us to seek further learning. There were poor teaching and learning resources. Even at home, because of our poor condition, we couldn't afford any learning resources; we didn't even have a computer at home. For that, I decided to do something that might boost my English language. I said to myself, I have to learn vocabulary words as much as I can to use them in my speech and to understand others.

That is why I started to make long lists of vocabulary words and memorised them. In this way, I survived my school years and got the chance to join the university as a future English teacher (FP11, LLH).

Similarly, students' attitudes to the pursuit of English language learning was found to be the strongest motivational force in the work of Alqahtani (2018); Kormos et al. (2011); and Papi (2010). By the same token, the positively encouraging attitudes of learners to their language learning were found remarkably important in boosting their motivation in Iran and Japan (Taguchi et al., 2009). Yet, it seems to run counter to the findings of the same comparative study of Taguchi et al. (2009) on Japanese, Iranian, and Chinese learners of English, reporting less influence of Chinese attitudes to their classroom experience on their motivation. Their finding parallels the claim made by Chen et al. (2005), stating that Chinese students do not require intrinsic enjoyment to pursue studying as they have a firm sense of needed motivation in that regard. It is vital to note, herein, that the presented examples of real-life instances could be regarded as a distinctive issue for further explorations, as the research expounds widely on the virtual world. Accordingly, the analysis of the traditional context is quite restricted.

5.4.1 Affective Disposition towards the English Language

The findings of my research revealed a significant sub-theme regarding the participants' emotional attachment to the English language. Nevertheless, it is imperative to note, herein, the difference between participants' passion for the English language per se and their interest in the process of learning English, which encapsulates their attitudes to the learning context at a traditionally institutional level and informally through virtual social spaces. However, the participants' expressions of their enjoyment of English depict their general disposition towards English language itself. Literally, none of the research participants expressed a sense of dislike towards the English language per se.

The data uncovered various reasons for participants' association with the English language. A female participant voiced her intrinsic liking for English beyond its utilitarian worth; "I grow up being fond of English. I was enormously happy that I can put letters together and understand something in a language that is not similar to Arabic in anything" (FP4, LLH), regarding the language as part and parcel of a modern and youthful identity; "I liked English as I used to think that those who know English are smart and sophisticated" (FP3, LLH).

These excerpts indicate the participants' genuine liking for English, highlighting some sort of emotional attachment with the English language and perceiving it as being novel. By the same token, a female participant displayed a strong internalisation of English, portraying an intrinsic relation to the language and viewing it with a sense of curiosity (FP2, LLH), a finding in line with Al-Mahrooqi and Denman's (2014) study. She also evoked a sense of aesthetic enjoyment and cerebral stimulation, a result featured also in Lanvers's (2016, p. 87) research which reported that some adult learners appreciated "non-language specific rationales, such as intellectual stimulation [and] aesthetic merit". For example, the following statement in the participant's LLH reveals her pure enjoyment of English;

I am enchanted by the English language because it is very interesting, so my feelings and my way of perceiving things have changed. It stimulates my thinking. I have positive attitudes towards English, so it has affected me unconsciously without my intention. English sounds really wonderful (FP2, LLH).

This affective status could be quite understandable if it is compared to the pure pragmatic orientations towards liking English for being valuable academic or professional currency. For instance, a female participant expressed an instrumental justification behind liking English; "I like English because it has become one of the most important languages to be added in one's CV in order to get accepted in a job" (FP7, LLH). Also, a female participant emphasised the significance of the social status behind liking English, "in the outer community, it is a prestigious thing to be a good English speaker" (FP1, LLH). Again, a female participant stressed the social standing that English language can bring about; "I became more connected to English because people respected and admired those who know English very well" (FP2, LLH). She further added to this point; "[t]he English language made some people respect and look at me differently especially my family" (ibid.). Pragmatically, she expounded on the domestic advantages of English within the Omani society, justifying her reasons for liking English as follows:

I like English because it is a powerful language of today. We need English in order to keep track with the world, to adopt their inventions and products so that we can understand for what they are used. In addition, we need English for economic purposes, getting jobs with good salaries, translating books and selling them. Moreover, Omanis have to learn English because of the location of Oman, which is a point of connection with the other countries. It is a crucial language in trade because most of our products come from the English countries and we export goods to them (FP2, LLH).

Interestingly, the same participant seemed to hold a dual linguistic affiliation as she carries an affective association with her Arabic language as well as the English language, which she acknowledged as being a powerful language for national advancement, as will be further discussed later in the next chapter. She reported that:

I love English because it is a global medium of expression. Therefore, I have to learn it beside my mother-tongue in order to improve and build Oman. I still love and value my Arabic language. I have a strong feeling that Arabic will gain a huge popularity in the future where people will strive to learn it (FP2, LLH).

Unequivocally, the participant's bond with her mother tongue is genuinely emotional. Also, her association with English is both internally-driven and externally-driven. Such duality in linguistic attachments appeared to yield a sort of contradiction in students' attitudes to the English language as explained by Norton (2000), proposing that learners' motivational investment in the language can be seen as a social and historical association between language students and the the target language, reflecting potentially ambivalent attitudes to learn the language and use it. As outlined earlier, almost all of the participants expressed a wide array of justifications behind liking and learning English, mirroring their mixed attitude towards English language and reflecting a quite sophisticated picture of their second language motivation. This finding is congruent with a recent study carried out by Shahbaz and Liu (2012) in Pakistan.

It is worth noting that a female participant represented an embedded manifestation of linguistic imperialism in which Arabic is deemed lower and less prestigious than English although a superficial interpretation of her statement reveals the great extent to which she has internalised the English language (FP2, LLH). The following excerpt unfolded her colonised state of mind;

From laughing at how the English language sounds, I started loving the language and wishing to be a speaker of it. That was the start of a new life. The life of a person who thought the other language was higher and prestigious than hers (FP2, LLH).

In-depth analyses of participants' statements implied latent linguistic imperialism as they described themselves as being prestige, special, and socially popular for acquiring English. They also considered English proficiency as a passport to high-paid professions, social status, and an entry to higher education institutions. This is in line with the argument made by

Canagarajah and Said (2011) that English language connotes prestigious social status whereas failing to communicate in English might indicate lower social standing. This is, in fact, consolidated by the Omani government's official announcement of teaching English as an obligatory school subject from grade one onwards, emphasising domestic and international vitality of English as a reasonable ground behind this decision. This signals a new form of a contemporary linguistic imperialism (Canagarajah and Said, 2011) in which successful acquisition of the English language is considered as the main goal to pursue higher education and gain a full spectrum of advantages attached to the language (Phillipson, 1996). Generally speaking, L2 motivations of Omani learners represent a complex fabric underlying the contemporary Omani society and its aim to both harmonise and compete with the international world. This point will be further illustrated in the next chapter due to its particular relevance to the present research. It is important to note that there is only limited data relating to real-life events, such examples could be regarded as a distinctive point for further investigations.

5.4.2 Some Omani English Teachers as Role Models

The research participants acknowledged the motivational role of some Omani English teachers, regarding them as role models. Given a general Omani cultural predilection for teachers' respect, however, participants did not hesitate to express their frustration over teaching aspects. In a sense, they appeared to be very critical of the overall learning context which essentially included teachers' roles and responsibilities, yet they seemed appreciative of their motivational role. Some Omani English teachers might have perhaps represented vivid and authentic images of the future-selves these participants aspired to be. In other words, these teachers acted as close language models for the participants within their immediate classroom environment. The following excerpt written by a female participant depicts this animated image;

One thing that has also helped me to see English as something attainable and made me trust myself was my Omani English teachers. Seeing them talking in English and teaching the subject made me ask this question, "why not I?" That was my first journey of English language learning. Now, that I am nearly close to my first English language teaching journey makes me see how magically time passes and dreams become true (FP10, LLH).

By the same token, a male participant echoed similar thoughts regarding the motivational role of Omani English teachers as can be seen in the following statements; "I was impressed at the

way that my Omani teachers spoke English fluently and confidently. I wanted to be just like them” (MP14, LLH). Similarly, a female participant stressed the influential role of Omani English teachers, perceiving them as role models; “[a]nd to see an Omani female professor in the field of higher education is enough to encourage you to imitate her” (FP2, LLH). Therefore, such motivational figures extended her with the power to visualise her future self. Discussions on future selves will be further illustrated in separate sections.

Albeit they generally criticised their teachers for being authoritative and traditional in the sense of adopting teacher-centred approach, they seemed appreciative of a very few exceptional teachers throughout their language learning experiences. In particular, some of the participants narrated about one particular teacher who encouraged them to learn English, helping them to capitalise on their potential capacities. This is palpable in the following extract written by a female participant; “thanks to my secondary school teacher who believed in my abilities in English more than I did” (FP3, LLH). Likewise, a female participant acknowledged the exceptionally encouraging attitude of her teacher in terms of presenting the language in an interesting fashion, provoking her passion towards English (FP8, LLH). The following statements further demonstrates this point; “my interest in English grew bigger since grade 11 because of my English teacher. Her personality influenced mine and the way she taught us the language was enjoyable and engaging” (FP8, LLH). This finding chimes also with the prior work of Lamb (2012) regarding the motivational role of the teacher, and thus leading him to propose that teachers could potentially transfer students’ positive attitude to English into real learning behaviour. In a sense, teachers should help their students become positive regarding their learning process, and hence students exert efforts into learning (ibid.). Remarkably, a male participant reported the efforts made by his inspirational teacher, highlighting his enlightening encouragement through verbal advice and creative methodology, as is evident in his quotes below;

I admire one of my [English] teachers who tried to make changes and were creative in the classroom. I remember him teaching me for three years for being one of the people who changed me and how I viewed English. He kept pushing me to improve and advising me to get better until I ended up at the [university] and I know that he is proud of me for making it there (MP12, LLH).

In a similar vein, a male participant explained that his teacher’s encouragement boosted his interest in English while justifying his choice to major in English language education; “I chose to learn English at the university because I was lucky to have a very enthusiastic

language teacher at the school who contributed to increasing my interest in the subject” (MP13, LLH). Likewise, a female participant pointed that “one of the professors in the English department used to call me “our official speaker”. My self-esteem raised and I became more confident to speak because of [him]” (FP2, LLH).

Generally, such teachers were portrayed by the participants as being inspiring, motivating, and highly qualified. Such findings echo those results found by Islam’s (2013) study. It is noteworthy that teachers were equally found as a source of demotivation, a finding in harmony with Al-Mahrooqi and Denman’s (2014) study. In this present study, two participants confessed that none of their teachers motivated them to learn English. The following excerpt written by a female participant reveals such reality; “[m]y school English teachers played no motivational role for me to learn English at school because I admired the language itself before anybody encouraged me” (FP7, LLH). This finding is in line with the work of Chen et al. (2005), downgrading the role of teacher in shaping some Chinese students’ motivation. Another female participant narrated a story regarding her demotivating teachers, as is palpable in the following quotes; “Unfortunately, my school teachers did not have any impact on my English learning motivation” (FP9, LLH). It may be necessary to indicate, herein, that those uninspiring and unqualified teachers described by the participants were often Asian or Arab foreigners, though by no means always. These demotivating teachers were also perceived by the participants as being difficult to understand because of their foreign accents. In addition, they did not provide any form of encouragement. It should be noted that data analysis relating to the influences of real-world events are quite limited, demanding further investigations of this distinctive point.

5.4.3 Immediate Family Context: Social and Digital Milieu

The data of the research uncovered a crucial motivational drive in the unique context of the Omani collectivist society, namely milieu. According to Dörnyei and Kubanyiova (2014), the effects of ‘significant others’ could be present in the ‘immediate learning environment’. Milieu has been considered as a significant component of L2 motivation research studies in different EFL contexts (Alqahtani, 2018). Interestingly, a prominent immediate family context appeared as an influential factor, contributing considerably to participants’ language learning experiences. All research participants of this study acknowledged the inspirational role that their families played in their English language learning process, and thus boosted

their motivation remarkably. The animated and detailed stories shared by the research participants through the focus group discussions and the individually composed histories revealed that participants were incredibly motivated by their milieu, including parents, siblings, friends, and the virtual social community. Significantly, parents' role, in particular, the father's role, appeared to be the most influential in stimulating participants' interest to pursue English language learning, reflecting essentially the patriarchal nature of the Omani society whereby fathers take great responsibilities towards their families. As such, they exert a powerful role in shaping their sons' and daughters' decisions, a finding in line with that of Islam (2013) in the Pakistani context. In my study, a male participant appreciated his parents' encouragement and guidance to choose his academic path grounded on their well-informed and trustworthy vision of his future, as is evident in the following statements; "a big reason for choosing English not math, which was my favourite subject, was my parents' belief that English would benefit me while math is only an abstract knowledge" (MP13, LLH). A female participant reported particularly her father's involvement in her English language learning process at a very early age as she narrated her story; "I started learning the language with my father by reciting songs" (FP9, LLH). In a similar vein, male participants showed that their fathers provoked their passion to learn English and provide them with useful direction in this regard, engraving memorable memories into their minds. They were also inspired by their fathers' communicative skills and command over English, as is palpable in the following conversational extract;

(MP12) I wanted to learn English because of one personal reason [because] my father used to spend a lot of time talking on the phone in English, so I wanted to know what he was talking about.

(MP13) my family praised English so much, so they told me that English is something that would open a gate for you to the world. I asked my father how my name could be written and which movie I could watch. He gave me useful tips.

(MP12) I even remember watching movies with my father. I remember two special movies that have a special memory because I watched them with my father and I watched them in English.

(MP13) My father knows that English is vital to live and improve [myself]. English is the lingua franca, so [I] need to have knowledge about English to really live and find a suitable job or life career (Group C, 1FGD).

Likewise, my female participants further expounded on their fathers' effective engagement with their English language learning process, informing them about its significance and acting as role models. These participants appeared to attribute their enjoyment of learning English to their fathers since they nurtured their interest from the outset. They also facilitated their learning by teaching them useful strategies for language learning, as is clear in the conversational exchange below;

(FP9) I started learning English with my father at home, memorising some letters, watching TV, and listening to native speakers. So, I started to understand the language. After that, I moved to the output like speaking and writing.

(FP8) what makes me feel that this language is important during the school period is my father. Since I was in grade four, he used to bring a file and he used to include some easy words like breakfast, lunch, dinner, good morning, good evening, and these words. At that period, he asked me to write all these words. I also noticed that whenever he went to the hospital, he used to speak in English. When he went to work, he used to speak in English. I liked that. He was my role model. That is why he makes me like the language and this is the reason that makes me enjoy learning English. I liked it so much (Group B, 1FGD).

Significantly, too, siblings were found to be very influential in encouraging participants to learn English. The following quotes written by a female participant illustrates this point; “[s]eeing my siblings fluent in English made me believe that I can learn it and become fluent as well” (FP7, LLH). Likewise, another female participant voiced similar thoughts and feelings in this regard; “I admired the way [my siblings] speak English” (FP4, LLH). Again, a female participant uttered joyfully the motivational impact of her siblings on her natural absorbing of English, as is palpable in the following excerpt; “my siblings speak English, so it was not very difficult for me. It was really natural to enjoy learning English and understand everything without difficulties” (FP1, group A, 1FGD). Specifically, the participants were primarily motivated by their brothers as they play an inspirational role in the sense of presenting English to them in a meaningful context relevant to their interest. The participants were also impressed by their brothers' English skills. The following exchange reveals part of the picture;

(MP14) my brother who can speak English presented English to me in a new way. He presented movies and video games that I was interested in. So, I started watching movies and playing video games that required understanding of English.

(MP13) I enjoyed English because of my brother. He was studying here at the university. He majored in English. When he used to return home, he would read articles in English and he would be committed to reading. So, I wanted to know why he was always reading in English. He would give me vocabulary (Group C, 1FGD).

A male participant reiterated his brother's role, bringing perhaps much focus on him as a role model; "my brother went to the university and I thought it was very good to be a university student. He knows a lot of English and I thought it is very good to learn English" (MP13, LLH).

Overall, the participants were found to be significantly motivated by their fathers and brothers given the patriarchal nature of the Omani society in which fathers and the elder brothers tend to uphold a great responsibility and commitment towards their families. Therefore, they could be very influential in their academic and professional decisions as they seemed to have led a successful and fruitful life, experiencing the social and economic advantages of learning English. Other parents seemed to have suffered from less-paid and less-prestigious jobs due to their lack of English which is highly considered in the contemporary Omani society, as is clear in the following excerpt;

Nowadays, most [Omani men] are married to educated women, so they take care of their children because they experienced how hard it is in the society to be without a degree. They give much importance to learning English. I have really felt it, so I can really see the difference (MP12, group C, 1FGD).

These statements imply that Omanis have experienced in their proximate social settings how disadvantaged they are without the knowledge of English, and thus they are acutely aware how it is beneficial to acquire this language so as to gain entry into prestigious universities and professions, a finding in line with that of Lamb (2012) in the rural Indonesian context. Importantly, too, fathers and elder brothers tend to support their families financially and socially to help them achieve their families' dreams and hopes. As such, it is quite understandable how their experience and advice function as a motivational driving force for these participants. Such findings chime with recent research by Alqahtani (2018) in the context of Saudi Arabia. Moreover, 'parental encouragement' and 'family influence' figured remarkably in a prior research study conducted by Taguchi et al. (2009). These authors reported that:

Chinese people often feel a great obligation to their parents to study, even though they may not be intrinsically motivated to do so themselves. Many believe that since their parents raised them, they have a duty to support them in their old age and carry out their wishes. This is why in China, parents will often choose a major for their children (Taguchi et al., 2009, p. 80-81).

Indeed, such parental guidance and involvement can be influential as my own personal and professional experiences attest to this fact. I can still remember vividly many cases in which female and male Omanis followed their parents' hopes regarding a specific major or career even at the cost of their own desires. In fact, this can be commonly sensible due to the immense socio-economic significance of English in Oman, and hence learners are constantly advised and encouraged by their families to pursue learning of English to lead a better life. Omani families despite their educational profiles, be they educated or uneducated, tend to take great pains to impress the value of English on their children (Al-Mahrooqi et al., 2016). However, Lamb's (2012) study in Indonesia found that parents' level of education, in particular, their English proficiency level, was the second highest indicator of their motivationally intended learning behaviours and L2 proficiency. The findings of my research study revealed that the participants do not belong to an English-speaking family, nevertheless, they all seized opportunities to converse with their fathers or siblings at some points in an attempt to either essentially develop their language abilities or proudly demonstrate their competence. For example, a female participant reported her passion to speak English with her sisters; "I love chattering in English with my sister, showing her how competent I am in English. Although my elder sister is used to correct my pronunciation whenever I utter a word, I just like it" (FP6, LLH). These illustrative examples of data concerning real-life events reveal how students navigate their online and offline identities with regard to each other.

Moreover, a female participant seemed to be grateful to both family and friends in extending their keen support to learn English, as is clear in the following excerpt; "I appreciate my friends' and family's support because they always encourage me to learn English and perfect it" (FP7, LLH). This result seems to be in accordance with Lamb's (2012) study in the Indonesian context, acknowledging both family and peer influences as motivational contributors towards expending efforts on learning English. In the Omani context, family influence notably contributed to students' motivation, as did peer influence (Al-Mahrooqi and Denman, 2014). Equally, too, peers' negative influence was found as a source of

demotivation in the previously cited study. Strikingly, though, a very recent work of Al-Mahrooqi et al. (2016) indicated opposite findings, that is, families and parents were found the most significant contextual factors impacting on Omani students' limited English proficiency.

Interestingly, the data showed the inspirational role of social technologies, particularly, TEDTALKS, introducing vivid images of successful Arab speakers of English. Perhaps, those outstanding models triggered their desire as lucidly living images of their future-selves. The following conversational excerpt further demonstrates this point;

I am addicted to TEDTALK. There are many people who are inspired by others and have stories to tell, so they share their experiences with the world through TEDTALK to get inspired by them. There are many types of stories that are relevant to technology, media, and other interesting areas. Most of them are from Arab countries and they are famous outside the Arab countries. So, I really feel the need to know these people who go outside to show their talents (FP10, group B, 1FGD).

Similarly, a female participant explained how TEDTALKS encouraged her to pursue her dream and visualise herself as she would like to be; "I keep watching TEDTALKS as an interesting way to train myself to be an English public speaker and I always feel longing to the day I would be able to be a presenter in TEDTALKS" (FP3, LLH). In a sense, those true images manifested through social technologies displayed embodied and attainable goals that participants aspired to achieve.

In general, the participants seemed to appreciate their families' supportive encouragement and enlightening guidance that took diverse motivating forms, mirroring a motivating and inspirational milieu. For example, participants' influential family members encouraged them through presenting various dimensions of the language, reading English stories to them, watching English movies together, or presenting to them different cultural products such as English novels and social technologies. Such findings are in harmony with Al-Mahrooqi and Denman's (2014) study within the Omani context. Also, such supportive milieu was found within virtual social spaces. In this social culture, parents, siblings, friends, and other virtual successful learners of English were influentially deemed as role models. Thus, they were admired and looked upon by the participants. These influential family figures, though not always, were fluent English speakers who basically used English for communicative purposes in their multi-cultural professions. For example, some of them were English language

instructors or students of English-medium higher educational institutions. To exemplify this point, a female participant reported that; “my father works in an international oil company in Oman and I just enjoy listening to him while he speaks fluently in English. I feel so proud of him” (FP1, LLH). However, this finding comes as no surprise given the strong conventional family system in the Omani society, stemming from its social and cultural norms as well as religious values. This is congruent with the argument made by Kormos et al. (2011) that language students in some cultural contexts, particularly, in eastern collectivist societies tend to view their families and parents as the mediators of the cultural and social morals, norms, and values. Therefore, it seems reasonable to contend that parents, family members, and significant others play an inspirational role in learners’ L2 learning experience in the Omani society, contributing significantly to their motivation.

5.5 Discussion of the Qualitative Differences between Participants’ Language Learning Experiences in Traditional and Virtual Contexts

The significance of participants’ overall language learning experience, encompassing their attitudes towards learning English, may be justified by the important status attached to the English language in the Omani educational system, in which English is declared as an obligatory school subject from year one onwards. Since 1970, heeding Sultan Qaboos’s assumption of power, which is the start of Oman’s modern era, the primacy of the English language has been officially flagged up (Al-Mahrooqi and Denman, 2018). Thus, English has been considered as an essential lingua franca, facilitating both intra and inter-communications across a wide array of domestic and international domains (Al-Mahrooqi and Denman, 2018; Al-Mahrooqi and Tuzlukova, 2012). Accordingly, English has played significant roles in higher education and employment in Oman (Al-Mahrooqi et al., 2016; Al Riyami, 2016). Such primacy of attitudes towards learning English might be potentially related to their internalisation of its pragmatic utility and its centrality to their future lives, and thus downplaying traditional and rudimentary learning context concerning teaching methodology and learning scenario, English language curriculum, teachers’ and students’ roles, assessment and evaluation methods (for more details, see 5.1.1.1, 5.1.1.2, 5.1.1.3, 5.1.1.4). This finding chimes with the prior work of Lamb (2012), emphasising that L2 learning experience exerts the most powerful motivational influence in specific contexts where English teaching is mandatory in tertiary organisations. In addition, perceiving some Omani English teachers as role models which might be partially attributed to the traditional Arab respect for teachers has

largely shaped participants' motivation, a finding in tune with Al-Mahrooqi and Denman's (2014) study in the Omani context. This also parallels Kormos and Csizér's (2008) study, observing the relationship between learners' attitudes towards language learning and teachers' role in increasing their motivation. Surprisingly, though, given the unsatisfactory learning environment outlined earlier, participants still held positive attitudes towards their language learning experience. Such attitude may partly be explained by their affective disposition towards English, driving intrinsically their 'survival' of the poor learning conditions (see section 5.4 and 5.4.1). Also, it might be partly justified by the fulfilment of their innate needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Ryan and Deci, 2002) found in the virtual social space as a compensation for the rigidly controlled classroom environment (see section 5.3, 5.3.1, 5.3.2, and 5.3.3). Thus, it would be reasonable to claim that their cyber lives have helped them face the challenges of their traditional learning context.

The qualitative findings of the present study showed that participants' learning experiences enormously shaped their L2 motivation, providing complex delineations in this respect. Thereby, I would further emphasise that a fuller picture of the learner's context is essential to account for the varying L2 experiences across a wide array of EFL contexts, amongst which is the unique Omani context and the digital context. Drawing on the data of this study, I would propose to accommodate virtual language learning experiences through social technologies into the original concept of Dörnyei's L2 experience in order to deepen and broaden its scope. It is worth mentioning, herein, that a recent work by Lamb (2012) employed two constructs pertaining to students' experiences, namely, English language learning inside the classroom and English language learning outside the classroom in an attempt to capture the richness and various dimensions of his Indonesian participants' L2 learning experiences. Thus, it would be prudent to further emphasise that L2 learning experience can be deemed as a lynchpin of the two self-guides.

This is, in fact, harmonious with what L2 Motivational Self System has hitherto offered in terms of adopting an accommodating approach for creativity, thus being able to accept current theoretical frameworks such as Complex Dynamic Systems Theory (Boo et al., 2015). In my view, though, given the multi-dimensional nature of second language motivation, it seems reasonable to draw on multiple theoretical perspectives in the spirit of presenting complementary aspects. In this regard, I can do justice to the considerably large body of

theoretical research and empirical data, relating somehow to the same phenomenological territory of applying the psychological theories of self, over the past five decades or so. Upon reflection, it also seems to accord with Dörnyei's (2005) proposition whilst introducing his framework at the initial stage, attempting to respond to some theoretical concerns in the earlier findings of L2 studies by focusing on the multi-faceted dimensions of his self-based system in light of the same theoretical underpinnings guiding prior second language motivation studies so as to render it congruent with the changing scenarios of various EFL settings in the complex globalising era (Dörnyei, 2005). Thereby, his insights bestow a new life on the previous theories of L2 motivation, providing them with newly relevant meaningfulness from the self-perspective (*ibid.*).

Based on the contextual dimensions of the distinctive Omani society discussed earlier, it may seem significant to further explore the motivational role of social and digital milieu, including immediate family context, local teachers, and significant others within virtual social spaces with different learner groups. Such inspirational milieu was considered by the research participants as role models, and hence shaped their L2 motivations. This seems to accord with Murphy's (2011) argument that L2 learning experience should necessarily detail diverse dimensions of students' life context, which could profoundly influence their motivation. It should be noted, though, that the present study mainly looks at the digital context, and there are restrictions to the offline context. The research findings focus on the online world more extensively, and hence keeping the analysis of the real-world influences very limited. As mentioned earlier, students sought autonomous language learning pursuits through cyberspace, which was deemed as a compensating space for the traditional and rigidly-controlled environment. Thus, they steered their conversations towards the virtual world. Ultimately, I would call for further explorations to investigate this distinctive area. Critically, too, the data unfolded the importance of understanding various dimensions related to the broader educational climate in an attempt to gain comprehensive insights into participants' L2 motivations as it appeared to have strongly influenced their learning experiences, particularly, their attitudes. As discussed earlier, the findings of the present study uncovered how the Omani participants tended positively to overlook the prevailing challenges characterising their traditional and rudimentary learning environment due to their strong realisation and internalisation of the significant status of English nationally and internationally. Such understanding seemed to shape their L2 motivations, and perhaps

nurturing and developing their L2 future selves or identities, which are the core focus of the following sections.

5.6 Future Visions: L2 Self-Guides

The findings of the research study showed that participants held vigorous idealised future visions of themselves, as will be explained in section 5.6.1 and 5.6.2. Equally, too, they projected a strong realisation of their future responsibilities and obligations, stemming from their personal worries and the substantial impact of influential people within their own immediate society as well as the global digital community, as will be discussed in section 5.6.3. Participants clearly emphasised the threatening dangers of not acquiring English. Also, the data revealed that the future visions of their future lives were both self-induced and externally-referenced, reflecting the importance of their English language competence in achieving their future selves (see section 5.6.4). Participants displayed acute consciousness of the value of English to their future, regarding mastery of English as an essential goal.

5.6.1 Representations of Ideal L2 Selves

All participants appeared to hold unequivocally sharp and confident ideal visions of their future selves. They all projected a variety of their preferable professions in the future, which seem to match their recent educational qualifications. The most desirable aspirations expressed by participants were as follows; two females (FP7 and FP2) and one male (MP12) would like to work as university lecturers, one female (FP4) and one male (MP14) as researcher, one female (FP11) and one male (MP13) as writers, one female (FP6) as a public speaker, and nine females, including some of the above-mentioned participants, (FP1, FP2, FP3, FP4, FP5, FP8, FP9, FP10) and two males (MP12, MP14) would like to pursue Masters (MA) as well as doctorate (PhD) studies. For other participants, the ideal self was to be academically successful. Generally speaking, most of them indicated a presence of more than a solely single future self. For instance, a female participant stated that she would ideally like to become a great English teacher, an English researcher, an English public speaker, and an English author simultaneously (FP3, LLH). Likewise, a male participant articulated his multi-future visions of his idealised selves; “I would love to be a member of the English press in the videogame Industry. My plan B is to be an English lecturer at one of the colleges in the country and get an MA in literature, psychology or education” (MP12, LLH), based on his personal preferences respectively. Occasionally, participants indicated other identities, such

as a photographer, artist, fashionista, or a member of particular group interest. The following extract written by a female participant exemplifies how her another identity could increase her motivation; “I belong to an international group of photographers via social technologies, which motivates me to learn and practise English technical jargons related to photography” (FP4, LLH). This finding chimes with the argument made by Ushioda (2009), highlighting the way in which the future ideal self might coexist with a variety of identities expressed by an individual, and thus language learning is but one aspect. She argues that people are not merely language students, but do also express many identities such as a photographer or a football player etc (ibid.). This also accords with the findings of Murphy (2011). What is of particular interest in my data is that very few participants saw their future teachers’ selves as their ultimate goal even though they all were studying to become English teachers. This may problematise the future of the Omani education system, which entails further investigations.

A female participant voiced her idealised selves in the future, reflecting her full awareness of achieving English language competence to reach her future visions (FP7, LLH). She wrote that “I picture myself to be a successful lecturer of English and a researcher in the future. I will be conducting research in English. I believe that speaking English is a significant part” (FP7, LLH), leading to a professional success. In a similar vein, a female participant is well-informed about the pivotal role of English in realising her ideal future self, as is evident in the following quotes; “I visualise myself as a prospective English teacher, so English plays a major role in my future self. It is the core of my career because I want to reach a communicative competence” (FP5, LLH), by reaching out to a wide range of international English speakers. These examples of real-world influences are only limited, necessitating further investigation. By the same token, a female participant stated her ideal future selves, revealing a robust understanding of the significant role of English and technology to realise her future aspirations, as is evident in the following quotes;

I see myself as a knowledgeable and up-to-date language teacher and as an active researcher in the ELT field. This keeps pushing me to be engaged in the different English digital space for learning opportunities. Nowadays, having the English language plus technology is the passport to enter the workplace competition. Of course, it is one way to get a prestigious job. English has become an international and multicultural language (FP1, LLH).

Besides their future dreams concerning professional careers, participants visualised their ideal future selves as full-fledged English speakers. As a matter of fact, participants regarded their

English language competence as part and parcel of their idealised future English-mediated identities, being intrinsically entwined in their future personalities and daily lives. For example, a female participant revealed that “I would like to be a proficient user of English to help me achieve my dream as a future writer” (FP11, LLH); a distinctive point which entails further explorations as the data clearly speaks to online worlds. Participants did not only perceive English as a gate to highly prestigious professions, but also did consider it a vital personality-related quality that would render their ideal selves socially impressive and amicable. They regarded acquisition of the English language as their own way of life, being profoundly proud of its mastery. For example, a female participant expressed similar expressions in this regard, emphasising the socially prestigious standing attached to speakers of English (FP5, LLH). This is illustrated in the following statements; “because I have learned English and I am fluent in it, everyone around me is amazed and thinks that I am special. This really motivates me to keep going and work hard. In Oman, English is needed” (FP5, LLH). She further expounded on the significant social status of English in the country and how it is closely associated with a successful life; “people think that those who speak English and are fluent in it are very unique, well-educated and prestigious. Now, everyone is learning or trying to learn English to reach that ultimate success” (ibid.). Likewise, my female participants confessed to each other how unique they felt due to their competence in English, as is evident in the following discussion extract;

(FP5) [English] gives you the feeling that you are very special and you have something different than the others. You have the language and are able to understand both sides: those who speak Arabic and those who speak English.

(FP6) we are really special.

R. You have emphasised several times the notion of being different. How does that make you feel?

(FP4) indescribable.

(FP6) Feeling powerful. Not everyone can have it.

(FP4) Many people lack this ability (Group A, 3FGD).

Unequivocally, the data uncovered that participants’ idealised visions of their future selves are grounded on communicative interactions in various social situations. For example, a female participant explained that “[b]eing able to speak and write in English gives you the

ability to contact different people from different nationalities” (FP6, LLH). She viewed English as being imperative to develop her personality and “ways of thinking” (ibid.). She further emphasised that “the English student is a unique person who has this privilege of using the web” so as to communicate through English social technologies (ibid.).

In general, participants’ future dreams pertaining to their personalities tended to focus on personal improvements in the sense of achieving communicative competence, gaining social popularity and acceptance, boosting confidence level, developing positive demeanour and improving personal outlook. Participants perceived English skills of equally personal and professional value. Interestingly, too, the findings of the present research unfolded a notable feature of females’ future aspirations. That is, females’ ideal future selves were similar to the ideal selves of their male counterparts, mirroring the rapidly shifting social patterns and models in the contemporary Omani society. As illustrated earlier, they would ideally like to get professional careers, continue higher educational degrees, travel around the globe, and communicate with the wider international speakers of English personally and virtually. Such future aspirations are, in fact, indicative of women’s empowerment in the modern Oman in which they recently hold leadership positions, of which are female ministers and ambassadors. Currently, Omani women do equally work in the used to be male-dominated professions. In the past, Omani women were mainly anticipated to manage housekeeping whilst the educated women would perhaps opt for teaching posts or rather less mobile domestic careers. These results chime with the work of Islam (2013) in the contemporary Pakistani society.

In summary, Omani participants appeared quite informed about the possible ways to help them achieve their ideal future images, as they revealed a thorough understanding of the means and skills, such as social technologies and communicative competence, necessary to successful future professions and personalities. They seemed to possess a well-rounded repertoire of the various English language skills which could render their future selves confident, attractive, and successful at both social and professional levels. Thereby, they demonstrated evident willingness to make changes by embracing different approaches to lessen the divergence between their actual selves and ideal ones. As such, it can be argued that these Omani participants have high motivations to pursue English language learning given the concrete, and practical visions of their ideal future selves which are deemed crucial

conditions in order to realise their full motivational potential (Dörnyei, 2009, MacIntyre et al., 2009). This point is the core focus of the next section.

5.6.2 Ideal L2 Future Selves: Representations of their Realistic and Pragmatic Dimensions

The research participants did not only appear to have lively lucid images of their L2 future selves, but also did have feasible and achievable visions. They seemed to be truly confident about what they would ideally like to be and what is required to materialise their future selves. Significantly, too, their imagined selves were closely linked with realistic action plans and motivational strategies, reflecting essentially the pragmatic nature of their future goals. That is to say, they displayed sharper visions of the future, speaking of their future plans at length. For instance, a female participant who aspired to be a public speaker, explained her plan to realise her goal, as the following quotes further elaborates on this point;

I seriously look forward to being a public speaker, spreading ideas for improvement particularly in the education field. I keep watching TEDTALKS as an interesting way to train myself and I always feel longing to the day I would be able to be a presenter in TED (FP3, LLH).

The data furnished evidence that participants' future selves were neither hollow dreams nor pointless fantasies. Rather, they were both passionately and meticulously purposive endeavours. They seemed to purposefully figure out the suitable context, be it digital or traditional, which would facilitate the realisation and attainment of their desires. For example, a male participant, who wished to be a videogame developer, started already working on his future dream by designing a Youtube channel and a website concerned with videogames; “[m]y website covers videogames, offering gamers in Oman and the Arab world a content that is worthy of their time and [I am] proud of the work [I am] doing and the response [I am] getting” (MP12, LLH). By the same token, a female participant vividly visualised herself as an English researcher, and thus acted upon that by being a virtual member of the Research Gate (FP4, LLH). She mentioned that digital space “helps me a lot to find myself as a researcher” (FP4, group A, 3FGD). Likewise, a female participant, who would like to be a great English teacher, illustrated how her future-self did motivate her to set purposeful goals to fulfil her wish through social technologies (FP5, LLH). The following excerpt further explains this point;

Having account on Facebook allowed me to be a virtual member of a teacher-development community, thus sharing ideas about teaching with other experienced teachers worldwide to develop myself professionally and achieve my goals (FP5, LLH).

These references to both traditional and digital contexts indicate how students navigate their online and offline identities in relation to each other. In addition, those extracts revealed that participants seemed to take greater ownership over their imagined future selves, indicating potentially the strengths of their idealised visions and signalling clear signs of certainty about what will happen in the future through their assertion of personal control over securing positive results. For instance, a female participant wished to establish her own smart school grounded on innovative and inspirational ideas adopted from various countries around the world, thus illustratively expressing her action plan through the following conversational exchange;

I start travelling as it helps achieving my dream, so I think the way and tool of communication is the English language because it is a lingua franca and everyone speaks the language. So, I will speak English. Also, I use youtube or the internet to follow up my dream. For example, what I shall do when I go to Japan and what they do there. So, I watch youtube videos and read some blogs in English language because I will not find anything in Arabic. I also write everything in English. I will also travel to South Africa where they speak English (FP1, group A, 3FGD).

Interestingly, too, the findings showed participants' idealised selves as to relate to the educated Omani speakers of English via social technologies, and hence be ideally members of the prestigious Omani English-speaking community. A female participant expressed such an ideal self and explained how she carried out her action plan on that direction; "through social digital clubs, I ideally meet Omani English speakers who share similar interests as me. They help me concentrate on my goals and push me further to improve as a person" (FP7, LLH). This finding is harmonious with that of Islam (2013), reflecting the social vitality of English in the Pakistani society. Interestingly, participants' desire to relate to the Omani English-speaking community via social technologies indicates the notion of 'integrativeness' in a rather different shape than Gardner's classic (1985) conceptualisation. In its traditional sense, integrativeness is perceived as the individual's wish to identify with the L2 natives or perhaps completely assimilate into the Anglophone countries. In the context under study, however, integrativeness appeared to be closely linked with the local Omani speakers, yielding varying implications. To begin with, it confirms the social standing of the local

English speakers in Oman. Second, it weakens the ownership of English claimed by the Anglophone countries, further supporting critiques of Gardner's (1985) notion of integrativeness. Eventually, it might have linguistic implications pertinent to their association with the Arabic language and perhaps their linguistic identities.

All in all, the data showed the significant contribution of the Omani participants' idealised images of themselves in explaining their L2 motivation, a finding in line with Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011), Kormos et al. (2011), as well as Csizér and Lucas (2010). Significantly, too, given the fact that participants made realistic plans and they already started taking actions to achieve their ideal selves further strengthened the effectiveness of their future visions. This is congruent with Dörnyei's (2009) argument that in order for the future selves to be truly effective, they should be in the form of a package which includes imagery constituents and a range of suitable action plans, scripts and cognitive strategies related to self-regulation. He also ascertains the powerful motivational engine of the idealised future L2 image so as to minimise the difference between present and ideal selves, driving students towards their ultimate goal. As pointed out earlier, the data showed that participants had even recognised the supportive contexts in which their ideal future images would be ideally and easily achieved, supporting the potential strength of their ideal images of themselves in the future. The data also revealed that participants' preferences for their future professions seemed almost harmonious with their current academic path, rendering their ideal selves attainable and, thus, effective. Participants' desired careers are regarded socially prestigious in the Omani society (Al Issa, 2006). However, these professions entail English language competence to get access to and achieve success, emphasising the 'social relations of power' which motivates students to learn the language (Norton, 2010).

5.6.3 Representations of Ought-to L2 Selves

The data unfolded representations of participants' L2 selves, reflecting different dimensions, strengths, and nature of such selves. Both female and male participants acknowledged the fundamental role of the English language in earning higher social status, and equally recognising its role in their immediate and future lives. Their ought-to L2 selves appeared to be purely driven by their future obligations, career and education-related fears, self-image, social standing, and expectations of significant others. Generally speaking, all participants presented a sense of necessity for pursuing English language learning grounded on their full

awareness of the negative results of not acquiring it. Literally, they admitted their fear of failure without achieving competence in English, signalling a vague and threatening future. For instance, a male participant exhibited a more of a prevention focused self while accounting for learning English; “[w]henver I see myself in the future and that I will not achieve my goal if I did not take [English] seriously, I work really hard on achieving it” (MP12, LLH). He further added “[f]or me, learning English is a matter of survival” (ibid.). Also, a female participant reported the contribution of English to her future; “nowadays, having the English language plus technology is the passport to enter the workplace competition” (FP1, LLH). Another female participant expressed how central English is in people’s future lives;

I think English is an engine especially for jobs. To be able to speak and write in English, it gives you an advantage and it opens job opportunities for you. Even if the job is not related to English, you are supposed to know English in order to survive and get promoted. We also use English in higher education institutions in Oman (FP3, group A, 3FGD).

The same participant went on explaining the negative effects of not speaking English, displaying a sense of weakness, as the following statement illustrates this point; “if you do not speak English, your voice will not be heard” (FP3, LLH). Similarly, a female participant exhibited a feeling of urgency in learning English in order to avoid setbacks and realise future goals; “it is a MUST to learn English if anyone wants to reach their goals. It is really necessary to learn English so that we know how to face any problem and reach our full potential” (FP5, LLH). Again, another female participant echoed similar expressions of urgency in seeking English language learning; “I think it is an obligation to learn English because of its universal necessity” (FP6, LLH). Also, considering the significance of English in gaining entry into the higher educational institutions, a male participant stressed that “English is a very important language nowadays for anyone to keep up with what’s happening in the globe. It is the language of instruction in most universities” (MP14, LLH).

Participants also associated English with gaining considerable social standing. For example, a female participant reinforced such view by stating that “people looked at English as the prestigious language, so they learn and teach it to their children, therefore, they can be up-to-date with the surroundings” (FP2, LLH), whereas another female participant shared with others the powerful position of the English speakers; “I guess whenever anyone speaks English, the power will automatically come to him” (FP4, group A, 3FGD). Again and again,

participants' ought-to selves accentuated a prevention-oriented nature pertinent to their social status. For example, a female participant shared with her female group her fears regarding the broader social attitude towards the lack of English competence (FP7, group B, 3FGD). Therefore, she invested considerable efforts to avoid the overwhelming sense of inferiority as she voiced her concerns;

If you don't know how to speak English here in our society, you might look uneducated and you don't want people to look at you in that way. So, this is really important in our society we are living in to be educated in this language. We do see the language as getting bigger in our country. We see it in shop signs and roads, so yes the language is everywhere. Sometimes, we do not even find Arabic instructions in the products (FP7, group B, 3FGD).

On the other hand, she seemed to counterbalance that prevailing feeling of inferiority with a sense of superiority in case of being equipped with the English skills as she stated that "the English language makes you feel that you are educated and more advanced than the people surrounding you who do not know English" (ibid.). In accordance with such broader social attitude towards the status of English endorsed by the Omani society, participants appeared to be striving to gain that prestigious social standing. For instance, a female participant discussed her future tendency with the other females in her group; "because of my society's views ... I believe that since I have the capacity to communicate in English, I can gain that social respect in my society" (FP8, group B, 3FGD).

All participants confessed that such social pressures and fears were transferred by socially significant others including parents, family members, peers, friends, teachers, etc. The following quotes written by a female participant accentuates her desire to meet her family's expectations of her future self;

when I think of what I want to be in the future, my family comes to my mind. They always view me as a strong, helpful, and ambitious person. Because of that, I want to be that person and teacher (FP5, LLH).

Furthermore, participants acknowledged the mediating role of parents and other family members in transmitting social pressures to learn English. A female participant shared with the other females in her group how her parents stressed the value of acquiring English skills as exemplified in the following conversational extract; "my parents would put special emphasis on English mainly because they see how important it is for my personal

development as they are surrounded by people using the English language” (FP7, group B, 3FGD). She further professed that their intervention was “in a way encouraging for me to focus more on the English language” (ibid.). Also, a male participant echoed similar expressions in this regard, mirroring his willingness and acceptance of such pressures, stating that “[my family] have high expectations of me. Even though it is a pressure on me, I try to reach their expectations. I try to improve myself and try to be as they expect me to be” (MP14, group C, 3FGD). He further accounted for such a seemingly valid social pressure drawing on the Islamic motivational belief to learn foreign languages; “I remember when my father tried to encourage me, he mentioned a saying by the prophet Mohammed peace be upon him to know others’ language in order to keep yourself away from danger” (ibid.). He admitted the motivational role of his father’s guidance.

It would be reasonable to claim that ought-to L2 selves of the Omani participants depict a prevention-orientation wrapped in a combination of internalised future obligations and varying social fears. There were frequently evident indications of potentially negative consequences as an encouragement to pursue English language learning. This finding parallels the work of Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011), highlighting the extrinsically preventional nature of this motivational aspect. As pointed out earlier, manifestations of ought-to L2 selves figured quite prominently in the Omani context due to the influential power of family members and influential people within their social context. This result supports the argument made by Kormos et al. (2011) based on their empirical findings that ought-to selves could exert a powerful influence in Asian cultures due to their strong family-value system. Thereby, I would call for further qualitative and exploratory investigations concerning ought-to L2 selves in the Omani context and perhaps in other collectivist contexts in order to critically capture such distinctive social features. For those quantitative researchers, I would recommend extending or perhaps reformulating Dörnyei’s scale pertaining to the ought-to self so as to make it relevant to diverse EFL settings in the sense of illustrating context-sensitive items so that it could clearly show its contribution to students’ motivation. It is worth mentioning that Lanvers (2016) has already proposed the necessity to re-introduce the ought-to L2 self-scale. She argues that:

Increasing evidence of ‘non-fit’ of Dörnyei’s model, especially (but not solely) from language learners with English as a first language, led the author revisiting Higgins’ original, which had more complex delineation of different selves that adopted by Dörnyei (p. 79).

Thus, she developed a new model called *the Self Discrepancy Model for Language Learners* (Lanvers, 2016).

5.6.4 Ideal and Ought-to: Reciprocal Relationship between L2 Future Selves

The data revealed participants' desire to be both successful professionals and well-respected individuals socially, mirroring their own ideal and other socially-fuelled obligations. Nevertheless, their imagined future selves cannot be realised without competence in the English language. The findings accentuate illustrative examples of participants' ought-to selves, reinforcing ideal L2 selves. For instance, a female participant displayed combined motivations of ideal L2 self and ought-to L2 self; "I am in a compelling need to acquire English as a second language. It is true that the first incentive is my passion, but I cannot deny that the job market offers better vacancies for those who are fluent in English" (FP8, LLH). At frequent instances, participants' future selves were inextricably interwoven to the extent that it seemed very hard to present them separately. An example of such cases could be seen in the following extract written by a female participant;

[f]rom my first days at school, I dreamed of learning and being an English teacher. I visualise myself, especially after graduating, to use English in my workplace. English becomes part of me and my personality. No doubts that it will be a significant part of my future since my degree is in English and it will be a tool for communication to succeed in my career (FP6, LLH).

The same participant further expounded on her internally self-motivated and idealised future self that was simultaneously driven by social pressures and mediated by significant others; "it was my own choice to major in English as being part of my personality, and all of my family and friends were both the essential support for me to encourage me to learn the language and be what I like" (ibid.). A female participant echoed similar motivational orientations as she shared her future aspirations with the other female group members, reflecting both ideal and ought-to L2 selves to achieve her personal desire and professional necessities (FP3, group A, 3FGD). She initially stated that "English is the weapon to achieve my dream and it is the source of energy because I want to be an English teacher" (ibid.; cited in Little and Al Wahaibi, 2017, p. 183). Then, she further added that there is a necessity to communicate with other teachers in English-speaking countries as they are "more advanced than us in teaching. So, sharing experiences through English social technologies will be very beneficial to keep us

abreast with current educational innovations” (ibid.). Another female participant exhibited similar motivational tendencies as she shared her future selves with the other female participants, stating that “I decided to learn the English language because my family needed someone to translate for them. At the same time, I really want to be unique and different than others who only speak Arabic” (FP2, group A, 3FGD).

Overall, the findings unfolded the mutual combination of Omani participants’ future selves, encompassing both ideal and ought-to L2 selves. Such thorough qualitative data showed that participants’ idealised images of themselves were considerably reinforced by their ought-to selves. Realistically, participants revealed that English competence was not only pivotal to fulfil their future career aspirations, but also was helpful in avoiding personal and social fears of failure. As illustrated earlier, participants’ desire to pursue English language learning so as to achieve their ideal future selves appeared to be integrated with a necessity to gain prestigious social standing, along with a clear recognition of social obligations, worries, the hopes of families and influential people. Their ideal L2 selves were profoundly influenced by the expectations of significant others since they appeared thoughtful or rather afraid of disappointing them. Moreover, participants’ future aspirations to be professionally successful and socially impressive seemed to be fuelled by ideal visions and social needs. Thereby, such combined motivational power is deemed a significant condition for maximising the motivational capacity of future selves and encouraging people to exert fruitful efforts to realise their future aspirations (Dörnyei, 2009). This also parallels Oyserman et al.’s (2006) argument that L2 future self-guides do not necessarily contradict each other, yet they have varying impacts on learners’ learning behaviour. Nevertheless, their harmonious relationship can yield powerfully motivated behaviour in comparison with that generated by each of them separately (ibid.). Besides that, the harmony between both L2 future selves implies that Omani participants have strongly internalised their social commitments, necessities, worries, and desired expectations of influential people due to their strong realisation of the instrumental value of English, and hence contributed profoundly to their ideal future selves. This result chimes with the work of Papi (2010), mirroring the key role of family and overall social pressures in affecting students’ academic preferences and achievements. In these collectivist social cultures, students might adopt the social values and principles mediated and encouraged by their communities or influential people, thus internalising such desires and social tendencies to be their own ideal selves (Papi, 2010). Importantly, too, Dörnyei and

Ushioda (2011) emphasise that the motivational capacity and intensity of L2 future self-guides would be incredibly improved provided that individuals' ideal selves are equally adjusted by counter-productive feared selves. To put it simply, students' robust understanding of the negatively undesirable consequences behind failing to achieve their ideal selves would positively impact on their motivation. Finally, the present data is in line with Higgins' (1998) work concerning the intimate link between instrumentality-promotion and his ideal self, as well as instrumentality-prevention and his ought-to self. He proposes the distinctive nature of both instrumentality constructs, arguing for a non-linear relationship between them. This finding is in congruence with the work of Taguchi et al. (2009), highlighting that each construct is inextricably associated with a distinct L2 future self of the learners, thus rendering them two different constructs which examine L2 motivation.

5.7 Wrapping up: Comparative Concluding Thoughts

This section explores the interrelatedness between identity, autonomy, and motivation of the female and male Omani EFL student-teachers in response to the first research question, highlighting participants' language learning experiences in traditional and virtual contexts. Therefore, this section presents comparative concluding thoughts regarding identity expression, autonomy and motivation evidenced via Web 2.0 engagement and via traditional media. It seems pertinent to reiterate that this study sets out to explore the link between these three constructs from two theoretical perspectives to assess the limitations of the present theories, and attempt to extend their borders. In so doing, this study aims to arrive at a robust understanding of the complicated interplay between the lives of individuals as well as the institutional, digital and social settings where they considerably interact.

At the traditional educational contexts, participants were generally reactive, aimless, examination-oriented, and lacking autonomy, as reported by the participants themselves (see section 5.1, 5.1.1, 5.1.1.1, 5.1.1.2, 5.1.1.3, 5.1.1.4, 5.4). Their justifications included the perceived boringness of English language education, insufficient chances for putting language into practice, and language assessment focusing on memorisation. Later, though, they started exercising greater autonomy by the virtue of cyberspace that was luckily at their disposal throughout their educational journey at the university. Therefore, they appeared to discount the traditional and rudimentary learning contexts that were sufficiently explained earlier. Clearly, their vivid future selves combined with their positive attitudes towards

language learning stimulated their motivation, and hence provoked their interest to pursue autonomous language learning via virtual space, which was considered as an alternative environment to compensate for the traditional, rigid and controlled institutional context. As such, their identity seemed to shift from being passive, to highly motivated prospective teachers as a consequence of their effective engagement with the English digital social technologies (see section 5.6.2). In other words, in the informally virtual learning process, future-teacher identity further improved their motivation, as is clear in the following excerpt reported by a female participant; “peer tutoring foundation students in my town through Whatsapp and Snap Chat allowed me to practice what I learn in the College of Education in real life, motivating me to practise my future role as a teacher” (FP7, LLH). Another female participant expressed similar views;

I grasped some opportunities through facebook by having online discussions with teachers, participating in virtual committees and courses, conducting my online workshops, and finding opportunities using different technologies. I love using blogs to write my dairies and to reflect on my learning experience and teaching practicum (FP3, LLH).

In turn, this encouraged the exercise of ‘student-teacher autonomy’ or ‘teacher-learner autonomy’, in line with Smith and Erdogan (2008; cited in Huang, 2011). In a broad sense, the overall findings suggest that personally relevant and meaningful learning tasks that are necessarily associated with individuals’ identities might lead to increased motivation. Consequently, it might promote the development of greater autonomy in the sense of taking charge over their own learning process and personal life. Thus, learners’ autonomy could be influenced by their conceptualisation and development of future selves. For example, participants exerted motivational efforts by engaging in diverse forms of autonomous learning-teaching through cyberspace, such as participating in virtual teacher-development communities, tutoring university students through social technologies, and volunteering to teach short English courses to non-English majors in their hometowns through virtual platforms (see also section 5.6.2 and 5.6.4). These virtual extra-curricular learning-teaching activities displayed a sense of developing a teacher identity which increased their motivation to seek autonomous language learning and teaching. In a sense, the stronger and clearer participants’ future selves, the more motivated they were to take charge over their learning, and thereby, the more autonomous they would be in learning. Participants described their virtual learning experiences as a learning to teach opportunity, projecting essentially their

twofold identities as EFL learners and EFL future teachers. Thereby, it seems prudent to claim that their initiative virtual activities and the greater control taken over such learning-teaching tasks could be attributed substantially to their envisioned future selves. In other words, the study provides illustrative examples of participants' strong idealised L2 selves, "operationalising the vision" (Dörnyei, 2009, p. 37) by engaging autonomously in diverse forms of virtual learning pursuits. This finding chimes with Cai and Zhu's (2012) argument drawing on Dörnyei's self-based system that engaging in a virtual learning community presents different and additional experiences for language students, thus helping them form or re-form their ideal L2 selves and ought-to L2 selves.

It might also be reasonable to claim that the sense of autonomy, competence, and relatedness afforded by the cyberspace and participants' heavy investment in a such alternative learning context might lead to the development of their self-identity construction, and hence stimulating their motivation. As explained earlier, participants credited their growing competence in English to a wide array of out-of-class language learning activities, in which they got involved autonomously and persistently. In particular, they reported being engaged in sustained efforts to pursue virtual language learning tasks autonomously. Consequently, participants showed identity development, expressing 'researcher', 'writer', and 'public speaker', identities among other different selves. Their self-identity formation process appeared to commence through their constant exposure to English cultural products found in social technologies during their tertiary education. As pointed out earlier, participants extended their English language learning through social technologies to broadly diverse issues in which they could boost their personal growth by realising personal meanings and relevant interests. To be more precise, participants were willingly engaged in social technologies, indicating a capacity to take charge over their learning process. They also exhibited conscious selections of English language learning tasks, matching essentially their personal interests and stimulating self-reflection. Besides that, they showed interdependent social learning through virtual platforms. Consequently, their sense of autonomy, competence, and relatedness gained through their greater investment in these digital forums intrigued better conceptualisation of their English prospective teacher identity. Also, exhibiting proficiency in English language and remarkable communication skills presented evidence of successful and competent English-major students' selves. Broadly speaking, my participants exerted much effort and energy into engaging through cyberspace as an

alternative context targeted at nurturing and developing identities. As such, I can confidently presume that autonomous supportive social technologies facilitated identity development and fulfilment, resulting in increased motivation. As elucidated earlier, participants claimed that their traditionally institutional education, be it school level or tertiary level, provided them with very limited spaces for personal growth in terms of personal control (autonomy), sense of progress and achievement (competence), as well as a feeling of belonging (relatedness) (see section 5.1.1, 5.1.1.1, 5.1.1.2, 5.1.1.3, 5.1.1.4, 5.2, 5.2.1, 5.2.2, and 5.2.3). Yet, the data implied that they saliently exhibited positive attitude towards language learning in spite of the traditionally unfavourable learning conditions due to the compensating virtual environment that satisfied their innate fundamental needs (see section 5.4 and 5.4.1). Interestingly, participants contended that they used cyberspace autonomously to develop themselves and improve their future lives. Drawing on the data of my study, virtual social space seems to present fertile ground for exploring the interrelationship of autonomy, identity, and motivation, as it generates a sense of control and accomplishment related to personal meanings and social affiliation (see section 5.3, 5.3.1, 5.3.2, 5.3.3). Indeed, there is inextricable link between autonomous language learning, increased motivation, and highly vivid and confident images of future English-speaking selves. This finding is similar to that of Chik and Breidbach (2011), that is, the research participants acknowledged that their autonomous language learning pursuits outside the English classroom to have crafted their identities as EFL students.

Overall, the data of this study yielded intriguing insights, pointing out to a dynamically non-linear relationship between identity, autonomy, and motivation. This result parallels that of Lamb (2011), emphasising the interrelationship between autonomy, motivation, and future selves in longitudinal EFL learning experiences of Indonesian adolescents. Also, this result is in accordance with that of Chik and Breidbach's (2011) exploration of participants' English learning experiences, through a tale of two cities, reporting the intricate link between these three constructs in a dynamically reinforcing fashion. Besides that, Murphy's (2011) exploratory-interpretive study emphasised the mutual connection between learner autonomy, motivation, and identity in distance language learning. Moreover, this finding chimes with the work of Huang (2011) although he mainly explored the roles of identity and agency in developing autonomy among Chinese learners in their institutional and societal environments. Significantly, too, the findings explained earlier suggest that there is a

potentially interacting relationship among these three constructs embedded in the learning context. Amongst motivation researchers, Lamb (2011) further asserts Dörnyei's (2009) suggestion regarding the importance of context in 'developing' and then 'priming' future selves. Examples of that could be early parental advice and family guidance, vivid role models of successful Omani English speakers and inspirational Omani teachers available in person or via social technologies (see section 5.4.2 and 5.4.3). Such exemplary contexts were perhaps instrumental in supporting the participants to vividly imagine themselves as competent future speakers of English, or possibly activate their emergent selves as future English-mediated identities. This is also in line with Ushioda's (2009) cogent argument for a more contextual and relational perspective on second language motivation and L2 self. She provides further encouragement for learners to express themselves through the target language by taking more responsibility for their input in an autonomy supportive learning context (ibid.). I would, therefore, argue that L2 learning experience can also be utilised at a macro level by exploring students' social life, including their cyber lives as they incredibly participate in an array of socially constructed digital spaces. This seems to parallel Cole and Knowles' (2001) argument that there is an intricate interplay between people's lives and the social as well as the institutional settings where they live. In addition, Huang's (2011) findings indicate a relationship between agency, identity, and autonomy rooted deeply in the learning context and the degree to which students can be considered as part and parcel of the context. I strongly believe that exploring the impact of digital context on language learning motivation research is topical in that it addresses an urgent need to systematically investigate such context grounded on L2 Motivational Self System and Self-Determination Theory at a time when the cyber lives of language learners become essential for self and social identity development (Ushioda, 2011). This will be further discussed and analysed in the next section, responding to the second research question. This is congruent with Cai and Zhu's (2012) call for examining the role of digital technologies in L2 motivation research during a period in which such technologies are being immensely integrated into the teaching and learning of foreign languages. In my study, though, I have explored their past L2 learning experiences at a traditionally institutional context and a societal level at large in order to investigate what motivates them to autonomously participate in digital spaces, thus exploring their development of self. I would strongly argue that looking into students' broader language learning context or situation specific motives potentially provides great insights into their motivation and development of self. In other words, exploring participants' wider language

learning experiences, including the institutional and societal contexts serve as a reflective platform through which they articulate their experiences in order to understand what motivates them to actively engage in digital social spaces and how such engagement might potentially influence their language learning, and hence could perhaps shape their current behaviour, throwing light on their identity, autonomy, and motivation.

So far, I have attempted to address the first research question. I have analysed how the interplay between these three constructs unfold between human beings situated in particular L2 learning context guided partly by two theoretical frameworks. As such, the data could potentially be used to complement predominantly quantitative findings in motivation studies, expounding on the intricacy related to the relationships of ‘person-in-context’ (Ushioda, 2009) by generating thorough delineations of students. Besides that, the findings could lend further support to the ongoing quantitatively research endeavours, examining the interconnection between future-related constituents of the self and motivated learning behaviour. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy to indicate, here, that this study largely emphasises the expressions of identities through cyberspace, referring only to a few examples of real-life incidents. The findings of this research concentrate on the virtual space more clearly, and thus putting certain limitations on the analyses of face-to-face contexts. As explained above, participants chose the online world to compensate for the traditionally unfavourable learning conditions. As such, they steered their conversations towards the virtual space to facilitate the expressions of their identities, directing their online and offline identities with regard to each other. Whilst there are limited data on real-world events, such cases could be deemed as a distinctive point for further investigations.

Chapter Six

Expressions of Identities Online and Offline

6. Introduction

This chapter aims to address the second research question which is formulated as follows: How do virtual social spaces facilitate the expression of female and male Omani student-teachers' identities, as compared to offline contexts? It should be noted that the data revealed that participants' online identity relates to their actual identity, and thus bringing their offline identity to the digital context. In a sense, what they consumed offline fed into their online identity, as will be illustrated in the following sections. Their online identity is filtered through the lens of English which facilitated their participation in virtual social spaces, as will be highlighted in the following sections. Data on offline identity will be referred to separately. The third and fourth focused group discussions were geared towards addressing this topic. The second research question will be discussed in relation to Dörnyei's L2 Motivational Self System (2009), the Self-Determination Theory (2002), and Yashima's International Posture (2009), while investigating other context-dependant motivational powers.

6.1 Expression of the Omani Identity and the Omani Variety of English in Offline Contexts

The focus group discussions with the research participants and their language learning histories provided mosaic glimpses of their deep-rooted national and religious affiliations in offline contexts. The findings revealed the need for the Omani variety of English to represent their national and religious identities, embodying their rich culture, values, traditions, and terminologies as the following conversational exchange illustrated;

(FP7) Here, in Oman, we have different words and vocabularies that if someone from America comes for the first time would not understand; we have words like: wadi, willaya. So, these Omani anglicised words belong only to the Omani culture.

R. So, do you think there is an influence of the Omani culture in the English language?

P (FP7) I believe we have our Omani English. We also have Arabic English. So, we have our special Omani English to be more specific as there are many Englishes in the world and Arabic English is one

of them. I believe that we should maintain our Omani English, because again it is an international language and other people might get to know more about our culture through this language. Again, other than just the Arab world, the Islamic world as well as their own vocab related to it, for example, we say Hajj when talking about pilgrimage. So, we do not even say pilgrimage even if we are speaking in English. So, when people read the word, Hajj, they will look it up in a dictionary and they are less likely to find it. And if they find it, they will get to know our culture and they will read about it. So, English is one way to preserve our culture through it and we get to know different cultures through it (Group B, 3FGD).

By the same token, a female participant reported that she likes to encourage the spread of the Omani variety of English to promote the Omani culture; “I like to support our Omani English to add a flavour to the English language, reflecting our Omani identity in the way we are using English. Therefore, we can spread our unique culture” (FP2, LLH). Similarly, a male participant stated that; “I like to speak Omani English with my friends” (MP12, LLH), which revealed a sense of national identification while conversing with their peers through the Omani variety of English. Thus, the representation of the Omani variety of English could be claimed to be an icon of their identity.

Similarly, a female participant shared an anecdote with the other participants about coining words in English (FP4, group A, 3FGD). Her anecdote implied a sense of ownership that the Omani variety of English offered them. She said;

Omanis are excellent at coining words. We use many words. I remember that my friend was talking enthusiastically with one of the teachers and she wanted to say that there were four rooms. Instead, she said that there were four **Gurfas**, which meant rooms in Arabic. So, she was saying that in Arabic, but adding the suffix S to show plurality (ibid.).

This funny everyday anecdote, which also occurred to many other Omani English speakers, could signal their desire to nativise and indigenise the English language they used to mark their Omani English, resulting in its linguistic variations.

Seemingly, those statements unfolded the participants’ strong desire to have a vibrant variety of an international language which is capable of carrying the richness of their national culture and tolerant religious ideologies, which they perceived as being unique to the Omani society. Thereby, that could be seen as an acknowledgement of the power of English as a lingua franca to be abundantly laden with distinctive portrayals of its myriad cultures. On the other hand, it could be interpreted as a resistance to the western English language that is immensely

drenched with colonial discourses of the inferiority of Arabs and Muslims. This is similar to Mahboob's (2009) argument that English is used in Pakistan as an Islamic language, mirroring Islamic values, cultures, and discourses. The English language is not exclusively owned by or restricted to the British or American native speakers due to its increasing use as an international lingua franca (Csizér and Kormos, 2009; Lamb, 2004). As was exemplified earlier in the third conversational exchange with my female group B (see above), I would argue that this newly globalised representation of English as a global language could perhaps play a motivational power in different EFL settings. For example, my participants exhibited their desire to reflect their Omani identities through the English language by carrying the distinct Omani discourses which embody the Omani culture as an Arab Middle Eastern society (see above). This, in turn, implies that the notion of integrativeness (Gardner, 1985) cannot precisely account for the Omani learners' motivations to learn English, being unable to depict a vivid image in this regard. To me, the expression of the Omani identity and the Omani variety of English in offline contexts may indicate the irrelevance of the construct of integrativeness (Gardner, 1985) in its traditional sense, as it cannot accommodate the necessity of using English as a lingua franca. Therefore, it would be prudent to stretch out its boundaries due to the pressing needs of the English language in its global variety and sense. These references to traditional contexts show how students navigate their online and offline identities with regard to each other.

6.2 Expression of a Bicultural Identity: National Progress of Oman through English in Offline Contexts

This section is geared towards exploring participants' desire for the national progress of Oman via English in offline contexts, expressing a '*bicultural identity*' (Arnett, 2002) to relate to the global culture whilst preserving their local culture. Put simply, the research data showed a recurrent theme pertinent to the influential role of English as it is the medium of burgeoning body of research, and scientific knowledge. The participants reported that they could effectively contribute to the development of contemporary Oman through conducting robust scientific research studies in English, highlighting the importance of biculturalism. The following conversational discussion further demonstrated that point;

(FP7) English is the language of research. And if I want to improve our society, we must take from the English language. Just imagine focusing on research that is done in the Arabic language, I do not think we will get more results than we would get in English because not only English-speaking countries use

English, but also other countries as well. So, it is really important to benefit from the other' experiences through research from different cultures not only English culture and apply that in our society, taking what is suitable for us and apply it after examining it and analysing it to shape it according to our society in order for it to advance. So, research conducted in English is so important as it plays a very important role in the developing Oman at different levels.

(FP10) if we want to develop our country and develop ourselves, we must seek knowledge through English (Group B, 3FGD).

In order to arrive at a robust understanding of their argument concerning the use of English language for national development, I proposed for them a seemingly easier plan by raising the status of the Arabic language to reach an international standard through making Arabic translations of the available existing knowledge. Interestingly, however, the participants appeared well-informed about the critical role of English as an international language with its scientific, economic, and political values. Therefore, a female participant responded to my suggestion saying that:

we do not really have time to translate everything that comes from the other side of the world into Arabic. So, being able to read in English and know English helps us to be in the same line with them to be able to move with the rapid changes that is happening around the world (FP10, group B, 3FGD).

Overall, the participants seemed to have a sound understanding of the power of English pertaining to the development of their country in all its aspects, be it at a domestic level or at an international one. In turn, this may explain the ubiquity of English as an icon of political, economic and social powers in the context under investigation and the international context. This point may be better explained in relation to Bourdieu's (1991) notions of 'capital', including its different forms such as social, economic, linguistic and cultural capital. Bourdieu further emphasises that these types of capital would be considerably treasured provided that they gain 'symbolic capital' in terms of higher social standing and recognition (ibid.). Also, the wider spread of English as a lingua franca has recently strengthened its symbolic capital in Oman, promising access to enormous economic and social capital (Al-Mahrooqi and Denman, 2018). For example, proficient speakers of English can get white collar professions and high-paid jobs (Al-Issa and Al-Bulushi, 2011), and thus gaining membership into elite social communities in Oman. Moreover, Islam (2013, p. 167) refers to De Swaan (2001) to draw on the 'hierarchical global language system theory', maintaining that "speakers of various languages in the world tend to learn a higher order language with

greater communication value and socio-economic benefits". In my study, participants also appeared to be fully aware of the necessity of being exposed to different cultures and being involved in intercultural dialogues for the sake of national progress and advancement, realising the significance of biculturalism. The following conversational discussion highlighted those dimensions;

(FP6) I think the main role of English is to introduce Oman to other countries. So, we can write in English to promote for Oman to another culture. So, English is helpful.

(FP6) I think English is an engine especially for jobs. To be able to speak and write in English, it gives you an advantage and it opens job opportunities for you. Even if the job is not related to English, you are supposed to know English in order to survive and get promoted. We also use English in tertiary education in Oman.

(FP4) It is a means to meet the world. If English is not being taught or used in Oman, the country will be backwards. It would not be open as now. There is no direct communication between cultures (Group A, 3FGD).

Moreover, the young Omani participants seemed to realise the status of English in the contemporary Omani society in comparison to its status in the past. Thereby, parents started taking measures to develop the English language skills of their children as it illustrated in the following conversation;

I think, in the past, local people in Oman did not see English language as important. For example, if their children got bad marks in English, they would not care because they expected that and they thought it was not important. Now, we see some awareness among Omani people. They see English language as significant not in Oman itself, but around the world. Even my father and mother try to hire a private English teacher for my sisters to teach them English at home besides their school lessons because they understand that English language is vital and they cannot do anything without English. You will learn English to enrich your future (MP14, group C, 3FGD).

Overall, the data uncovered participants' instrumental and integrative orientations behind seeking English language learning for national development, representing the English cultural identity and the Omani identity that allow them to belong to the global culture, as is evident in the following statements written by a male participant;

Through English, we can know the culture of other nations. If I can speak this language, I can read a lot of books so that I know the culture. While communicating with others, I can present my English cultural side, along with my Omani background and experience to add to the discussion (MP12, LLH).

Participants appeared to robustly understand the scientific reservoir of English that can be used for personal and national growth whilst adhering to their local culture, and thus exhibiting strong desires for ‘bicultural identities’ (Arnett, 2002). In a sense, participants retained future aspirations for their roles at a national level. They also exhibited positive attitudes towards the English language, showing an awareness of English language needs. As such, it seems prudent to comprehensively understand students’ global identity (Csizér and Kormos, 2009), along with their national affiliations. These illustrated examples of real-life events, which occurred in traditional contexts, indicate how students direct their online and offline identities in a reciprocally reinforcing manner.

6.3 Identity Curatorship: Representation of the Omani-Islamic Selves through Cyberspace

My qualitative data revealed a dominant and recurrent theme. All my research participants expressed a powerfully driving force behind their effective engagement and great investment in cyberspace through the medium of English, representing distinct identities through social media which are intrinsically related to their Omani-Islamic affiliations. That is, they voiced their intrinsic desires to display positive pictures of the Islamic, Arabic, and Omani identity which might be explained as being rebellious against Islam-phobia imposed on them via social technologies, and thus rejecting this imposed self as will be explained in the following examples. For instance, a female participant elucidated that she carefully used social applications available through the digital space to rectify any misleading perceptions about Arab and Muslim people, accusing them of being “terrorists and backwards” (FP11, LLH). Therefore, she perceived her responsibility as to convey the truthful message of Islam as “a religion of love and peace” (ibid.), highlighting the significance of English in this regard. In a similar vein, a male participant expressed his collective responsibility regarding such a grim picture depicted through the media about Muslims and Arabs (MP12, LLH). He wrote;

Unfortunately, there’s this stereotype that Muslims are terrorists and Arabs have an oil field in their backyards from which they get their money which is not true. By sharing my ideas with the world through such communities or even through my own social spaces, I get to show the world how I feel about what’s going on in our planet (ibid.).

What is clear is that Omani participants frequently voiced their collective responsibility to alter public perception which is imposed on them via social media, emphasising the pivotal role of English to facilitate their perceived duty in this direction, as reported by participants in

the previous examples. Such feelings of social obligation are congruent with that of Gore et al. (2009), comparing collective responsibility against individualistic ones in divergent contexts. Also, Islam et al. (2013) argue that national affiliation can be an influential motivating drive, directing students' motivations in Eastern collective societies. Similarly, this finding accords with a recent study conducted by Alqahtani (2018) in the context of Saudi Arabia, emphasising collectivist goals prevailing the Arab Middle Eastern societies. They emphasised that religious and national affiliations assume critical roles in motivating learners to learn English (ibid.). A similarly prior research of Al-Haq and Al-Masaeid (2009) presents evidence that the motivations of Jordanian students behind learning English is closely related to national identification processes, explaining that they tend to consider their learning of English as a fulfilment of their commitments nationally and religiously.

The concept of curatorship (Potter, 2012) is evident among the data collected from the focus group discussions and the individually composed language learning histories, presenting evidence of participants' selection and identification of meaningfully relevant digital pathways. Participants demonstrated their consciousness and carefulness regarding what and how to share their intended messages with others, whilst striving to positively present their true Islamic values and embody respectful images of Arabs, in particular, Omani men and women. Their anguished expressions indicated how they poignantly felt alienated, and hence displeased about the negative representations of the inferiority of Muslims and Arabs pervading the global mass media. As such, they carefully 'curate' what to display through their social virtual participation in an effort to rebel against the digitally imposed selves. For instance, a female participant expressed her conscious stance against such imposed selves, acknowledging her conscious use of twitter to "show others who we are as Muslims and as Arabs and to correct their views about us" (FP11, group B, 4FGD). Also, a male participant mentioned that:

Through my experience in these social applications such as following some youtube channels, watching videos, going through the comments, adding my own comments, I mainly focus on how I am presenting the things that I want to say as I am projecting myself as an Arab. Some people have a negative attitude to Arabs because the media feeds them with negative ideas about Arabs and Muslims. But through youtube, I am putting myself as evidence that the media is mistaken for presenting such ideas (MP13, group C, 3FGD).

Likewise, a female participant wrote that she particularly used blogs to be the platform through which she engaged in reflective dialogues aimed to inform people about Islam; “using blogs is highly beneficial [so that] people can argue and oppose upon different topics and in the same time provide facts that can support their claims” (FP6, LLH), and thus can change their misconceptions regarding Islam as “a religion of terrorism” (ibid.) by presenting cogent arguments.

The sense of autonomy demonstrated by participants through their initiative participation in cyberspace and their personal control over their cyber-lives is coupled with a potential success, as they clearly navigate their digital paths by being equipped with the required skills essential for effective online engagement, bringing to the fore two innate human needs, namely, autonomy and competence that are postulated by Ryan and Deci’s (2002) Self-Determination Theory. As an example, a female participant echoed a similar sense of success and confidence by pursuing her future self as she voiced such feelings through her language learning history;

They are still dreams; dreams that will come true one day. I had and still have so many opportunities to learn and practise the language with native speakers or international speakers of English through technological social spaces. This kind of communication has raised my confidence to be the person I would like to be in the future (FP5, LLH).

Ostensibly, the Omani EFL participants did not view their engagement with those cultural social technologies through the English language as a threat to their Omani, Arabic, and Islamic identities as one of the female participant expressed her pride to interact in English via web 2.0 technologies, displaying a sense of relatedness as she stated; “I am proud to speak English, to connect with others around the world through the virtual space, to be able to defend Muslims and spread peace”(FP6, LLH). In fact, participants presented their thirst for belonging, seeking out meaningful interaction and reflective participation via English social technologies. In writing up this study for publication, we argued that Dörnyei’s motivational model (2009) might be further developed through the inclusion of “an additional ‘identity’, imposed by society and media through prejudice and misconception” (Little and Al Wahaibi, 2017, p. 182), which might be at disparity between their actual and future self-concepts. Thereby, I asked my participants in a direct manner during group discussions whether they perceived English as a danger to their Omani-Islamic identity or not.

(FP11) No, I think it serves because knowing English will help us to transmit our culture to others and to correct anything wrong that they construct in their minds about us. Maybe, these are wrong stereotypes and wrong misconceptions, so through the English language we can correct these and spread our true Islamic values and Islamic teachings.

(FP10) Muslims are seen as terrorists coming from the place of terrorism. Being able to change this idea is what we all want to seek (Group B, 3FGD).

The Omani participants seemed to have a motivational perception of learning English as a significant international language that facilitated their involvement in Web 2.0 technologies to further strengthen their loyalty for their country. Also, participants' use of the English language seemed harmonious with their Omani-Islamic identity due to its utilitarian worth within and outside Oman as one of the female participants mentioned;

when I learn English, I try to spread the Omani culture and the religious culture because I did not view English language as a danger. I try to spread my religious identity and show the world the truth, not misconceptions of Islam (FP5, LLH).

In a similar manner, another female participant stated that; "English is not a threat and it is not going to harm me. I am Muslim and I can use the language to spread Islam and write about our culture, tradition, and my view of being Muslim" (FP2, LLH). Nevertheless, a male participant expressed his awareness of different views perceived by some Islamic groups regarding the potential effect of English language on their religious morals and cultural principles (MP12, LLH). That is, he acknowledged the perception held by some fundamentalist Muslims that English could pose a possible threat to the Islamic values and cultural norms by carrying different ideologies (ibid.). This can be interpreted as Potter's (2012) notion of curatorship as they appeared selective of what to take and what to avoid. This manifested in another conversational exchange as follows;

(MP12) there is the whole filtering process. We are as Muslims and Arabs; we have our own values and traditions. I do not want to throw my Omani identity away and wear a new one. So, what we do all the time is that we *filter* it and take what we want or what we accept in our tradition and leave what is not useful for us. [emphasis added]

(MP14) you take the good things that cope with your identity. It can be part of your identity. You can take the appropriate thing that your culture and religion accept. You can also draw boundaries (Group C, 3FGD).

It should be noted, however, that the repeated use of the word ‘filter’ by that participant when it came to the discussion of English as a potential threat might have perhaps implied existing threat to their identities, however, it seemed to be overlooked by its attached progressive advantages as explained by a female participant;

The English learner should take what is beneficial for him/her and what suit his/her culture without affecting his/her identity. Instead, we can use English language to promote our country and its rich culture. Using English as an international language beside technology will help to reach the whole world. People from other parts of the world will get to know our culture and religion. In return, these foreign people will understand and appreciate our identity and will avoid any cultural conflicts and misunderstanding (FP6, LLH).

This text potentially implies that identity is dictated by culture and religion. In this regard, a female participant stated that:

I don't see the English language as a danger to my Omani-Islamic identity. I see it as another window for more opportunities. I think that as long as a learner is careful to what extent to get into the other culture, there is no fear in that at all. Knowing the boundaries and limitations is very crucial at this point (FP8, LLH).

Another female participant reinforced the idea of maintaining the Omani identity whilst having a meaningful engagement with the English culture (FP11, LLH). Nonetheless, she acknowledged the progressive aspect of the English culture that could favourably impact on the Omani culture as she documented that; “we should never forget about our Omani culture when being immersed into the English culture. We should try to keep our own traditions but with a flavour of modernity that we get from the west” (ibid.). Over and over, the research participants confessed their admiration for some aspects of the English culture, yet they appeared sensitive to other cultural aspects which were not harmonious with their religious and cultural identities. For instance, a female participant mentioned that she liked some cultural aspects such as “commitment to time and work. At the same time, we do not like some cultural aspects like extra-marital stuff that do not go along with our Islamic religion” (FP2, group A, 4FGD). Another female participant echoed similar expressions, reinforcing such tendency by stating that “we can take the useful things that suit us, fit our personalities, ways of thinking, cultural and religious backgrounds. We can also leave the other things” (FP6, group A, 4FGD). Reinforcing such attitude, another female participant articulated similar expressions regarding the English culture, saying that “we admire some parts and we

do not admire the other parts. Some of the good parts are being professional, being independent, respecting time, and being punctual are the main elements” (FP7, group B, 4FGD). Obviously, participants did not exhibit complete assimilation into the English culture, thus posing questions regarding the relevance of Gardnerian concept of integrativeness to the Omani context.

In a nutshell, what is clear is that the research participants powerfully represented distinctive selves which are inextricably pertinent to their national and religious identities. This seems to accord with the argument made by MacIntyre et al. (2009) concerning the fundamental necessity to take cultural variations into account in the exploration of identity. As exemplified earlier, socially and religiously collective motives tended to shape Omani identities via digital social space. In addition, the data showed evident Omani representations in digital space, displaying identity curatorship as the Omani participants seemed to consciously construct their cyber-lives. Simultaneously, their identity curatorship could be seen as a correspondence to their imagined future self. This finding is congruent with Potter’s notion of curatorship (2012). As such, participants endeavoured to carry out their dual perceived duties, initiating multifaith and multicultural dialogues in cyberspace to build a bridge between the divergent worlds to solve their unsettled issues regarding politics, culture, and religion. This will be further discussed in section 6.5. The Omani EFL participants further perceived English as a vehicle for promoting their history, culture, traditions, and perspectives in the wider international arena through virtual social spaces, which is the focus of the next section.

6.4 Cultural and Religious Emissaries: Forming Ideal L2 Selves in relation to the Omani-Islamic Affiliations

Drawing on Dörnyei’s motivational model, this research study investigated participants’ future aspirations and their influential power on motivation. The focus group conversations and the LLHs of the Omani research participants revealed the complex relationship between participants’ national interests and their second language motivation. Their deeply valued future desires are concurrent with their collective or national commitments (ibid.). For instance, a male participant stated that:

I would like to be the international Omani games developer to present Oman and its rich heritage worldwide, promoting its various aspects, such as cultural norms, religious values, dress code, tourist attractions, and historical landmarks through my video games to show a positive image of Oman, as opposed to the passive picture illustrated in social media by the Arab Gulf countries (MP12, LLH).

He appeared rebellious against the projected picture of Oman as a passive society in the Arab Gulf Region, which he perceived to be a portrait negatively depicted by those neighbouring countries. Accordingly, he established his own YouTube channel to exhibit his Omani video games, displaying his own written content. He also passionately participated in an online community comprised of international video gamers. Clearly, Potter's (2012) curatorship is evident here, as the participant carefully chooses various dimensions of the Omani culture to share with others through his virtual and cultural products.

By the same token, a female participant voiced her dream to be an internationally renowned Omani writer to convey the distinct culture of Oman worldwide (FP7, LLH). While elaborating on her future self, she described the specific style of writing she was targeting. She shared her views with the other female participants, stating that:

We know that a language can preserve our own culture when we are writing, we must take under consideration that we use our own environment. For example, if I am writing a fiction or a novel, so I need to integrate my environment and the name of the characters themselves is also one part of that. So, through writing, we mention our social norms just as we learn about other cultures through writing or watching movies so that we can get it published to the world and get them to know about our culture through their language (FP7, group B, 3FGD).

Similarly, another female participant viewed her future self as an international public speaker besides being an English teacher in order to bring about positive changes in the Omani educational system to positively impact her society at large as she went on explaining her future plans to the other female participants;

I would like to be an EFL instructor and an internally famous public speaker to bring about positive differences to the system of education in Oman. More than that, there is a necessity to communicate with others especially as we can see now that foreign countries are more advanced than us in teaching. So, sharing experiences with those teachers through online applications will be very beneficial for me to choose the right thing to help the students. Also, I am not viewing my future away from conferences because I really like them. For example, having online discussions after attending a conference is the right place to express our ideas. Also, I would like to be a public speaker, so I keep watching TEDTALK videos about teachers who talk about their experiences with their students. So, I would encourage the teachers in Oman. Therefore, having some kind of recorded videos of reflective experiences with students would help me to go with my vision to change the Omani educational system (FP3, group A, 3FGD).

Similarly, a male participant articulated his dream to be a translator in the future so that he could translate the Omani rich knowledge about religion and their religious tolerance to spread peace to the entire world (MP13, LLH). As such, he could spread the Omani tolerant and peaceful culture as an exemplary country as he shared this perceived truth with the other male participants;

Omanis are famous for their tolerance [amongst the Islamic and Arabian countries]. So, I would like to translate their knowledge into English to promote the Omani tolerance and peacefulness to the world to set an example (MP13, group C, 3FGD; cited in Little and Al Wahaibi, 2017, p. 183).

In the similar vein, a female participant imagined her future identity as an Omani and Islamic caller, aiming to promote her cultural and religious values as she reported that she would like to be in the future “a caller for Islam. Besides that, I can spread my Omani cultural heritage” (FP5, LLH). Again, she explicitly voiced her future desires, rebelling against the frustrating images firmly held by others grounded on mere prejudices and misconceptions portrayed via social media.

Obviously, the future desires of participants appear to be deeply linked with their Islamic and Arabic affiliations, prevailing the collectivist Oman. According to Islam (2013), national interest can be closely connected to learners’ ideal visions given its idealistic yet plausible nature. These views are also in accordance with Alqahtani (2018), emphasising participants’ aspirations to convey truthful realities about their culture and religion. It is quite noteworthy that their autonomously embraced digital pathways to realise their future selves are necessarily grounded on complicated interacting variables pertaining to learner autonomy and identity, as argued by Ushioda (2011).

6.5 Representation of Virtual Multicultural and Multifaith Communications: Engaging Omani-Islamic Identities

Analysing the results of the focus group discussions and language learning histories yielded the pressing need for multicultural and multifaith dialogues articulated by the participants, which were geared towards national purposes. For example, a male participant wrote that:

I love talking to speakers of English through virtual social spaces. Talking with them and getting to know them better helps in breaking the stereotypical view they have about us and the one we have about them which is a win to win situation in order to bring about positive interactions, leading to the progress of Oman in all its spheres nationally and internationally (MP12, LLH).

In the same line, a female participant seemed to have realised the considerable significance of English in bridging diverse nations through multicultural communications (FP8, LLH). As such, she encouraged such dialogues so that Oman could be well-integrated with the rest of the world as the following quote illustrated; “I think English helps my country to be socially and politically connected to other countries” (FP8, group B, 3FGD). Likewise, a male participant aspired to be an ambassador to effectively engage in multicultural communications for national development; “I would like to be an ambassador to build a bridge between my country and other countries by engaging with each other in order to develop Oman” (MP14, group C, 3FGD). Besides that, the findings indicated the necessity of being involved in multicultural communications to satisfy their thirst for knowledge from the western scientific reservoir as expressed by a male participant; “through English, I can learn from the western people and communicate with them to benefit from their rich knowledge about scientific advancement” (MP13, group C, 3FGD).

Interestingly, the results of the research revealed participants’ awareness concerning current international affairs and the influential role of His Majesty, the Sultan of Oman, in resolving critical political issues due to his English communicative competence and multicultural communicative skills. There was another influential political Omani leader, Yusuf Bin Alawi, as the following conversational exchange revealed;

I can see the role model for us is the Sultan Qaboos as he was able to bring peace through communications with other countries, so one might think how he can do that. It is the English language as a main tool to communicate with other countries and his personality is the main thing that he projects through his communication with these countries. Another figure I could think of is the Minister Responsible for Foreign Affairs. Recently, he has been very famous and he is communicating with many people from different parts of the world. The main event is his negotiations with atomic nuclear crisis. Eventually, he was successful. The English language is very important here in Oman and its people since they are very sociable so that they can communicate with other people in Oman like visitors and foreigners. So, English is a way of communication (MP13, group C, 3FGD).

Also, the data showed that the Omani participants were interested in maintaining multifaith communications, expressing and exchanging their religious views openly with various nations to lead a tolerant lifestyle as the the following conversational exchange illustrated;

(MP12) I love the idea of communicating with English speakers all around the world. Also, what has been happening in the world against Islam urges me to tell others that not all Muslims are bad. Those

are the minority. They do not express us. I like talking to people and I like getting to know others' religious views and ideas to be able to be tolerant and accept differences.

(MP14) I definitely agree with you. Also, I want to promote our Islamic cultural identity and Omani culture. I also want to clarify any misunderstanding of Islam and Arabs (Group C, 3FGD).

Although the Omani participants seemed to hold a simplistic perception of a highly intricate and sophisticated international communications, the topic appeared quite prominently through their focus group discussions and their language learning histories. Also, participants' desire to establish multicultural and multifaith dialogues mirrors their positive affective disposition towards the international community at large and their aspiration to interact and identify with international people. However, this does not imply in any way the relevance of Gardnerian (1985) Integrative construct as they were not particularly interested in identifying completely with the L2 community, but rather interested in bridging different cultures and religions through insightful communications. Thereby, the notion of integrativeness should be reinterpreted from a self-perspective (Ryan, 2009). According to Ryan (2009), integrativeness and ideal L2 self "may in fact be tapping into the same pool of emotional identification that learners feel toward the values of the language and its speakers" (p. 131-132; cited in Magid, 2011, p. 120). Ryan (2009) further argues that the ideal self provides solid grounds for comprehending the affective aspect of L2 motivation than integrativeness. In fact, my research participants were not only interested in interacting with native speakers of English, but also with diverse international members. This point will be discussed in the section below.

6.6 International Posture: Imposed and Displayed Selves in the Context of Web.2.0

While the previous section focused primarily on establishing virtual multicultural and multifaith communications for *national* purposes, this section addresses the international posture of Oman in a *self-determined* context of Web 2.0 to express an *international identity*, mirroring essentially *imposed and displayed selves*. The data revealed participants' desire to view themselves as part of the global community, be concerned with universal issues, and be willing to communicate with international individuals, as will be explained in the following examples. Due to the recent 'Arab Spring' that has swept the Middle East Region and its accompanying devastating turmoil since 2011, it has indeed brought about dramatic political and social terrorisms that have negatively projected through the western

media (Little and Al Wahaibi, 2017). Nevertheless, the Arab spring has manifested in a quite different shape and size in Oman. Poignantly, the darkest image of all has been associated with the so-called fundamentalist Islamic State or, ISIS, and its terrorist actions. This appears to have caused a sense of gloomy alienation amongst Muslims and Arabs who have witnessed such a terrifying period (ibid.). The Omani research participants were found extremely displeased about the grim portrayals of Arabs and Muslims. They believed that constructive engagement through virtual spaces in English could help them immensely to communicate a healthy image of Oman as a representation of a Middle Eastern Arabic and Islamic country, ‘curating’ identities carefully to be viewed by the world via virtual spaces, as it appeared in the following excerpt;

I think being a proficient English speaker who can effectively immerse in cyber social spaces will definitely help in transmitting our culture to others and to correct anything wrong that they construct in their minds about us because these are false stereotypes and false misconceptions. So, through the English language we can correct these and spread our true Islamic values (FP11, Group B, 3FGD).

In a similar manner, a female participant expressed her strong desire to present an international portrait of Oman to compensate for the imposed feeling of a passively quiet and peacefully secluded country in comparison to the famous economically thriving neighbouring country (FP8, group B, 3FGD). As such, she seemed to carefully ‘curate’ (Potter, 2012) her semantic messages to be communicated to the globe through social cyberspace. She narrated a personal anecdote to the other female participants (ibid.). She said;

I remember a situation when I was in Britain. A man came and asked me where I am from and I said: I am from Oman. He said: where is that? He did not know anything about my country and I was so surprised. But, whenever you say that Oman is next to Dubai, they say: oh, Dubai, we know it. But, they did not know my country, so it forces me to use English through social technologies to introduce my country and its culture. So, the language serves me a lot in this way to view my country in a good way and introduce Islam to these people and let them know more about Oman (FP8, group B, 3FGD).

Likewise, a male participant projected an international posture he would ideally aspire to attain so that he could mark the presence and contribution of Oman internationally, reflecting interest in international activities (Yashima, 2009), as he indicated in the following conversational discussion with the other male participants; “I try to leave my Omani stamp or touch in the world while I am trying to improve my English language. So, I try to participate

in international events to leave my Omani touch as being part of the world” (MP14, group C, 3FGD). A female participant echoed similar expressions towards introducing Oman to the virtual international community whilst discussing her views with the other female participants (FP2, group A, 4FGD). She stated that the main goal for establishing her blog was to inform international people “about our tradition, culture, and norms in Oman. I used to post about daily different activities related to the Omani culture” (ibid.).

Participants aspired to disseminate Omani intellectual contributions at an international level through their autonomous participation in social technologies, reflecting a sense of autonomy (Ryan and Deci, 2002). Additionally, the findings revealed that participants held a high collective responsibility to present the Omani contribution to the world through promoting their an exceptionally tolerant Arabian culture in an international level, reflecting semantic representations of what to convey to the international community about Oman, as a male participant documented;

The Omani culture is a proud culture of its heritage and we all, as a community, do whatever we can do to give back to this great land. Therefore, it deserves to be presented internationally as an exemplary tolerant culture (MP12, LLH).

In addition, a male participant believed that while constructing meaningful communications with other nations via social technologies, he could promote his unique and distinctive Omani culture in the international arena (MP14, LLH). A sense of relatedness (Ryan and Deci, 2002) comes to the fore, here;

Online social communication with other countries through the English language will open the door for me to present my culture as well. Oman has a rich and a unique culture. It has managed to keep the old and add a flavour of the new to it without losing its identity with the passage of time, and I think it should be presented to the world to set an example for other developing countries. For instance, I can connect with many individuals from various continents of the globe using just my phone or an iPad or a computer. The message can be conveyed to thousands of people in a matter of seconds. For example, there are millions of users of Instagram, so posting one picture and writing a short comment on it every day will convey the message I want to get a cross. Adding to that, I can present my religion as well (ibid.).

Also, a male participant stressed the importance of acquiring an excellent command of English communicative competence in order to project a good image of Oman internationally, leading to an increased motivation as he reported that; “we should have

excellent communication skills in English which ultimately means that the country gets better in the international view. This helps in boosting the level of motivation” (MP12, LLH). A female participant reinforced such tendency coupled with a sense of competence (Ryan and Deci, 2002) by stating that; “I believe having a good English definitely helps me spread some knowledge about the Omani and Islamic culture among people from other cultures and religions” (FP2, LLH). Similarly, another female participant consolidated the significance of communicative English skills, as is evident in the following extracts;

I really want to reach the communicative competence as I visualise myself using English proficiently to reach my high goals, to be able to converse internationally with others and understand others from different parts of the globe and share my ideas and speak in a wider range. Therefore, I can present Oman internationally (FP5, LLH).

The participants appeared to form a global identity (Yashima, 2009), mirroring a feeling of relatedness to the international community (Ryan and Deci, 2009). Their strong need to relate to the global community may also justify their motivation to bring about positive changes to the world’s understandings of Muslim and Arab people in order to communicate with them in a harmonious fashion, thus feeling respected and accepted by the international community. This may explain their refusal to just live their lives, knowing that the bad press does not relate to them. Also, the data revealed that participants manifested signs of international posture in relation to their future L2 selves, mediating their interest in pursuing English language learning to realise their L2 using future selves. That is, they illustrated future visions of themselves related to global concerns, thus finding meaningfulness and relatedness to learning English which, in turn, reflects self-determined type of motivation in terms of achieving a sense of autonomy, competence, and belonging. Participants also presented evidence for semantic representations of international posture in the sense of what to convey to the world, a finding in line with Yashima (2009). She argues that international posture mirrors the future selves of an individual, participating in an imagined international community (*ibid.*). Conceptually and empirically, she further emphasises that learners who exhibit high levels of international posture tend to embrace strong visions of idealised future selves (Yashima, 2009; Yashima et al., 2004). This finding also chimes with that of Kormos et al. (2011), highlighting a mutually strong connection between the ideal L2 self and international posture. Another study conducted by Shahbaz and Liu (2012) shows a strong correlation between international orientation and intended learning efforts of Pakistani

college students. As illustrated in the previous quotes, I would argue that participants' international posture in my research study, unlike Yashima's study, is linked to their ideal L2 self as well as the 'imposed self' by media-influence views, resulting in a 'displayed self' relevant to the digital context. Besides that, the data uncovered that international posture reflects both integrative and instrumental orientations, a finding similar to Yashima's (2009) theoretical and operational argument. This led me to question the traditional dichotomy between instrumental and integrative orientations postulated earlier by Gardner (1985) in his classic socio-educational model. What is of particular interest, too, is that participants showed their inherent need for communicative competence as a means to realise a communicative goal. This seems to accord with MacIntyre et al.'s (1998) model of willingness to communicate, explaining the complexity of L2 communication beyond its acquisition as an ultimate goal. However, what is of particular relevance to my study is Yashima's (2009) argument that learners' ideal selves entail English proficiency as an essential element, working as a motive for L2 related actions. She maintains that conscious learners, in the sense of how they associate themselves with the world, are perceived to be highly motivated to learn and speak in English since they could perhaps envision their English using selves vividly (Yashima, 2009).

6.7 Wrapping Up: Comparative Concluding Thoughts

Addressing the second research question pertinent to Omani EFL student-teachers' expressions of identities through cyberspace in comparison to offline contexts, the findings further support the tripartite motivational model developed by Dörnyei (2009) to function as a platform through which participants engage in the development of their future selves, allowing rooms for context-sensitive motivational forces necessary for comprehending contemporary L2 motivations in a rapidly complex globalising era. As envisioned by the government of Oman, Omani students are encouraged to participate in international exchanges, such as student exchange programmes and international conferences led by students (Little and Al Wahaibi, 2017). Thus, their expressed identities in cyberspace and their cyber-lives - which they carefully select to share with the globe - are deemed significant to achieve effective globalised exchanges. What is of particular interest is that the data is topical as it parallels current thinking in the arena of L2 motivation.

Interestingly, the expression of national and religious identity as a motivational driving force for Omani learners to engage in English social technologies is notable. It also appeared in offline contexts, reflecting that their online identity is congruent with their offline identity. In other words, what they articulate offline is also expressed via digital modes. Nevertheless, virtual social spaces facilitate the expressions of their identities to a wider extent (see section 6.3, 6.4, 6.5, 6.6). These presented links to the influence of the real-world incidents reveal how students figure out the direction of the relationship between their online and offline identities, and thus channelling them in a mutually supporting way.

As pointed out earlier, there is a potentially motivating drive for Omani EFL students to engage in social technologies to eloquently articulate the Omani, Arabic, and Islamic history, culture, and perspectives in the wider international arena. This finding chimes with two Chinese research studies conducted by Lo-Bianco (2009) and Orton (2009), indicating learners' motivation to pursue English language learning so that they can promote the cultural aspect and identity of China to the globe. Clearly, too, my research participants seemed to form a global identity, reflecting 'a feeling of relatedness' to the international community. Thus, participants' international posture could also be explained as a significant constituent of their L2 self-systems as they tend to extend their selves by forming new pictures of themselves related to the international affairs of the modern era (Yashima, 2009). Participants also aspired to promote their own local and religious cultures through offline modes. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy to indicate, here, that this is not a surprising finding given the collectivist nature of the Omani society in which collective responsibility is strongly held, stemming fundamentally from their core religious beliefs and cultural values. On the one hand, one would argue that such a claim should be cautiously made and well-thought out as it might mirror their strong internalisation of the significant status of English in Oman across the board and its deep penetration into the society. That is to say, such explanation might be supported by the dominant social and political discourses that are heavily emphasised and profoundly infused with its utilitarian worth. On the other hand, I would argue that the qualitative methodology embraced by this study has given us insights into participants' articulations of their affiliations towards their national and religious identities.

In Line with Self-Determination Theory (Ryan and Deci, 2002), Omani participants clearly exhibited manifestations of autonomy as they initiatively took charge of their cyber-lives to

engage in global exchanges through virtual social spaces. They also demonstrated their burgeoning competence as they identified their digital avenues supported by essential technical and language skills to facilitate their virtual engagement. Besides that, representations of relatedness were evident since they displayed robust understanding of their role and relevance to the digital space they navigated, necessitating new interpretations of the original theoretical notions described by the authors. In other words, social technologies have offered potential affordances for accommodating fresh insights into the previously introduced terminologies, such as ‘relatedness’ and ‘belonging’, necessitating future investigations of students’ cyber-lives. Likewise, their perceived future selves (Dörnyei, 2009) are palpable, and driven by their intrinsic motivation to change the world’s misunderstanding concerning the Islamic religion and culture. However, as argued by Little and Al Wahaibi (2017) in the article based on this study, two additions are to be integrated into Dörnyei’s Motivational Self System. They suggest incorporating the imposed and displayed selves, explaining that the imposed self is somewhat different to the ought-other self in L2MSS, which is largely influenced by external obligations put on the individual. They explain that the imposed self does not replace Dörnyei’s ought-other self. Instead, it looks at how in more recent years the media has had an ever-increasing impact on how cultures are represented. In some cases, they are misrepresented, in particular, Islamic cultures and traditions to the extent that young people are looking at how they feel represented by the media and feel the urge to go against it to curate their own self in the digital context through how media-representation imposes on their lives and on their cultural identity (see the following quote for further details). Put simply, they propose

to incorporate the possibility of future selves being influenced, not as Dörnyei outlines it in his ‘ought to’ self, by outside demands placed upon the individual, but instead an ‘imposed self’ which is the result of media-influence perceptions, and which results in a ‘displayed self’ which aligns with Potter’s (2012) notion of curatorship, and is of particular importance in the digital context (Little and Al Wahaibi, 2017, p. 184).

Little and Al Wahaibi (2017) argue that although their ‘displayed self’ is largely controlled by the learner, it is potentially affected by society and media. Thereby, the learner himself ‘curates’ messages to display a particular picture of their religion and culture, resisting necessarily against an imposed self (ibid.). Participants’ selection of English words such as ‘weapon’ is one way to show that English is not basically instrumentally-perceived, but also a

way of unsettling deep-rooted prejudices and misconceptions imposed upon particular groups based on their national and religious orientations. They also refer to Higgins' (1987) self-discrepancy to further explain how participants relate to the imposed self with regard to the self they would like to display to the world, consciously 'curating' (Potter, 2012) their virtual lives to send their intended messages. Eventually, they recommend future research avenues concerned with the ways in which digital space fundamentally impacts upon our concepts of self as well as our motivations to actively navigate cyberspace (ibid.).

Significantly, the findings bring the Gardnerian (1985) concept of Integrativeness into question, suggesting the need to re-frame it, since participants seemed to be yearning to participate in the wider international community rather than Anglophone countries for the sake of meeting national and religious affiliations. Thus, I would take a critical stance, along with other researchers such as Csizér and Kormos (2009), as well as Ryan (2009) regarding the irrelevance of Gardner's integrative motivation to many EFL contexts in an increasingly complex globalising world. It seems, therefore, essential to further explore learners' international posture as well as their national interest behind pursuing English language learning in diverse EFL contexts. I, in line with Yashima (2009), would rather view the concept of international posture as a constituent part of the L2 Motivational Self System.

Finally, I would argue for the necessity to widen and deepen our comprehension of students' selves in social cyberspaces, exploring the link between English social platforms and the religious and cultural interests of students. As is clear, virtual social and cultural technologies present a widely extensive exposure to and participatory engagement in social multicultural spaces, encouraging further explorations of this specific context.

Chapter Seven

Self-reported Judgements about the Impact of this study on Participants’ Understanding of their English language, Identity, and Motivation (Autonomy, Competence, Relatedness).

7. Introduction

This chapter aims to address the third research question concerning the possible influence of this study on participants’ consciousness manifested throughout the investigation. The research question is formulated as follows: How do female and male participants self-report the impact of this study on their understanding of English language, identity, motivation (autonomy, competence, and relatedness)? In fact, this study addresses the research question at a metacognitive level, exploring the affordances of awareness-raising in relation to promoting learner autonomy, developing learner future selves and increasing learner motivation. This study sets out to explore participants’ consciousness of their L2 motivations and identities by stimulating their reflection through thoughtful consideration of significant dimensions pertinent to their language learning and teaching process. Importantly, too, awareness-raising is deemed pivotal in developing, and hence achieving participants’ future-selves (Dörnyei, 2009). In this respect, Dörnyei and Kubanyiova (2014) further emphasise the vitality of raising students’ awareness of their “preferred self-images” in order to achieve them, thus advising teaching practitioners to facilitate the expression of students’ desired future selves in order to develop these images by “capitalis[ing] on their own existing strengths and unique features” (p. 35). Similarly, Lamb and Little (2016) ascertain the importance of awareness-raising in fostering learner identity and developing learner autonomy so as to sustain learner motivation, arguing that:

For practitioners in the classroom, this illustrates the need for awareness of their learners’ identities, and to what extent their future selves may impact learning and teaching in the here and now. It also suggests that teachers need to encourage learners themselves to reflect critically on their future selves (p. 191).

Thereby, this study also aims to contribute to participants’ prospective professional identity since reflective teaching practices are not common in the Omani context (Al Riyami, 2016). In this regard, Al-Sadi (2015) upholds that by engaging learners in awareness-raising about

themselves as language students, their processes of learning, the opportunities and obstacles characterising their learning environment, they can thus learn effectively and sustain their motivation. Thereby, the methodological implication lies in the promotion of reflection as an awareness raising tool. Awareness is also raised through simple telling. The fifth and sixth focus group discussions were devoted to addressing this topic. Motivation development was traced through participants' self-reported judgements about the impact of this study on their understanding of English language, identity, and motivation (autonomy, competence, relatedness). This question will be discussed in relation to Deci and Ryan's (2002) SDT as well as Dörnyei's (2009) L2MSS. To be more precise, the chapter will look at different foci. First, it will discuss motivation development from the perspective of autonomy, competence, and relatedness (see section 7.1). Second, it will discuss the development of motivation in relation to participants' English future selves (see section 7.2). Third, it will explore participants' development of motivation, as is evident in their reflection on teaching practicum and perspectives on improvements (see section 7.3). The research participants explicitly referred to the research terms such as autonomy, identity, motivation, and virtual social space in terms of their own roles as future teachers.

Participants' developing consciousness regarding themselves and their language learning process was evident in their language throughout the focus group discussions, along with their individually composed language learning histories. Nevertheless, it would not be reasonable to contend that participants' awareness was solely and entirely as a result of the present investigation. It would be sensible, though, to indicate that participants did exhibit some awareness regarding particular dimensions of their language learning before taking part in the present study. For example, the following excerpt stated by a female participant may perhaps demonstrate her prior awareness of the research topic; "I wanted to know more about these concepts like autonomy, identity, and motivation. And how each one of us view these things" (FP5, group A, 6FGD). She further added that she decided to participate in this study to understand how her peers "think and view these concepts that are bigger than what we thought of. They seem very simple, but there are lots of things that are hidden" (ibid.). Similarly, a male participant reported his covert knowledge about autonomy and intrinsic motivation as he used to exercise his autonomous capacity unconsciously; "we used to do them, but we did not know that. I mean autonomous learning and intrinsic motivation. It is mostly labelling what we used to do subconsciously and putting them under this category"

(MP12, group C, 6FGD). As such, I would claim that the investigation could have potentially raised deeper awareness, and hence might have brought it to the fore through articulating such growing awareness evidenced in their self-evaluation statements. The conversations might have functioned as a springboard for awareness-raising through participants' input, and thus provided participants with opportunities to directly express their consciousness in a quite confident manner. For example, a male participant stated explicitly that the concept of autonomy "sounds familiar, but we do not know a lot about it. Throughout the meetings, we learned more about it" (MP12, group C, 6FGD).

7.1 Participants' developing sense of autonomy, relatedness, and competence

The sixth focus group discussion was geared towards exploring participants' development of motivation. In these discussions, participants frequently referred to their increasing awareness of autonomy, relatedness, and competence (Deci and Ryan, 2002). Participants voiced a wide range of self-evaluation statements about the impact of study on their understanding, revealing their growing awareness throughout the investigation. Given the fact that participants' awareness might have developed prior to the research, I attempted to purposefully bring to their attention how the *present study* could have perhaps influenced their sense of autonomy, relatedness, and competence. It should be noted that I kept reminding them of this point from time to time to make sure that they followed the path of what they were specifically being asked about. For example, I asked clarification questions to understand whether their responses referred particularly to this study or not.

First of all, most of the participants decided to participate in the research after reading the Participant Information Sheet, being basically intrigued by the research topic. Mostly, participants reported that they were not familiar with both the topic of the study and the research methods employed. However, a few of them acknowledged that they were not entirely novice to the topic, yet they were eager to have deep knowledge about the researched concepts. For instance, a female participant expressed such ideas; "I was really interested in the whole topic. It is something that I have not done before and I thought that would be really a good experience as a new thing and because it is in a field that I am interested in" (FP7, group B, 6FGD). Thereby, she was motivated to take part in the study. She was further intrigued by the focus group discussions; "I have never been in a setting where my peers have to share their opinions on such topics. So, these discussions are something new" (ibid.).

Another female participant was attracted by the research methods particularly and the research topic generally;

it is something we have never heard of like group discussions. What is it exactly? And how is it done? I have never had the chance to do it, so that what encouraged me to participate. Also, it is a group discussion on a topic we are all interested in (FP9, group B, 6FGD).

Again, similar expressions were echoed by other participants, for example, a male participant stated that “what makes me to take part in this study is that I was curious about the topic itself. It is new to me. This topic opens a new window on how to learn” (MP14, group C, 6FGD). Another male participant stated that he was novice to the research method employed by the study, therefore, he decided to take part in the study; “this is the first time we did focus group discussions because we are used to individual interviews and surveys” (MP12, group C, 6FGD).

Another dimension of the research which students were interested in was the sense of autonomy (Deci and Ryan, 2002) that the focus group discussions afforded. For example, a female participant stated that “these discussions give us the chance to discover, express our own ideas, and at the same time inspire others” (FP5, group A, 6FGD). Similar views were echoed by a female participant as she mentioned that “the group discussions give more elaborations and there is no kind of authority, so the participants have more freedom to express their ideas. I can add new dimensions to the research” (FP9, group B, 6FGD). Obviously, participants seemed very appreciative of the fundamental sense of autonomy they were provided through such discussions, as is evident in the following conversational extract emphasised by a female participant; “it is like you are opening the door for silent people” (FP10, group B, 6FGD). Interestingly, another prominent manifestation of participant’ awareness-raising pertinent to autonomy is their appreciation of ‘a person-in-context’ qualitative inquiry (Ushioda, 2009) employed by the study, privileging and valuing their voices. A female participant stressed that “what I mostly like about the research is that you do not visualise yourself as a number in the research, but you visualise yourself as an individual that all her ideas being listened to” (FP10, group B, 6FGD).

The data also revealed that participants were attracted to the reflective aspect of the study, which several researchers consider to be part of the construct of autonomy (Lamb and Little, 2016; Murphy, 2014). A male participant indicated that writing his language learning history

was “more of a reflection” (MP12, group C, 6FGD). Another male participant stated that writing his LLH helped him to “reflect on my own learning strategies that I have used to learn English language” (MP14, group C, 6FGD). Also, a female participant indicated her enjoyment and appreciation of the reflective dimension of the study; “participating in this research has been a good and enjoyable opportunity to reflect on my own learning and teaching practices” (FP1, LLH). Likewise, a female participant highlighted the reflective aspect of writing her LLH;

Because writing is such a high cognitive process, it brought some unconscious things that happened in the past to our present. It brought back some of the things that I never thought of like how home/family environment inspired me to learn the language without even feeling it and what I did in school that affected the whole learning, what the teachers did, and how my peers looked at me, the activities I was involved in, and how the whole process of the language learning was affected by these aspects. So, yes, it brought unconscious things to the conscious through those reflective writings (FP7, group B, 6FGD).

Another female participant highlighted the introspective dimension of writing her LLH; “we do not only write about our experiences, but also write down our feelings and how we felt at that moment” (FP11, group B, 6FGD). In a similar vein, a female participant said that she got interested to write about her language learning experience and about her participation in the study, comparing it to “writing a new story of your life like your journey in participating in the research [and] reflecting upon your feelings and ideas”(FP5, group A, 6FGD). Overall, all participants supported the view that the whole research study provided them with the opportunity to literally practise reflection in reality, and hence they were able to generally understand themselves as individuals, and particularly as EFL learners. Another female participant stated that “the most valuable advantage I got is reflecting on myself” (FP4, group A, 6FGD). In fact, participants’ consciousness of themselves as EFL students through reflecting on their learning experience is deemed as a vital feature of autonomous individuals (Murphy, 2014; Benson, 2011; Sinclair, 2000; Little, 1991). According to Sinclair (2000), development of autonomy entails awareness about the learning process through reflective practices, and thus consciously making decisions. This finding also seems to accord with that of Murphy (2014), emphasising that learner autonomy entails critical reflection in a socially situated context of learning where interdependence and collaboratively negotiated control prominently feature.

Moreover, the data showed participants' developing awareness regarding social autonomy or collaborative learning (Murphy, 2014; Murray, 2014; Yashima, 2014). For example, a female participant reported that she highly valued the available opportunity to construct knowledge collaboratively with others through the focus group discussions; "it is about collaboration in learning because we have now the chance to build knowledge through these discussions" (FP9, group B, 6FGD). In fact, participants' appreciation of how the study was set up could be explained as a sign of reflection on their growing awareness about learning. As I pointed out earlier, participants highly valued the progressive sequences of group conversations rather than controlled interviews or answering fixed questionnaires. For example, a male participant explained that his initial expectations of the research project before conducting the first conversational session had been completely different from what he actually experienced during the session, mirroring his awareness-raising about constructivism in action on the one hand and research methods on the other hand; "I did not think that I would add to my knowledge. I thought I would only be answering questions and only discussing what I know" (MP12, group C, 6FGD). He further added; "once I hear my friends talk, I say I never thought of that! It is like building knowledge together" (ibid.). He further reinforced such views regarding collaborative learning; "I had an expectation that it would be a give-take kind of meetings. I did not think that I would spend time discussing my personal experiences and how it affected me in becoming who I am today" (MP12, LLH). Another male participant echoed similar expressions about interdependence or social autonomy; "I did not even think that I will gain knowledge from these discussions. I only thought that I will say whatever I know and leave, but in each session, I gain something new about autonomy from my fellow mates" (MP14, group C, 6FGD). This finding seems to be in line with the recent notion of social autonomy or interdependence as defined by Murray (2014), perceiving it as a capacity developed in social contexts through learners' collaborative interdependence.

Additionally, Deci and Ryan's (2002) sense of relatedness comes to the fore quite prominently. The data unfolded participants' appreciation of relating to one another, discussing and sharing their experiences in a congenial ambience. They reported that they found the focus group discussions very intimate, valuing necessarily their interactive nature as well as their peers' input. For example, a female participant stated the merits of relating to her peers through the focus group conversations;

the focus group discussions were very encouraging and very warm. I am really glad that I participated in this research because I had the chance to sit with my peers and discuss some issues with them. This experience allowed me to see how my peers saw things related to teaching and the overall education system in Oman and how they are dealing with the issues. Having them accept and support my input is what I really do appreciate. I learned from my peers how they improved their language through social media as it encourages people to participate more than just receive and this encourages them to have critical thinking skills and good writing skills. I appreciate that I was given the chance to sit with my peers to discuss different issues because it rarely ever happens in such settings (FP7, LLH).

Similarly, participants reported that they enjoyed the group conversations as they spent time listening to, interacting with, reflecting on, arguing with, and eventually constructing knowledge collectively. For instance, a female participant explained that she found her participation in the study “a worthwhile experience because we have got to share our experiences and I found myself thinking about it” (FP11, group B, 6FGD). She further added that through those group conversations “I got the chance to develop social skills, for example, respecting each other, turn taking strategies, agreeing and disagreeing with each other” (ibid.). Obviously, participants acknowledged the positive impact of sharing and exchanging their language learning experiences with their peers, and hence they felt they were not alone or even strangers in their seemingly individual endeavours. For instance, a male participant illustrated that:

I came to know that other friends play video games. I used to think that I was the only one who did so. It looks weird when I say to someone that I have learned English through video games and movies. There are others who are just as weird as me (smiling) (MP12, group C, 6FGD).

This finding chimes with that of Murphy (2014), highlighting learners’ enjoyment of belonging to a group in order to sustain motivation following Ryan and Deci’s (2002) sense of relatedness. Interestingly, too, the findings showed another aspect of relatedness, referring to an identification of the research topic as being relevant to participants’ own lives. For example, a male participant expressed such views; explaining that throughout the progressive focusing nature of the sessions, “the discussions become very interesting and enjoyable even we did not notice the passing time. We enjoyed the topic as it is related to us and to our previous experience as well as our teaching practice” (MP14, group C, 6FGD). Likewise, a male participant reported that the research topic “is related to our daily lives and interests” (MP12, LLH). Clearly, the topic of the research appears to speak to participants’ passions, interests, and curiosity, thus providing genuineness by relating learning to authentic life

experiences (Murphy, 2014). This finding seems to be in line with the essence of Littles' (2007) proposition that language learning should be principally targeting authentic and autonomous use of the language.

Deci and Ryan's (2002) sense of competence is clearly evident in the data. Participants reported a growing feeling of progress throughout the investigation. For instance, a female participant highlighted that she decided to take part in this study to "challenge myself" in order to improve her competence (FP11, group B, 6FGD). Interestingly, her sense of competence was coupled with the possibility of success as she stated; "I know I can do it. It will also add to my personal development and enrich my experiences because of the discussions we have had" (FP11, LLH). Importantly, too, a female participant explained how the focus group discussions provided participants with "evaluative feedback from different dimensions on our language learning strategies", and thus increasing their sense of competence as they used to "reflect and critically think about the feedback we get from our peers" (FP9, group B, 6FGD). Another female participant echoed similar expressions of her growing competence; "I realise from these discussions that it is very beneficial and was able to see the progress that I have made and that inspires me to continue" (FP7, group B, 6FGD). Also, a female participant explained that she liked the idea of writing about one's own language learning history, reflecting essentially the sense of developing competence;

you can go back again and read through these stories and you will see yourself: the old one and the new one. And you will start to compare what the changes that I have made after one or two years of experience as a participant in this research or giving you ideas for the future and keeping a record of your journey of learning (FP5, group A, 6FGD).

This finding chimes with that of Yashima (2014), emphasising the pleasure and excitement derived from a growing sense of competence and achievement. Kicking off with the first introductory session I had with the participants, it was obvious that the level of language used to define their experiences in relation to language learning was basic and did not encompass sophisticated constructs and academic jargons which were evident in the later focus group discussions and reflective language learning histories. For example, a female participant used a complex concept while reflecting on the merits of focus group discussions, as is evident in the following excerpts; "the group discussions was more of a community of practice. All of the members were my age and with the same interest, developing English language by using virtual platforms" (FP9, LLH). She further added; "I developed a register from the

discussions and developed a much more sophisticated future-teacher identity” (ibid.). Upon reflection, she wrote a closing remark about her growing awareness that “using technology to develop my language is an autonomous process, yet happens in a collective environment with peers of expertise” (ibid.). In a similar vein, another female participant wrote;

the topic of the study was really great and there were important concepts such as autonomy, identity, motivation, web 2.0 technologies, and so on. It is another proof of how technology can promote autonomy in language learners when having their own accounts and sharing the world their experiences, taking and giving at the same time (FP5, LLH).

7.2 Motivation Development in relation to Participants’ English Future Selves

In the sixth focus group discussion, participants also referred to their development of motivation in relation to their English future selves (Dörnyei, 2009). Due to the fact that participants’ awareness might have developed prior to the research, I carefully brought forward the question of how *this study* could have influenced their visions of their L2 future selves.

Participants’ self-evaluation statements indicate increasing awareness about motivation development in terms of their English future selves. Generally, a female participant reported that “the research helped me know who I was, where I am, and what I want to be. It has made me proud of myself, too” (FP10, LLH). Specifically, a female participant expressed her future self by taking part in the present study as follows; “I see myself as a researcher in the future” (FP7, group B, 6FGD). Similarly, another female participant exhibited her growing awareness about her researcher-identity as is evident in the following extract; “I think this is only the beginning and we start from here. I hope this experience will open up other doors for research participation in the future” (FP11, group B, 6FGD). Another female participant stated that she felt grateful for participating in the study as “it provided a real-life experience of conducting research, not just theoretically” (FP7, LLH). By the same token, another female participant gave even further elaborations on her future researcher-identity, reporting that by visualising herself as a future researcher;

I can build another research out of this research or focus on a certain area of this research. Also, participating in this research is educationally beneficial for us because it teaches us how the research is conducted and how the questions are written and see not only the positive side of the research, but also the limitations of the research. So, we can develop it. Or, if we are going to do our own research and

because we are now in the place of participants, we understand that instead of using questionnaires, it is beneficial to use focus group discussions. It is a great opportunity (FP9, group B, 6FGD).

Interestingly, too, a female participant demonstrated her goal-oriented plan to realise her future researcher-identity; “the first goal is to understand the procedure of collecting research data especially for higher level of learning” (FP1, group A, 6FGD). Likewise, another female participant expounded on her future research environment by getting involved in the present study;

starting from being as a participant in this PhD research makes me feel like here is the atmosphere of conducting research as we can have a better view of joining this group of people, and then participating in order to know what is going on in making this heavy kind of research (FP4, group A, 6FGD).

She further added that “experiencing different things related to research may result in a better way of understanding oneself and achieving dreams” (ibid.). Similarly, a male participant depicted his future image of himself developing as a result of taking part in the present study; “I imagine myself as a researcher, and with the help of others, creating valuable knowledge. Hopefully, it would be helpful for Oman” (MP14, group C, 6FGD). This result seems in tune with Miller and Brickman’s (2004) argument, stressing the need for goal-focused strategies and sufficient knowledge or experience pertaining to future dreams in order to realise them.

Also, the data revealed participants’ awareness-raising regarding their prospective teacher-identity. Although participants had already started visualising their roles as future teachers, the present study seemed to further develop diverse dimensions of their anticipated identity. For example, a female participant explained that her participation in the present study was “to understand how this study could help me in my own learning and teaching and what happens actually” (FP1, group A, 6FGD). Similarly, another female participant expressed similar aspects of identity development throughout the investigation; “through our discussions, I got really excited to be active and apply all of these theoretical things into the real world through my future job” (FP6, group A, 6FGD). Equally, too, a female participant described her developing awareness about her future teacher-identity throughout the investigation; “I imagine myself as a better person and teacher as well. We get to talk about different aspects and different concepts related to education and related to us as individuals, how we think and how we view things” (FP5, group A, 6FGD). Interestingly, a female participant highlighted ‘a person-in-context relational view’ (Ushioda, 2009), as she described her awareness-raising

throughout such developmental discussions; “it is not only related to education and about being a good teacher, but also about being a good citizen, spreading good ideas, and being an influential person in your society” (FP5, group A, 6FGD). Similar views were echoed by another female participant, describing her participation in the research as being beneficial to her as a prospective teacher as it raised her awareness about different issues related to the teaching process; “it is a good chance to be in the frame and have a background about each topic and how I reflect on myself, interpret it on my way and apply it in my real job, my future job” (FP6, group A, 6FGD). This result lends credence to Dörnyei’s argument (2009) regarding the necessity of a sufficiently vivid and elaborate future vision to be truly effective. As indicated earlier, participants showed increasing awareness about their future-teacher identity, and hence accumulating a sufficient degree of detail and specificity to conjure up its motivational power.

Remarkably, too, the findings showed that all participants visualised a common future-self developed throughout the investigation. They all aspired to be agents for change. In other words, they all desired to make necessary changes in the Omani educational system; a dream that can be attributed partly to their developing awareness raised throughout their participation in the present study. For example, a female participant stated that “I visualise myself to be active and I can change something. Maybe I can change something in the system and the curriculum” (FP6, group A, 6FGD). She further indicated the necessity to take initiative and make tangible efforts to bring about real changes; “participating in this research is like applying and moving all of the theoretical way of thinking into real actions because words are not always actions if you are not taking any steps further to make changes” (ibid.). She confidently concluded that “I found myself like being in a really important place or position in the society, so I can change the teaching and learning context in Oman” (ibid.). She also reiterated such dreams in her LLH; “I see myself as an agent for change, spreading ideas for improvement, particularly in the educational field” (FP6, LLH). Interestingly, too, participants appeared quite confident of their dreams to bring about desired changes, attributing such awareness to their participation in the present study. For instance, a female participant exhibited a sign of awareness-raising by taking part in the study; “our participation in this research is helpful to everyone in the society, for us, and for you as a researcher, and even for the other communities, not only in Oman, but also in the whole world” (FP5, group A, 6FGD). She further explained that “it is somehow as if we were

initiating contributions towards the needed changes in the society” (ibid.). Likewise, another female participant voiced similar expressions of awareness-raising in a quite ambitious tone;

through participating in this research, I became more ambitious toward achieving my dream of being a good English teacher who takes part in changing the current education system to make it better (FP6, LLH).

A male participant stated that throughout the investigation; “I saw that it could be a chance for me to help change the way things are going and literally shape the future of Oman” (MP12, LLH). He further added; “I have always been a critic of how things are going in the country when it comes to education and I can’t run when I get the chance to make changes in the community through participating in the study” (ibid.). Particularly, a female participant indicated that “the word autonomy is the key word that can make change for the generation who are in the era of technology” (FP4, group A, 6FGD). It seems that participants’ involvement in the present study could have functioned as “potent ideal self-reminders” to be agents for change as they envisioned themselves through activating their ideal L2 selves, and thus keeping their future visions alive (Dörnyei, 2009, p. 37).

All in all, participants’ constructive engagement in the present research served as a concrete pathway to direct and channel their energetic power, and hence operationalised their future selves. To support such claim, Dörnyei (2009) passionately states that “future self-guides are only effective if they are accompanied by a set of concrete action plans” (p. 37). Realistically speaking, constructions of future-selves cannot be realised without involving awareness-raising (Lamb and Little, 2016; Dörnyei, 2009). In this respect, Dörnyei and Kubanyiova (2014) maintain that “the realistic process of constructing a vision is more likely to be one of awareness raising” (p. 126). Significantly, too, the finding pertinent to participants’ common future dream as being agents for change seems to be in line with the argument made by Boyatzis and Akrivou (2006) that the future visions of a desired end-state “once shared, have the power to become a force, and in that sense an inspiration for social development and growth, for intentional change at many levels of social organization, not just for the individual” (p. 633).

7.3 Motivation Development: participants' reflection on their teaching practicum and perspectives on improvements

Participants' reflection on their teaching practicum and recommendations for improvements regarding their teaching and learning situation could be seen as a notable manifestation of their growing awareness in relation to their English language, identity, motivation (autonomy, competence, and relatedness). It is pertinent to indicate that the fifth focus group discussion was devoted entirely to exploring participants' development of motivation, as is evident in their reflection on teaching practicum and perspectives on improvements. Clearly, participants' reflective perspectives provide insights into diverse dimensions of their language learning and teaching context. What is of particular relevance, though, that the nature of their perspectives for language learning and teaching evidently indicates their increasing awareness of themselves as English language learners and EFL future teachers. Such perspectives also demonstrate the development of a robust understanding pertinent to their English language learning and teaching process. This is clearly manifested through the level of argument raised in support for their recommendations. These perspectives are, in fact, two-fold, mirroring their identities as language students and future EFL instructors. Thereby, the significance of participants' perspectives resides in its representation of authentic and insightful voices raised by their dual identities. Put simply, such perspectives are essentially expressions of who they are.

The data revealed participants' ideas for the potential improvements of EFL teaching and learning in Oman. However, what is of particular interest is that participants suggested, through reflecting on their teaching practicum as a result of their increasing awareness, to help students explicitly vocalise their possible selves. For example, a female participant recommended a rather direct way to activate their future selves by asking them "what do you want to be in the future?" (FP10, group B, 5FGD); she believed that would help them "to visualise themselves and to keep them focused" (ibid.). Another male participant believed that helping students express their future-selves explicitly would help them "become conscious of their choices and make them know what they want to do and have certain goals" (MP12, group C, 5FGD). Similar views were echoed by a female participant as she suggested the necessity of capitalising on students' personal interests or identities as a motivational force (FP3, group A, 5FGD). She stated that helping students to voice their future selves can lead them to realise maximum potential by visualising their future images vividly (ibid.). She

recommended one way to do so by giving everyday inspirational talk and encouraging them to capitalise on their strengths as well as improving their weaknesses;

If I find one of the students who have good instructive skills, I would give him a nickname and tell him: let's see the teacher of the class today! What does he have to say? Or, let's see the doctor of the class! What does he have to say? Giving them these little nicknames and talking to them privately after the class. Also, assigning them with projects as well like presentations. I will ask them to do presentations on something they are interested in (ibid.).

The findings also showed that participants suggested the importance of encouraging students to find their popular cultural resources and communication technologies as a motivational engine since language learning and communication are inherently social. For instance, a female participant recommended that “the possibility of creating imagined international community in cyberspace to communicate in English” through one’s preferred social and cultural technologies (FP7, LLH). This seems to chime with that of Chik and Breidbach’s (2014) project, highlighting that an imagined community of practice of language learners at an international level is necessary for identity investments. Another female participant observed, during her teaching practice, that her students were interested in blogs and twitter (FP3, group A, 5FGD). As such, she invested heavily on such social technologies as motivational driving forces for collective meaning-making (ibid.). While reflecting on their language learning experiences, a male participant illustrated the significance of online video games and online movies as wealthy cultural technologies that helped him immensely in acquiring English (MP12, LLH). He stated that “every time I hear about Greek mythology or about film making, I remember some stuff that I can relate to and can refer to because I am consuming them every day through video games and watching movies” (ibid.). Likewise, a female participant suggested the importance of encouraging students “to find their preferred cultural resources like songs” and relating to other fans of such songs through social technologies (FP5, group A, 5FGD). By the same token, participants recommended different ways to motivate students to figure out their popular cultural resources and communication technologies, as is evident in the following conversational exchange;

(FP11) I think one way to let them decide on their popular communication technology is to try them out. For example, we can ask the students: why don't you discuss this topic in twitter, Instagram, or snapchat, or whatever. Then, the technology that they find themselves in and feel comfortable; they can adapt it as their popular one.

(FP10) I have noticed during my teaching practicum that some of the students like singing a lot, then I introduced the idea of presenting kids' voices, having judges, introducers and singers. They started singing in English and they were really good at it. Till now, they still talk about it. I think it is a good way (Group B, 5FGD).

Interestingly, participants recommended the possibility of contributing to the shaping of the technological applications for language learning in Oman. For example, a female participant expressed the need to “add flavour to these technological applications that are related to Omani culture” (FP2, group A, 5FGD). She further added that “we can add things that will help students to learn English more and we can design our own website, create our own communities with the students like blogs and online communities that will help them learn” (ibid.). Similarly, a male participant echoed similar expressions in this regard, stating that:

I am part of the Omani culture, so I think I know what interests me as a learner and I think that will help me to reflect on what I will be developing such as how to improve learning English through cultural video games (MP12, group C, 5FGD).

This finding seems to accord with Chik and Breidbach's (2014) view that English language popular culture could be the most vibrant domain where discussions on how technology mediates learner autonomy. They argue that Web 2.0 technology should be deemed popular cultural practices in their own right (ibid.). Besides that, individuals tend to cultivate and negotiate their identities through gaining access to and consuming the popular culture (Storey, 2010). Also, Chik and Breidbach's (2014) intercultural project revealed that Anglo-American popular culture accessed online through digital applications seemed to be the shared ground in which Hong Kong and German participants came to develop the social aspect of learner autonomy through constructing knowledge collectively as well as constructing and nurturing their identities.

Significantly, too, participants recommended the promotion of autonomous learning among their future students because “autonomy facilitates students' development of many skills like critical thinking and problem-solving” (FP7, group B, 5FGD). Participants suggested ways to encourage autonomy amongst students and teachers, providing a rationale behind such a trendy approach. This is evident in the following conversational exchange;

(FP11) I think one way is by allowing students the chance to hold responsibility for their own learning on what to learn and how to assess themselves. So, these choices must be made by the students

themselves, not only the teacher. Also, it motivates them to think thoughtfully and evaluate their own progress.

(FP7) yah, it starts with small things like: why don't you look up the word on your own instead of asking me? So, these little things really help with the whole idea of autonomy, have all of the students contributed to the class. So, they have a sense of contribution in order to feel motivated and by making them aware of their learning strategy as one way to have them autonomous. Other than that, have the class interactive and inspire both teachers and students to improve their teaching and learning experiences.

P (FP7) there is a role that must be played by the ministry of Education to promote the concept of autonomy by providing workshops and training sessions for the teachers in a periodical way so that teachers would be up-to-date and know the trends and what's going on to be able to make their students autonomous as well. That will help them realise they are not teaching the same generation; this is a new generation with different needs, different perceptions, and different perspectives (Group B, 5FGD).

The data showed that participants engaged in reflection-stimulating and thought-provoking discussions around recommended alternative ways for teaching and learning in Oman. As a result of their increasing awareness by taking part in the present study, they suggested the integration of the two research methods used in the present study into their future classrooms as teaching and learning methods. For example, a female participant suggested the incorporation of focus group discussions into their classes so that students would “share ideas and listen to each other attentively and reflect upon the ideas that are shared” (FP2, group A, 5FGD). Similarly, a female participant reinforced such views by highlighting that such reflective conversations could facilitate collective meaning-making as “they negotiate meanings with each other, express their ideas, how to accept or disagree with each other” (FP3, group A, 5FGD). With regard to the writing of language learning histories as a teaching and learning method, a male participant stated that writing of LLH would “help students to reflect” (MP12, group C, 5FGD). Another female participant ascertained that she would integrate LLH writing in her future classrooms since it is “at a personal level and very engaging to write about your own emotions and your thoughts. It does really encourage us to learn” (FP7, group B, 5FGD). She further added; “it can also be used as a tool to evaluate the whole class and how learning was effective to re-evaluate your lesson plan and what the things you can change” (ibid.). Upon reflecting on their language learning journeys, a female participant underlined the significance of using LLH as a reflective method. She stated that “when I write down my experience, I feel that I have gained and learned a lot of things about

myself as a student and as a person. So, it changes a lot of things in myself as a learner” (FP5, groupA, 5FGD). This finding seems to chime with that of Al-Sadi (2015), encouraging the integration of research methods targeting awareness-raising into classroom practices so as to promote autonomy and reflective thinking. Also, this result parallels the work of Chik and Breidbach (2014), highlighting the value of sharing different language learning histories.

Overall, participants’ autonomy, identity, and motivation manifested clearly in their recommendations for improvements pertaining to EFL learning and teaching situation in Oman. If we were to scrutinise participants’ suggestions for developments, we could sense that much of their recommendations target issues of identity expression in cyberspace, expression of oneself by capitalising on their personal interests, having an active role and increased responsibility over their language learning process. This is not surprising, though, because their main concerns regarding EFL language teaching and learning in the Omani context revolves around such matters. In turn, this indicates their growing awareness about themselves as English language learners and EFL prospective teachers, mirroring essentially their language learning needs. In fact, their recommendations and justifications seem to flag up issues of valid concerns regardless of how intellectually and practically convincing they are to authorities and other stakeholders. Importantly, too, participants’ perspectives highlight significant dimensions of the teaching and learning process discounted by quite a large number of educators and classroom teachers. For instance, a female participant stated that “teachers found a safe place in the traditional ways in the passive traditional ways of teaching to the point that they are not open about going autonomous with their students” (FP7, group B, 5FGD). Also, my professional experience attests to this fact as some teachers prefer to be in their comfort zone, preserving their traditional methods and being basically oblivious to learners’ varying needs. Thereby, participants’ perspectives revealed by the present study can be insightful as they represent authentic, yet often neglected voices. This seems to echo Al-Sadi’s (2015) argument concerning students’ insightful voices in relation to their learning process which should be seriously considered whilst making teaching plans. To further support such argument, Breen (2001) presents convincing justifications pertinent to the significant additions learners may contribute to the improvement of their learning. As pointed out earlier, the data uncovered participants’ need for self-expression of identities, and personal interests, as well as personal agency for making decisions regarding their learning. This seems, however, to run counter to the results of Borg and Al-Busaidi (2012) as well as

Goodliffe (2005), illustrating Omani learners as lacking capacity for autonomous learning. Al-Sadi's (2015) study, though, chimes with the results of my research regarding learners' demand for the ownership of their learning, reflecting basically their readiness and capacity for autonomous thinking and learning. This also seems to be in tune with the current change at diverse political, social, and educational spheres in Oman, demanding a greater role and voice (Al-Sadi, 2015). Ultimately, participants' perspectives present insightful grounds for future academic endeavours, focusing on improving English language learning and teaching process. Indeed, such perspectives can function as a point of departure for conscious and reflective thinking, and thus leading further investigations to this significant, but uncharted territory in the Omani educational system.

7.4 Wrapping up: Reflective Concluding Thoughts

The data revealed participants' self-reported judgements about the impact of this study on their understanding of English language, identity, and motivation (autonomy, competence, relatedness), indicating clear development in their awareness about themselves as individuals, EFL learners, and EFL future teachers. Participants also reported increasing awareness about various dimensions of their English language learning process, highlighting essentially their teaching and learning scenario in Oman. Such growing awareness might have developed through, amongst other potential reasons, the reflective and thought-provoking discussions which they have constructively engaged in. In other words, participants' notable development of awareness could be a result of the deep and critical thinking approach embraced by the present study, stimulating their reflection and raising their consciousness about themselves and language learning. To support such argument, the existing body of literature maintains that reflection contributes to awareness-raising (Lamb and Little, 2016; Al-Sadi, 2015; Dörnyei and Kubanyiova, 2014; Dörnyei, 2009).

Motivation development was discussed through the lens of Deci and Ryan's (2002) SDT as well as Dörnyei's (2009) L2MSS. Both female and male Omani EFL student-teachers repeatedly referred to their increasing motivation from the perspective of autonomy, competence, and relatedness. They also referred to motivation development in relation to their English future selves. Equally, too, they voice their growing consciousness about motivation development, as is evident in their reported recommendations for improvements concerning their English language learning and teaching.

Chapter Eight

Conclusion

8. Introduction

This chapter will revisit the three research questions, drawing conclusions grounded on the analyses and discussions introduced in the previous chapters. Nevertheless, these conclusions are subject to my own comprehension and interpretation of the data in terms of my familiarity with the context under investigation and my knowledge about the existing literature on the researched topic. Thus, I would argue for cautious interpretations of the research findings if the study is to be replicated elsewhere. I will, secondly, make claims about the contributions of the research to inform theory and practice. Thirdly, I will make suggestions for future research avenues. Fourthly, I will address the limitations of the research pertinent to its various dimensions to help the wider body of researchers to arrive at a robust understanding of the research findings. Fifthly, I will consider the pedagogical implications for EFL educators and policy makers. Finally, I will provide reflective thoughts on the overall research endeavours, beginning from research design and findings to myself as a researcher as well as an individual.

8.1 Summarising the Research Findings: Brief Responses to the Research Questions

RQ1. What role does participation through virtual social spaces play in the development of female and male Omani EFL student-teachers' identity, autonomy, and motivation, as opposed to traditional language learning experiences?

The findings of the research study affirmed a dynamically non-linear interplay between identity, autonomy, and motivation of the female and male Omani EFL student-teachers, examining participants' language learning experiences in traditional and digital contexts. Thus, the data reported comparative analyses concerning identity expression, autonomy, and motivation evidenced through participants' involvement in Web 2.0 technologies and traditional media. This question was explored from the lenses of Dörnyei's (2009) L2 Motivational Self System as well as Deci and Ryan's (2002) Self-Determination Theory. In attempting to examine the link between these three concepts from two theoretical standpoints, I aimed to problematise them in terms of their limitations and to further extend their

boundaries. Thus, I would present complementary perspectives grounded on these theories, functioning in a reciprocally reinforcing manner. In doing so, this research set out to sharpen our understanding of the intricate relationship between persons' lives, encompassing their institutional, digital, and social settings where they inextricably intersect. Thereby, the present findings may possibly be used to enrich existing quantitative data on motivation research, elaborating on the complicated relations of Ushioda's (2009) 'person-in-context' approach by yielding thorough details of individual learners. Hence, it seems prudent to claim that the L2 learning experience should be further explored from a broader perspective, looking into learners' social life encompassing their digital lives as they engage in myriads of social virtual platforms. I would further argue that investigating the effect of digital context on L2 motivation studies is timely, corresponding to a pressing need to explore learners' cyber-lives driving essentially their development of personal and social identities.

Significantly, too, the qualitative data generated by this study is valuable in offering fine-grained and in-depth accounts of Omani participants' language learning experiences in both traditional and digital contexts, and thus leading to interesting contribution to the literature. At the traditional educational contexts, participants reported having no purpose and showing no interest in learning English, explaining that they had no ownership over their learning processes and lacked adequate practice opportunities, along with language assessment emphasising rote learning and retention of information (see section 5.1.1, p. 136-137; 5.1.1.1, p. 137-139; 5.1.1.2, p. 139-141; 5.1.1.3, p. 141-142; 5.1.1.4, p. 142-144; 5.4, p. 162-164). Participants also reported that their traditionally institutional education did not provide them with sufficient spaces for personal growth in terms of personal control (autonomy), sense of progress and achievement (competence), as well as a feeling of belonging (relatedness) (ibid.). Nevertheless, the data uncovered participants' strong ideal L2 selves, as demonstrated in their capacities to ride out traditionally institutionalised monotonous language classes, and thus self-regulate out-of-class language learning via cyberspace. Their future aspirations, accompanied by their positive attitudes towards language learning, ignited their motivation, and thus evoked their interest to seek autonomous language learning pursuits through digital social spaces, which was deemed as a compensating space for the traditional, strict, and authoritative institutional environment. Thereby, their identities appeared to change from being passively indifferent (see section 5.1.1, p. 136-137; 5.1.1.1, p. 137-139; 5.1.1.2, p. 139-141; 5.1.1.3, p. 141-142; 5.1.1.4, p. 142-144; 5.4, p. 162-164), to considerably motivated

prospective teachers as a consequence of their diligent participation in the English virtual social platforms (see section 5.6.2, p. 181-183). I would argue that their autonomous participation in social technologies and the increased charge taken over their learning may be largely credited to their imagined future identities. On the other hand, it could also be sensible to contend that the greater sense of autonomy, competence, and relatedness provided by the virtue of digital space and participants' active investment in this alternative learning setting could contribute significantly to the development of their self-identity. As elucidated earlier, participants attributed their developing competence in English to varying out-of-class language learning tasks, in which they participated independently and diligently. They reported being immersed in persistent efforts to seek language learning activities autonomously. Participants demonstrated identity development, expressing multiple future selves simultaneously. Their constant and extensive contact with the English cultural elements introduced through social platforms seemed to prominently shape their self-identity. The research participants stretched their English language learning via cyberspace to a wide range of issues in which they could improve their personal development by seeking relevant interest and meaningfulness. Therefore, it might be claimed that the autonomy supportive virtual spaces provided invaluable chances for identity development and personal fulfilment, leading to an increased motivation to learn English. Clearly, cyberspace appears to introduce a wealthy ground for investigating the intricate link between language learner identity, autonomy, and motivation, thus producing a feeling of control and progress linked to personal and social meanings. However, it is worthy to indicate, herein, that the present study concentrates extensively on the digital context, with only a few references to the traditional context. While research findings highlight the effects of the virtual space to a greater extent, the analyses of the traditional mode are kept confined to certain limits. As reported above, participants opt for the online world to compensate for the traditionally unfavourable learning conditions. As such, they directed their conversations towards the virtual space to facilitate the expressions of their identities, navigating their online and offline identities in a dynamically reinforcing fashion. Ultimately, I would argue that data on real-life instances are distinctive, necessitating further inquiries.

RQ2. How do virtual social spaces facilitate the expression of female and male Omani student-teachers' identities, as compared to offline contexts?

Responding to the second research question concerning Omani EFL student-teachers' expressions of identities through cyberspace in comparison to offline contexts, the research findings lend further support to Dörnyei's self-based system to serve as a platform where the research participants participate in the development of their future identities, providing room for context-dependent motivational powers essential for sharpening our comprehension of second language motivation in the modern globalising world. Interestingly, national and religious identity appeared as an influential motivator for Omani students to participate in virtual social platforms. Their envisioned future-selves (Dörnyei, 2009) are evident and intrinsically guided by their motivation to address representations of Islamic ideology and culture in the media. It also appeared in offline contexts, reflecting that their online identity is in line with their offline identity. In a sense, what they express offline is also communicated via the digital modes. However, virtual social spaces extend the expressions of their identities to a larger extent (see section 6.3, p. 200-205; 6.4, p. 205-207; 6.5, p. 207-209). Equally, too, Omani participants expressed global or international selves, representing 'a sense of relatedness' to the international community (see section 6.6, p. 209-213). However, they desired to retain their national and religious affiliations, and hence expressing a 'bicultural self' (Arnett, 2002) evidenced via online and offline modes (see section 6.3, p. 200-205; 6.4, p. 205-207; 6.5, p. 207-209). Participants' international concerns could perhaps be interpreted as a significant element of their L2 motivational Self System as they seemed to extend their selves by expressing new visions of themselves related to international affairs in today's world (Yashima, 2009). It is worth mentioning that the present study highlights prominently the online expressions of identities, citing only limited examples of the face-to-face context. The research data elaborates on the digital space more widely, and hence restricting the analysis of the real-world influences to certain degrees. Therefore, I would encourage future investigations to further explore this distinctive topic.

Similar to Ryan's and Deci's (2002) Self-Determination Theory, both female and male Omani EFL student-teachers demonstrated signs of autonomy as they independently took control over their digital lives to involve in international exchanges through cyberspace. They also displayed their growing competence as they successfully figured out their digital paths facilitated by necessary technical and linguistic skills to improve their digital participation. Additionally, manifestations of relatedness were clearly palpable as they exhibited a sharp understanding of their role and relevance to the virtual world they frequently navigated,

calling for new explanations of the initial theoretical concepts introduced by the authors. Digital social platforms have afforded new theoretical insights into the original terminologies, such as ‘belonging’ and ‘relatedness’, urging future explorations of students’ cyber-lives. Omani learners are expected by the Omani authority to participate in international exchanges in the 21st century (Little and Al Wahaibi, 2017). Therefore, their cyber-selves and cyber-lives-which they consciously select to share with the globe- are considered vitally important to realise improved international exchanges. The research findings are topical as they resonate with the current thinking in the realm of L2 motivation.

The qualitative methodology adopted by this research has offered insightful understanding of their cultural and religious commitments, unveiling doubts of misinterpretations which are typical characteristics of quantitative research. Eventually, I would even go further to encourage future investigations into students’ identities through social digital spaces, examining the relationship between English social technologies and students’ cultural and religious affiliations. As is evident, social and cultural platforms afford wealthy exposure to and participatory involvement in multiculturally-oriented spaces, promoting extensive research of the digital context.

RQ3. How do female and male participants self-report the impact of this study on their understanding of English language, identity, and motivation (autonomy, competence, relatedness)?

The data of the present research uncovered participants’ self-reported judgements about the impact of study on their understanding, indicating noteworthy growth in their awareness about themselves as persons, students, and future teachers. Both female and male Omani EFL student-teachers reported improved consciousness about varying dimensions pertaining to their EFL learning process and their teaching and learning scenarios. Such evolving awareness could be potentially credited to the reflection-stimulating conversations to which they have vigorously contributed. In other words, participants’ increasing realisation might have perhaps resulted from the critical thinking method adopted by the research, provoking their reflective skills and raising their awareness about themselves and their language learning experiences.

The exploration was conducted in a welcoming and approachable manner. Students were stimulated to participate in thoughtful and insightful discussions about their learning journeys, helping in data collection pertinent to my research questions and facilitating awareness-raising concurrently. Besides that, this research set out to support participants in increasing their consciousness of themselves as people, as well as of EFL teaching and learning processes, by evoking their reflection through thinking deeply over specific dimensions related to their language learning and teaching situation. What is of particular relevance to the study is that awareness-raising is considered practically significant in developing, and thus realising participants' future aspirations (Dörnyei, 2009). Similarly, Lamb and Little (2016) argue for the necessity of awareness-raising regarding students' identities, emphasising the extent to which learners' L2 future selves can influence learning and teaching. They also recommend that teaching practitioners should encourage their students to thoughtfully ponder upon their L2 future visions, justifying that awareness-raising may help fostering students' identities which can boost their motivation to seek language learning over time (ibid.). Lamb and Little (2016) even go further to argue that awareness-raising

involves not only being aware of themselves as learners with specific goals and motivations but also being willing and able to critically reflect on their learning, including their goals and motivations, and to enhance it (p. 201).

The narrative style of the research exploration could have ignited their interests to share their distinct stories about language learning, highlighting their emotions towards pursuing English learning institutionally in a traditional learning context and independently via cyberspace. The data unfolded intriguing findings, suggesting educational implications to inform theory, practice, and policy-making in aspects relevant to EFL teaching and learning in Oman and probably similar settings elsewhere. Participants frequently referred to their increasing awareness of English language, identity, motivation (autonomy, competence, and relatedness). They also voiced their growing consciousness, as is evident in their reported recommendations for improvements pertinent to their language learning and teaching. Still, though, their thoughts were not considered or perhaps not listened to basically, which may be such a major lost opportunity. Al-Sadi (2015) even goes further to argue about this issue in the Omani context by stressing that students have their own plans for learning, which most teaching practitioners do not take into consideration as they believe that their teaching

agendas fit their students. Accordingly, serious research endeavours come into play, illustrating a realistic image of the context-under-study.

8.2 Research Contributions and Suggestions for Further Research

Herein, I will limit my discussion to highlighting significant contributions and how they could be further supported or stretched out by future research endeavours. Later, I will discuss some implications of my research findings as reflective concluding thoughts for each research question (see section 8.3).

8.2.1 Cultural Insights

One of the original contributions to knowledge is potentially the cultural insights the study offers into Omani EFL learners' identity, autonomy, and motivation via cyberspace. That is, it provides fresh and genuine insights into these aspects, which have not been explored yet in the Omani context, let alone its scarcity in the wider literature. Equally, too, this study provides the research audience with great insights into how notions of identity, autonomy, and motivation are conceived and experienced in Oman as an Arabic-Islamic society, highlighting collective aspirations and responsibilities (see chapter 5, 6, and 7). For example, the findings revealed participants' need for the Omani variety of English to represent their national and religious identities, embodying their rich culture, values, traditions, and terminologies (see section 6.1, p. 195-197). Also, the data reported Omani participants' desire for the national progress of Oman via English, expressing a 'bicultural identity' (Arnett, 2002) to relate to the global culture whilst preserving their local culture (see section 6.2, p. 197-200). In addition, the data showed evident Omani representations in digital space, displaying identity curatorship as the Omani participants seemed to consciously construct their cyber-lives. Simultaneously, their identity curatorship could be seen as a correspondence to their imagined future self (see section 6.3, p. 200-205). The data also revealed the complex relationship between participants' national interests and their second language motivation. Their deeply valued future desires are concurrent with their collective or national commitments (see section 6.4, p. 205-207). Moreover, the findings showed Omani participants' desire to establish multicultural and multifaith dialogues, which were geared towards national purposes (see section 6.5, p. 207-209). Also, participants reported the importance of acquiring an excellent command of English communicative competence in order to project a good image of Oman internationally, leading to an increased motivation

(see section 6.6, p. 209-213). Furthermore, Omani participants clearly exhibited manifestations of autonomy as they initiatively took charge of their cyber-lives to engage in global exchanges through virtual social spaces.

8.2.2 L2 Motivational Self System (L2MSS) and Self-Determination Theory (SDT)

At a conceptual level, the data of the present research study found that Deci and Ryans' (2002) Self-Determination Theory contributed significantly to Dörnyei's (2009) self-based system, yielding thoroughly detailed experiences of language learners pertinent to their innate human needs within their language learning context. These basic tendencies of autonomy, competence, and relatedness fed mutually into their learning experiences. Participants demonstrated motivated engagement in language learning through social digital spaces due to the fulfilment of their fundamental needs, as opposed to the rigidly controlled classroom environment (see section 5.3, p. 152-153; 5.3.1, p. 153-157; 5.3.2, p. 157-159; and 5.3.3, p. 159-162). Thus, it would be reasonable to claim that their cyber lives have helped them face the challenges of their traditional learning context. With that specific focus on the notion of self in language learning, the SDT framework confirmed its close connection with the L2 Motivational Self System, regulating cognition, affect, and behaviour (Noels, 2009). My contribution to the existing knowledge can be seen through my attempt to investigate the relationship between identity, autonomy, and motivation of the female and male Omani EFL student-teachers via cyberspace in comparison to traditional media from two theoretical perspectives, testing the limitation of the present theories and trying to extend them to new contexts. Due to the multi-faceted nature of L2 motivation, I would, thus, argue to draw on multiple theoretical frameworks related to the self-perspective, hence providing complementary aspects. In this regard, researchers can build on previous second language motivation research driven by the same theoretical underpinnings whilst addressing some theoretical concerns found in those studies to better account for the current changes characterising diverse EFL contexts in the contemporary globalising world. Overall, this small-scale qualitative study of an exploratory nature helps flesh out the core skeletal statistical model of Dörnyei's L2 motivational Self System.

8.2.3 The construct of L2 Learning Experience: Immediate Social Milieu and Digital Global Milieu

With reference to the construct of L2 learning experience, the present study explored Dörnyei's (2009) self-guides through a bottom up process by first elaborating on participants'

L2 learning experience to well justify the motivationally and (de)motivationally contextual effects in order to better understand the development of L2 future selves. Broadly speaking, the study offered insightful understanding of the inextricable link between participants' lives along with the institutional, societal, and digital contexts in which they immensely interact. At the traditionally institutional level, the study investigated participants' language learning experiences at a greater length, covering their previous experiences at a school level since self-concept is closely related to information drawn from one's past experiences (Dörnyei, 2009). In my view, participants' experiences at school could potentially give great insights into their current motivations and experiences at the university level, including teaching methodology, language curriculum, evaluation and assessment methods, as well as students' and teachers' roles. Drawing on the findings of the present study, participants' learning experiences exerted a significant role in influencing their L2 motivation. My contribution to this line of inquiry is the qualitatively generated nuanced delineations of the L2 learning experience, including immediate social milieu and digital global milieu (see section 5.4.3, p. 169-174). That is, family members, Omani English teachers, and influential others were perceived as inspirational role models. Surprisingly, however, the construct of L2 learning experience has received little attention so far (Moskovsky et al., 2016), featuring only as a theoretical concept (Chik and Breidbach, 2011). This leads me to call for qualitatively empirical explorations to enrich Dörnyei's basic quantitative instrument to reach its maximum potential in this regard. Thereby, qualitative future investigations may throw light on providing an in-depth portrait of the learners' context. I would also recommend analysing autonomous virtual language experiences, thus capturing the richness and depth of students' learning experiences.

8.2.4 Formation of Ideal L2 Selves as Cultural and Religious Emissaries through English-Speaking Cyberspace

In relation to the future L2 selves, the findings of this research lend credence to the relevancy of Dörnyei's (2009) L2MSS to the context of Oman, an under-researched context, functioning as a platform to explore the intricately intertwined relationship between language learner identity, autonomy, and motivation through digital social spaces, as compared to offline contexts. Participants seemed to be diligently engaged with digital social technologies, developing their autonomous future selves. The Ideal L2 Self appeared congruent with the way research participants related to English through their engagement with cyberspace. What

is of great interest, though, is that contextual motivations appeared quite prominently, highlighting its centrality in understanding L2 motivations in an increasingly complicated globalising world. For example, the representation of cultural and religious identity as an influential motivator for Omani students to participate in English virtual platforms is quite significant (see section 6.4, p. 205-207). It also appeared in offline contexts, reflecting that their online identity relates to their offline identity. That is, what they articulate offline is brought to the digital context. Nonetheless, virtual social spaces spread out the expressions of their identities to a broader level, as exemplified in chapter six. Thus, I would encourage researchers to embark on future enquiries to broaden our understanding of learners' cyber-lives, exploring the connection between English digital platforms as well as the religious and cultural commitments of students. Besides that, such cultural and religious commitments could presumably exert profound motivational influence in eastern collectivist societies rather than western individualistic societies, necessitating further investigations in diverse contexts to gain an insightful understanding into this collective phenomenon. Importantly, too, cultural aspirations may be assumed to be one facet of participants' ideal selves, requiring further explorations to examine the potential link between cultural affiliations and ideal L2 self through cyberspace in different global contexts.

8.2.5 International Posture and Ideal L2 Self

I believe that the present findings add to the existing body of evidence introduced first by Yashima (2009) that the construct of International Posture may be deemed as a constituent element of Dörnyei's (2009) self-based system. Drawing on the data of my research, participants expressed a global identity, reflecting a 'feeling of relatedness' to the wider international community (see section 6.6, p. 209-213). Besides that, participants exhibited manifestations of international posture pertaining to their future L2 selves, facilitating their interests in seeking English language learning to realise their L2 speaking future selves. Put simply, they depicted future images of themselves concerned with international issues, hence attributing meaning and relevance to pursuing English language learning. Interestingly, they went on introducing semantic signs of international posture in terms of what to say to the global world. Therefore, I would further encourage exploring the relationship between international posture and L2 future selves in diverse developing EFL contexts in which engaging with the international community seems to be quite nebulous.

8.2.6 Ought-to L2 Self

With regard to the ought-to L2 self, representations of such selves appeared quite notably in the Omani social matrix due to the prominent power of family and significant others (see section 5.6.3, p. 183-187). As such, I would encourage further qualitative explorations regarding ought-to L2 selves in the Omani context and possibly in diverse collectivist cultures to critically investigate such unique social features. I would also argue that by extending or perhaps re-formulating Dörnyei's scale pertaining to the ought-to self, it makes the L2MSS relevant to diverse EFL settings in the sense of illustrating context-sensitive items so that it could clearly show its contribution to students' motivation.

8.2.7 Interplay between the Arabic Self and the English Self

Notwithstanding the research participants' show of positive attitudes towards Anglophone cultures, they simultaneously exhibited strong desires for bicultural identities (see section 6.2, p. 197-200). In essence, they retained future aspirations for their roles at a national level (ibid.). They also exhibited evident affective dispositions towards their Arabic language (see section 5.4.1, p. 164-167). This implies that there might be Arabic selves, reflecting potentially multiple self domains functioning simultaneously. Thereby, it seems intriguing to call for future inquiries in Oman or any other bilingual/multilingual settings to explore the link between students' L1 selves and their future L2 selves.

8.2.8 Dörnyei's Future L2 Selves and Gardner's Integrativeness

I have argued (in chapter six) that the research participants showed dynamic forms of integrativeness in terms of their desires to nativise the English language they used to mark the Omani variety of English, mirroring essentially their Omani identities (see section 6.1, p. 195-197). That is, they aspired to spread the Omani culture via the English language by carrying the unique Omani discourses, embodying necessarily the Omani selves rooted deeply in the cultural values of an Arab Middle Eastern society (see section 6.4, p. 205-207). Significantly, too, the research participants aspired to participate in the larger international community rather than Anglophone countries. They showed great interest in communicating with various international members as well as with the native speakers of English (see section 6.5, p. 207-209; 6.6, p. 209-213). Albeit participants demonstrated a general openness and keen interest in the target culture-which are the basic constituents of Gardnerian integrativeness (1985) - I, along with other researchers, would still argue that its elements

have weakened its revealing and explanatory nature in global EFL settings, particularly, in the multicultural digital space. Drawing on the data of my research, I would call for future research to explore the contemporary dynamic aspects of integrativeness and their interrelatedness with future L2 selves, comparing comprehensively their motivational power in diverse contexts.

8.2.9 Digital ‘Relatedness’

In congruence with the Self-Determination Theory (Ryan and Deci, 2002), Omani participants obviously demonstrated representations of autonomy as they autonomously took control over their cyber-lives to participate in global exchanges via cyberspace. They also exhibited growing competence as they recognised their digital paths facilitated by necessary technical and linguistic capacities to improve their digital participation. Also, signs of relatedness were clear as they showed solid comprehension of their standing role and relevance to the virtual world they navigated, requiring new interpretations of the traditional concepts introduced by the authors. Put simply, the affordances of social technologies in bringing new meanings to the original theoretical constructs like ‘relatedness’ and ‘belonging’ entail further explorations of learners’ cyber-lives (see section 6.3, p. 200-205; 6.7, p. 213-216).

8.2.10 Digital Identities and the Digital Context

What is of significant contribution is that the data is topical, as it resonates with the contemporary thinking in the realm of L2 motivation, bringing fresh and genuine insights from the Omani context. Creating global citizens immersed in international exchanges entails understanding of their cyber-selves and cyber-lives. Evidently, digital social platforms afforded by Web 2.0 technologies offer a wealthy exposure and participatory involvement in multicultural spaces (see section 6.3, p. 200-205; 6.4, p. 205-207; 6.5, p. 207-209; 6.6, p. 209-213; 6.7, p. 213-216), thus promoting in-depth investigations of this particular context. It would be also reasonable to comprehend learners’ digital identities, requiring further research to explore the ways in which the digital context affects our self-concepts, our motivations, and our abilities to actively navigate and engage in cyberspace.

8.2.11 Imposed and Displayed Selves

The research data uncovered that participants’ perceived future selves were grounded intrinsically on their motivation to alter the world’s misconceptions of the Islamic religion

and culture (see section 6.3, p. 200-205). I would argue that two selves are to be accommodated into Dörnyei's motivational system. That is, I would recommend incorporating the influenced future self, however, it differs from Dörnyei's 'ought-other' self, which is largely influenced by external obligations put on the individual. Traditionally, the ought-other self is about expectations that others have of a person. However, the imposed self is particularly relevant to the online context because it makes use of the broader community we are part of. It should be noted that the imposed self does not replace the ought-other self in Dörnyei's L2MSS. Instead, I would suggest adding the 'imposed self' shaped by the impact of media-views, consequently, constructing a 'displayed self' which is in tune with the notion of Potter's (2012) curatorship related to the digital context (see section 6.6, p. 209-213). According to the cogent argument made by Little and Al Wahaibi (2017), their 'displayed self' is largely controlled by the individual student, yet it is fairly much influenced by society and media. As such, the students 'curate' semantic messages to display a specific portrait of their religion and culture, showing resistance to an imposed self (ibid.). Little and Al Wahaibi (2017) argue that participants' use of particular English vocabularies like 'weapon' is perhaps a way to demonstrate that English is not only pragmatically-conceived, but also a way of fighting prejudices and misunderstandings imposed on specific groups defined by their national and religious roots. Referring to Higgin's (1987) Self-Discrepancy Theory, Little and Al Wahaibi (2017) illustrate how participants related to the imposed self with reference to the self they would like to display to the globe, curating purposefully their online-lives to send their curated messages. Unlike Higgins' psychological theory of Self-Discrepancy, Dörnyei's L2 Motivational Self System is related specifically to language learning. However, I would argue that the extension of the L2MSS is desirable to accommodate the potential effects of digital contexts on our concepts of L2 self, our L2 motivations, and our capacities to seek L2 learning via participation in social multicultural technologies. By widening the L2 Motivational Self System, it takes into account media-representation of a cultural identity.

8.2.12 Awareness-Raising and Students' insightful Voices

I would claim that the notion of awareness-raising is my genuine contribution at the Omani context in which the collective selves form a major part of the society. Conceptually and empirically, awareness-raising is considered essential in developing, and thus realising participants' future selves (Lamb and Little, 2016; Dörnyei, 2009). Surprisingly, though,

there is a limited number of research studies which is directed towards exploring students' awareness in this regard, being completely absent in Oman. As such, this research addressed this niche, contributing genuinely to knowledge through students' insights into this issue by provoking participants' reflection through insightful consideration of important aspects related to their future L2 visions as well as language learning and teaching process. It should be noted, though, that awareness-raising was not necessarily a goal of the study, but was indeed observed. Participants reported their growing awareness evidenced through their self-evaluation statements regarding the impact of this study on their understanding, which could be noted in their reported development of motivation from the perspective of autonomy, competence and relatedness. Motivation development was also reported in relation to participants' English future images of themselves, and perspectives on improvements pertinent to their English language learning and teaching process (see section 7.1, p. 220-226; 7.2, p. 226-229; 7.3, p. 230-235). Contextually, therefore, students' insightful and truthful voices would make original contributions to the area of ELT in the Omani context, yielding theoretical and pedagogical implications in this direction. That is, students' insights have been mostly overlooked in the context under exploration. Methodologically, the data revealed noteworthy growth in participants' consciousness about themselves as individuals and learners, attributing such increasing awareness to the critically in-depth approach adopted by the study in order to stimulate their reflection about themselves and their language learning process. Thus, I would argue that the research methods I used in this research are flexible and learner-friendly, being sensitive to contextual and cultural dimensions. The focus groups and language learning histories (LLHs) encouraged reflexivity, and thus allowing a comprehensive exploration of the relationship between Omani EFL language learners' identity, autonomy, and motivation through participating in virtual social spaces, as opposed to traditional language learning experience. This approach was important in addressing satisfactorily my research questions. I am truly pleased to have earned my participants' trust and content regarding the valuable advantages they stated because of their participation in this study, which I would deeply appreciate.

8.2.13 Autonomous Omani Learners

Contextually, the findings of this study depict a very promising picture of the Omani learners and their abilities for autonomous learning, which is completely opposite to that typically illustrated in the Omani ELT research (see chapter five and six). Considering the wider

literature, this result would hopefully bury the idea that autonomy is unfavourable or inimical to Arab learners (Al-Shaqsi, 2009). Upon reflection, such finding should come as no surprise. That is, exploring students' larger social lives instead of just perceiving them as institutional students of a subject would certainly unveil diverse forms of autonomous behaviour since social autonomy can be concealed by classroom tasks or rather by what instructors trust these tasks should be (Holliday, 2003). It is more likely that students do not agree with the teachers' agenda, and hence demonstrate this in sheer passivity (Lamb, 2007). Also, when students are highly motivated to learn, couched in Dörnyei's terms (2009), they have a vivid and realistic 'ideal L2 self'. Thus, they will exhibit autonomous behaviour (see section 5.3, p. 152-153; 5.3.1, p. 153-157; 5.3.2, p. 157-159; 5.3.3, p. 159-162). Couched in Deci and Ryan's (2002) terms, students' motivation is internally regulated when they are intrinsically motivated provided their innate human needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness are fulfilled. Thereby, they would engage in autonomous learning activities. In turn, this implies that individual autonomy is largely constrained by the learner's context (Lamb, 2007), and thus should be facilitated by dynamic social interaction (Ushioda, 2003), which could be possibly mediated by social technologies to compensate for the rigidly controlled environments.

8.2.14 Wrapping up: Significant contributions of the Research

The research topic and approach adopted both make invaluable contributions to the literature. This qualitative study makes original and well-grounded contributions to the existing body of literature in the realm of language learner identity, autonomy, motivation, and digital social space, drawing out specifically Omani-Islamic identity and digital social media influence. There has been no previous study in Oman which investigates the interplay between L2 identity, motivation and autonomy. Also, the findings of the study contribute to the existing knowledge by generating intriguing insights, confirming a dynamically non-linear link between language learner identity, autonomy, and motivation via digital social spaces. The research participants engaged actively in cyberspace as an alternative context aimed at developing their autonomous identities, compensating for the rigidly controlled classroom environment. I would suggest, therefore, to further explore the affordances of cyberspace for the development of language learner identity, autonomy, and motivation in less favourable learning conditions featuring EFL contexts worldwide. I would argue that investigating the influence of digital context on L2 motivation research is timely in that it corresponds to an

urgent need to systematically explore the digital context driven by the L2 Motivational Self System and Self-Determination Theory at a time when students' cyber-lives become a necessity for the development and expression of personal and social identity. Equally, too, qualitative future research may be directed at exploring how learners' strong internalisation and recognition of the economic, social, and educational vitality of the English language help them overlook traditional and rudimentary learning conditions in different EFL settings.

I would, therefore, confidently claim that the present study contributes to the ongoing theory development by complementing and enriching the prevailing quantitative data in motivation research, elaborating on the sophisticated relationships of 'person-in-context' (Ushioda, 2009) by yielding holistically thorough accounts of a learner. Importantly, too, the qualitative data generated by this research is valuable in providing comprehensive accounts of Omani participants' language learning experiences in both traditional and digital contexts, and thus leading to interesting contribution to the literature by reporting comparative analyses on identity expression, autonomy, and motivation facilitated by participants' engagement in Web 2.0 technologies, as opposed to traditional media. By employing a qualitative methodology, this research has also filled the gap in second language motivation research in Oman, which has extensively used quantitative designs.

8.3 Practical Implications for Language Pedagogy, Curriculum Development, and Policy-Making

8.3.1 Promoting Identity Development through Innovative EFL Reform

Drawing on the data of my present research, I would argue that policy makers, curriculum developers, and teaching practitioners should invest considerable efforts into helping Omani students become the persons they would like to be, as an ideal starting point towards an innovative EFL reform in the Omani context. This self-based approach can be justified by the fact that:

a foreign language is more than a mere communication code that can be learnt similarly to other academic subjects; instead, the knowledge of a language is part of the individual's personal 'core', involved in most mental activities and forming an important part of one's identity (Dörnyei and Kubanyiova, 2014, p. 11).

Referring to Dörnyei's (2009) L2MSS, the data revealed that teaching practitioners should facilitate students' expression of their L2 future selves. For instance, language teachers can initially help their students to vocalise their ideal L2 selves, and later to help them consolidate their future images throughout their language learning journeys in order to maintain long-lasting motivational powers. Teaching practitioners can also help their students articulate their future dreams and share their L2 aspirations with their peers in order to encourage other students who may not be able to visualise their future selves.

Albeit my research participants did not conceive the English language as a potential danger to their identity, they appeared very selective in what to carefully adopt from the English culture (see section 6.1, p. 195-197). Their consciousness of possible challenges to their current identity may imply what Lamb and Budiyanto (2013) referred to as 'cultural challenges'. They further contend that cultural challenges may conjure up emotional arousal as the tensions between the present socially-traditional local self and the future individually-modern global self may generate strong emotions by challenging students' identities, thus charging their motivation to pursue language learning (ibid.). Thereby, policy makers, curriculum developers, and teaching practitioners in Oman and similar contexts elsewhere should deliberately exploit cultural identification processes from the outset. As such, students' motivation to pursue English language learning would not be negatively affected. Thus, educators and curriculum designers are advised to acknowledge these cultural challenges in order to maintain students' short and long-term motivation, promoting positive identity development anchored in the local and global English-speaking community. Engaging examples of identity work that can be practised in language classrooms are the use of focus group discussions as engaging platforms through which students may discuss local issues in English and their consequences in the international arena. They can also discuss local projects and their advantages at a national and international level. Such performance-targeted speaking activities can help ignite students' envisioned bicultural selves in the sheltered environment of their language classroom, provided with the supportive presence and encouragement of their peers. These discussions can be extended beyond the classroom through participating in virtual social spaces, and thus communicating with international speakers of English. This could be facilitated through students' exchange programmes, or perhaps conducting a shared project between a local university and an overseas university whereby students work collaboratively via cyberspace to complete an academic project.

Through these classroom activities, students can also relate to the international English-speaking community through discussing issues of mutual concerns, and thus yielding greater levels of involvement. It can also be argued that such motivational activities directed at identity development would capitalise on the present and future aspects of students' bicultural identities. EFL teachers should create a conducive environment in which they can collaborate with their students to figure out different ways to represent themselves. These speaking activities hold greater social authenticity, mirroring students' own lives in English-speaking versions. Through focus group discussions, students have to reconcile their local identities with their future global identities, negotiating necessarily the concerns and values of both selves. Another engaging pedagogical activity which revolves around identity work can be the use of reflective language learning histories (LLHs), providing students with invaluable opportunities to reflect on their English-using selves in the protected setting of a personal memoir. I would also suggest creating a community of practice inside the classroom and perhaps extending it outside the classroom via cyberspace. I would presume that its success lies in nurturing students' identities through capitalising on their personal interests, thus igniting their imaginations as future English-mediated selves. In this regard, they are not being positioned as merely language learners in monotonous classrooms, drilling grammatical and lexical exercises. Ultimately, such cultural identification processes may contribute to the development of Ideal L2 selves.

Considering reform efforts into the Omani educational system, teachers are also advised to develop their English-speaking identities through training programmes and professional development. In this respect, Palmer (2007) argues that "Good teaching comes from identity, not technique, but if I allow my identity to guide me toward an integral technique, that technique can help me express my identity more fully" (p. 66). Lamb (2007) also pointed out that teaching practitioners who did not have robust confidence "in their own English and struggled to view themselves as authentic users of the language who were also failing to convince learners that they were potentially effective users of English" (p. 257). Drawing on the findings of the present study, teachers in the Omani context appeared to practise the role of authority figures, requiring their students to involve in prescribed textbook exercises which teachers were mastering confidently (see section 5.1.1.3, p. 141-142). Lamb (2007) justifies such authoritative roles embraced by the teachers as an expression of their uncertainty regarding their roles as competent and authentic practitioners in the larger English-speaking

community of practice. This seems to accord with the essence of Wenger's (1998) argument that "being an active practitioner with an authentic form of participation might be one of the most deeply essential requirements for teaching" (p. 277).

With regard to the practical implications for educational institutions, the findings of the study uncovered a mismatch between theory and practice regardless of the huge investment on EFL reform in Oman (see section 5.1.1, p. 136-137; 5.1.1.1, p. 137-139; 5.1.1.2, p. 139-141; 5.1.1.3, p. 141-142; 5.1.1.4, p. 142-144). As such, it seems imperative to explore the issues which have impeded the teachers from translating the theoretical essence of the EFL reform into their actual teaching practice. A practical step in this direction could be carried out by the educational authorities who should provide periodic training programmes for their language instructors and make them part and parcel of their professional development. This is due to the fact that poor pedagogies may conjure up negative attitudes towards learning English, resulting in unsatisfactory learning outcomes. In terms of practical implications for policy makers, the data suggests the necessity to further consider the improvement of ELT in Oman. Particular emphasis should be given to students' motivation from the self-perspective. This present study proposes that language policy making should emphasise the facilitation and development of students' L2 future selves so as to sustain their motivation to learn English.

8.3.2 Preparing Global Citizens in a Multicultural World: Raising Intercultural Awareness

Based on the data of my study, participants exhibited national affiliations through pursuing English language learning in the digital context (see section 6.3, p. 200-205). Thus, educators may highlight national discourses about the necessity of English in realising their collective national commitments to encourage students to learn English. Considering its motivational power in the Omani context, policy makers and curriculum developers should emphasise events and issues of national significance such as the diversity of the relationship between Oman and the global world. National cultural elements and intercultural discourses may also be integrated into the language curriculum, and hence should be highlighted through the available teaching materials inside the classroom. This would lead to developing Omani students' intercultural awareness, being regarded as a focal aspect of international communication through English as the world language in such an increasingly globalising era (Baker, 2012; Kramsch, 2009). It is worth noting, though, that cultural awareness in its wider

sense should neither be confined to students' local cultures, nor to Anglophone cultures, in order to promote intercultural communicative competence in the contemporary world in which the interactions between L2 speakers has largely intensified (Baker, 2012). Accordingly, Baker (2012) further argues that educators and students' efforts should be targeted at increasing their critical cultural awareness through teaching and learning materials in varying traditional and digital forms. Lamb and Budiyanto (2013, p. 24) go even further to argue that "cultures are not monolithic entities, and [students'] with little personal experience of foreign cultures will likely base their identifications on stereotypes that need to be critiqued" while they gradually progress through the educational ladder, underlining the need for intercultural awareness-raising in language pedagogy. Put simply, language pedagogy stripped of its cultural elements represents a largely missed opportunity to involve students in the process of authentic language learning (ibid.). Therefore, I would reinforce Baker's (2012) proposed intercultural awareness-raising to be seriously considered by teaching practitioners, curriculum designers, and policy-makers in the Omani context and similar contexts elsewhere. In this respect, I would argue that digital social spaces should be taken into consideration as motivational resources for the promotion of multiculturalism, thus creating global citizen.

8.3.3 Realising Students' Expressions of Identities Facilitated by the Digital Context and their Communicative Needs

Drawing on the data of the present study, educators need to realise students' expressions of identities in the contemporary globalised era and the potential influence of the digital context (see chapter six). As pointed out earlier, this study uncovered participants' representation of cultural and religious identities as well as global selves through cyberspace (see section 6.3, p. 200-205; 6.4, p. 205-207; 6.5, p. 207-209; 6.6, p. 209-213). The data unveiled participants' aspirations to communicate with interculturally-competent English-speaking Omanis within their community and the wider global English-speaking community (see section 5.6.2, p. 181-183). Thereby, teaching practitioners and policy makers need to realise the pedagogical implications of the centrality of English in developing national as well as international selves. Curriculum developers may also design language curriculum in a way that highlights significant dimensions of English as a lingua franca whereas teachers may introduce teaching materials related to English as the world language. Based on my findings, language teachers shall understand the varying communicative uses of English at domestic and global levels so

as to improve students' English competence in congruence with the emerging communicative needs of the rapidly globalising world (see section 6.1, p. 195-197; 6.2, p. 197-200; 6.3, p. 200-205; 6.4, p. 205-207; 6.5, p. 207-209; 6.6, p. 209-213; 6.7, p. 213-216). Therefore, I would recommend that educational resources and contents shall provide illustrative examples of L2 social conversations between L2 speakers since the wide use of English as a global language has largely resulted in greater communications between L2 speakers. Teaching materials may, therefore, highlight lexical and grammatical features of English in varying L2 settings. Significantly, too, teaching resources should reflect students' social lives and emerging needs, relating the use of English to their wider social context. These pedagogical concerns would further students' future desires to vividly envision themselves as legitimate participants of a larger international English-using society, visualising themselves precisely as modern English-speaking internationally-involved selves. In this regard, EFL teachers should help their students develop their ideal L2 future selves by developing pedagogical chances for multicultural events to experience their L2 English-speaking selves, and thus developing their sense of competence and relatedness to the international community. For example, teachers may create an independent learning project, such as interviewing international English speakers about a specific topic, searching for specific cultural elements of a specific country, or writing detailed accounts of significant international affairs, thus promoting the use of social and cultural technologies to communicate with international English speakers. By capitalising on developing students' future selves, educators may channel their pedagogy into students' identities as they might possibly be significant dimensions of their ideal future selves, as illustrated in the findings of the present study (see section 6.4, p. 205-207).

8.3.4 Designing Pedagogical Motivational Techniques Underpinned by Self-based Approaches

In line with the Self-Determination theory, the findings of my study revealed the importance of relating the English language to students' needs and interests, necessitating that teachers' efforts should be directed at clarifying explicitly the reasons behind learning English. The Omani participants explained that their careless attitudes toward learning English at the early phases of schooling was due to their ignorance of the core value of the language (see section 5.4, p. 162-164). In terms of classroom pedagogies, the data showed that the learning tasks used in class need to be at a challenging level, yet learning outcomes should be achievable in

order to develop students' sense of competence (see section 5.1.1.2, p. 139-141). Importantly, though, teachers need to be well-informed about the nature of the feedback provided to students in that it may decrease their sense of competence. Thereby, teachers should provide constructive feedback to motivate students to perform well. The results also indicated that teachers should allow students an increasing control over their learning, and thus consolidate their sense of autonomy. Regarding the evaluation methods, teaching practitioners should assess students' competence in English and their needs so as to establish a conducive learning ambience. In a sense, teachers should design suitable pedagogical activities to result in an effective learning. To boost learners' motivation to learn English, teaching practitioners should promote students' autonomy and foster students' identities by encouraging them to thoughtfully ponder upon their learning needs (Lamb and Little, 2016). Relatedly, the findings of my study indicated that social digital spaces could immensely develop learner identity, encourage learner autonomy, and thus increase learner motivation (see section 5.5, p. 174-177; 5.7, p. 189-194).

Obviously, Dörnyei's (2009) self-based system also lends itself to motivational practical implications. Although he limits his motivational practices to the ideal L2 self only, I can see substantial room for pedagogical practices pertaining to all three components of his tripartite system. The findings of the present study provided us with great insights into Omani learners' L2 motivational powers, drawing out particularly Omani-Islamic identities. The data revealed collective aspirations and responsibilities characterising the Omani culture. The data also uncovered the motivational force of social milieu and significant others in the Omani context, encompassing family members, peers, friends, and teachers. Thus, such insightful understanding could help us figure out motivational activities which are suitable to the Omani context, and hence incorporating them into the EFL curriculum to facilitate effective language learning and teaching process (for more details see section 8.3.6, p. 257-258; 8.3.7, p. 258-259; 8.3.8, p. 259-260). In other words, fruitful efforts could be directed at devising motivational pedagogic activities to help learners define their interests, potential skills, future aspirations, commitments, and feared possible selves. These activities, however, should be first introduced to the English teachers, emphasising their pedagogical significance.

As pointed out earlier, the research participants exhibited manifestations of harmonised ideal and ought-to L2 future selves (see section 5.6.4, p. 187-189). Considering students' future

selves, educators should devise effective motivational tasks by asking their students to further elaborate on their L2 future selves. Teaching practitioners can perhaps approach their students and chat informally with them, thus gaining insights into their future visions. For example, teachers may direct their efforts towards priming students' ought-to selves by highlighting their obligations and duties they are committed to. To achieve highly effective learning, "cohesive learner groups" might be organised according to the similarity of their future images (Dörnyei and Ushioda, 2011, p. 108). By establishing such a motivationally conducive environment inside the classroom, students could be assigned or perhaps assisted in setting relevant learning goals, retaining the groups' motivational conditions. Educators are also advised to actively ignite students' L2 visions in their working memories, since they could not always be awake at the consciousness level no matter how strong these future selves (Dörnyei, 2009).

8.3.5 Devising Realistic and Feasible Action Plans

The data of my study revealed that participants' future selves were closely linked with realistic action plans and motivational strategies, mirroring essentially the pragmatic nature of their future goals (see section 5.6.2, p. 181-183). In this regard, Dörnyei (2009) emphasises that students should devise a set of concrete action plans, including a goal-setting component and self-regulatory strategies. First, though, the future self-guides should be "perceived as plausible...that is, realistic within the person's individual circumstances" (Dörnyei and Kubanyiova, 2014, p. 13). They also explain that the future self-guides should be escorted by "relevant and effective procedural strategies that act as a road map toward the goal. Once the learner's vision generates energy, he or she needs productive tasks into which to channel this energy" (Dörnyei and Kubanyiova, 2014, p. 14). Students may also benefit from a training programme designed to help them develop clear and pragmatic self-evaluation mechanism in order to assess their action plans to realise their future aspirations. Nevertheless, challenge needs always to be brought to teachers' attention whilst devising classroom motivational strategies and activities as they entail high calibre pertaining to classroom interaction. That is, optimising the motivational capacity of students' L2 future selves is indeed challenging. According to Dörnyei and Kubanyiova (2014), language educators can design intervention programmes to facilitate students' development of future selves. Such intervention programmes may encapsulate a myriad of classroom activities ranging from simple tasks like interviews, drawing a tree of future visions, to composing a story about the potential future

selves and their role in students' lives (ibid.). Finally, Hock et al. (2006) argue that the last element of a training programme shall include a comprehensive check-up stage where completion of tasks is revised, goal-settings are continually amended, plans are reviewed, achievement of goals is joyfully celebrated, further targets are constantly added, fears and hopes are continually investigated.

8.3.6 Establishing a Motivationally Nourishing Learning Environment Bridged with Students' Families

Based on the findings of the research project, students' immediate family context appeared to play a motivational role in the Omani students' language learning experiences (see section 5.4.3, p. 169-174). Considering families' influential roles in the Omani context, I would propose that teachers can consult students' families whilst devising motivational strategies and activities, bridging students' institutional learning experience with their families' immediate context. Another dimension of such a motivational learning atmosphere is to capitalise on the academic strengths of high achievers to peer tutor low achievers, thus creating an inclusive ambience inside the classroom. For example, participants pointed out earlier that they felt alienated as their classroom activities did not match their cognitive levels, being basically monotonous and burdensome (see section 5.1.1.2, p. 139-141). Teachers did not make necessary efforts to create challenging tasks for higher achievers, thus ignoring their participation in the classroom. Similarly, low achievers were overlooked (for more details see section 5.1.1.2, p. 139-141). Thus, teachers could help weak students by emphasising the symbolic value of English and its associated socio-economic advantages at a domestic level and perhaps internationally. Importantly, too, given the collectivist nature of the Omani context and similar contexts elsewhere where group solidarity is highly valued (see section 2.1, p. 13-15), teachers may create inclusive groups of both high and low achievers to work collaboratively. In this case, high achievers would appreciate their participatory involvement in the classroom, realising their collective responsibility towards their peers or social autonomy. Also, low achievers would grow more confident by constructing knowledge collectively with their peers. Drawing on my research findings, participants expressed their needs for a motivational environment in which teachers employ learner-centred approaches, and thus promoting the growth of autonomy (see section 5.1.1.1, p. 137-139; 5.1.1.2, p. 139-141; 5.1.1.3, p. 141-142; 5.1.1.4, p. 142-144). Teachers may negotiate with their students on what to learn, how to learn, and how to be assessed.

As outlined earlier, the data showed that parents and other family figures played an influential role in motivating students to learn English (see section 5.4.3, p. 169-174). As such, the present study further encourages such familial support. This support can also be extended to the local community, possibly forming learning hubs to ascertain the value and relevance of English in their lives in order to satisfy their sense of relatedness. These learning clubs can also be in the form of virtual platforms.

8.3.7 Introducing Successful Bicultural Role Models

Drawing on the reported motivational force of social milieu and significant others in the Omani context, including family members, peers, friends, and teachers (see section 5.4.2, p. 167-169; 5.4.3, p. 169-174), educators can employ ‘near peer role models’ strategy (NPRMs) as termed by Murphey (1998). Close peers who may share a similar cultural background as well as age group can powerfully motivate other students in their language classrooms (Dörnyei and Murphey, 2003). They further argue that due to the profound psychological attraction exerted by NPRMs, students find it easier to comprehend and emulate their closest peers’ strategies of success as role models (ibid.). This is grounded on the argument that near peer role models share a myriad of similarities with other students, amongst which are age, setting, major or career preference (ibid.). This also chimes with a significant proposition of social learning, stressing that imitation occurs when an individual considers the similarities related to both the role model and him/herself (Weiten et al., 2014; Murphey and Arao, 2001). In the words of Dörnyei and Kubanyiova (2014), they also explain that:

students are likely to be more inspired by an outstanding individual who excels in their own area of interest and who is close to their social background or age level, because in this way they can more easily use this model for generating a possible future image for themselves (p. 63).

This proposition leads me to argue that learners’ influential family figures or successful peers within their educational institution or within their immediate social environment could be inspirational role models for them. Accordingly, teaching practitioners can draw on the experiences of successful students by simply inviting them in person to the language classrooms to narrate their motivational language learning experiences. Teachers may also draw on a near peer role modelling approach by making use of successful language learning experiences of L2 learning as teaching materials. Curriculum developers may also embrace such a motivational approach, designing pedagogical activities in such fashion. Teachers may

also exchange their successful language learning experiences and strategies with their students. In this regard, the data uncovered that some Omani teachers considerably influence Omani learners' motivation to learn English, highlighting the motivational role exerted by some exceptional teachers (see section 5.4.2, p. 167-169). Teachers should seriously consider this motivational dimension of teaching, and thus improve their classroom-related performances. Teachers and curriculum designers can also take further steps in that direction by integrating Web 2.0 technologies, creating virtual social platforms to host and exchange students' language learning histories and successful learning strategies.

The data of the present study uncovered potentially inspirational role models, be they influential family figures or significant others through social technologies of internationally-aware English-using Omanis (see section 5.4.3, p. 169-174). As such, it would be reasonable to promote pedagogical activities, targeting the development of students' potential bicultural identities to realise their motivations in learning English. Drawing on my research findings, participants represented manifestations of bicultural selves (see section 6.2, p. 197-200).

8.3.8 Accepting the Omani Variety of English in Language Classrooms

Considering the participants' needs, in my present study, for the Omani variety of English to essentially spread the Omani culture (see section 6.1, p. 195-197), teachers should encourage the fluent speakers of Omani English rather than valuing only students who acquire native-like accents. In turn, this allows other learners to see more closely attainable Omani models of successful language learners. This may also be relevant to pedagogical activities linked with students' future selves, thus encouraging students to imagine themselves communicating through their local accents of English (Islam, 2013). These tasks will not only decrease learners' efforts expended on emulating Anglo-American accents, but also would help teachers create an inclusive ambience by avoiding feelings of alienation amongst their students in language classrooms (*ibid.*). Equally, too, given the reported motivational role of some Omani English teachers (see section 5.4.2, p. 167-169), policy makers and other stakeholders may consider providing more opportunities to employ Omani educators in higher educational institutions as it would be costly effective and practically feasible. Citing Holiday (2005) and Medgyes (1994), Lamb and Budiyanto (2013) maintain that "in recent years it has almost become TESOL orthodoxy to downplay the value of native speaker teachers and advocate the strengths of non-native local teachers of English" (p. 21), arguing

that knowledge of students' immediate social context and their mother tongue render them professionally advantageous. Arguably, Rivers (2011) contends that introducing native speakers of English as legitimately prestigious linguistic models encourages a monolingual ethic, driving students to develop unfavourable attitudes towards other international users of English and may potentially develop increased feelings of inferiority and anxiety amongst language learners.

8.4 Limitations

Since research is always conducted within webs of varying methodological and contextual constraints, I should acknowledge that there are limitations pertaining to my study. I am mindful of these limitations which I will deliberately explain to help researchers and other interested readers to well grasp any stated claims regarding the design of my study and its interpretive results in light of the limitations in which the study was carried out. Significantly, too, limitations help the research audience to understand what is precisely within and beyond the scope of the research.

One of the limitations is that this research focuses largely on the expressions of identities through cyberspace, making only a few links to the effects of the real-world incidents. References to traditional contexts unfold how students navigate their online and offline identities in relation to each other. However, research findings highlight the virtual world more clearly, and thus placing limitations on the analysis of face-to-face contexts. Participants reported that due to the rudimentary and monotonous learning experience in their traditionally institutional education, they sought autonomous language learning pursuits through the digital context, which was deemed as a compensating space for the strict and authoritative environment. To be more precise, participants were willingly engaged in social technologies, indicating a capacity to take charge over their learning process. They also exhibited conscious selections of English language learning tasks, matching essentially their personal interests and stimulating self-reflection. Besides that, they showed interdependent social learning through virtual platforms. Consequently, their sense of autonomy, competence, and relatedness gained through their greater investment in these digital forums intrigued better conceptualisation of their English prospective teacher identity. Also, exhibiting proficiency in English language and remarkable communication skills presented evidence of successful and competent English-major students' selves. Broadly speaking, my

participants exerted much effort and energy into engaging through cyberspace, as an alternative context targeted at nurturing and developing identities. As sufficiently explained earlier, participants claimed that their traditionally institutional education, be it school level or tertiary level, provided them with very limited spaces for personal growth in terms of personal control (autonomy), sense of progress and achievement (competence), as well as a feeling of belonging (relatedness) (see section 5.1.1, 5.1.1.1, 5.1.1.2, 5.1.1.3, 5.1.1.4, 5.2, 5.2.1, 5.2.2, and 5.2.3). Therefore, participants channelled their discussions towards the online world, and hence reporting only limited examples of data pertinent to real- life, which could be considered as a distinctive area for further investigations.

Being a small-scale study might be viewed as a limitation. Nevertheless, this study embraces a qualitative approach concerned primarily with the quality and depth of the participants' responses regardless of the quantity. According to Oxford (2003), quantitative approaches detach the researcher from his/her context and conceal cultural suppositions into the trap of generalisation and abstraction. As such, this research does not attempt to generalise its findings to all college learners of Oman, thus maintaining the idiosyncrasies of the context under study which may not be achievable by adopting a large-scale quantitative study. Albeit the present findings are drawn from one tertiary institution in Oman, it presents a broadly ubiquitous scenario in similarly diverse EFL contexts. Therefore, limitations related to the generalisability or transferability of the results do exist as similar research studies conducted in varying contexts would definitely yield different results. Nonetheless, it may be transferred to diverse settings based on the level and extent of commonalities (Guba and Lincoln, 1985). As such, the present research offered thorough delineations of the research participants and the context under investigation with its cultural variation in order to allow the wider research audience who intend to replicate the study, and hence attempt to identify any similarities to their contexts.

The third limitation relates to the study population. That is, the participants did not only demonstrate that they were exceptional language learners, but also they did diligently invest much effort and time to improve their English competence through their constructive engagement with cyberspace. If less motivated learners had taken part in this study, different results would have been yielded. Given the fact that the research participants were not representative of the majority population in the context under study, I would propose a future

comparative study sets out purposefully to compare learners with high and low motivational profiles, studying in a generally similar context so as to explore the intricately interwoven connections between identity, autonomy, and motivation from a different angle. Again, I must admit that targeting a diverse population drawn from other disciplines could have potentially unfolded resistance to English.

The focus group discussions and the individually composed language learning histories were all communicated in English as greatly demanded by the participants. Notwithstanding that it may signal their high motivation and autonomous L2 identities, it could also be seen as a barrier in articulating their voices and feelings.

If I could repeat the research study, I would also adopt a theoretical approach of experiential learning through participating in virtual social spaces, besides the focus group discussions and the language learning histories. The research participants would be asked to engage in relevant experiences in which they would reflect on the role of Web 2.0 platforms in their language learning experience so that they could develop their English language competence. In return, they would hopefully foster autonomous pedagogy in their classrooms amongst their future students. Therefore, I would employ different social applications for the three focus groups to facilitate online reflective exchanges of language learning experiences. I would, however, encourage them to propose their own preferred online applications they would like to engage in. In summary, these online social spaces would be used to host language learning histories in order to exchange and reflect on their distinct language experiences. Consequently, such discussions would raise awareness regarding various learning strategies adopted to develop their language proficiency. Eventually, this would steer their conversations towards the impact of Web 2.0 tools on mediating the socially collective building of language-related knowledge through autonomous endeavours. It should be noted, therefore, that I would take the role of a facilitator in these online groups given the fact I am a constructivist researcher.

8.5 My Concluding Reflexive views as a Researcher

At various stages of my PhD journey, I have critically reflected on my progress as a researcher. Broadly speaking, I have been deeply thinking of the issues to explore in my research, being equally aware of what is beyond its scope. I have been also critical about the possible ways for researching my topic. Relatedly, I have been reflexive about my role, and

experiences which I have carried with me throughout the research process, potentially affecting the interpretation of my data. As such, I have been transparent in the sense of approaching my research, its design, and its general methodology which I embraced in collecting my data as well as analysing and interpreting these findings. I have been, thus, explicit about the diverse arguments pertinent to the research methodology and methods adopted in my study, accommodating a critically positive discussion concerning the possibly diverse methods of examining and interpreting the issue under investigation.

In a more specific level, I have been reflexive about my own thinking and research, thus being highly sensitive to and aware of my preconceptions, values, and beliefs. Taking a more reflexive outlook, being a qualitative researcher has challenged my deeply settled epistemologies. I have poignantly learned how to perceive multiple realities through divergent perspectives, necessitating me to unsettle and re-think my deep-rooted ontology. This has also entailed me to embrace a stance of unknowing to further explore diverse views of knowing and being related to social matters in life context.

Undertaking a PhD research is undeniably an exploratory journey at personal and professional levels. To begin with the professional level, I have learned valuable knowledge about conducting rigorous research as well as language learning and teaching through taking research courses, attending and presenting at local and international conferences, participating in seminars and workshops, my own extensive readings, as well as the thought-provoking conversations with my inspirational supervisor. Thereby, I have started to re-think different dimensions of EFL teaching and learning which I used to strongly believe in. Undoubtedly, my extensive exposure to the recently critical debates in my field and participation in critical discussions has deepened my comprehension of qualitative enquiry and its underlying philosophy. I have also started to realise how context could have a potential impact on the research, and could possibly update practice. In a sense, I have managed to develop a robust understanding of qualitative inquiries and improve my research skills in this area which would help me carry out future studies, targeting context-sensitive issues and disseminating my research data in academic refereed journals. In fact, I have already published a joint scholarly article with my supervisor based on my research findings. I have also been awarded a conference grant from the University of Sheffield to present my research findings in an international conference, being accepted to present at the Korean

Association for Multicultural Education in 2017. Through my work, I have changed my opinions regarding the value of qualitative research, developing a strong conviction of its richness and diversity bestowed on a social issue under question. It is worth mentioning that I have changed my fundamental assumptions concerning reality and knowledge, and thus my research approach as part of my developmental journey. My initial research proposal aimed at gauging quantitatively learners' readiness for autonomy. The series of supervision meetings, modules, seminars, conferences and my readings have significantly contributed to my current understanding of various philosophical paradigms and recent theoretical frameworks relevant to my topic. One of the influential pieces of work, which has worked as a starting point for shaping my understanding of qualitative research, is that of Wellington (2015). His book offers an introductory guide to the research methodology and methods written in an accessible and readable style, discussing different approaches and issues. Whilst introducing various qualitative research methods, Wellington (2015) points to their limitations. He also presents diverse ways of analysing and reporting qualitative research methodology, he offers practical case studies composed by various researchers. Besides that, he provides references to seminal literature on educational research, presenting a variety of theoretical frameworks underpinning research. He also discusses the importance of a researcher's criticality and reflexivity at different phases of research. Indeed, Wellington's (2015) book is thought-provoking as it helps me engage in a self-reflective practice, pondering upon different issues pertinent to qualitative methodology and research methods. Other essential work on social research methods are that of Bryman (2016, 2012). Both editions are informative, rendering me as a reader quite pleased to travel the road of research methods. Bryman's books present an encyclopaedic view to the research methodology and methods in social science. Bryman provides illustrative examples of both quantitative and qualitative research methods, helping me as a novice researcher to critically identify the suitable approach to my research aims. His book has guided me throughout all phases of the research process which encompasses the formation of my research questions, deciding on appropriate research methods, choosing research participants, collecting and analysing data, as well as disseminating research data.

Personally, I have developed personal and intellectual qualities pertaining to critical thinking, being tolerant and accommodating diverse (opposing) perspectives, as well as avoiding running into conclusions before holding reasonable evidence. However, there is still much to be learned about life generally and research particularly. Indeed, embarking on my PhD

journey has been a life-changing experience. It is an endless journey towards exploring knowledge!

The investigation was carried out in a congenial ambience in which students were encouraged to engage in reflective conversations about their learning experiences, facilitating data collection pertinent to my research questions. Participants exhibited developing awareness of their L2 identities and motivations. The narrative design of the research investigation might have provoked their interests to share their own unique narratives about language learning, encompassing their feelings towards learning English at institutional levels and autonomously through digital social spaces.

The data uncovered interesting results, pointing to potential pedagogical implications for teaching methods, curriculum design, and classroom practices pertaining to language teaching and learning in Oman and similar settings elsewhere. The data revealed participants' self-reported judgements about the impact of this study on their understanding of English language, identity, and motivation (autonomy, competence, relatedness). Both female and male Omani EFL student-teachers repeatedly referred to their increasing motivation from the perspective of autonomy, competence, and relatedness. They also referred to motivation development in relation to their English future selves. Equally, too, they voice their growing consciousness about motivation development, as is evident in their reported recommendations for improvements concerning their English language learning and teaching. Yet, their ideas were not taken into consideration or rather not listened to from the outset, which could be such a lost chance. According to Al-Sadi (2015), teachers tend to make teaching plans "in the way *we* think is appropriate and useful for our students but it is also true that students have their own agendas for learning, which many of us ignore at our peril" (p. 270). Thereby, further research projects are still needed to depict a wider picture of the holistic context. For example, further qualitative investigations should be geared towards exploring L2 motivation among varying representatives of English language students in Oman, and thus embracing context-dependant perspectives. In the Omani context in which the issue of unequal gender roles is still prominent, I am planning to examine the connection between the L2 selves of both females and males and the gendered practices depicting the social norms of an Arab culture. Another future research direction which I am considering is to explore opportunities regarding how reflective identity exploration can be used in teacher

education. I am also looking forward to re-analysing my current data from the narrative perspective, drawing out unique individual narratives. Taking this research a stage further, I am planning to consider the practical steps for creating vision-enhancing pedagogies. Based on the findings of my study, participants demonstrated strong ideal and ought-to selves (see section 5.6, p. 177; 5.6.1, p. 177-181; 5.6.2, p. 181-183; 5.6.3, p. 183-187; 5.6.4, p. 187-189). Thereby, curriculum developers and teaching practitioners may create vision-enhancing techniques, which will be explored in a future research to render students' future visions vivid and plausible. Another future direction, which I am also considering, is to take a longitudinal perspective to further explore the relationship between language learner identity, autonomy, and motivation.

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APPENDIX 1

Ethical Approval Letter from the University of Sheffield



Downloaded: 25/12/2015
Approved: 17/12/2015

Suad Al Wahaibi
Registration number: 140105232
School of Education
Programme: PhD/Education FT(EDUR31)

Dear Suad

PROJECT TITLE: Towards Autonomy as a Social Construct: Exploring Omani EFL Language Learners' Autonomy, Identity, and Motivation through Virtual Social Spaces.
APPLICATION: Reference Number 006862

On behalf of the University ethics reviewers who reviewed your project, I am pleased to inform you that on 17/12/2015 the above-named project was **approved** on ethics grounds, on the basis that you will adhere to the following documentation that you submitted for ethics review:

- University research ethics application form 006862 (dated 14/12/2015).
- Participant information sheet 1013436 version 7 (14/12/2015).
- Participant consent form 1013435 version 4 (13/12/2015).

If during the course of the project you need to [deviate significantly from the above-approved documentation](#) please inform me since written approval will be required.

Yours sincerely

Professor Daniel Goodley
Ethics Administrator
School of Education

APPENDIX 2

Approval Letter from the Research Context

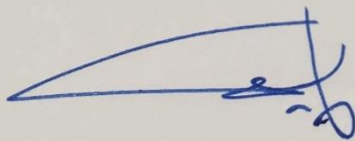
18th January 2016

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

This is to certify that the University has no objection of Mrs. Suad Al-Wahaibi, PhD student from University of Sheffield, UK, conducting few focus group interviews and language learning histories to collect the relevant data for her research titled:

“Towards Autonomy as a Social Construct: Exploring Omani EFL Language Learners' Autonomy , Identity, and Motivation through Virtual Social Spaces”

Kindly cooperate with her to obtain the data required for her research.



Prof. Taher Ba-Omar
VC's Advisor, Academic Affairs

APPENDIX 3

Participant Information Sheet

Participant Information Sheet

The University of Sheffield

1. Title of the study:

Towards Autonomy as a Social Construct: Exploring Omani EFL Language Learners' Autonomy, Identity, and Motivation through Virtual Social Spaces.

2. Invitation:

You are cordially invited to take part in my PhD research study. Before you decide to participate, it is very essential for you to clearly understand its purpose and other significant details. Please take time to read the following details thoroughly. You can also discuss them with others if you wish to do so. In case you need further clarification, you are welcome to ask. Allow yourself some time to decide whether or not you wish to take part in this research study.

3. Purpose of the study:

This research study aims to explore how you view yourself as a language learner and as a future EFL teacher, your motivation to pursue English language learning, your visualised future possibilities, and your autonomous efforts to achieve your ideal future self through your engagement in social technological applications such as blogs, discussion forums, and Facebook.

4. Why have I been selected?

You are kindly being asked to participate in this study because you have spent four years studying English as EFL student teachers, enrolled in the College of Education at a tertiary institution in Oman. Since you are at your final year of studying, you are being invited to reflect on your own language learning experience as an EFL learner and a prospective EFL teacher.

5. Voluntary participation:

Taking part in this study is entirely voluntary. You are completely free to take your decision whether or not to participate. Your refusal to take part in the study will not involve any penalty. Even if you decide to take part in this research, you are still free to withdraw at any

stage without giving a reason. Finally, if you choose to participate, you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. It should be noted that your participation in the study will have no impact on your academic assessment.

6. What will happen to me if I participate?

You will be in a group with five other Omani EFL student teachers. I will meet with your group once per month. Each meeting will last for about an hour, discussing a specific topic related to your language learning experiences. The conversational groups will be conducted in a friendly manner. We will talk about various topics concerning your language learning journeys. You will have the opportunity to share your views with the other students in your group and describe your motivations for language learning and how you go about learning English outside the classroom through the use of virtual social spaces such as blogs, discussion forums, wikis, youtube, and facebook, to name but a few. It is worth mentioning that I will inform you about the topic of discussion beforehand via e-mails.

Besides these informal meetings, you will be asked to write a reflective story about your language learning experience prompted with relevant topics. In other words, you will reflect critically on your past learning experience and express your feelings with regard to these experiences. You will be asked to write one story which cover relatively similar ground as face-to-face group discussions.

As mentioned earlier, the study will take six months. However, we will meet once on a monthly basis. The meetings' schedule will be negotiated with you in advance. You will be asked to choose the days and times of the meetings at your convenience in order to be suitable for all participating students.

7. What do I have to do?

You will be asked to attend six meetings with me and with other students participating in this study. We will informally discuss topics related to your language learning experience with the other students in your group. Additionally, you will be asked to write your own language learning history at any time during the study period. Your participation in this study will involve no lifestyle restrictions.

8. Will I be recorded, and how will the recorded media be used?

Yes. Your discussions during the meetings will be audio-recorded. Basically, the recordings of your tasks conducted during this study will be only used for the purpose of analysis as well as for conference presentations and academic publications only. 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.

To be more precise, data generated by this study will be uploaded into my laptop, which is password protected, to ensure that nobody can access the data apart from myself and my supervisors. The stored data will be, then, transcribed by The Avid Researcher for academic purposes only.

9. What are the possible disadvantages and risks of participating?

You will not be exposed to any kind of risks or disadvantages by taking part in this study. Yet, there may be some discomfort from writing about different aspects of your language learning history. However, I would like to assure you that you do not have to write any topic that makes you uncomfortable. You might also experience inconvenience pertinent to your attendance of an hour of meeting each month for the period of six months, comprising of six hours in total. Nevertheless, these meetings will be organised for mutual convenience.

10. What are the possible benefits of participating?

While there seems to be no immediate advantages by taking part in this study, it is hoped that the findings of the research will significantly contribute to the development of teaching and learning in Oman. Thus, this research study aims to generate data that can enhance language teacher education programmes in Oman. Moreover, your participation in this study will give you the advantage of receiving a copy of my research findings as soon as my thesis is published. You will also be entitled to get a copy of my future academic journal articles which I will publish based on the gathered data from this study. All in all, I aim to elicit information for my research project and create a useful learning opportunity for you to delve into yourself and bring to the consciousness various aspects of your own language learning experiences.

11. What if something goes wrong?

If you are concerned about any aspect of this study, you can contact me immediately on (wahaibis@squ.edu.om). Should you feel that your concern has not been addressed to your satisfaction, you can communicate with my research supervisors: Professor Terry Lamb at (t.lamb@sheffield.ac.uk) and Dr. Sabine Little at (s.little@sheffield.ac.uk).

12. Anonymity and Confidentiality

Your participation in this project will be kept confidential and anonymous at various stages beginning from data collection, storage, to the dissemination of the research findings. Your name and identity will be kept strictly confidential, and hence you will not be identified in the write-up of this study or any future academic publications. The audio recordings of the discussion groups and written language learning histories will be transferred onto my laptop for transcription but they will not be disclosed to a third party. Data obtained during this research project will be retained according to the University of Sheffield's policy on academic integrity.

13. What Should I do if I want to take part?

If you decide to participate in this research study, you can contact me at (wahaibis@squ.edu.om). You will then be given a consent form to sign.

14. The preservation of Research Data

Data generated by this study will only be used in my PhD thesis as well as any academic future publication emerging from this research. The data gathered from you will be destroyed after the completion of my PhD study. Nonetheless, I would like to assure you, once again, that you will never be named or identified in any report or publication.

My PhD thesis will be published by the University of Sheffield upon my completion of my degree and participants will be notified in due course to obtain an electronic copy of my thesis.

15. Who is organising and funding the study?

This study is funded by the Ministry of Higher Education in Oman and under the supervision of the University of Sheffield.

16. Who has ethically reviewed the research?

This research study has been supervised and reviewed by Professor Terry Lamb and Dr. Sabine Little. It has also been ethically approved by the Department of Educational Committee at the University of Sheffield.

17. Contact for further information:

If you need further clarification about this research project, you can contact me through

E-mail (wahaibis@squ.edu.om).

Note:

If you decide to take part in this study, you can keep this information sheet and you will be given a copy of the signed informed consent for your record.

Thank you for considering participation in this study.

APPENDIX 4

Participant Consent Form

Participant Consent Form

The University of Sheffield

Title of Research Project: Towards Autonomy as a Social Construct: Exploring Omani EFL Language Learners' Autonomy, Identity, and Motivation through Virtual Social Spaces.

Name of Researcher: Suad Al Wahaibi

Participant Identification Number for this project:

Please initial box

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet dated [] for the above research project and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the project.

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason and without there being any negative consequences. In addition, should I not wish to answer any particular question or questions, I am free to decline.

3. I understand that my responses will be anonymised before analysis.

4. I understand that my name will not be linked with the research materials, and I will not be identified or identifiable in the report or reports that result from the research.

5. I agree for the data collected from me to be used in future research.

6. I agree to take part in the above research project.

Name of Participant

Date

Signature

Name of 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 of 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.

APPENDIX 5

Discussion Protocol : Open-ended Questions Used as Prompts for Focus Groups

Discussion Protocol : Open-ended Questions Used as Prompts for Focus Groups

- ❖ The following questions were designed to direct the focus group discussions. It should be noted, though, that I was quite flexible in posing relevant questions as the conversations progressed, following up with participants' answers and interests to gain an insightful understanding of their views and trigger their reflective thinking. Also, I did not follow the exact order of the questions below. It all depended on how the discussion went with each group.

1. Traditional English Language Learning Experience in Formal Educational Contexts

- **Previous schools**

1. Did you enjoy learning English at school? Why/Why not?
2. Can you describe your English learning experience at school in terms of your role as a learner, teachers' roles, peers' roles, learning conditions, classroom facilities, teaching methods, English language curriculum, learning goals, constraints, your behaviour in the class?
3. In your view, how could the educational context at school be improved for you?

- **University**

4. What are your reasons to study the English language at the university?
5. What is your evaluation of your experience in learning English here at the university? Why?
6. Can you make a comparison between your English learning experiences at school and the university? How do they differ?
7. Do you seek opportunities to learn English outside the classroom? Why, where, what, and how? Provide examples to justify your answer.
8. Do you enjoy learning English outside the classroom? Why/why not?

- **Attitudes to the English Language, EFL Teachers, and Immediate Family Context**

9. Do you like the English Language? Why/Why not?
10. Did your teachers play a motivational role for you to learn English? Why/Why not?
11. Do you belong to an English-speaking family?
12. Do you speak English with your family?

2. Virtual English language learning through social technologies: Autonomy, competence, and relatedness.

- ✓ Validation of questions related to the topic discussed in the previous meeting.

1. Do you learn English online? Why?
2. What is your comfort level with technology?
3. What kind of technological applications do you use? Why?

4. What kind of online language learning activities do you engage in?
5. Do you usually have any kind of personal goals or learning agendas before engaging in online activities?
6. What are your language learning goals?
7. What roles do you play in the online activities? Roles & responsibilities?
8. Can you decide on what topics to study online and how to study? I ask whether you are able to decide on your preferable learning strategies or not.
9. In your opinion, can you manage your online language learning? Why & how?
10. What kind of online activities do you seek?
11. Are they relevant to your personal goals & needs?
12. How do you develop your English language skills through Web 2.0 applications?
13. Have you experienced a sense of achievement & progress while participating in social technologies? How? Explain.
14. How does your sense of progress and achievement make you feel?
15. How do you monitor your learning progress through engaging in online-related activities?
16. How do you evaluate your progress & achievement online?
17. Do you communicate with your peers via online social spaces? If so, give examples to justify your answer.
18. Are you a member of any online community? What & why?
19. Do you get online feedback from your peers on your performance? What is the role of peers' feedback? How does it make you feel?
20. Do you consult your friends online on issues related to your language learning, teaching practice, or other issues?
21. Do you interact with English speakers online?
22. What gains (if any) do you get by interacting with English speakers online? How does it make you feel?
23. How does your sense of belonging contribute to your motivation?
24. How does online language learning differ from the traditional classroom learning?
25. What are your views on autonomy and responsibility through online social spaces? What does it mean to you?
26. In your view, how could online language learning be linked to classroom learning?
27. In your view, do social technology encourage or limit autonomous learning? If so, in what ways?
28. How do you evaluate the virtual learning environment?

3. Future L2 Selves and Expressions of identities in cyberspace and offline contexts

- ✓ Validation of questions related to the topic discussed in the previous meeting.

- **(Ideal and ought-to)**

1. What would you ideally like to become in the future?
2. Do you think you would use English in the future? If yes, what is the role of English in your future self?
3. Does your participation in Web 2.0 platforms help you realise your future L2 self? If yes,

how can you relate your engagement with these social online platforms to your future L2 self?

4. How do you express your future selves via online social spaces?
5. How does your future-self affect your learning behaviours?
6. In your view, is it obligatory for you to study English? Explain your answer
7. Do your families/teachers/friends encourage or discourage you to study English? Explain your answer
8. Do you find yourself motivated or pressurised into studying English?
9. Does technology support or constrain your efforts to learn English? Explain your answer
10. Do you have any plans or strategies to achieve your future self? Explain your answer

- **National Progress**

11. In your view, what role does English play in Oman?
12. To what extent is English important for the national progress of Oman?
13. Do you think English language pose threats to your national and religious identity? Why/why not
14. In your view, is it essential for Omani nationals to learn English? Why?
15. Is there any influence of the Omani culture in the English language? Explain your answer
16. Do you think participating in English-speaking social technologies would help or limit your contribution to the national development of Oman?
17. What is the status of technology in Oman?
18. What motivates you to participate in social technologies?
19. How do you express your future selves via online social spaces?
20. Do social technologies support or constrain the expression of your identities? Explain your answer

- **Attitudes to the L2 Culture and Community**

21. Do you have ideas about the Anglophone cultures? If yes, how did you come to know about their cultural aspects?
22. What kind of popular cultural resources and media texts do you use?
23. Are you inspired by their cultures? Why/why not?
24. If yes, would you like to get immersed into their culture? Why/why not
25. Do you think English belong to the English-speaking countries only? Why/ why not?

- **International Posture**

26. What is the status of English in the world? Explain your answer
27. Would you like to communicate with English native speakers or with international speakers of English? Why/why not
28. How would technology help you to communicate with them? Give examples.
29. Do you think participation in English-speaking social technology would encourage or discourage you to communicate your ideas at an international level? In what ways?

4. Affordances of Cyberspace

- ❖ It should be noted that each group chose a specific social technology that they were interested in to discuss its affordances. For example, group (A) chose Blogs, group (B) chose Twitter, and group (C) chose YouTube.

1. Do you keep your own personal blog/twitter/You Tube? Why/why not?
2. How do you represent it?
3. Do you keep academic blogs/twitter/You Tube? Why/why not?
4. What kind of activities do you engage in through blogging/tweeting/You Tubing?
In what ways does that help you?
5. What do you think the advantages of blogs/twitter/You Tube?
6. In your opinion, do blogs/twitter/You Tube facilitate or hinder the expression of your identities? If so, how?
7. In your view, do blogs/twitter/ You Tube facilitate or hinder social interactions and reflective dialogues?
8. In your view, do blogging/tweeting/You Tubing activities generate critical thinking?
If so, in what ways?
9. In your opinion, how you find peer comments? How do you respond to them?
10. Do you integrate blogging/tweeting/ You Tubing into your teaching practice? If so, how and why?
11. Do you think blogging/tweeting/ You Tubing activities facilitate reflective practice?
If so, how?
12. To what extent could blogs/twitter/You Tube help student-teachers during their teaching practice? What kind of topics do you discuss through blogging/tweeting/You Tubing activities which are related to your teaching practice?
13. Have blogging/tweeting/You Tubing activities helped you develop your motivation?
How? Explain.
14. Do you set your own learning goals before blogging/tweeting/ You Tubing?
15. How do you monitor your learning progress through blogging/tweeting/ You Tubing?
16. Do you think blogging is an appropriate method for language learning and teaching?
17. How do you evaluate the blogging/tweeting/You Tubing learning environment? How could it be improved?

5. Reflections on Teaching Practicum

- ✓ Validation of questions related to the topic discussed in the previous meeting.
1. In your opinion, who is a successful teacher?
 2. Can you explain the roles and responsibilities of a teacher?
 3. How would you assess your strengths and weaknesses as a future EFL teacher?
 4. Do you keep a teaching plan before going to your class?
 5. Do you evaluate your classroom lesson? How?
 6. Would you as a future teacher be happy to give your students more responsibility towards their learning?

7. Do you think Omani learners are autonomous? Why/Why not?
 8. In your view, is autonomous teaching and learning possible in the Omani educational system and culture?
 9. How would you promote autonomy through your teaching and among your future students?
 10. How do you imagine yourself as a future EFL teacher?
 11. Do you integrate social technologies into your teaching practice? How?
 12. Do you share your teaching practice experience with your fellow students and support each other? If so, give examples to justify your answer.
 13. What do you think of the two research methods being used in this study? Would you employ them in your future classrooms as teaching methods? Why/why not?
 14. Do you think of incorporating LLHs writing in your future classroom? Why/why not?
 15. Would you help your students to realise their possible selves? How & why?
 16. Would you encourage your students to find their popular communication technologies? Why & how?
 17. Would you like to contribute to the shaping of the technological applications for language learning in Oman? How & why?
 18. In your opinion, do you encourage/discourage the incorporation of Web 2.0 technological applications into language teaching and learning at a tertiary level? Why?
 19. Would you like to recommend alternative ways of teaching and learning English in Oman? How & why?
- 6. Self-reported judgements about the impact of this study on participants' understanding of their English language, identity, and motivation (Autonomy, Competence, Relatedness).**

- ✓ Validation of questions related to the topic discussed in the previous meeting.
 1. Why have you chosen to take part in this study?
 2. Has your participation in the study influenced your visions of your future L2 selves?
 3. Can you describe your initial expectation of the research project prior to the first conversational session? Did you find your expectation similar or contrary to your actual experience during the sessions?
 4. Are there any advantages you have gained by participating in these conversational discussions? If yes, what are they? Give examples.
 5. What advantages (if any) have you gained by writing your reflective language learning histories?
 6. How would you assess your involvement in this research project?
 7. What is the potential impact of sharing and exchanging your language learning experiences with others?
 8. Would you participate in future research studies? Why/why not?
 9. Would you continue to develop your language learning & teaching methodologies online? How? Give examples to justify your answer.
 10. In your view, is there any connection between Web 2.0 technology and autonomous learning? Explain your answer
 11. Can you list the key ideas and topics being discussed in this research project?
 12. If I were to replicate this research, what alternative ways for improvement would you suggest?

APPENDIX 6

Sample of Focus Group Discussion (Group C, Session 1)

Group C: First Focus Group Discussion (1FGD)

R. Hello gentlemen. I'd like to thank you for deciding to take part in the study after allowing yourself time to read the participant information sheet and then signing the consent forms. Today, we are going to talk about your English language learning experience in your previous schools and here at the university. So, I am really interested to know whether you enjoyed learning English at school or not and what were the reasons behind that. Can you further elaborate on your English language learning experience at school?

(MP12) There are some years when I did not enjoy it. But, there are some years that pushed me to learn English.

(MP12) During the first four years from fourth grade to eighth grade, I wanted to learn English because of one personal reason that I wanted as my father used to spend a lot of time talking on the phone in English, so I wanted to know what he was talking about. I have started learning through movies and school. I remember in my eighth grade one teacher as he pushed me a lot and motivated me. He was one reason why I wanted to learn English. From that point, I started to improve myself in English. Then, when I got to the tenth grade, the classroom depended on the teacher himself, so it became boring to some extent. I would be that kid in class who would not talk unless no one knew the answer. The teacher, of course, will give me some activities that are at my level. After tenth grade, my level was advanced and the English classroom did not advance with me. That was my experience at school.

R. Did you have a chance to choose what you like to study at school?

(MP12) at school, no. I think that is the easiest answer. I can't really remember an instance where I did choose one thing that I wanted to learn. In twelfth grade, the teacher had to give everyone a book to write about, so he had all of the books and I chose one. I was the only one who chose the book, so that was the only time I chose what I wanted to learn. Other than that, it was only by myself outside school away from the requirements at school.

R. Thank you.

(MP13) for me, I was internally motivated because my family praised English so much, so they told me that English is something that would open a gate for you to the world. I have started learning English in grade four, but before that I started to discover English by myself. I asked my father how my name could be written and which movie I could watch. He gave me useful tips. I started English in grade four and I was really motivated. I kept learning English outside the classroom by myself. I watched movies and documentaries. So, I have learned more of a practical side of English. But, with the theoretical part or grammar and whatsoever, I did not have much knowledge because I was in general education and the English curriculum was really simple. They did not improve the knowledge they gave us until grade eight, so nothing was new in that curriculum. They gave us simple improvement. So, I was basically independent and learned English by myself. When I came to the university, it was something different because the practical side without the theoretical part.

R. Did you enjoy language learning experience at school?

(MP13) No. We were like passive students and not active which made us really disappointed.

(MP13) Actually, when I finished grade 7, I realised that English was very important, and it would help me in the future. So, I took a summer course and I started learning English by myself, focusing mainly on grammar. Then, when I came to school, my teacher noticed that my English was better than the others and they started encouraging me. At the same time, my progress in English was increasing. Actually, I spent a lot of time learning English from textbooks and stories.

R. Ok.

(MP13) But, actually, at school, teaching English was not that active or enjoyable.

R. Why?

(MP13) Because the process of teaching English is not followed in the practice.

R. How was it?

(MP13) Teachers spend a lot of time during the class talking in Arabic which affects the students as they have very weak English.

R. Ok.

R. What else?

(MP13) And they do not focus on the communicative aspect of English.

(MP14) For me, my learning English at school have steps. For example, from grade 1 to grade 3, I hated English.

R. why?

(MP14) Because I was not good at English at all. But, after completing grade 3 and during the summer vacation, my big brother presented English to me in a new way.

R. Good.

(MP14) Because I hated English, I did not even want to learn English. But, my brother who can speak English presented English to me in a new way. He presented movies and video games that I was interested in. So, in order to understand what they are talking about in the movies or video games, I have to learn English. So, in the summer vacation, I started watching movies and playing video games that required understanding of English. So, in grade 4, I started to improve my English even though the curriculum was below my level, as I improved my English through watching movies and playing video games. Then, the teaching process from grade 5 till grade 8 was boring because they were below my level. So, I was not interested in what were taught. So, it was boring so that I answered the questions, as I was given those answers without any effort. In grade 9, I met a new teacher who tried to use new ways even though he was instructed to follow the curriculum or the syllabus. He was trying to present English in a new way. He was my teacher from grade 9 to grade 12. Although he faced a problem because the inspectors and supervisors wanted him to follow the syllabus, he booked a big room for the students to ask them to bring the food they wanted and let us watch a popular movie at that time by Will Smith. After watching the movie, he asked us to write what we saw. After we wrote, we submitted the papers. Then, he asked some students to

come in front of the class and talk about the movie. So, he tried to bring new ways for teaching English to motivate students. Also, because of him, I was motivated to major in English at the university.

R. Did he play a motivational role for you?

(MP14) Yes.

R. Ok. Interesting.

(MP13) For me, I only remember my time at grade 7. Before that, I do not actually remember enjoying English maybe because the class was very tedious. But, in grade 7, there was an Omani teacher who taught us a full year in grade 7. I enjoyed the way how he presented the course and language. But, then, he left. In grade 8 and 9, I do not remember anything about English (smiling) because again the classes were tedious. In grade 10 and 11, the English classes became interesting because there was a new Egyptian teacher. He had a unique way of teaching. he did not follow the book. He had new posters, stories and videos. But, there was an instance in grade 10 when I was walking home from school, I found a novel called Bermuda Triangle. I always enjoyed reading stories. So, I found that book and I did not know that there were novels in English because I was most of my time either at home or at school. So, that was the first novel I ever seen. I asked my teacher about it and he told me about novels and short stories. He also told me there was another novel that are taught to grade 11 or 12 students. It was the reason I enjoyed English because of the teacher. There was also another reason because of my brother. He was studying here at the university. He majored in English. When he used to return home, he would read articles in English and he would be so committed to reading. So, I wanted to know why he was always reading in English. He would give me vocabulary. That is all about my time at school.

(MP12) To some extent, there was a point in my life when learning English was not for the sake to wanting to learn English, but rather for the sake of understanding what I am watching in a movie or what I am playing in a video game. That was the motivation as I wanted to know what those guys were saying and what was going on. To some extent, I can say that I wanted to watch that movie and I wanted to play that game. So, English was a result of it. I did not watch the movie because I wanted to learn English, but rather I learned English because of watching movies. English came as a result at one point in my life.

R. Was that at school?

(MP12) Yah. I even remember that channel 2 in English was starting at that time.

(MP12) From that day on, I even remember watching movies with my father. That was even another thing. I remember two special movies that have a special memory because I watched them with my father and I watched them in English. There were to some extent reasons for that.

R. Ok.

R. How were the learning conditions at school?

(MP13) In a classroom, you would find maximum 4 who knew little English and most of them did not even know how to write their names in English. There were not many reasons to improve yourself in English. With regards to the classroom conditions, it was really horrible. You would find 40 students in a class. So, it was really devastating for some areas.

R. What about the teaching methods?

(MP13) The teaching method was more of a lecturing by the teacher and students listening.

R. Ok.

(MP13) Students did not talk. The teacher made 90% of the talk.

R. Did you like that?

(MP13) No, I did not like that. Giving a chance to the students would make a difference. But, they did not make any attempts to do that. I can't really blame the teacher because they were following the curriculum.

R. Anything else?

(MP14) For me, learning conditions were very poor and the teacher was following the syllabus, trying only to spoon-feed the students. They were only giving students information without actually interacting with them. Most of the teachers were trying to do that. As I mentioned before, only one teacher did something new. I was a passive learner and classes became boring. The information could not even enter my ears.

(MP13) I even remember one teacher who affected me; he used to take the first five minutes of each class and asked us about general stuff like: did you play games last night? Or what was the last movie you saw? Because after a whole semester, he knew each of us and what our interests were. He got closer to us. He made us choose what we want to talk about for the first five or seven minutes. He got out of the chain he was chained by the curriculum and he affected us through a very simple way. So, that is how he gave us the opportunity to learn something by ourselves.

R. Was he the only teacher who did that?

(MP12) Yah. I think he was the only one I can remember. My brother is studying now at the same school and I asked him whether my teacher does the something he used to do with us and he said yes.

R. In your view, how could the educational context at schools be improved for you?

(MP13) The first thing is that the Ministry of Education has to let teachers at schools to be creative because they are now instructed to follow the syllabus. They are instructed not to teach something out of the syllabus. They should let them be creative in teaching because they know the students and they know what they need. They know what they are good at. So, the first thing is to let the teachers be creative to choose the curriculum that fits the students to let them actually learn something. Also, in teaching you have to use different methods because the students learn in different ways. For example, some students learn through visual aids and some learn from doing actions. Also, because the intelligence of the students is

different, so the first thing to be done is to let teachers be creative in teaching by using different methods and different curriculum. Also, there is a need to change the curriculum because it is so old and so boring. Even the students become bored because of it. If you ask one of the students about the curriculum, they would tell you that they are bored. In the past, students were weak at English, but you will find students who are good at English. So, the curriculum is below their level. So, we have to change and adapt to the changes happening in the world.

R. Do you blame the Ministry not the teacher himself?

(MP13) Actually, I blame the Ministry not the teacher.

R. Why is that?

(MP13) Because the Ministry's role is to adopt a new curriculum and the teacher has to transform the knowledge to the students. He will do it perfectly, but the curriculum itself is boring. It is not worth to learn. So, the Ministry has to change the curriculum to suit the students' level because the curriculum is used in the past and has not been changed for twenty years now. The ministry has to adopt new ways of teaching.

R. Do you prefer to be given the opportunity to decide on what to study?

(MP13) Yes. Even you can distribute a questionnaire to the students to ask what they like to learn in English and then apply their ideas to change the curriculum to suit the students' age and intelligence.

R. Do you have an idea of what topic should be included?

(MP13) Well, the first thing is to use technology in classrooms because even young children know how to use technology more than the adults. So, we can use that as a way to teach English to students.

R. OK.

(MP12) Being in the classroom is mainly how the teacher makes changes. There are students who say that there is a teacher who changes how we think. So, it is the teacher. You have the material and sometimes it does not matter what it tells you. Of course, you have to follow some guidelines. The more experienced you are, the more you can do with the material you have. So, the teacher can make this sheet of paper interesting for me in the way he presents it. So, I can't really blame someone because I understand how the process is now. I can't say it is the Ministry. But, the thing is what I am thinking is that we need to do a unit about media in the tenth grade. So, we need to set the objectives and you can move through the book or you can get out of your comfort zone and do something different. It is mainly the teacher commitment and dedication. Some teachers throw what they know and get out of the class. They do not really want to teach. You can't feel that energy from them. So, it depends mainly on how the teacher behaves and his view of English and how he interacts with the students which affect us. Also, how we view English and how the teacher can change how we think is mainly the teachers' role.

(MP13) Also, we need to adapt new ways and methodologies. For example, I was involved in a student exchange program in New Zealand where I observed the teaching process at schools in New Zealand. The teacher actually divided them into different levels because you can't teach a group of students with different levels. For example, he would put the best students in English in one group and these who are at a middle level in another group. He put students with the lowest level in one group. So, he would teach each group something that meet their level. Then, he would leave them to work on a specific activity and he would move to the other group. So, he teaches them what suits their level. That is why there will be some improvements. For example, you can't give extensive English to the students with the lowest level. You can either give simple activities to advanced students. So, we have to give students some materials depending on their level which is a good way, as low-level students would participate in the class.

R. Interesting.

(MP13) For me, the teacher should be given more opportunities to change the curriculum and bring about new methods of teaching. But, mostly, they have to follow the curriculum. If we look closely at the curriculum, there are something that should be changed. The English curriculum is supposedly student-centred. But, in reality, the activities do not really contribute to the centeredness towards students.

(MP13) But, there might be another reason. Some teachers, as I have talked to some teachers, they complain about the paper-work that are given by the Ministry.

R. Do you mean administrative work?

(MP13) Yes, administrative and course-related paper work.

R. Ok.

(MP13) They said they need to write more papers and spend time on useless work. But, they could invest time on searching for new methods or diversifying their teaching. but, some of these teachers are just lazy and some of them might be competent and interested in teaching.

R. Good.

R. Who did play a motivational role for you to learn English?

(MP14) For me, it was one of the teachers who taught me English from grade 9 to grade 12. He saw that the English book was useless, sorry to say that. He sometimes threw the book in the table and used his own materials. He tried to teach students something about English because he knew that English is very important in our world this time. Also, he tried to motivate us to learn English. Actually, his classes were very interesting even though students who only knew little English tried to participate. He used some technologies which was not even in the curriculum. So, because of him, I was motivated. In the past, I did not want to major in English. But, he was the main step to major in English.

R. Was he the only teacher who motivated you?

(MP14) No, there is another teacher, but in other subjects not English. So, I respect him because he actually tried to teach us things not from the books.

(MP13) For me, it was mainly my father and one teacher. My father knows that English is vital to live and improve yourself. English is the Lingua France, so you need to have a knowledge about English to really live and find a suitable job or life career. The teacher gave me more motivation to learn because he gave me different methods and he taught me different things that I did not know about the language. He even sat with me and he looked at my weaknesses and tried to improve them. I owe him a favour.

(MP12) For me, it was my father and the way he used to talk a lot in English on the phone. We had special time watching movies together. The other teacher in his five minutes at the beginning of each class changed me a lot. But, there was another teacher who did not even teach me. He was at school and I was in the drama club, so he told the other teacher that I was good at English. 99% of the time, we used to speak in English. It was in class only. Outside the class, he was the only one who used to talk to me in English so that it motivates me and even the way he treated me. To some extent, I wanted to be good in English to make him happy. When you let your teacher down, you can see that he is really sad. Now, I do not want an A for me, but I want that teacher to be happy. He feels I deserve more, so I have to work hard.

(MP14) For me, when I was in grade 7 and grade 8 when I used to say anything in English, everybody would clap for me and I would be someone special.

R. Do you mean your peers?

(MP13) Yes. But, most students were at low levels in English.

R. Ok.

(MP13) But, after grade 10 or 11, my teacher would encourage me to learn English and the way he used to teach was very interesting. Also, my brother went to the university and I thought it was very good to be a university student. He knows a lot of English and I thought it is very good to learn English.

R. Good.

R. What are your reasons to major in English at the university?

(MP13) I have two reasons, actually. The first one is that I love English and I am internally motivated that English is something crucial in my life. Language is a package and it comes with its culture, so I want to get exposed to that culture and to know more about them. So, I really wanted to learn English to (Inter) interact with that culture. The second one is to have a career.

R. Ok.

(MP12) There is a difference between being bilingual and only having one language. With Arabic only, you will have 10 books, but with English you will have 20 or 30 books. Arabic books are to some extent limited to Islamic stuff, but English books are to some extent full of different sources of knowledge. The other reason is mainly to get into media. One of the ways how I improved my English was through online forums as I used to get a review on a game. So, what I used to do is to get a review from that website and I would translate it. Then, I

would publish it in the website. I also worked on that to the point I even got money for it. So, I saw that those guys who were engaged in those forms were paid by companies to attend a convention. When I saw that, I wanted to do that as well.

(MP12) I love video games and I love movies, so they become a reason to learn English. The other thing why it is in education is that I have seen there is this whole concern among my peers that English is hard. But, it is not because I know it is not hard, so I wanted to change that and to be someone who affects the society telling them that English is not hard. Even now when I meet up with my friends from school, they are all now studying at colleges and they all say that English is not hard. If I got an A or B in English, I would have achieved my first dream I had.

R. Good.

(MP14) For me, I was also interested in movies and video games, so it was a reason for me to learn English. Also, I was motivated by my teacher to learn English. Actually, I can learn English without majoring in English, but what made me to major in English is what English can do for me. For example, English is an international language and you cannot do anything without it in your country. With English, I can even travel to different countries in the world and speak to them. I would like to engage with each culture. Also, because of English I want to learn another language. For example, I watch movies or series which are subtitled in English and the characters are speaking another language. I can actually speak some words of that language.

R. Do you mean languages other than English?

(MP14) Yes.

R. Are you interested to learn other languages?

(MP14) Yes, for example, Japanese.

R. So, you are learning other languages through English.

(MP14) Yah.

R. Very interesting.

(MP13) Personally, I choose to major in English because I love English because I think it is like a window into the world and you can share different cultures. It becomes like a mean through which we can get in touch with the whole world not only the UK or the US. I think English gives us a bonus because I can communicate with any people from all around the world.

R. Interesting.

(MP13) I also learn English for career purposes. I could get career opportunities in many places. If I do not like my job, I can change it any time I like because English is needed everywhere.

R. Ok.

R. What is your evaluation of your experience in learning English here at the university?

(MP13) to be honest, it is a mixed of all. We have been interested in being successful. It was boring at some cases and it was mainly difficult because I am a student who does not memorize, and I can't even memorize a page. I do not know how that is. I like how the psychology department here deal with it because they do not give you the information to memorize, but they give you the information and make you use it in your real life. then, you apply it in your test. It was really interesting for me and it was successful. Until now, I can tell you everything about psychology.

R. Do you mean the psychology courses that you take as part of your educational degree?

(MP13) yes. So, it was difficult but interesting at the same time. The boring ones were that required memorization. Memorization is not useful for me because if I memorize today, I will forget it the next day. It is mostly successful because I have improved my English since for the past four years. I notice how I improved.

(MP12) for me, it is mostly an average. The courses that require discussion or to go deeper into a piece of literature are the courses that I really enjoyed because I read a lot. Other courses depend on a personal preference. Some courses are interesting, but the teachers are not passionate. But, there are passionate teachers from whom I got the passion for the course.

R. How?

(MP12) it is mainly how the teacher deals with us. I remember one teacher and the way he introduces the novel and the way he discusses it; you can feel that he knows a lot. So, I want to be like him. He is so energetic, so I feel energetic to go to the class. But, other teachers just wait for the classes to get finished, so I feel that I am going to be executed when I go to class. It is mainly the teacher and how he presents his course. it is the material itself, but it is the way he interacts with the lesson.

(MP12) it is the teaching method and the way he deals with us. Some of the teachers deal with us as adults as they expect us to know the consequences. Others just keep throwing stuff and they are spoon-feeding us. Some teachers even for one course at the department, it was one of the most useful courses. It was the research project. We were independent. So, I can say it was one of my favourite courses even though a lot of people hated it. First of all, I chose a topic, then I worked on it. I spent a lot of time with the teacher, so he saw how much efforts I made into this project. It was a task-based course. it was only about getting information, but also applying it and using higher thinking skills.

(MP12) enjoyed taking control of your learning like choosing a topic and applying critical thinking skills.

(MP14) for me, the course I have taken are mostly difficult. But, because of the teachers' passion for the subject, it has transferred to us. For example, we have taken three courses on psychology, but it was only one subject that I was interested in learning from it. the teacher was passionate and did not ask us to memorize. Instead, he made us engage with the knowledge. Even though I did not get good grades in this course, I actually liked the course. I admired the teacher because he actually makes us very passionate about the course. but, the

teachers who taught us the other course on psychology were not passionate. So, it became the same as we had to memorize the information. In the English department, there were some teachers who were passionate. For example, in poetry course, we had Prof.() who was well-known in the department. Even though poetry or literature courses are difficult, he makes it interesting. He makes us very interested in the subject. He elaborates the lesson in different ways to make us understand. Also, there are other teachers who teach different subjects in the department make us interested in the materials. It depends actually on the teacher. If he is passionate about the course, students will become interested in the course. but, if the teacher is not passionate about what he teaches, it becomes difficult and boring.

R. Interesting.

R. Anything else about your language learning experience at university?

(MP13) my experience in learning English has been quite successful. But, I do not like the ways in which the courses are designed and assessed.

R. Do you mean the assessment methods?

(MP13) yes.

R. Why?

(MP13) because I think some assignments did not help the students to improve the aspects they are supposed to improve. That kind of assessment will not help students to improve.

R. Do you have a chance to choose a specific assessment that appeals to you?

(MP13) generally, no.

(MP12) sometimes, teachers would ask if we prefer presentations or research projects. So, it depends on the teacher.

R. Was it an occasional thing?

All participants: it is rare.

R. Can you make a comparison between your English learning experiences at school and the university? How do they differ?

(MP14) in school, I did not actually learn a lot because they were spoon-feeding us with information, but here I can say that I have learned a lot and I can differentiate what I have learned here and what I have learned at school. When I entered the university, I only knew the vocabulary and some structures of grammar. But, I was not able to speak. At the university, I have to work on my own to find the knowledge and learn via technology as computer labs with free internet were available to us. It is actually a huge gap between the schools and university. Our level at school cannot be compared to our level at the university.

R. Do you enjoy this role?

(MP14) yes, it is enjoyable.

(MP12) I think the difference between the experience of learning English at school and the university is totally different because at school learning English is just understanding a repertoire of vocabulary and that is it. but, at university, you are supposed to experience English by communicating in English through blogging and tweeting. I did not only rely on my classrooms.

R. Do you enjoy the process of learning English?

(MP12) yes, it is natural to learn English or any foreign language by living it rather than studying it from textbooks.

R. Ok.

(MP13) for me, there is a huge difference between my experience of learning English at school and the university. I remember some time ago when I was in my second year at the university as I was looking at some papers that I had, I found my writing papers for grade 11 and 12 and I found to my surprise so many mistakes that a teacher should have given me zero instead of giving me 100%. That was mainly writing. The difference only in my experience that I did not have much speaking experience at school. It was only in writing, grammar, and vocabulary. But, at the university, I had much experience in speaking English as I had to speak with my peers, friends, and teachers. We have online chat rooms. So, I enjoyed practising the language by giving me the opportunity to use the language with other English speakers through online technologies that was freely offered to us in the university.

R. You all mentioned that you looked for opportunities to learn English outside the classroom through online social spaces. Would you mind giving me examples? and why did you seek these opportunities?

(MP14) I seek opportunities to learn English outside the classroom. For example, when I joined the university, I started to read online novels that I was interested in. They were not assigned by the teacher. I did not read those novels because I wanted to improve my English, but I also enjoyed reading those novels. They were appealing to me. I also communicated with English people and other speakers of English. Additionally, there are institutions outside the university which teach English to students. These institutions bring native speakers of English in Muscat, Sohar, and Salalah. So, I go to this institution in Muscat and communicate with them to improve my speaking skill. Also, I can say that I use movies and video games to improve my vocabulary and pronunciation through subtitles. I have also done a research on movie subtitles and how they improve students' English skills. Also, a lot of boys at our age like video games, so I use these games to improve my English.

R. Interesting.

(MP12) when it comes to video games, I want to play and live that experience because it is a story that I want to live it. I am not playing it for English, I want to play to know the story. So, English came as a result. After playing a game about the Greek Gods, I searched on google to know the story. It was written in English, so it opened a new horizon for me. Sometimes, this video game deals with the idea of imperialism or mythology. You can have info about these stuff on the internet in Arabic, but they are limited. Another thing is that there is a strong movement about video games. I can use the mic. The game is like a puzzle

and you should work with another guy. Of course, if you know him, you would do better. But, sometimes, you do not have someone who plays video games, so you will be put with someone randomly. So, you have to play with a British, American, or even Russian guy. So, I have to communicate with them in English. Video game is one way which improved my speaking skills.

(MP13) for me, I always seek opportunities to learn English. Adding to what they say about movies and video games as I always love these things. I am also a curious person and I always like to fix things and even search about the tiny things that puzzle my mind. For example, when I want to fix a broken computer, so I search about it in English because the available Arabic info is not clear, and it does not make sense as the computer system is in English. So, you have to adapt to the English situation for all. So, it was a really good opportunity for me to learn English and how to fix things. Also, if I want some simple information, I would prefer to read in English rather than Arabic.

R. Why is that?

(MP13) because of the content. It is far richer than Arabic.

R. ok.

(MP14) we need exposure to video games, movies, or novels. So, it is very interesting to bring new materials to students to make them curious so that they can search about it to learn more.

R. Do you enjoy learning English outside the classroom through online spaces?

(MP13) I really like learning English outside the educational context because the traditional context is very limited. There is only one path to go. For example, in literature, you can learn literature in the course only. But, I could always search online about anything I like and google it. In my first year, I always used to read stories with pictures in English. But, I do not like the Arabic version. I would read the English version.

R. Why do not you like the Arabic one?

(MP13) these stories are originally Chinese or Japanese. They are translated into English and then to Arabic. so, through the process of translation, they lose their originality and interest. I am interested in reading these stories in English.

R. Do you read online?

(MP13) yes. There are weekly issues that come out in new volumes for the stories, so I follow up the stories. They give me very interesting updates, so I am very interested to read the next issue and it is always in English.

(MP12) personally, I find learning English outside the university is more enjoyable because here, we are limited. But, outside the university, we read what we are eager to read, and we listen to what we are eager to listen to.

R. Good.

R. Do you engage in online activities?

(MP13) yes, watching movies, listening to music on YouTube.

(MP14) I enjoy learning English outside the classroom not as a purpose for learning English but as an interest. Through following my interest, I improve my English and my skills.

(MP12) You are free to do whatever and read whatever you want. if I read the novel assigned by the university, I will take six weeks to read it. but, it is only 100 pages. But, I can read 300 pages in two weeks. So, it depends mainly on your interest so that you take it at your pace. I do not have to do a test on it. I am not doing it for the test, but I am doing it for my sake. There is this internal motivation. Other than that, we are discussing some stuff and reviewing stuff. You have a discussion with people who share the same interest as yours. For example, when you go around the world, you can see that many people are ignorant about Islam. They think of it as being against women and oppressing them. They also think that we do not do things for fun. You can see there is a whole gap between us and them. Sometimes, these discussions are thought-provoking.

R. Interesting.

(MP13) I really enjoyed learning outside the classroom because I have the freedom to do whatever I want, whenever I want, and choosing the content I want. I am an adult and I can choose what is suitable for my age, my culture, and my interest. I can also question if it is suitable for me. Also, am I able to choose the content that is beneficial for me? I have dealt with that because we always need that systematic framework that guides us in learning because we can be lost haphazardly in some ways while learning. but, it can be more focused with a system as you have goals to set and you have to reach these objectives. So, it is more beneficial when integrated with classroom.

(MP13) I think learning English outside the classroom is an essential part of language learning along with the monitored lessons. Students are supposed to be given an opportunity to practise the language freely.

(MP13) I think it is very good to have the freedom to learn.

R. How do you view the teacher role?

(MP14) we can say the teacher's role is as a guide. We can also say as a facilitator, but not as a knowledge giver.

(MP12) he should not spoon feed us.

(MP14) this is a crucial thing about the teacher's role. He guides us for improvement and facilitates our learning but does not give us the knowledge. We have to gain it ourselves by learning on our own.

R. ok.

R. Would you like to add something?

R. In your opinion, who is the successful language learner? how does he differ from unsuccessful learner?

(MP13) I think the successful learners are those who are exposed to language in reality. They are given opportunity to live the language, to communicate with others, to listen to others and speak to them. They are not those who just learn from their books and go through their curriculum.

(MP13) They are exposed to the language in real situations.

R. Good.

(MP12) first of all, a successful learner is the one who can use the language fluently. He is fluent in the language. He can use it in his daily life and in his talk freely. A successful one is the one who can use the language in the right context and he can apply the cultural elements which are very important than just speaking the language.

R. Do you think you are a successful language student? why/why not?

P (Imran) for me, I can say that I am a successful learner. for example, when it comes to English, I want to learn English. I even want to have a Master's degree in English because I am interested to learn English and use it in my daily life. so, yes, in some ways, I can say that I am a successful student because I am eager to study English and use it in my daily life.

R. Anything else?

(MP13) yes, I think I am a successful learner first because I have learned how to assess myself from the beginning when I entered the college of education. For example, you have first draft, second, and third in writing. You have to keep them in a portfolio. So, when you look at them after a year, you can see how you have changed after a while. So, it is more of a successful learner because I have seen myself that I have improved throughout the years.

(MP12) for me, I try as much as possible to use English mainly for writing stuff in social network. I remember in my first year in one of my classes, one of the professors said you would know that you have mastered English when you start dreaming in English. Yes, I have experienced that, and I think I am a successful learner. besides the motivation, there is this whole idea that it goes fluent when I talk in English as I do not have to take two seconds to think before speaking. It goes naturally most of the time.

R. Do you ever feel bored with learning English?

(MP14) well, it depends. For example, English is a new language for us. It is a second language. So, it is very interesting for us. So, we cannot say that learning English is boring. But, how the teacher presents it can be boring. For example, we have linguistics courses like phonetics and phonology. These courses are really interesting, and you feel that you are learning new things about the language. But, how the teacher presents these materials can be sometimes boring. It can be a passive process as the teacher gives the information only and you have to memorize. When I reached for syntax and semantics as final courses on linguistics, they were very difficult. I got very bad grades on the tests, but I was very interested in those courses. I felt that I learnt new things. On the final test, I did my best to get a good grade and I got C. The teacher himself who taught me syntax made me actually aware how to learn syntax and how to engage with the material itself. I can say that the materials are not boring, but how the teacher presents it can make it boring.

(MP12) it is sometimes blended with our own lives like the linguistic course on language and society. It can be boring sometimes depending on the teacher. It is the most interesting and funniest thing when I can relate it to my personal life. so, we can see what is behind the curtains, not only what is on stage.

R. Ok.

(MP13) the thought that I would become a teacher at a school later and I would spend my time on students at a basic level of grade 5,6, or 10, I might get less time to practise English. I always have my free time to learn English not intentionally, but by doing things that I like such as watching movies, reading from the internet, using facebook and twitter. It is not conscious, but subconscious.

(MP13) personally, I do not dislike English. What I do not like is the courses and some materials. Otherwise, I like English. I do not find English a boring language.

R. Interesting.

R. Now, let's talk about your experiences with different web-based technologies like YouTube, discussion forums, wikis, twitter, blogs, Facebook, podcast and your comfort level with technology?

(MP12) for me, I use most of the social networks in English and I listen to podcast in English. They range from general stuff to deep topics in science. Sometimes, I go to audio books in English. As for the blogs, I had a blog for one of the courses in English. There is also the online forum that I use for translating stuff into English as I want to offer something for the Arabic readers. With regard to twitter, I follow critiques on things I like, and I write in English. So, I am not following them for English, but I am following them for the content. So, English is coming naturally. For example, I follow footballers who tweet interesting things in English or post interesting stuff on Facebook. I will look for the news in English first. Most of the time, I know it in Arabic. so, I consume it in English first. If I find a problem, I consume it in Arabic. these are some of the ways that I find useful.

(MP13) at this stage, I am comfortable with technology because most of the time I use technology. The first source of news for me is twitter. I use it a lot and I always follow foreigners who speak English. They would tweet about news and different things. The second one is YouTube. There is no Arabic content on YouTube whether about cars or movies. We do not really see Arab devoted youtubers except for some Saudis. So, we are forced to follow those foreigners who speak in English. So, you need to learn English in order to understand them in the first place. The second one is to provide English contents for you to learn English.

(MP14) I can say that I am comfortable with technology as I use it in my daily life. for example, I read online novels and I discuss about the novels and do research about it or analyse papers on it. Also, I use YouTube and TEDTALK that can give me practical ideas that I can use in my daily life. Because it is in English, I can learn a lot from it. I can even learn new vocabularies. Also, I use blogs and Facebook to discuss stuff that I am interested in. I am really comfortable with technology.

R. Interesting.

(MP13) I really like watching YouTube for different purposes. For example, if I have a problem in my car, I would search for the solution in YouTube in English because there is not much online resources in Arabic.

R. Do you mean the Arabic resources

(MP13) yes. English is richer than Arabic because English contributions are from different cultures. They have different backgrounds and experiences. So, I find more videos on the topics I like in English than Arabic.

(MP12) my first tweet was not a pleasant experience at all. The youtube contents I watch range from simple topics to deeper ones. I always watch youtube because of my curiosity. When you youtube or google, you find a whole world of information. Curiosity is what pushes me to youtube most of the time.

R. Interesting.

(MP13) There is also another thing about discussion forums. If I want to search about something that I want to read about history, there are many discussion forums that present these sources. If there is anything I want to read about, most of them are available in YouTube and discussion forums.

R. Thank you.

R. Anything else to add?

R. Thank you for such a stimulating discussion. That is the end of our first meeting.

R. Do you have anything to say?

R. Thank you.

APPENDIX 7

Sample of Focus Group Discussion (Group A, Session 2)

Group A: Second Focus Group Discussion (2FGD)

R. Hello ladies. This is our second meeting and I am very pleased to see you here. First of all, I'd like to summarise the main points you have mentioned in the last meeting to confirm that my understanding of your discussion is exactly what you meant. You reflected on your traditional language learning experience at the school level as well as at the university here. You have commented on the poor teaching methods, teacher-centred approach, the weak English language curriculum, your passive role as students. Therefore, you searched for out-of-class language learning opportunities to improve your language skills. Is this what you meant in the previous session?

All participants: yes.

(FP2) Besides that, we are frankly supposed to have one hour of discussion. But, it was not enough to discuss and reflect on such enjoyable questions on this beautiful topic that actually helped us see the reality of our second language learning process. Besides that, all of us agreed that we had a poor curriculum and the methods that our teachers used at school were not enough to expose us to the English language.

R. So, what are you suggesting exactly?

(FP6) We can extend our meeting for an open time, maybe! So, we can share our experiences as we have passed twelve years at school and five years here at the university. So, why not extend the time and share our experiences?

(FP2) One hour is not enough for us to discuss.

R. I am happy to do so.

(FP4) Because it is the only time we get to know someone who is very interested in our opinions in such things. Because we are graduating soon and till now nobody has asked us about what we think and whether we want to change the methods of teaching or something like this. I am sure that maybe some of our experiences will be helpful for other generations or those new students.

(FP3) Yah. The chance to reflect on our experiences is really valuable. We are pleased and glad that we are reflecting in our meetings.

R. I am happy to hear that.

R. So, now, we will talk about your English language learning through virtual social spaces. So, let me ask you this question:

R. Do you learn English through online social networking platforms?

(FP6) Yah, we do actually. We did, and we are still doing because depending on the teacher all the time is totally wrong. We have to look for other sources to gain other information or, at least, to understand the task or the course task in a broader understanding, not only depending on the teacher because two hours in class is not really enough. So, online sources and online websites help us, especially in the university life, to develop our English skills in

all kind of skills, even surprisingly in speaking. So, someone cannot expect that online websites can help with the speaking skill.

(FP2) If second language learners of English depend on the teachers, they are going to be passive. For learners who want to learn a second language, they must seek other opportunities to improve their language like using online resources. When we were at school, we did not have the chance to do such things. For example, when we did not understand some of the mathematical courses, we did not have the chance to go to YouTube and watch a video to learn about it. but, when I was accepted at the university, I got a better chance to access the internet and access YouTube. So, whenever I have a difficulty in learning, I do not feel afraid that I cannot understand it because I have other sources instead of relying on the teacher only. So, I go to YouTube and other webs. For example, we cannot depend on the teacher with regard to writing, so we have to use other applications like twitter to share our views and ideas with others in the world. Besides that, blogs are very helpful for us to reflect on things and to show the world that we are actually here, thinking and having a sense of what is happening in the world.

(FP3) We can say that smart phones are really indispensable. As students, we cannot live without smart phones especially with the apps that we can download like YouTube, Facebook, and other things. This tells us that we are in need for technology to enhance our language learning. It makes our life easier. So, technology is indispensable with for language learning.

(FP2) Learning online can be a motivational tool for us to learn. for example, we have a big number of students in class, so the teacher cannot focus on every student. But, when you learn through online, you might communicate with someone who can motivate you to keep learning online. For example, I used Campbell program and there was an American lady who said that she could understand my language. The same thing applies to writing. If you use WordPress or blog and you receive feedback on your writing, wouldn't you continue writing? Of course, you will do the same thing. This is one of the advantages of using online resources.

(FP4) You remind me of Julie Phonics used nowadays in schools. It is like a song where the children repeat the sounds. I remember the first syllabus in which the child is exposed to a sound. Amazingly, I found myself in need for this song. So, I start repeating this song over and over at home to teach my younger brother the way these sounds work together to pronounce them correctly, not the way we used to be taught in schools like a sound as a written form not as a spoken one. So, that makes the difference. The other one is that I learn English online till the moment. I remember one of the courses which was in linguistics specifically phonetics, I downloaded an app from the store "google play" and it was about the English sounds with the phonetic transcriptions. I spent most of my time before the exam practising through this programme. Finally, I got a good mark in phonetic transcription because of the app itself as the word was pronounced and then you would be given time to pronounce it.

R. Interesting.

(FP3) I, actually, use the same app for this course and some other apps for different courses. When I have a course, I go to google apps and look for something that can make me understand the material better. The other thing was about the academic writing through an app, giving you information to go through stages which was very motivational as I felt that someone was reacting to me. There are other apps like YouTube that is very necessary for me as a student and in the coming months as a teacher. Language materials sometimes seem like abstract. I think these videos and technological apps make them more of a 3D which are enjoyable and clearer. I think YouTube is a good thing to go on with when you want to understand a difficult task.

R. You mentioned some of the online language learning activities that you are engaging in. Would you like to say more about specific learning activities?

(FP4) I want to say one thing about watching different YouTube videos. I am also interested in biology and chemistry, but I am not studying in the college of science. I am in the college of education. So, whenever I have the chance to enhance my knowledge in this area, I just google that and watch videos in English that I am interested in like the stages of human birth since the moment of human creation till the moment he is born. I like it very much because it gives me some new insights about other areas not only English as a linguistic field. It is wider than that.

(FP2) I have used most of the technological applications like twitter, blog, Facebook, and stuff like that. I want to say that what I like about these apps is the two-way communications. One you have someone to respond to you and comment.

(FP6) I first used online websites during my study here at the university. In the educational programme, we take literature courses. So, we do not really understand the literary texts 100%. So, we have to google these texts and read summaries and analyses on them. We search about poems, novels, and short stories. So, we can understand, and we are able to participate in class because the teacher is no longer able to go through the whole novel. So, we access websites like spark notes because it provides for us summaries about these literary texts. They were really helpful for us specially to prepare for the tests and when you miss classes. So, it is really easier to go online rather than having the explanation from the students who understand the poem in different ways.

(FP2) When we were studying novels from the English department, most of the students used to watch movies because movies gave them clear understandings of the stories. Also, TEDTALK is very helpful. For example, I sent my friends yesterday a link about Manal Al Shareef who is a Saudi activist. She was fighting to get the driving licenses for Saudi women. This motivates us to create our own identity. It affects us in a way to use a second language to express ourselves because she stood in front of foreign people like American, British, and other nationalities to express her own view. So, when I was watching her, I really wished I could have the power and language she has. Her language was excellent.

R. Do you mean she speaks English?

(FP2) Yes, she spoke English in front of foreign people. She was presenting through TEDTALK. So, using online applications to listen to people talking in English helps you and

touches your heart as you want to be someone who has power and authority. You want to be like them to express your ideas and experiences powerfully without being afraid or punished at the same time.

(FP4) In the creative writing course, we used to write some poems and I posted one poem through twitter. I also put a mention for someone as an advertisement if they would like to post their poems in a well-known website. I knew by that time that the website was a popular one. So, I sent to them my poem to boost my motivation and confidence. They posted it. Even if nobody saw that, it would be still kept in my mind as somebody cared about my poem. So, I kept writing poems many times. It was a great thing in my history through twitter.

(FP2) It was similar to my experience when I wrote about the 'Gift of God' that was published in Muscat Daily. I was excited to receive a comment from a professor from Oxford who said that it was an exemplary work. It was very helpful and supportive.

R. Was it an online newspaper?

(FP2) Yah.

R. Interesting.

(FP3) Technology has really broadened our horizons. It makes us imagine things that may or may not happen. I really keep watching TEDTALKS and the way the presenters speak. More than that is the confidence to stand there and talk for 20 minutes in front of the audience in an interesting way. You can see that the audience is attracted to the talk, so they continue listening to the end of their speech. So, I have kept developing the idea of having my own TEDTALK. I am really serious about it. So, I have started thinking about my TEDTALK.

R. Interesting.

(FP3) I have actually thought about it in detail like the topics I would talk about. I thought it would be a motivational one especially for my students as they would see me. So, I would start planning for my talk through my desktop, sharing it with my friends. Then, others will be asking for these videos. So, technology has made us think about these things. I keep thinking about it and looking forward to how it will happen and what my next step will be. I am a little bit ambitious about it. I will really get a great benefit from it.

(FP2) Especially in your CV.

(FP4) She reminds me of myself when we were participating in the Toastmasters Club. Once I was very anxious about my first icebreaker and how I can do it. Then, I imagined that I was in TED and that I was giving a speech. That was very helpful for the quality of my language and the selection of words. It was totally different. So, I am planning to do so with my students at school because I saw that their level was high, and they were motivated to learn. So, do not make them demotivated by your performance.

(FP2) I have heard one of my friends who is studying at the college of medicine that TED team is going to be in Muscat soon. So, you might go and ask for an opportunity to present.

(FP3) Yes, I have heard about it. They will be talking about medical issues. Watching them will be really nice.

R. Now, do you usually have any kind of personal goals or learning agendas before engaging in online activities?

(FP3) Yes, actually. Personally, I usually go to technology to develop my weaknesses. As I said before, I downloaded an app which is about academic writing because I found myself in need to practise my writing and to get feedback from others. When you write something and read it on your own, you will get benefit. But, when others view it, they will look at it from different sides and they will see things that you did not see. So, I downloaded this app because I needed to develop my writing skill. At one point in my language learning journey, I found a difficulty in committing mistakes in spelling. I thought I should not have done that as a future teacher. So, I immediately felt that I need an app to practise spelling words so that I can develop myself. Again, aiming to be more professional in speaking, I go to TED till now. In order to fill your free time, games are really a good solution. But, I do not like games that are of no benefit.

R. So, what kind of games do you like?

(FP3) I like crossing words. I am sure I will benefit from it a lot as I am filling my time with something beneficial in terms of getting information and developing my language.

(FP4) this is also the case with me when I watch movies. I hate Egyptian movies and Kuwaiti movies. So, every time I decide to watch a movie, I watch them with no subtitles. I am doing two things at the same time which are learning and enjoying my time instead of wasting my time reading the subtitles as that would be a passive way of entertaining yourself. You can do two in one. That is the way I am filling my time.

R. Are you watching movies online?

(FP4) Yes, without subtitles because it develops your listening as well in the way you are catching the words, searching for them, and using them in context.

(FP6) Movies help you in the way you pronounce words and the context in which you use that specific words because there are differences between spoken words and written words. We make mistakes in academic writing in terms of wrong selection of words because they are used in a spoken language.

(FP4) I remember when I started viewing TEDTALKS, I used to view three talks a day. I was very pleased with the performance of the speakers. I mostly viewed topics on psychology, health, science more than the linguistics ones. Then, I started to collect the new words I heard by writing them down, and then translating them. In the last academic writing course, I wrote a poem using all these words. It was a nonsense poem as my professor said. But, it was one of the new trends that poets follow as cynical poems. It was a very beneficial experience. The number of words I collected from those talks was really higher than the words I learned from reading books and newspapers.

(FP3) In the creative writing course, I faced a difficulty in finding words that match the rhythm for the poem. So, you have to think about it from different dimensions like meaning,

and word-ends. So, I used a website called Word Hippos that was very beneficial as you search synonyms and antonyms of the words, rhyming words for the word you are searching for, the meaning of examples, and other things that could help you.

(FP4) There is also another website in which you are given the word you search for in many poems so that you can use the combination of words that you liked the most.

(FP2) Similar to you, I also use the technological online apps to overcome my weaknesses in English language skills. Besides that, I like to remind people of some issues like Palestinians' issue especially through twitter as you can tweet about things and you can remind people of such things. As trainee teachers, we can create an online community and remind people of things in English like writing essays about Islam or ethics that will help students to gain vocabulary and it will be still available after their graduation from school. When you give your students a written story in a paper, they may lose it. But, it would be saved through technology. So, they can access it whenever they want.

(FP3) This also may help your students to find another purpose of what they write in English. If you involve technology, it will be more appropriate and interesting especially for the new generation of students.

(FP2) I have noticed while observing classes that students are demotivated. Their level of English is very good, but they are not enthusiastic. They do not participate with the teacher. When I went through the groups checking their homework, only two students out of thirty did the homework. Their teacher was so mad. If I were in her place, I would punish the students. At the same time, I could not blame them as they might be bored. They seemed not having a purpose for learning. So, I think the teacher's main goal is to give her students purpose and aims for language learning. Or, she can flourish or renew what they have. For example, they can use new materials to supplement the curriculum.

(FP3) Whenever I think of a new way of teaching, I cannot think about it a way from technology. The more involved technology is especially with the students in this era, the higher expectations you have of your students. I think they will perform better. Sometimes, parents misunderstand the role of technology or rather focus on the negative consequences of using technology. So, when their children start their school, they would tell them that they are not allowed to use smart phones, access twitter, or any other apps. But, they do not understand the amount of benefits they can get from accessing these apps. For example, our teacher had account in twitter, so we kept following her. So, if you miss her tweets, you will miss the tweets. Twitter is really beneficial, and I really like it very much. There you can read others' comments, so you can practise your reading skill. You also write your comments using a few words. Students will like to do that. It is two in one, having fun as you learn and finding another purpose like spreading our culture or talking about your identity. In twitter, you do not talk to your classmates or the people from your country only, but also you talk to the world. So, you express yourself through twitter.

(FP2) We are as users of technological applications and as teachers, we can share our experiences with other teachers and students. The first unit in grade 10 is about media. So, the teacher was saying to the students: "imagine your life without media? How is it going to be?" One of the students said: "we are going to die".

(FP4) They are very attached to media.

(FP2) This shows that the students have ideas about technology, but they do not have the right guidance to use it properly for English language learning. Then, the teacher said jokingly: “is water more important than technology?” Half of the class said technology, and the other half said water.

R. Back to you [FP2], you said that during your teaching practice you observed students not motivated during the class. In your opinion, what was the reason?

(FP2) I think it is because of their level in English. As I said, their level of English is very good, but maybe they are bored. They are aimless especially they are in grade 10. When I entered to the class this morning, one of them asked me to explain something. I said: “I am not going to explain now because I am supposed to start teaching next month”. Then, she said: “Miss, make a game for us”. This shows that they want something fun. They want something to learn from. They do not want to depend only on papers. They need something new. I have spent two weeks in the school so far and I have not seen any teacher using technology. Maybe, because the LCD is far away from the class or because of the internet. I have heard one of the teachers complaining that the internet is very weak. I do not really know the reason behind not using technology. The teacher is teaching them about media. I think she should bring some of the tools to the class or show them a video instead of depending on traditional things.

(FP4) I also remember in one of the secondary schools, we were going to the classrooms instead of staying at the teachers’ room. We started asking the students questions like: “do you watch movies?”. They said: “yah, very much”. They said that they watch them online. I said: “oh, Gosh. We are now in danger”. They started listing different websites. Then, we kept quiet, thinking they are not the traditional students who do not have background in technology. Then, in another class, I asked them whether they like English songs or not. They said: “yes, yes.” I said: “do you listen to Hannah Montana?”. One of the students said: “oh, my God. That is for kids.” Then, I realised they are advanced. So, if the teacher just used such a chance to see what could interest her students as they seemed very attached to technology, so that would make the difference. That was the top class in school. I am sure that those students have many other things to say if technology is concerned. But, there is no chance given to them to show themselves and suggest what and how they want to learn.

(FP2) Teachers need to be prepared for such things. They should be given suitable background about technology as not all applications are suitable to students’ age. So, the teacher has to be well-trained about how to teach students through such applications.

(FP4) I remember a website for practising speaking. One of my friends in the foundation programme suggested that in front of the class. I tried it in the first part. But, I felt very bored because it was a little bit complicated in the way it worked. So, I left it.

(FP3) When we talk about demotivated students, we can refer to autonomy itself. Because they are learning a language, they have to be in contact with this language all the time. So, when we leave the students for three months (during the summer holiday), those students will stop learning because we were spoon-feeding them. This actually violates the rule of learning

a language. So, she needs to encourage her students to use technology and even to be in contact with her if possible or just share her experiences with them and share her ideas on technology. They have the interest, she just needs to boost and enhance their interests. The teacher then will be happy about their results, their performance, and good attitude towards English. I can say that one of my sisters is using a website called Duolingo that I did not know about. So, technology is always updated. If we give the students the chance to express themselves through technology, they can surprise us with what they can find. Actually, I am going to recommend Duolingo to my students to practise their four language skills every day. You can accumulate points through this website so that you go from one step to another. If you do not open this website for one day, you may lose points. The more points you have, the more opportunities you have to access other resources to learn better. It is really very beneficial in teaching students spelling, forming words, translating, and other things that can help the teacher to develop her students' level.

(FP4) That can be accessed by the whole group of the class. Because if it is accessed individually, it will be a little bit with side effects on the students as they will be just addicted to the website. I guess that will lead to other consequences like affecting their grades in other subjects. I mean if the teacher can use it with the whole class, it will be great.

(FP3) Maybe, it can be as an introduction. I think it is good that we let them try it on their own, so they can continue doing it on their own.

(FP4) I think that because they lose marks or points if they are not accessing it every day.

(FP3) I do not think that five minutes can affect them. Maybe, the teacher herself can make that website part of her session so that they can be attached to technology.

(FP4) Also, I have a point about the teachers themselves. I do not mean only English teachers at school, but also other teachers. Many of the tasks in the 'English for Me' textbook has a combination of English classes and IT classes. But, when we come to reality, there is no connection between the two teachers. So, in grade 6, they are asked to make a recipe of a dish they like. In the teachers' book, there is a written comment as follows: "you have to arrange with the IT teacher to help students create their own recipe magazine". So, I asked the teacher and she said: "no, we are not doing it". They are excluding the integration part from the other courses. If there is a relationship between different courses, there will be meaningfulness for students to learn because everything is helping each other. So, they do not learn something in English, and not doing anything with it outside the class.

(FP2) It is called learning through content, I think.

(FP4) Yes.

(FP2) Yes. When you teach math, you can integrate the English language. Another example is making a recipe through integrating IT stuff.

R. Now, I will let you reflect on your language learning goals behind using virtual social spaces.

(FP6) In the first place, we are planning to improve our English language since we will be involved more in English and use it in the job market. So, our aim is to be fluent and to know

most of the vocabulary used in the English-speaking countries, not only covering the surface, but also to be involved in the culture. So, using the language and understanding the culture in the first place is what online activities and autonomy and self-independence is all about. Also, improving our weaknesses in the English language. For example, I faced a lot of difficulties in the academic writing. I was googling and looking for transition signals that can level up my writing so that it sounds more formal and more academic to catch my doctors' eyes. They would say: "she can write in English and she can produce well-known written texts". This is my goal currently and in the future.

(FP3) Personally, when I access my account in twitter, I keep following some accounts related to BBC because I like following and updating myself with the world's news. I thought if I did it in English and followed English news, I will be doing two things in one which is learning English and knowing the news itself. Again, I followed an account about famous quotes focusing on women. Another thing is that they give you a description of the movie so that you can see comments and feedback to encourage you to watch that movie based on your interest whether it appeals to you or not. Also, I want to contact my professors, so the first thing I do is to follow them so that I can know about them. Sometimes, we feel surprised to see their personality online which is strikingly different than reality. Through online, you can know them as an open book.

R. How is that?

(FP6) Through their private page.

(FP3) Through their tweets, you get to know them. you can also ask them questions and they answer, so you come to know them.

(FP4) Actually, my friend had a case following her instructor and she was very pleased to ask. Back to the point of quotes and following accounts in twitter, I like going to read Brainy Quotes.com which is one of the most interesting websites in which you can get some new words and you can enhance your language level. You can use idioms and quotes at the beginning of your presentation or when you are motivating somebody. With regard to newspapers, I have used flipboard which is an electronic magazine. I like it very much because you can read the title, then just decide whether you want to read or not. I remember my first article I read in flip board was that "Do you know that rich people's language is different than poor people's language?" I said: "how come! it is only one language." Then, I realised it was about word selection, intonation, and other things. Also, I use flip board to search for words to be used in my presentation. It is the most puzzling thing in my life to decide on a topic to write about as I have many topics at the same time. For example, I used flip board to decide on a topic for my persuasive and informative presentation in my speaking course. So, I read some articles about the tunnel built under the sea in Korea and did my informative speech on that, not only that but I also suggested a list of topics for my friends. So, they choose for their informative and persuasive speeches. It is very enjoyable just to go through and you can follow anyone you want and any kind of news like history, and photography. I like photography so much because it has some photos with captions. Also, in twitter, there are many accounts in which you can have a word written in a picture with a very simple definition of the word. I like it very much because the drawing or picture itself is reflecting the word, so you can link it in your mind especially for visual learners which is very easy.

(FP2) One of the language learning goals I have is that when we are learning a language, we are learning the culture and the ethics of the people who speak the language. For example, if you are learning Chinese or Japanese or whatever language, you are learning the culture and ethics that are connected to those people. When you learn English language, you get to know the people who are speaking it. The Arabic language is connected so much with religion. So, when you get to learn Arabic, you will find yourself learning about Islam. In most of the YouTube videos about foreigners learning Arabic, they catch up some words that are related to our religion. The same thing happens when you are learning the language of another culture, you are learning words connected to their identity. With regard to the article about the language of rich and poor people, you are learning actually the dialects of the standard language. They have different dialects according to their social class. Another learning goal is to overcome our weaknesses as second language learners.

(FP4) Another goal I have is to move a way as possible from the bookish language that we have like the structure of forming a sentence. But, actually, this is not the case when you are talking with a doctor or when you are given a recipe. I remember once that when I was still in the secondary school, the asked me what was wrong with me. I was silent because I did not know how to explain that I had a fever. It was because we were not introduced to the language of daily life conversations.

(FP4) Then, I started to learn such things from old books that introduced conversations in the airport and restaurant. I learned what to say in such situations by reading these books and memorising them. But, that was not a good way as it was with no intonation. It was like a flat picture.

(FP2) It was not helpful.

(FP6) It was not practical.

(FP4) So, I started to use YouTube videos to see how people behave in a restaurant because it was very difficult for me to order some food from any restaurant without being able to get the full sentence. So, I guess those kinds of things are very helpful for us.

(FP2) I remember Dr. (...) who is very addicted to technological websites. She was full of pride to tell us that when she googled her name, she found hundreds of her articles. She was showing off in front of her boss. She told him: "why do not you google your name?". He did not find anything.

(FP4) Yes, she is very addicted to technology. She calls it the technological budget which means the identity we have in the internet.

(FP2) When using the technology, we are unconsciously gaining a digital identity. When you said that you are following your professor in twitter, you see him as a different person from reality because he switches between two identities. Maybe, we have two identities.

R. How is that? Can you explain?

(FP3) Digital identity. I like this about technology. We can hide behind a nickname.

R. Why is that?

(FP4) because I said I am following many Omani men like Talal Al Rawahi and male foreigners. My name was written in English. So, my mom said:” Change your name”. I said:” mom, you do not use twitter and you do not know the environment in twitter which very different than Facebook in that your name is a real threat because people would recognise me”. She said: “you have to change it”. So, what should I put?

(FP4) It is because of gender issue and cultural issue. For example, one of my brother said: “how do you access Facebook with your name?” is that a sensible behaviour from a girl like you to chat with others using her full name?”. I said: “it is not about a full name or abbreviations. It is my identity. If I am not posting offensive words, it will not harm my family’s name”. He said: “no, you you’d better change it”.

R. Ok.

(FP3) I think when you write your own name, people take things personally. But, when you have a nickname that reflects your identity as a member of a community or as an agent of something, what you say will be taken in another way. I believe that we have more freedom through technology in what we write. Nobody has the right to ask us why we write what we write even if he/she is my professor because in the virtual space they are not my professors, but we are all users of that space. This is actually what makes technology more interesting. You are expressing yourself in the way you want, following people that you want, tweeting things that you want to share about perspectives that you cannot say it frankly in places other than social platforms. As you said, there you are a bit hiding. But, here, you might be questioned why you say that.

R. Now, let me ask you about your roles in the online activities. What roles do you play? What are your responsibilities?

(FP6) I think there are two sides to answer this question. From the academic side, we have to produce well-written sentences or comments, so we do not make mistakes in terms of the language since we are prospective English language teachers. On the other side, there is a cultural responsibility or role to express ourselves in a way we are raised up morally and religiously. We have to reflect who we really are and not making mistakes by misusing these websites. So, we should benefit from these websites and have positive effects, and not wasting time having illegal or immoral things. So, these are two responsibilities.

(FP2) For me, when I am using online activities, I am both a learner and a teacher at the same time. I am a learner because I am learning something new whether about the world, English language, or even the Arabic language when you read different articles. Also, when you use different applications, you learn how to use them and how to educate yourself in terms of the vocabulary. I am a teacher at the same time. When you post something, you need to put in mind that someone is going to read it. You need to consider the benefit of writing something. When you tweet or post something, someone is going to read it. It is your responsibility to make sure that the person who is going to read it is going to benefit from it. Or, at least, the idea you post about is clear to the readers. It is your responsibility as a user of the online activities to share your culture, traditions, and norms. You should be proud to share them with the world. In a global world, you are able to connect with people from Japan and Africa. It is your responsibility to let them know who you are. So, we are sometimes under a lot of

pressure to share things with people frankly and in an explicit way to give them a plain view. For example, when I took a discourse analysis, one of the professors in the English Department said that a disabled person wrote a book. He was not able to move his body except for his finger. So, he used his finger to call for Islam. He is teaching people about Islam in America. God gave him that finger to teach people through technology. Now, in technology, you can move things by the movement of your eyes. So, if technology was not available for him, would he be able to share his role with the world? Would he be able to be a teacher? So, technology gives us the responsibility for doing things carefully and achieving them actually.

(FP6) Even when commenting through Facebook on a topic, it is really your responsibility to well-choose your words and the way you comment if someone agrees or disagrees with you or the way you negotiate with him/her. So, your words reflect yourself, your belief, who you are, where you come from, and the cultural environment you come from. So, it is available for everyone. I read a joke that a boy used to choose his life partner by the help of his mother or sister. But, now, the joke says that he can choose her through her page account like her Instagram if she is able to cook or her Facebook account if she is a well-educated person or her twitter account if she is able negotiate, build relationships. Even with the kids, you have to monitor their page account. So, it really helps them to reflect themselves and find a free space for them to express and share their characters.

(FP2) Once I saw a YouTube video about a man who accessed the Instagram accounts of some people and then would go to the street to ask, “did you make a cake today?”. A lady was shocked to hear that, and she said: “yes, I did. You are a wizard!”. Then, he said:” you posted a picture in your account today”. Then, he continued to do such things for different people. It is actually your responsibility when sharing personal things. People even share their locations with others whether they are on the street or the hospital. Sharing personal information can create risks for you. Yes, you are sharing it with people. But, at the same time, you have to be careful. For example, you might say that you are not at home and robber might steal your home. So, technology has to be used carefully.

All participants: yes.

(FP6) The rapid growth of technology and how we are addicted to using technology create a doubtful attitude towards using it. So, 70% of our postings and bloggings are doubtful for some people. They doubt if these things really true and can happen. For example, I post a photo of a plane. So, they wonder if I really travel. It is not anymore a reliable source to acknowledge our personality and daily life.

(FP4) Most of the time before posting anything, tweeting, or retweeting, I prefer to think about the good consequences. So, you have to put positive impression on others and to watch what you are tweeting or what you are re-tweeting from others because you will be asked about anything you write at the end.

(FP2) Especially when you are posting something. We are as females, we understand things differently than males because they tend to be logical as research shows whereas we tend to be sentimental. So, when you post something, you are at a risk that people may understand it wrongly. Then, you have to be ready to defend yourself and what you meant.

R. Can you decide on what topics to study online and how to study? I ask whether you are able to decide on your preferable learning strategies or not.

(FP3) Maybe, this is one of the good things about technology that you are given the opportunity to choose. For example, in twitter, you choose whom you are following, whom you want to hear from, and you choose the topic itself. So, you choose the materials and how. It can be through idioms, movies, quotes, and long journals. So, you pick the things that you like and follow them to learn from. Again, in technology, you can manage to select what and how to learn a language. But, in real life, we cannot ask people to do thing the way we want, and we cannot ask them to do it for us because there is not me only in the classroom.

(FP2) We get to control the ways of learning as there are different styles of learning. if you are a visual learner, you need to watch and see pictures. So, if you do not understand a teacher who is lecturing and giving information, you search for what matches your style of learning. if you're a visual learner, you watch a video. Some of them like to watch movies which is a good way. Because you are controlling the content that you learn like learning about the daily life of these people and the phrases that you want to catch up. With regard to the content, you might want to learn about syntax, so you google it and get millions of websites. But, you are free to choose the website that suits you like educational websites. So, it gives you an advantage of making a decision regarding the reliable content that you want. sometimes, you find things that you do not want which are not relevant.

(FP4) I believe that we can control what we learn and how we learn. For example, I can decide on the time and the place. The teacher cannot say whether I access YouTube in the morning or in the afternoon. I can control myself and adapt myself to the plans I put for myself in order to learn. We can also control who we want to be in the technological environment. If we want ourselves to be perceived as teachers, we can tweet about education. So, we give the authority to others to know who we are according to what we write about. I believe that we have the control over these things.

(FP6) We also nowadays have smart phones, laptops, and internet connection which are facilitated in the teaching and learning environment whether in students' accommodations or at home. We can control and choose the suitable time and the content we want to learn because technology is in the hands of everyone.

(FP2) I remember when we took Children Literature Course, there were rhymes and Lullabies, so you were able to access the WIFI at SQU so that you showed us Lullabies. At that time, I was not able to access the WIFI, so you were advantaged.

(FP6) The illiterate person nowadays is not the one who cannot write or read. He is the one who cannot use technology or access the internet. So, this is the challenge nowadays. The 21st century challenge is to be involved in technology not in everyday life, but in every second. You are studying and teaching through technology. You are texting, calling, and doing almost everything through technology.

(FP4) Also, when you are travelling, you can control where you want your trip. For example, if you want to travel abroad, you do not have to reach there and ask them where you can go because you have many applications. I use many of them like the trip advisor. You can plan

ahead of time before reaching your destinations, and that will save you time and give you control over your trip and not to be led by others. It is you who choose where you want to go.

R. Interesting.

(FP3) Going back to literacy in relation to technology, it actually adds another role to the teacher. As a teacher, I do not want to be viewed as illiterate and old-fashioned. I have to update myself with new things so that my students will trust me more because they can see me a bit closer to them as we are using technology and sharing things with them. I can earn their trust as I am updated with the technological things that they are using. It is not for them only.

(FP6) I remember that I voluntarily taught grade nine students during the summer break. They were chosen as the best students in Math at the Oman level, getting 100%. They were named as young explorers. In the last session, the responsible professor said: “you can give recommendations about learning English and studying at the university.” I chatted with them at the end of the course and distributed an article that was published in a magazine which was related to Oman’s Time News. I made ten copies for the ones who were interested. When I started distributing those hard copy papers, one of the students said: “Miss, do you have an account to send us an electronic copy of the article?” I said: “yes. I blog it in my Facebook account.” They asked if I had a Facebook account or snap chat. I said: “yes”. They said: “ok, we can reach it online. Do not worry and do not bother yourself about distributing hard copies”. I do not truly blame them because all of them have smart phones and online accounts. When I was at their age, I did even have an e-mail. This is a huge difference between the generations.

R. That is interesting.

(FP4) I guess the main exposure we have is here at the university because five years ago we were ignorant about technology. We did not know anything about technology. Even e-mails were big things for us.

(FP2) By the way, there is something called pen pal. Have you tried it?

(FP4) No, but I have heard of the name itself.

(FP2) The idea of it is that you have a friend from another country who is a learner. Then, you exchange e-mails using the language that you want to learn. So, it is a good idea. I have tried it.

R. How do you evaluate your progress and achievement online?

(FP6) I think I always compare my comments and use of language with my other peers who are in the same college and major, but with different cohorts. They really use nice words to express their thoughts. For example, I am following a friend on Facebook and I am amazed at where she gets these words from. Maybe, she learns them from novels and movies. You can easily tell that if someone is addicted to movies and novels or addicted to the academic books which is well-known about students from the college of Education. So, I always compare through my readings on Facebook accounts. Also, when we have a test, I let my language flow, so I can see if I am able to find words. So, if I am not, it means that I lack vocabulary.

Am I able to form a sentence in the way I think about it? Can I really express what I have in my mind easily by forming well-academic written sentences? So, academic tests and my own comparisons with my peers can tell me something and can push me to develop my language.

R. What about the others? How do you evaluate your progress?

(FP2) I evaluate my progress and overcome the weaknesses that I have on my own. For example, there are some online quizzes that I do provided by marks. So, when you have one quiz after the other, you can see your improvement and the progress that you have made. At the same time, there is a game called quiz up and you move through levels. So, one level after the other shows that you are progressing. When you reach level 20, you will feel that you are at the top. They will also send you a photo that you are at the top ten gamers in Oman. So, this is an assessment from the game itself that you are progressing.

R. So, what is the impact of positive assignment scores on your motivation?

(FP2) it is encouraging me to continue using the Omani app as an activity. When I see that getting high scores in a game, it actually encourages me to use it more and more. If I am not able to use it during the day, I use it at night. It actually becomes part of me and I have to use it as it is going to help me learn the English language. For the quizzes, I am not using them continuously because I prefer to watch things as I am trying to improve my speaking skills more than the reading skill.

(FP3) The other thing is that the quizzes compare you with others when they indicate that I am better than 70% than the users of this app. Sometimes, it actually motivates me to practise my skills to be better than the rest, not only the 70%. When we move through stages, we feel proud. It is like recharging your motivation and gaining power. So, you can keep on using this app. When you want your words to be read and heard, just go on and publish them because others' comments and interactions with your post tell you the level of what you are writing and how to develop it. This can make you go on and make progress.

(FP2) Once in a creative writing course, the teacher said that some online communities' goal was to edit for each other. For example, if you write a story and post it there, the members will provide you with comments to edit your writing. This is another way of evaluation. It is through the online application or an online community that you are involved in. I use self-assessment while my friend uses peers' view about her own progress. so, it depends again on the way that you prefer to assess or evaluate yourself. Anyways, both of them are beneficial for second language learners.

(FP4) For me, in addition to these methods, I use to imagine a situation in my mind and see how far I can go in the conversation between me and myself. If I am good enough, I can make good selection of the words, I can also continue the conversation by having the two roles. It will be very beneficial as I can be satisfied with my progress in this area. If I have breakdowns in the conversation, I know that I have some problems with the vocabulary, ideas, or cultural backgrounds. So, I can go back to the website and so on to enhance my language.

R. How does your sense of progress and achievement make you feel? I mean being able to read, write, and speak fluently.

(FP2) It makes second language learners strongly motivated to learn the language. Once you see that you are learning, and you are not a passive learner. You feel that you want to do more and explore such technological stuff, improve it, and share it with the others. So, you can also benefit from them.

(FP4) You remind me of the educational technology course, it was a good challenge for myself because I like technology and I like English as well. The teacher just said: “you can use a software to record yourself and create a podcast.” Then, he gave us the program and we started to know the program on our own by exploring it. if we are done with that project, it does not mean that you only have achieved the linguistic goal of your learning. but, you have also added some credit to your technological background by using this app. That is very interesting.

R. Are you interested in technology per se? Or are you interested in English?

(FP4) Both of them. The most interesting thing is how to adapt yourself to use English to serve technology and help you to use technology to improve your English.

(FP2) almost all of the applications are in English, so we should use English in order to be able to use them.

(FP4) especially the photoshop. It is very hard because there are very specific terms in order to have more brightness or less brightness or in between. There are very precise words used by professionals in the field. That is why I guess we get to know more vocabularies and technological terms because we are using these programmes without being introduced to them and without knowing the language itself.

R. Ok.

R. What about the rest?

(FP3) I think when I see myself progressing through online platforms, this allows me to search for a new purpose. For example, my purpose of using technology was to strengthen my language as a language student. But, when I have seen myself progressing, I have stretched my goal to be as agent of change like helping others to develop their language. Now, as a trainee teacher, I would contribute to the educational field by giving comments on pedagogical practices. The other thing that relates to our identity as Muslim and Arab girls, we can fight for related issues. So, when I have achieved my purpose, I can stretch it and find a new one.

R. Good.

(FP6) Actually, being known as a second language learner in my community, it makes me different and special for being able to speak two languages. Also, everyone knows that English is an international language, so it is like a weapon as it enables you to take challenges especially after graduation. So, if someone knows that she can speak English, she can understand English, she can write in English, and she can read English, it makes her really proud. For me, personally, it is number one motivation that pushes me and encourages me to continue developing my English language. When I was teaching a speaking course as an extra-curricular activity, I introduced a play to differentiate between the British and American

accents. The students were really surprised at how I was able to speak both accents. I said: “by the way, we can also pronounce these words in an Indian accent or Egyptian accent. So, they looked at me with different eyes saying: “she is special, and she knows things we do not know”. So, this is really a good impression and a good feedback that encourages you to continue.

R. Good.

R. So, you said that you communicate with your peers via online social spaces. Can you give me examples to justify your answer?

(FP6) Most of the people who are following me are majoring in English from translation and education departments.

R. Are they following you through twitter?

(FP6) Through Facebook. Most of the time, we have a page related to our community. One of the members is able to draw and paint. But, he comments in English. He explains his paintings in English. He majors in English from the college of Education. He has a hobby in drawing and painting. So, he explains the themes of his paintings in English. So, I keep following his paintings. The other member is really addicted to movies. So, she is following a page where participants criticise movies along with a doctor from the department. So, we post the newest movies that have won prizes and are being on the top of the Box Office. So, they post a poster of the movie and start criticising them in English. So, when you come to read the comments, you learn a lot of words related to movies, directing, filming, and decorating. Another girl is addicted to reading novels who is an English literature student. She is always posting her opinions and thoughts about novels. This is what encourages me to buy that novel and read it. After passing some months, I go to the Facebook page and comment on that novel after I have finished reading it. These students are older than I. however, I always try to catch up with their level in English. Their language is excellent and that what pushes me to learn to reach their level.

R. That is good.

R. What about you?

(FP3) I share my ideas with others through twitter and LinkedIn. I actually opened a page in Facebook to read others' contributions, but I do not post anything because I am not yet experienced in using it. These are the most applications I use.

R. Good.

(FP4) I like to use Good Read app where I can find any reviews about any book I want to read. That is very effective, at least, for me because I am not an addicted reader. So, if I want to read a book, I have to choose the book I want to read. So, Good Read is a very good website where you can see whether this book is the one you are searching for and the one you are interested in. So, you can decide in advance before buying the book or before reading it.

R. Good.

(FP2) I communicate with other people using the social spaces like twitter, Facebook, and WhatsApp because WhatsApp is available to everyone and it is the easiest way to use for its simplicity. I also want to comment on something that [FP6] has already said. She is using these social spaces because she is reading about the experiences of other people. So, she benefits from their experiences as they have already gone through what she is actually experiencing now. So, social spaces actually allow you to communicate with well-experienced people.

(FP4) I want to say something that is not related to the point that [FP2] has raised. It is something different. I am interested in making my mom and my elder & younger brothers & sisters to be also interested in technology so that they use it. Because I am very much attached to my brothers, I feel very proud to have them with me when posting a tweet and getting comments from them. it would be very enjoyable to have them. my younger brother is very much attached to technology. But, I am a step ahead of him. My mom texted me yesterday to ask me to search for blabla for my younger brother. I told her: “mom, why do not you access the net?” She said:” I do not know how to access the net and I do not know how to access YouTube.” I said:” it is very easy. All you have to do is to use your phone and you will find the app there.” She said:” I am not a friend of technology.” I said:” so, why are you using WhatsApp?” She said:” WhatsApp is not technology. It is very usual.” I said: “mom, WhatsApp is one of the technological apps.” So, after a very long time discussing this issue, she said:” will you search for me or just quit?” I said:” I will, but next time try to search yourself.” She said:” maybe, I will in the future.” So, those elder people need someone to help them to go with the crowd as they feel they are detached from this era. They just need someone to encourage them to be with us. They are learning it very fast because it is available.

(FP2) I want to add something about my experience in a programme with my community.

(FP2) It has online related activities. We have three illiterate women who cannot read fluently in Arabic. but, we teach them English. Yesterday, one of them sent a question taken from her child’s book through WhatsApp group. She was unable to help her child to solve it. so, she was seeking help from us. Because of technology, she was able to help her child. So, it is a good way to communicate with people that you have already taught.

(FP4) and even those who cannot write, they still use WhatsApp. I am very surprised with my grandmother. She opens her mobile phone and just presses the recording button to say whatever she wants and then sends it. sometimes, she sends it to the wrong person. What we have to do is to put a specific shape or face besides the name, so she links that face with that person. I was talking to her yesterday and she said: “I put a girl with a pony tail to know that you are calling.” So, I was laughing at how the elderly can use technology in a funny way.

(FP2) Did she put that picture of you on her own?

(FP4) no, she asked her nieces and nephews to do that for her.

(FP2) So, she integrates emoji with mobile phones numbers to identify the identity of the callers.

(FP4) Laughing. She usually says I remember when you were very young and how I used to comb your hair as a pony tail style. So, that is why she uses that emoji.

R. That is interesting.

R. Can you tell me if anyone of you is a member of any online community?

(FP3) I am a member of an educational group, seeking to develop students regarding educational issues. We use twitter and Instagram to publish our workshops. Otherwise, we will not have a big number of audience. More than that, we have a WhatsApp group to organise meetings. With a big number of members, it is hard as each one has his own commitment. So, meeting with the group and discussing issues makes it easier for us.

R. Good.

(FP2) For me, I am a member of online communities like WordPress targeted for poets. After each week, they have to write a poem and post it there. The more readers and likes it gets, it means that your writing is improving. I am just a reader but not a writer of poems. I am afraid to write and do not trust myself to write yet.

(FP4) It is also very helpful that technology helps you to take these huge steps in your life. for example, I am sure that after a few months, you will be a poet just like them. you will see their friendly atmosphere, doing something for the purpose of learning and making mistakes is welcomed as long as you are benefiting from them. Maybe, you can take this step in the near future.

(FP2) As future teachers and upon graduation, we can create our own community where we can share different experiences and tasks that work well or not. It is going to help us develop the curriculum and develop the abilities of our students.

(FP3) Now, we have a place together. Later, after four months, we will be far away from each other. Even when we become teachers, we will be in different schools. So, gathering in an online group through Facebook, twitter, or WhatsApp makes us attached to each other. Even if we get new friends, we are still the one who go through the same stages of learning and becoming teachers. So, we have the same perspectives towards things.

(FP2) We have a WhatsApp group as well.

R. What is the purpose of that online group?

(FP2) We send different things about the courses we are taking. We also discuss issues that are related to our major like the teaching styles of our instructors. Also, now, for our teaching practice, we discuss about the schools and school students.

R. Are you sharing your experiences with each other?

(FP2) Yes, of course. That is the main goal behind creating that WhatsApp group.

R. Good.

R. You said as well that you get online feedback from your peers on your performance. What is the role of peers' feedback? How does it make you feel?

(FP2) I get feedback from the people I am following in WordPress. They are not Omanis. Most of them are from Africa and other countries. The feedback they give me does encourage me to continue doing what I am actually doing or improving it. For example, when you write through blogs and someone is reading it, it becomes alive. It is not dead. Most people have blogs. But, if nobody reads it, it is dead. When you see that there are many people who read your blog and comment on it, you feel that you have succeeded in attracting the people to your topic. So, it encourages you to keep developing yourself.

R. That is interesting.

(FP4) The obsession of the independent learners is to share their opinions and get the world to know how they think and feel through blogging and tweeting. They introduce to the world how they think and the mentality they have by getting reviews and feedback from peers and even their followers which gives you a second chance to look at things, criticise yourself, and reason the way how you think. Maybe, they have another opinion, so you might be convinced which subsequently lead to changing your mentality and thinking. So, it is very important especially for us as we are still learning the language. If we get feedback from the native speakers, we feel it is valuable and directed to the point as we need someone to give attention to our opinions and listen to our voice. So, I guess it is very beneficial to get feedback from peers and from any user of the technological virtual spaces.

R. Do you mean that you intentionally form online groups to get help from friends and peers?

(FP4) Yes. Most of the cases, yes. Imagine yourself that you are tweeting, and you do not have followers, so nobody reads your tweets. It would be pointless. If it was me, I would stop tweeting because it was of no point. Otherwise, I can write for myself in a diary, not necessarily in twitter. But, if it is in twitter or blog, it means I am seeking feedback.

R. Ok.

R. What is the importance of that feedback?

(FP4) It is like questioning myself, my perceptions, and adding to my views of life. It also gives me the power or motivation to continue writing, reading, and posting.

(FP2) Especially here at the university, we are from different students' campuses and some of us live off-campus. So, online groups help us to share ideas and make meetings through the online groups. For example, when we were doing the group projects, we have to create a WhatsApp group to share and divide the work that we have to do. So, it is very necessary to create WhatsApp groups these days in order to communicate and share experiences regarding learning strategies or teaching methods. Right now, we are doing our teaching practice, so we share our experiences with each other. I am practising teaching in a different school than my friend. So, we communicate through WhatsApp.

(FP4) Nowadays, we feel very isolated without Facebook, twitter, or WhatsApp. I look at my contact list and wonder if someone does not have a WhatsApp. So, I immediately link everyone with her/his digital identity because we do not meet face to face every time. It is all by texting and so on.

(FP2) So, it shortens the distance between people. During the old days, the one who used technology was the one who was isolated. But, now, those who are not involved in technology are the ones who are isolated. I have gone through this experience because I have opened my WhatsApp group for three years. When my friends got together and made discussions through WhatsApp group, I was not available. One of the girls had to come to the building where I used to live to tell me about the summary of the meeting. It was very painful actually and I was complaining to my mother. I said: “I want a smart phone that has the WhatsApp application”. So, she asked my father to buy a smart phone for me and now I have WhatsApp groups. It facilitates my life a lot, especially academically and socially.

(FP4) Sometimes, if I chat with my friend during the weekend, I would feel like seeing her although I did not meet her personally three days ago. You are very attached to those people and you are talking with them consistently. So, it is like being isolated without technology.

R. Good.

R. Do you consult your friends online on issues related to your language learning strategies, teaching practice, or other issues? You have already touched upon these issues a bit. Can you elaborate on these issues?

(FP3) Yes, actually. Maybe, this is very clear when we share academic stuff like our writings, seeking feedback for our development. For example, we have something to write, then we share it online through e-mails or other applications. We seek feedback and suggestions for development. For example, I was in need to increase the word count and further elaborate on a story I was writing. So, I shared it with my friends online and then they gave me ideas about their opinions of the story which boosted my confidence about my story itself and gave me ideas about how to develop it without breaking its flow. So, we deliberately go and share things, seeking advice, feedback, or consultation.

(FP2) When I took the research project, we used to send our proposals to some people for editing and to share with us their own experiences because they already took the course and they were well-experienced to give us feedback on that. At the same time, we used the university e-mails to communicate with each other. When we reached the data collection stage, we used google drive. Some of the students were expert on such things. So, we asked them how to access google drive by sending us photos on how to do it whether they were at home or any other place, no matter what the distance is. So, technology enabled us to share the tools used for data collection.

(FP4) Yes. Technology saves time and money because you can reach a large number of population since it is online, and it is very easy for people to access.

(FP3) Technology is very important for research purposes, especially for data collection. When we were doing our research projects, we were really in need for people to fill out the questionnaire. So, the clever and smart choice was to do the forms through google docs specifically if your research is targeting specific group of people here in Oman - especially that more than 70% of the students were doing their research projects at the same time. So, they were passing their questionnaires to the same students. So, students felt fed up and they

were bored doing those questionnaires twice a day. So, accessing google drive to use google forms saved time and efforts for collecting and calculating.

R. Interesting.

R. You also mentioned that you have intentions to join ELT community online to interact with others on issues related to ELT after your graduation. Why is that?

(FP2) We are going to create online ELT communities in the future as teachers. For example, [FP4] is from Al Dhahra Governate, I am from Al Dakhliya, and [FP3] is from a different place in Oman. So, despite the distance between the teachers, we can still gather in one community. For example, my friend can tell me that she does this task with her students and it works well. So, I will ask her to send me the link through the community so that I can do it with my students. At the same time, for example, the member of this community can gather the target people to share their experiences and also share their ideas and thoughts on certain things.

(FP4) I also want to say if we can let all teachers join us to easily lead to change. We do not only want to cause a change in one place, but we want to cause the change throughout the Sultanate by changing teachers' perceptions. So, if teachers are gathered in one community sharing these ideas despite the fact that they might agree or disagree, you can just give your opinions and they have their own decisions whether to follow or not. But, at least, there is a shared experience among us. It works with some people and it might not work with others. We get to know through research that if the population is larger, the consistency of the result will be authentic. So, applying one of the changes to the curriculum by a group of people is better than an individual effort.

(FP2) If we create a team of English teachers, we are still going to invite other teachers. We will not invite engineers. We are not going to be interfered by other people who may misunderstand what we are talking about. This is a community where you can share your own identity as a teacher. It is a good way to do such things.

(FP3) The simple thing is that by creating such a group, we can save our English vocabulary repertoires because we know that when we start teaching at schools, we deal with students whose language and vocabulary is very basic. So, we will stop using some terminologies. Consequently, we may lose them forever. We will go down if we do not chat with each other in English instead of progressing. Now, we are taking English courses, dealing with English teachers, and dealing with students who have better knowledge. But, if we stop chatting and communicating with each other as well as limiting the domain of our interactions with the school students and the school curriculum, we will definitely lose our English skills.

(FP2) If we have a team of English professors and linguists here at the university, we will be glad to join them because they are well-experienced people and researchers. I am sure if we go through their experience, we will benefit from their ideas. But, I do not think we have such a thing. They may have their personal pages, but there are no communities.

(FP3) They do follow their students actually. They welcome their students as we have actually tried interacting with them.

R. Good.

R. You said that you interact with English speakers online. How does that make you feel?

(FP2) When they understand what I am saying, sending, retweeting, or writing, it gives me an impression that I am on the right track by understanding how the language is used. For example, if you send a question and someone replies what you mean by that, the impression you will get is that I am not able to express my ideas and ask a question. For example, when I used the Campbell application, I received a reply that I was understood by the other person. So, I felt happy. She actually encouraged me to come back and have a chat with her. But, since I did not have money to use that application, I did not go back.

(FP4) It also happened with me in the Language Centre when we had some American people who were studying Arabic as a second language. I was passing a male student who was sitting there practising simple words like office, true, false, and these things. Then, he asked me: “please, how can we write this one?” It was the Arabic equivalent word of stairs. The combination of sounds seemed heavier than what I used to. Then, I felt there was a balance as he was learning Arabic just as I was learning English. So, we can just benefit from each other. He just started to ask me questions regarding how to pronounce words and sounds in Arabic. Then, I understand that it is not a big deal if you make mistakes in communicating with a person who is a native speaker. This enhances my opportunity to talk with native speaker because I used to be afraid of talking with native speakers as they would be able to notice my mistakes. So, I have realised it is normal for second language learners to make mistakes as long as you are understood without paying too much attention to grammar and word selection. For example, instead of saying a book, you can say a story. You can have alternatives. It is very helpful to feel that somebody understands what you are saying.

(FP4) I remember when I was doing my training on Why Magazine, I felt very depressed at the beginning because the way I used to speak was more of an academic way, not in the same way used in companies. So, whenever I started speaking, I felt afraid. She said:” I feel that you feel afraid of speaking because you know that we are native speakers. But, it is ok with us. We are very happy to help any person who learns English as a second language.” Then, she asked me to write a specific kind of article for the magazine. So, I was doing my article to be published. I worked very hard. When I gave her a copy of the article, she said: “I will read it and meet you on Sunday.” On Sunday, the issue had been already published. So, I was working on another issue and I was surprised that my article was not there. So, I was wondering what was wrong with my language. I tried to be very precise and very clear. I went to her and said: “why did not you publish mine?” She said: “because you are too formal and very academic. So, this language is not the magazine’s language”. Sometimes, we tend to exaggerate our problems and have bad impressions about ourselves and our language. So, it was a good step to know that my language was not wrong, but my style of writing does not fit the purpose of the magazine.

R. Is it an online magazine?

(FP4) Yes, it has an online version and a hard copy version.

(FP4) Have you published any article?

(FP4) Yes, I have published three to four articles.

R. Interesting.

R. How does your sense of belonging to others contribute to your motivation? e.g. belonging to your peers, belonging to online followers.

(FP3) Most of the times, we have accounts in different virtual social platforms because our friends have it and they have invited us to do so. Most of the time, we do things because we want to feel attached to our friends and because we want to be in a group. We do not want to be isolated and detached because they have things that I do not have. so, I want to be with them. I will do what they are doing and follow what they are following because I want to be with them. This is not only with peers and friends. It could also be related to our interests as teachers. So, we feel that we are obliged to do so.

R. So, how do you feel when you are related to others?

(FP3) This is the duty that I want this relation to sustain. So, I have to do whatever possible to make it sustainable and last forever. They encourage me indirectly and motivate me to learn English because they speak it. For example, they use technology to meet and chat with each other, discussing different things. So, if I am not with them, I feel detached and isolated from discussion and technology they are using. That would address me as being out of the group. I do not want to be like that.

(FP4) I also have the same experience with my twitter account because my close friends and relatives do not use their accounts consistently. Once, I joked at my friends and sent a photo via WhatsApp group, writing beneath the photo @ my friends' names. I wrote that was the way I could mention them through WhatsApp because they did not use their twitter accounts. I like the sense of belonging to my friends as they can see what I write and comment on my posts. Another experience was a little bit crazy experience in Snap Chat. I hate this application too much because I think it is useless, at least for me. You can do similar things through Instagram. It is like an additional version of these two applications. Three of my friends use Snap Chat and discuss about it. Every time we went together, they held their phones and posted videos through Snap Chat. So, I downloaded the application just to see what they were doing through Snap Chat. So, I followed them. Till this moment, I have not posted anything. I just want to be with the crowd even if I am not posting anything. I just want to know what they are doing.

R. Good.

R. Do you have anything to add?

R. All of you said that you have your own virtual space.

All participants: yes

R. You said that you have your own Twitter account, Facebook account, and whatever. So, how do you create it and personalise it?

(FP3) I think this is done easily through your file.

(FP4) Through your bio as well.

(FP3) You can also put the picture you want. you can put the information you want about yourself. This is available in every app. There I can say that I am here a university student and a language learner. So, I set my role and express my interests through this app. I do not accept the invitation of any follower. I have my own followers and I follow whom I want. Even if they follow me, I may reject them.

(FP2) I have some accounts in Twitter, Facebook, and WordPress. The way I personalise them is through the meaningful pictures that I put in the background. I remember that I put a picture of a boy holding a flag in my Twitter account, so I noticed that others were following me thinking that I was a boy. Then, I deleted it and posted another image. Even the picture you put, it has something to do with your character. It features who you are. So, I replaced it with a flower.

(FP3) Yes, it plays a crucial role.

(FP2) Yes, you are right. Even the name you assign for your account in Facebook, it relates to your personality. Mine is about God.

(FP4) Many of us decide to put names as reminders of mentioning God. You put it there and everyone sees it, so God rewards you for that.

(FP4) when I follow my friends' accounts, I notice that they put expressions related to their Islamic identities. It is like a continuous reminder.

(FP2) It is a good way. Even the emoji we use in WhatsApp has something to say about us, reflecting our own personalities.

(FP4) Actually, I like faces and emojis very much. I am able to create any story for any face of them. Every time I am chatting with my friend, I send a new face or emoji. She said: "what is the indication of this one?". She knows that there is a meaning behind that.

(FP2) It is like a drama. Hahahaa

(FP2) Even in WhatsApp, if there is a wedding, people will put a photo to indicate that. If it is a teachers' day, you will notice that most of the teachers will have an image about that. So, it gathers people through the images of their profiles.

R. Interesting.

(FP3) Actually, this is having an effect on the people around us. For example, if it is my friend's wedding and I do not put a special profile as a gesture to celebrate the event, this will seem as if you were not happy.

(FP2) Yes, and they will be very sensitive.

(FP3) It means a lot for them.

R. You mean that your space expresses your emotions, feelings, and ideas.

(FP3) Yes. It has big effects on others.

(FP4) I was about to say that. Most of the time, I negotiate with my brothers because my brother's status through WhatsApp has never been changed since he first used it which says: "Hi there, I am using WhatsApp", and the other one has put his Majesty's picture since then. I said: "we are fed up with your picture and status. Just change it as it is very boring". He said: "it is of value to you, but it is not of value to me".

R. What does that tell you? I mean if someone does not personalise his/her online space.

(FP3) Those are not active members. They do not care about WhatsApp. So, they do not care about changing their profiles and status.

R. Do you think your online space has an effect on you?

(FP4) Yes, I guess. It is a way of expressing yourself and your emotions.

(FP2) Some of them use these applications for learning purposes. They write new vocabulary that they have learned. They will write it there. My friend once put a picture of English quotes and it was very helpful. We were following you. It is a learning strategy that you can develop.

R. Good.

(FP3) Actually, people sometimes use this profile or status to seek attention or to confess things that we cannot say it frankly. For example, I want somebody to talk to me during the death of one of my relatives. I cannot say to everybody: "hey, my relative has passed away". It is not appropriate to advertise that. But, when you put an idiom or a picture meaning that you lost someone, you will start receiving condolences from others.

(FP2) It is the responsibility of the readers to respond.

(FP2) It feels like that you do not have the right of not knowing because it appears in the profile. It is like you know about it.

(FP2) Yes, you are not excused.

(FP3) It is not an excuse that you do not know. It is out of respect that you show your sadness to your friend who has lost her relative, for example.

(FP2) Nowadays, we are using it for commercial stuff. If you want to buy something, you will have to contact a certain number.

(FP4) Sometimes, people are advertising for themselves. For example, I have many people in my list who are my friends and they put their Twitter and Instagram accounts so that people can follow them. They are not satisfied with WhatsApp only. They also use other applications to be updated.

(FP3) They can also advertise for workshops they do. For example, they do not have your number, but you have the advertisement about the workshop in their profile.

R. Interesting.

R. Do you feel responsible for such social values?

All participants: yes

R. Now, we will talk about online language learning activities you seek through virtual space. How does that differ from the formal classroom learning?

(FP4) One main important point is that in the classroom, the learner does not have the full control over his/her learning. But, outside the classroom, there is full control and full plan for the learner himself to decide and choose. The learner is intrinsically motivated to plan his out-of-class learning unlike classroom learning where the teacher has specific goals and objectives and students have to achieve them in one way or another. So, the teacher takes students step by step to achieve these goals. But, sometimes, those steps are not suitable for the students. So, I am with the other kind of learning other than classroom learning.

(FP2) If you are in a classroom, you are limited to one hour or even two hours here at the university. But, when you have online resources, you have infinite time to go wherever you want and whenever you want to access such contents or information or the knowledge you want to learn. In the formal classroom, it is compulsory for you to have a specified teacher and subject. The teacher style and teaching method may not match with your learning style. So, you will be forced and pushed to seek other ways. You have online applications. If you are a visual learner, you can access YouTube. If you like writing and making notes, you can read books and highlight things that you want to remember. If are an audio learner, you can go and listen to the radio. Nowadays, you have online radios, so you can access it through the net. So, wherever you are, you can learn. You are not excused for not learning.

(FP3) We have seen that students feel bored in formal classes and you cannot blame them because they will be going through the same routine. So, they need something new and different so that they can feel they are doing something creative and interesting. This is what they actually need in schools. So, they would be helped to learn English.

(FP4) It also helps the learner develops his self-assessment strategy. It helps individualising learning because when we are in a classroom of 35 students, the learner is not getting the attention he/she deserves. So, there will be breakdowns in the learning process. So, whenever the learner has the chance to fill these gaps or breakdowns, it will be very effective because it is a way of individualising learning and giving attention to what the learning is searching for.

R. interesting.

(FP2) As teachers, we may encounter students who are dyslexic. So, in these cases, we need to use online activities, tasks, games, and stuff like that. If we only depend on the material like books, we are not going to deal with these cases effectively. But, through online activities and applications, we can expose those learners to a wide range of activities, games, and songs that suit them to make sure they learn.

R. Interesting.

R. What are your views on autonomy and responsibility through online social spaces? What does it mean to you?

R. You have already touched upon that. I just need further clarification.

(FP2) Autonomy and social spaces are strongly connected. Autonomy means you have the responsibility to be self-learner and to educate yourself through online social spaces. When you are an autonomous learner, you are not under the control of anybody. It is your choice to choose the place and time of learning. It is your responsibility to search and explore what you want to learn through these online social spaces. You do not have an excuse to say I do not have a teacher who does not match my learning style and the curriculum is limited. So, we are dependent on our own selves to seek knowledge.

(FP4) As teachers, we have to update ourselves because we are usually complaining about our students who are under-achievers and we forget to blame ourselves because we are not matching their level of technological development. I guess updating ourselves and being able to contact with those students using a variety of ways is the best way of getting their respect and benefiting them.

(FP3) We keep saying that the ultimate goal of teaching English for students is to make them autonomous as much as possible and less dependent on teachers so that they continue learning and they will not stop when teachers are on holidays or in other situations. Making them autonomous learners and less dependent on teachers means making other alternatives for them to learn the language. This is all available through technology.

R. What is your understanding of autonomy online?

(FP2) You are as an autonomous learner, you are an independent learner. You depend on yourself to seek knowledge and achieve our goals through games and feedback received from the applications. For example, we have a BBC application through which you will be sent notifications of updated news. The autonomous learner who uses online applications is an independent learner. You are forced to continue looking for and seeking knowledge.

R. Who does force you to seek knowledge online?

(FP2) It is me and the technological stuff.

R. So, you choose that.

(FP2) Yes, of course, I am the one who decides to download these applications in my smart phone. So, I am responsible about continuing the use of this application. If not, I have the choice to delete it from my smart phone. But, I am keeping it because I know that I want to learn from it. At the same time, we can say that the applications themselves are forcing us to continue learning.

(FP3) These technological applications are available to everyone. I am autonomous, so I search for it, download it and use it. Also, I have time for it in my agenda to benefit from it. Maybe, I would see an advertisement for a movie, but it is my duty to search for that movie and look at it. For example, by seeking a review of a book or a review of a novel, I have done my role in the beginning by downloading the app. Then, it is me to go and search for that novel online. So, it is having these things available to us and activating it to serve us.

(FP4) Autonomy means that I am the person who decides what I have to work on and I have the right to stop whenever I feel that I am not getting any benefit. So, it is my decision to establish that programme and it is my decision to end it whenever I want and wherever I

want. So, there is no upper hand above yours that controls your use of the internet or the applications.

R. In your view, how could online language learning be linked to classroom learning?

(FP4) Actually, it can be adapted to be the main style of learning or the main style of teaching in schools. We can have an environment full of online learning tools with the guidance of teachers. Of course, we cannot have a class without a teacher or online settings as these students need guidance in order to be good achievers and use technological applications in a good way. They can get the help of the teacher. I can imagine in a few decades that we can have a digitalised environment of learning if the teachers understand the way these programmes can work.

(FP2) They can be trained.

(FP4) Yah, they have to be trained so that they can make a fruitful benefit for the students because that what students want. They want games and virtual spaces which kinaesthetic learners need. They need to touch things. The problem is that learning is linked to classroom tables, desks, and teachers who do not follow the trend of technology. So, they believe that the students or children who not attend classes do not learn. But, it is not the case because we know that foreign people who are from advanced countries in education have home tutoring. They have teachers who are responsible to teach their kids at home. It is not only a classroom setting and a board.

(FP2) Nowadays, I think the government gets the notion of the importance of technology. That is why they provide almost every school with smart boards. But, here, in Muscat, there is a special case in terms of having techno schools. There is a smart board and a white board in every class. The teachers are supposed to use smart boards because you cannot separate technology from the classroom setting anymore like the old days. From time to time, you have to use PowerPoint slides showing pictures. If you have a listening class and your recorder is damaged, you can access the net and find it there if it is available. We can integrate technology in a very simple way like presenting a video as a warm-up.

(FP4) You remind me of one of the instructors here at the department. Once, we were watching the Harmmmer's book of teaching English, and the teacher was about to show us an interview with Harmmmer. He was comparing two lessons with each other and he was asking us to compare to say which one is the best. The CD was not working. I said to him: "write it on YouTube and you can find it". he said: "no, there is nothing on YouTube". It seemed as if I was saying something very bad. He stopped. So, I said: "I am sure there is something online. How come! This is the famous book on teaching English". Then, one of the male students went to the laptop and just wrote that. Then, it appeared on the top of the suggestions. I said: "oh, my God." I was saying it was online, but he was saying there was nothing. So, if there was something wrong, it was not with my suggestion. It was with him.

R. Thank you ladies. I do sincerely appreciate your participation, enthusiasm, and motivation. I do truly value your input.

All participants: thank you very much.

R. Do you have something to say?

(FP4) It was also another interesting meeting.

(FP2) we hope we can meet you next week insha'aa Allah.

R. Thanks a lot. I wish you all the best.

APPENDIX 8

Sample of Focus Group Discussion (Group B, Session 3)

Group B: Third Focus Group Discussion (3FGD)

R. Hello ladies. This is our third meeting and I am very pleased to see you here. First of all, I would like to summarise the main points you have mentioned in the last meeting to confirm that my understanding of your discussion is exactly what you meant.

You reflected on your engagement with online social networking platforms. Some of you reported that such online activities were enjoyable and beneficial alternatives to compensate for the rigidly controlled classroom environment. Some of you considered those virtual social spaces as additional informal platforms for learning English which significantly contributed to your enjoyment of your learning process. Some of you reported on your autonomous learning efforts by setting goals for your online learning, monitoring your progress, and evaluating your performance. You also mentioned the importance of relating to others while being engaged online for different purposes.

Is this what you meant in the previous session?

All participants: yes.

R. Do you have anything else to say?

R. Ok. Today, we are going to focus on your visualised future possibilities and your autonomous efforts to achieve your future selves. So, let me begin to ask you this question:

R. What are your most cherished dreams in the future? what would you ideally like to become in the future?

(FP8) For me, I would like to be an English teacher in a school because I have a dream to raise a great generation. First of all, being a teacher is like a noble profession and this is a dream I want to achieve and also, I want to carry some messages that I like to deliver to my students and my generation. So, this is my dream.

(FP11) We all entered the college of education to achieve our dreams to be teachers. But, other than teaching, for me, I have another dream which is to be an international writer. I want to be a writer because I am inspired by other writers in English and Arabic. For example, the Book Fair that is happening here in Oman is always encouraging us to read more and write more and see some Omani intellectual figures and from the Arabian Gulf who are becoming famous and people read more for them. I would like to be like these people and it is good to be like them in the future. I want to be a famous writer.

R. Interesting.

(FP7) I do not want to be a teacher in the school. I prefer to be in a higher education institution because I am really comfortable with the age range here. I would really like to teach in higher education. Within that, I would like to be a researcher at the same time. Also, within that, I would like to be a writer. Actually, the main reason I didn't go home today is that a writer is coming to the university and I would like to go and visit him, Saud AL Senusi, the writer of Bamboo wood. He is coming to the college of Arts tomorrow, so I am going to attend the event they are holding there. I would like to meet with him and learn from his experiences.

R. Interesting.

(FP10) I also do not visualise myself as a school teacher because I have a bigger dream. I would like to travel abroad to complete my Master's Degree, so teaching in a school is not for me. I am also interested in psychology, so it would be a great field to do my master in.

R. Interesting.

(FP10) Travelling abroad would be a good chance to communicate with other people and to improve my communicative skills, to visit places that I have not visited before, to meet new people and so on.

R. What role does English language play in your future dreams of your ideal future selves?

(FP7) I said that I want to be a lecturer in a higher education institution. What I am learning now is English language which I love so much, so teaching somebody something with the passion that I have would be one thing that I imagine myself to do. Other than that, we all know that the research language is mostly English, so that is also going to help me and will open so many doors for me when I am doing my research. And the language that I prefer writing in is English. Whenever I hold a pen, the first thing I write is English. It is the language of writing, research, and teaching. This is how I imagine myself with this language.

R. Interesting.

(FP11) Because I want to travel abroad and English is an international language, I should learn it to communicate with other people because most of them will not speak Arabic. For me, to speak English and to be able to communicate in English would be easier for me.

R. Interesting.

(FP8) Since I want to be a school teacher, it doesn't mean that I will not meet people from different places. Using English will help to acquire the knowledge and skills I need in my field and in different fields, so it may help me to understand my field and others. Also, I will use it for communication and to help others and advise others regarding certain issues.

(FP10) Wanting to be a future writer, English will help me broaden my knowledge and help me read and write and help me see things from different angles and write in different ways according to different styles of writing. So, it is important.

R. Interesting.

R. How does your future-self affect your learning behaviour?

(FP7) You would make extra efforts to learn that thing because you say: "oh, my god, everyone knows this except for me. What kind of a teacher would I be if I don't know this simple thing that everybody knows except for me?". So, it pushes you forward with more open-hearted and even working hard to know these things and not just whenever they pass by you. You catch them and you learn them and try to use them because they are very important for your future self.

(FP10) If you are having models a head of you, you would like to be actually like them. If you want to be like them, you have to improve yourself and improve your English. I think

that wanting to be something, you should take certain steps in order to improve. The more you improve, you feel the need to further improve. This is the concept itself; wanting to be something more and more.

(FP8) For me, English plays a great role in my life because I have a purpose. I said that I want to be a teacher in a school and to raise a great generation, and that means I am changing something in my country and that may happen if I use English and read different resources in different fields like science to help me gain information and gain knowledge. Later on, I would transfer that to my students and so on. Also, I can use English as a key to a successful me and, later on, for my country of course. That's it.

(FP11) I think our future selves guide our learning behaviour because we try to develop ourselves and enhance our language skills and our communicative skills. Because of that, we can achieve what we aim at.

R. Does your participation in these online social networking platforms help you realise your future L2 self? Explain your answer

(FP7) In a way that makes the picture more vivid because I love watching YouTube videos, seeing other people explaining and making things easy. I say to myself: "oh god, I want to be like that teacher, making it so simple and so interesting". So, it makes the picture more vivid, makes your models vivid and easy to implement and visualise their skills in your behaviour and practice in the future. So, I would say it makes the picture really vivid.

(FP10) I think, for me, participating in online activities or seeing things like the best book seller in the world which has been translated into 20 or 40 languages around the world, it really encourages you to do things not just to read or write, but to communicate with others. You have to see things and know that there are things that you have to reach and in this way your dreams become even bigger. This happens through online activities.

R. Do you have any plans to achieve your future self? Explain your answer

(FP7) of course, wanting to be a university lecturer means getting good grades. Other than grades, many graduates say don't care about grades, but they are important if you want to be a lecturer right in the university you are studying in. So, good grades is one of the plans and of course while trying to get a good grade, you also need to develop the other skills and improve them by participating in other societies that we have here in the university for extra-curricular activities that we have all around in English language can really help you to use the language in different contexts and learn every day and every time you are with the members of the extra-curricular activities. These are my main plans.

R. Interesting.

(FP10) Also, developing our English skills, our communicative skills will help us achieve our dreams.

(FP8) Yes, it is the same. To develop our skills, our knowledge so that we can participate in different things in our society and in our country to reflect a good idea about our country and so on. That is the plan, to have the knowledge and, later on, to spread a good idea about our country, our society, and ourselves.

R. Interesting.

(FP11) To know what the things that are happening now and how they start to improve and the new technologies that are introduced to us and they may help us see the big picture and help us see what we are going to see and may be change it.

R. How do you express your future self via these online social spaces?

(FP7) One part of wanting to be a writer is to communicate and read what other writers doing and producing, and hence communicating and discussing the different elements related to writing. I have this Facebook page that I like to read people's discussions about it and how everybody perceives it in a unique way. They are all at the same time revolve around the same idea that the writer mentions. It is really interesting in that way that you can communicate with other people who have the same passion as you. Other than that, maybe you can also have a community of researchers you can communicate with. From the courses I am taking in the university, they can help me in the research process and develop myself in that area. Research-wise, we have got a WhatsApp group to discuss different issues related to education. All of them are actually peer tutors in the Language Centre here at the university, so we all chat about different issues we face in teaching. For example, one says: "hi, I have a reading task and I do not know how to do it with my tutees. What do you suggest? What kind of activities would you like me to choose? I am not confident about the skill and how to teach it", so everybody would come and advise him about that. These are the things that I am really interested in.

R. Interesting.

(FP8) For me, I would like to be a school teacher, so we may create a blog and we can have different people from different places who would like to be teachers in the future to join and share some things that are related to the teachers like how to use technology in a creative way so that you can raise a good generation and encourage them to use technology and other things. So, I collect different ideas from different places via blogs, WhatsApp, and so on.

(FP10) For me, I like blogs. It is interesting as much as reading book reviews. I cannot read a book without reading people's comments and how they react to it. There is also a famous writer, who is named John Lewis, he has a YouTube channel, containing book reviews. I really find it interesting to know him and see how he replies to comments on books. Everyone knows he has his own ideas about books and he contradicts with others, but it is interesting to know how somebody thinks. YouTube and online applications help us see how people think, as we maybe see certain people as models for us.

R. In your view, is it obligatory for you to study English?

(FP7) In this era we are living, yes. And the society we are living in is yes. If you don't know how to speak English here in our society, you might look uneducated and you don't want people to look at you in that way. So, this is really important in our society we are living in to be educated in this language. We do see the language as getting bigger in our country. We see it in shop signs and roads, so yes the language is everywhere. Sometimes, we don't even find Arabic instructions in the products, so the English language makes you feel that you are educated and more advanced than the people surrounding you who do not know English.

(FP10) Even though it is obligatory, I am enjoying it and I am having fun while learning it. English actually helps us to know about other cultures and to share our culture with others. Also, to correct the stereotypes and misconceptions that others have about our culture and convey the essence of our culture and the true values and true Islamic teachings because the world is having a wrong picture of Islam. So, it is our duty to correct these misconceptions and stereotypes through learning English.

(FP11) I think English helps us achieve what we want. Also, our families support us in learning English, for example, my mom always encourages me to know more about English and she feels proud that I am learning English and becoming an English teacher though I want to be more than just an English teacher. But, if she sees it as a good thing, why not becoming more than that and making her much prouder.

(FP8) Yes, I agree with them. I see that English is an obligatory thing. It is not just me, it is also the society, my family, and my friends. Everybody thinks that English is an obligatory thing. Because of my society views and my family views, I think that since I have the ability to communicate in English, I can gain that social respect in my society and in my family. I can see that my family is so proud of me and I feel that they are so happy because I have the ability to do so. Also, I want to create that positive image about our country and about Islam since a lot of people around the world view us as terrorists and we would like to change that idea. All of that may happen through this language, so it is obligatory to have this language.

(FP7) I remember my parents when I was at school, they would put special emphasis on mathematics and English mainly because they have other children who are engineers, nurses, and teachers-I have got a lot of siblings by the way. So, they would put special emphasis because they see how important it is for my personal development, as it is important for others who are working in other fields, as they are surrounded by people using the English language. It is really important to know this language in order to advance, so they put special emphasis on English for some reasons in a way that is encouraging for me to focus more on the English language.

R. Interesting.

R. In your view, what role does English play in Oman?

(FP7) As I mentioned before, it is the language of research right now. If we want to improve our society, we must take from the English language. Just imagine focusing on research that is done in the Arabic language, I do not think we will get more results than we would get in English. This is because not only English-speaking countries use English, but also other countries as well. So, it is really important to benefit from the others' experiences through research from different cultures not only English culture and apply that in our society, taking what is suitable for us and apply it after examining it and analysing it to shape it according to our society in order for it to advance. So, research is so important as it plays a very important role in Oman.

(FP11) It is the language of trade, commerce, fashion, technology, and research. For example, when you go online, you search in English because you would find tons of information available in English and not other languages because it is considered as an international

language. So, it is really important to know the language. Even in technology, you find applications, programmes that are in English with the hardware, software, and manuals are all in English. So, you should know English to know how to use these technologies and to adapt them in your daily lives.

(FP10) Yes, I believe that English is number one language in the world that everyone wants to learn. Most schools around the world believe that English is the second language important to know because many fields depend on English and most of the scientists that we know are from English countries. If we want to develop our knowledge and develop ourselves, we do not really have time to translate everything that comes from the other side of the world into Arabic. So, being able to read in English and know English helps us to be in the same line with them to be able to move with the rapid changes that is happening around the world.

(FP8) I think if there is no English here in my country, there will be few chances to join these international organisations and so on. Actually, I think English helps my country to be socially and politically connected to other countries, So English is the main thing that helps the country to be with the international countries.

R. What is the status of technology in Oman?

(FP10) I think it is not fully developed, but we are changing. When you compare it to the past, we have changed a lot and we are using now advanced technology.

(FP7) The Omani government is paying special attention to this side in different organisations. It is called the Digital Oman/Digital Government/ or E-government. So, the whole government is paying so much attention to technology which really encourages citizens to get involved in the whole process of moving from the traditional ways to use more technology in daily life and provide different products that are digital and different gadgets that are available in stores. That is one way which is improving. Also, having different majors here that are always specified for IT, which is always developing in Oman other than focusing on humanistic fields. For example, here, in the colleges of Education in Oman are paying special attention to technology in education because the whole generation is changing. So, they are really paying attention to how the world is advancing and trying to utilise that in the whole process of developing technology.

(FP11) I believe that English and technology are two important companions here in Oman that are hoped to be developed and used in the best ways ever.

(FP8) Yah, that is clear. For example, we have some classes for teaching students' IT skills although students major in English. It is an evidence that technology plays a great role here in our country and they want us to shift from the traditional way. Especially, when teaching English, we are encouraged to use different online resources.

(FP7) Also, it becomes an obligatory thing for all foundation students all over the Sultanate to take English and IT courses before they actually start studying their majors. So, it is really taking an important phase here in Oman.

R. Interesting.

R. Do you have any strategies to achieve your future self? Explain your answer

(FP11) Through imagination. We always imagine ourselves being a famous person, so we feel proud and others whom we care about feel proud of us. So, imagination plays a good role in shaping our identity in the future.

(FP7) It is the same thing to use imagination. Also, as I told you before, one of the things I do is to look at real models to utilise their skills and their ways of getting wherever they are and applying that in my life. It is my strategy that I use.

R. How do you get in touch with these role models?

(FP7) The people that I watch on YouTube. They appear in a website, so, I go and communicate with those teachers. They post their reviews on YouTube, but they have their websites as well where they have quizzes and more information about the language skills they focus on. There is a comment section, so you can always ask them and they are always available to answer. So, it is really important that you communicate with these people.

R. Back to your previous comments, you frequently emphasised the Anglophone cultures. Are you inspired by their cultures?

(FP7) We are for sure inspired in many ways to the point that we can't realise how much we are inspired. Getting involved in technology is certainly one of them. The English-speaking cultures are more likely to be developed than others and use many gadgets and technologies, so we are trying to catch up with them when it comes to technology. So, this is one aspect of being affected by those cultures.

R. How did you come to know their cultural aspect?

(FP7) Mainly through movies and books which are really rich of their culture. It tells how their daily life is and how their relationships work there, what the norm of their relationship is and how the social status is formed. It tells us about their traditions, so it really gives us rich experience as if we were there. Watching movies makes us feel that we are there with them. Reading a book can make us imagine that we fly there with them and living there with them. So, those books and movies really give a very rich experience of how a culture would be.

(FP10) Also, through social media because everyone has his account in social media, expressing their ideas there. Through their ideas and what they post, we can realise what they think of and what their culture, customs, and traditions are, what they think of and what they do.

(FP11) Yah, there are some programmes that are becoming real, reflecting the real life of those people like snapchat. The main thing is that they are capturing their daily lives and what they do. So, it is interesting to know how they live and what they do. It is also important to know that not everything they do we can do because. We have our own culture as well and we have our own identity that we do not want anybody to touch and we do not want to be changed because there are things like religion that we do not want to change. I think it is important to know what is good for us to know and what is good for us to apply.

(FP8) Yah, there are some courses in the university like literature one and two in which we read different novels from different communities in India, America, and Britain. All of these novels help us to know more about different cultures. The professor explained for us and we

were surprised to know about these cultural things that we did not know before. We just came to know it because we read a novel or technology, like a film about that novel so that we know more.

(FP7) I think there is always an element of comparison going on in our heads, so we know about our culture and we know about other cultures. We always compare what we learn about other cultures to our own culture. Maybe, we are not aware of that because it happens automatically in our heads. Of course, within this comparison, if something does not match other culture or is not suitable, we just leave it. And when something just matches and does improve our society, we immediately take it and try to apply it. Comparison does really help us understand other cultures and compare them to our culture.

R. Do you want to be fully immersed into their culture?

(FP10) No, not really. Being aware of other cultures help us being critique about things and criticise things that does not match our interest and our own life.

(FP11) I think knowing their culture will help us create a climate of understanding. To understand what they do and what they say, but not necessarily apply them or adapt what they say or what they do because maybe it does not match our values.

R. Do you think English belong to the English-speaking countries only?

(FP7) I do not think so because there are different cultures contributing to this language. So, considering that it is only coming from a certain culture is certainly wrong. The analysis which is based on this idea is of course wrong. It is important to realise that it is not coming from a certain culture. Being an international language is a huge evidence that it does not belong only to the English-speaking countries.

R. Interesting

(FP10) I think English belongs to those who speak it. It is a language for communication, so it should not be for someone or a specific area.

(FP7) Even the countries that they speak the language are different from each other. We know the British, American, and the Australian ones. They are very different from each other. They have their own specific vocab that does not exist in the other variation. Here, in Oman, we have different words and vocabularies that if someone from America comes for the first time would not understand; we have words like: wadi, willaya. So, these Omani anglicised words belong only to the Omani culture.

R. Could you further clarify your point?

P (FP7) I think we already have our Omani English. We also have Arabic English. So, we have our special Omani English to be more specific as there are many Englishes in the world and Arabic English is one of them.

P (FP7) I believe that we should maintain our Omani English, because again it is an international language and other people might get to know more about our culture through this language. Again, other than just the Arab world, the Islamic world as well as their own vocab related to it, for example, we say Hajj when talking about pilgrimage. So, we do not

even say pilgrimage even if we are speaking in English. So, when people read the word, Hajj, they will look it up in a dictionary and they are less likely to find it. And if they find it, they will get to know our culture and they will read about it. So, English is one way to preserve our culture through it and we get to know different cultures through it

R. Interesting.

R. So, would you like to communicate with English native speakers or with International speakers of English? Why/Why not?

(FP10) We are already doing that through our teachers, instructors and sometimes through some programmes that help us communicate with other native speakers, so it is not something that we would like to do in the future as it is already happening. It is part of becoming English teachers.

R. How would technology help you to communicate with them? Give examples

(FP10) Through chatting programmes, in general, through social media.

R. Do you think English language pose threats to your religious and national identity? Why/why not?

(FP11) No, I think it serves because knowing English will help us to transmit our culture to others and to correct anything wrong that they construct in their minds about us. Maybe, these are wrong stereotypes and wrong misconceptions, so through the English language we can correct these and spread our true Islamic values and Islamic teachings.

(FP8) I remember a situation when I was in Britain. A man came and ask me where I am from and I said: I am from Oman. He said: where is that? He did not know anything about my country and I was so surprised. But, whenever you say Oman is next to Dubai, they say: oh, Dubai, we know it. But, they did not know my country so that force me to use this language to introduce my country and its culture. So, the language serves me a lot in this way to view my country in a good way and introduce Islam to these people and let them know more about Oman.

R. It is interesting.

R. You already mentioned that you have your purpose of presenting Oman and its culture to the world. How can you do that? And why?

(FP10) Because there are some people who are patronised by non-Muslims and they are seen as terrorists coming from the place of terrorism. Being able to change this idea is what we all want to seek.

(FP7) Another thing we can do is through writing in English. We know that a language can preserve our own culture. When we are writing, we must take under consideration that we use our own environment. If I am writing a fiction or a novel, I need to integrate my environment and the name of the characters themselves is also one part of that. So, through writing, we mention our social norms just as we learn about other cultures through writing or watching movies. We can do the same with writing and produce more movies and publish it to the world and get them to know about our culture through their language.

(FP8) Back to her point, we have an example here. There was a course called studies in the essay in which the teacher asked us to write. At the end, she asked us to send our writings to different places in which we could publish it. She said: “it would be like a great opportunity for you, especially for those who write for readers in Britain or so on to have a good idea about your country and about Oman and about the Islam”. We were so enthusiastic to do that. There were some students who wrote about Oman and its traditions. Some people wrote about Oman and Islam, Oman and War. We actually published that. We hope that people from different places read all of these so that they have a good idea about us and about Omani writers so that might happen through writing.

R. Interesting.

R. Do you have anything else to say?

(FP11) Along with writing, it is not mainly being able to write is what you write. For example, you have this book about Himalaya Which is becoming more famous. It talks about Pakistan and Taliban; how Pakistani people are mad at her and how she describes them, but Americans and those other people in the west like the book because it gives them a good picture.

R. Anything else?

R. So, that is the end of our third meeting. Thank you, ladies, for your time and effort.

(FP7) Thank you.

(FP8) We would like to thank you miss. We benefited a lot.

APPENDIX 9

Sample of Focus Group Discussion (Group A, Session 4)

Group A: Fourth Focus Group Discussion (4FGD)

R. Hello ladies, this is our fourth meeting and I am happy to see you here. To begin with, I would like to provide a brief summary of our last meeting to confirm that my understanding of your discussion is exactly what you meant. You talked about your visualised future possibilities and your autonomous efforts to achieve your ideal future self. Interestingly, you emphasised your desire to know about the culture of English-speaking countries as well as your desire to communicate with English native speakers and with other international speakers of English to engage in intercultural dialogues for national and religious affairs. Is this what you meant in the previous session?

All participants: yes

R. Do you have anything else to say?

(FP1) Yes, almost. But, it is not the whole culture that we want to explore, experience, and live. There are only some cultural aspects because some of them do not suit us. For example, I will never leave Islam for anything as it is a huge part of us. This is might not be that much important in the English culture.

(FP2) I just want to add to your point. I like some aspects of the English culture like commitment to time and work. I also like people's freedom to speak and express themselves whether in political issues and stuff like that. At the same time, we do not like some cultural aspects like extra-marital stuff. There are things that do not go along with our Islamic religion because these are just the opposite. That is what I wanted to say.

R. Thanks a lot. is there something else?

(FP6) I think a huge part of our experience in English includes learning about its culture. What I see is really important to understand the language and use it at the same time. However, there are some cultural aspects which I see through movies. For example, they are far away from parents and family gatherings. In my view, this is really a huge part of our culture as Arabs, Omanis, and Muslims. So, I might not agree with. By the age of sixteen, they have to go out of their parents' house and look for their individuality. They search for themselves in terms of studying and careers. However, we always need our parents' support in all the steps and phases of our life. So, there are cultural differences. In my culture, I cannot deny the importance of this aspect.

(FP2) The differences in cultures help learners to reflect. When you see something that is different from your culture, you will be able to make comparisons and have a say. So, you will have open-minded views of the world.

(FP6) Eventually, we are witnessing things, so we can take the useful things that suit us, fit our personalities, ways of thinking, cultural and religious backgrounds. We can also leave the other things. There is no problem at all.

R. What do you specifically like about the English culture? Can you give some examples?

(FP6) What I like about the English culture is that its people has the freedom to express their opinions without social restrictions or gender restrictions.

(FP1) I like their independence. They build themselves by themselves.

(FP6) yes, from early ages.

(FP1) That is a good thing. My point of view is that we create our own future, so we have to work for that and they work a lot for their own future.

(FP6) and you are amazed that at young ages, boys and girls look for jobs during the summer after school. We do not have this in our culture. We always hear that girls stay at home and boys are still young to work. But, in the English culture, parents try to teach their children to be independent from early ages which is a good thing.

(FP5) Yes. Also, what I like about the English culture is that they respect time and others. They also very committed to their work and you feel they are passionate about their work. You feel that they are working from their heart. We need some of these aspects and values for us as teachers or even English learners to have such values in our life. it will also help us in learning the language and communicating with them as English learners. Another thing is that their passion for reading, as it is a daily habit for them. This is really amazing. It is something that we need to encourage our students and ourselves to do.

All participants: yes

(FP6) When you get to know these people from a closer distance, you will be amazed that the person has a lot of skills as he is a multi-skilled person. We have a hobby of drawing, for example. But, the same person there can draw and does a lot of things at the same time. so, there is a lot of self-development in terms of skills and interests.

R. Interesting.

R. Today, we are going to discuss the affordances of cyberspace, in particular, blogging activities as you chose it yourself. So, let me start with this question:

R. Do you keep your own personal blog?

(FP6) Yes, we do.

R. Why?

(FP5) Actually, I have my own blog. Because I love writing, I really like the task of creating our own blogs and writing about different things related to our daily life like talking about our hometown, activities we do in our hometown, or hobbies. So, when you express yourself about things related to you in a blog, you feel that you really hear your voice, ideas, and thoughts. By doing so, you are actually developing your thoughts, your critical thinking, your cognition. You will also move from one stage to another stage. So, I like having my own blog and share my ideas with my friends and other colleagues.

(FP3) The interesting thing about blogs is that it allows you to practise writing. You know that we hear that writing needs practice so that you can master writing and can develop. In blogs, you are not only practising, but also receive comments from your colleagues, friends, and could be professors if you wish to.

(FP2) For me, I have created my own personal blog. The intention for creating that blog was to let people know about our tradition, culture, and norms in Oman. I used to post about daily different activities related to the Omani culture. It was really a good way to show others about our culture to practise writing and to read what another people's post. In order to have followers, you have to follow others. There is a feature in blog that you can see who reads your blog from different countries.

R. Interesting.

(FP1) I used to write in my blog. But, when I moved to twitter, I kept my own diary through twitter. Now, I have started from the beginning of this semester to write about the methods of teaching. So, whenever I read a book or apply a new method, I would write about it in my twitter and people keep replying and asking for advice. So, I have a chat with them and write my own reflections. I also give and receive advice about games that we can use for different levels of students.

R. So, how do you represent your blog?

(FP3) By the writings that you post and the title of it. for me, it is mostly about teaching and things related to students like how to deal with them, how to gain their opinions, or issues related to your school so that you need others' advice on them.

(FP5) Sometimes, we personalise our own blogs when we give it a name. Also, when we have a picture for that blog. When you put your own picture that reflects your own personality, you are personalising your blog. Also, when you write anything or post something that is related to you not only as a person, but also to your multi-identities as a student, a trainee teacher, and as a human. I mean when you post different topics about different issues and put your touch on these things, then you are personalizing yourself.

(FP2) Everything that you do in your blog, you actually say something about your personality and how you are. The post that you write must be related to your current interest. The thing that you read must be related to your personality. The name of the blog has to announce something about you. If you write about teaching, you name your blog as teaching or something like that.

R. Do you keep academic blogs?

(FP3) Yes, for sure. In our blogs, we have friends who are in the same major and who are doing their teaching practicum as well because they are dealing with students as we are. For the others who are expert teachers, we can have discussions about academic topics related to the theoretical part of teaching.

(FP1) I think we started blogging through a technology course. it was our gate to blogging. We wrote about academic topics like methods of teaching, and smart boards.

(FP2) When we took a course on the World's literature, I used to access blogs most of the time because there are some expert readers who post their ideas about a story or a poem. It was really so helpful to follow academic blogs, especially that there are things that you will not find in a website. But, you will find in blogs. As trainee teachers, when we use a method,

we would like to share it with others if it is successful or not. I can see if the teacher who uses this method has worked with her/him or not.

(FP6) Also, through blogs, we can notice the others' way of thinking, their critical thinking toward a philosophy, theory, or perspective, especially in literary texts like stories or novels. The instructor can raise a question about the character, so the question will push us and encourage us to share our way of thinking toward that character and analyse them. So, others' way of thinking might be useful for your research or your reflective paper on that specific character. There is always a sense of sharing and getting to know others' perspective toward something even if these opinions are not based on research, but only self-expressions.

(FP2) In the future, we can create a community for teachers using blogs where we can share our experiences upon teaching and difficulties or challenges that we face. Maybe, we can talk about different varieties of students that we are going to encounter in the future. So, blogs can be really very helpful in our career later on.

(FP3) I think they have started that as my friends have created a group using a blog in which they post their opinions and discuss educational issues, for example, their opinion about a teaching method. They might also narrate what happens with them and how they dealt with these situations. It is mainly about methods of teaching and those teaching-related issues about dealing with students who goes behind your expectations. For example, they might not do their homework, and talk too much to the extent that you do not know what to do.

R. Interesting.

R. So, what kind of activities do you engage in through blogging?

(FP2) Different things. For me, I read, write, and communicate with others. I read my posts from time to time and read others' people post on different subjects whether they are news, religion, poetry, and literature. I also write my posts and write comments on others' work. I also receive comments from others. So, I write to share my ideas. Besides that, I communicate with other people. Because when you post something, it is a sign for people to communicate with you and send you back. Also, people used to write their diaries in a traditional way before they go to bed on their notebooks. But, through blogs, they can share their daily diaries rather than writing them down in a hard copy. Also, I am interested in following the current issues, especially in Oman and the middle east like sport news and economic news regarding oil prices and these stuffs. The other things which I am really obsessed about is blogging and sharing the best quotes about famous authors. I am really much engaged with literary texts. Through my readings about novels, short stories, journals, and critical essays, best quotes are always mentioned there. For me, I like to memorise these quotes while others reflect on them.

(FP1) Also, blogging is a good way to see how you think. Maybe, my thoughts that are inside my head is different from expressing it so that I understand myself better. Also, keeping my blog can help me go back to my old posts to see how I was thinking and how I changed. It is amazing how people change sometimes and how their thoughts develop. So, it is a good way to go back to see how I am now and how I was.

(FP2) Also, I can compare one of the new posts with one of the oldest post that I have written. You can compare the mistakes that you have overcome and the progress that you have achieved so far during this period of time.

R. interesting.

(FP3) Sometimes, blog topics turn to be a debate. For example, one of the topic is on the use of assessment whether through formative exams, learning assessment, or off learning. It starts by a post and turns about to be a discussion on this debate. There are two parties and you will be discussing and defending your opinion regarding that issue. Actually, there is a group of people who are interested too much on reading books, especially Arabic books and they open a blog so that they can share their opinions on a specific book. It is an online book club. So, they post the name of the book and all of the people have to read that book. Then, they have to share their opinions and criticise it through the blog. So, the current generation are too much engaged with these technological applications rather than face to face meetings. So, they can share their opinions online.

R. So, in what ways does blog reading help you?

(FP1) It depends on my purpose. For example, sometimes, I read about fashion and about academic topics. Surely, I will find somebody who has written on these topics. It also depends on my interests, academic purposes, or self-development purposes.

(FP2) Blogs help me in many ways. As I said, I engage in different activities like reading, writing, and commenting. My writing skill has improved, and my reading skill has improved. More than that, reflecting on what you read is really important. So, we have to be careful when choosing words to write.

(FP1) It also increases our self-esteem because when someone comments on your post and says something good, it increases your self-esteem as someone reads your post and like it.

(FP2) Yes, especially when you see the viewers from France, Canada, and other places. I feel proud that my post has reached these countries while I am sitting in my country.

(FP5) Besides all of these, blogs increase and enhance our motivation. At the same time, it enhances our autonomy. We feel that we have the ability to do things and we can take charge of our own learning. So, we do what helps us to achieve our goals. Also, it helps us to develop our creativity and our sense of sharing. When you create your own blog, you post your own writing and post pictures that describes somehow what you write in your post. So, this shows your creativity, how you are able to create things that people will understand immediately after reading your post or even after looking at the picture you have posted. So, blogging helps a lot not only in developing our sense of sharing and communicating with others online, but also in terms of our personality. It develops us to reach a higher stage of understanding others and understanding ourselves.

(FP2) Blog is more than that. It is just like a world where you can find whatever you want whether it is good or bad. If you are a writer and you did not get the opportunity to publish your ideas and thoughts in newspapers, you can have your own readers through blogs. If you are a photographer, you can join competitions which are organised by people through blogs.

(FP5) It also help those who feel that they cannot express themselves in public or face to face with other people. Some of them are really creative and they have a lot of ideas. They are even critical thinkers, but they feel shy and there is something that blocks them from sharing their ideas with people when seeing them face to face in public. So, blog gives them the opportunity to express themselves and reflect on their progress. It gives them the chance to express themselves and share their ideas. So, this is the floor or where I can express myself and show the world what are the things that I am able to show.

R. Interesting.

R. So, what do you think the advantages of blogs are?

(FP3) I think one of the things about blogs is that it could be a starting point for you as a writer. You know that to boost your courage and confidence to publish a book, you have to see whether the audience likes what you write or not. The other thing is that even if you are in your way to be a public speaker, through blog you can express your ideas. So, when you express your ideas, you can see if people interact positively with your writings and ideas. This will encourage you to go on and be a public speaker or writer.

(FP2) There is also an advantage which is having relationships. When you have a follower through blogs who comments on your writings and is interested in your posts, you might wonder if he wants to befriend you. I remember that I have a follower called Elizabeth from Ghana in South Africa. I remember there was a war there, so I felt so sad to see that and feel touched by those people. You feel that you want to befriend them. It is a great opportunity for us to expand our relationships in the future. we might have a chance to visit them.

(FP5) Also, blogs can be a gate for something big in the future. As we said, we write a lot of things in our blogs. So, if we have a lot of followers in different parts of the world, you might be a famous writer or a public speaker. What helps you to be that person is through your posts and communications with others.

(FP2) It is also an inspiration to others. You said that you like to post some quotes which is one of the advantages that your readers and you will get at the same time. That is, when you see that people like to read the quotes that you post and you can change somebody's life to achieve what they want. Another advantage is motivation. People get motivated by real people from their society, so using blogs allow them to have the freedom in expressing their ideas and getting accepted by others.

(FP6) No one can deny that blogs are a source for knowledge. We share things, but sometimes I am busy. So, I use my free time to search for some topics, including my studies or my interests. So, these blogs are sources of knowledge, especially if such information is posted by expert people in their field. So, it is good.

(FP2) I remember a book called *Out of Place* by Edward Said. I had a difficult time reading it. Before the test, I was looking for some reflective comments from readers. So, I found in WordPress a very long article about this issue. It was very helpful, and I did benefit from it. So, it really helps us even in our courses.

(FP6) Sometimes, you cannot find reliable sources. But, they can expand your knowledge in a way that you can see as a whole so that you can dig and make you think about it.

R. So, you mentioned that blogs support self-expression and self-reflection.

(FP6) Yes

R. Can you explain that to me?

(FP6) As we said, sharing comments and opinions towards specific issues. We cannot hold a microphone and be in public places to express our feelings or bitterness toward specific things like poverty around the world or famine in Africa. So, through blogs, we can show our feelings and express ourselves. Sometimes, we can suggest some solutions. Maybe, a person on authority can read that suggestion and take an action regarding that.

(FP1) It even helps us in understanding our own thoughts. It is like writing an essay. When we write an essay, we have an idea. But, we do not know where it is going. So, I have this idea, but I do not know what my own thoughts are. But, when I start writing, this idea keeps developing until it reaches a conclusion. Writing a blog is the same. We have this idea, but we do not know what to write or where it is going until we start writing. So, the idea keeps developing and we get to understand ourselves. We understand our own quotes more. As I said, we can reflect on our thoughts and we can understand ourselves better. We can also understand the world around us and how people think.

(FP2) Blogs support self-expression when we share our identity and who we are with other people. Since we are Muslims and Omanis, we can express ourselves in a way that are different from other nationalities. With regard to self-expression, it is like reading an article and reflecting on it by seeing the connection between the authors' ideas and yours. That is something that helps us.

(FP3) In our case, we are having a teaching practice now and I believe that this period is rich of experiences that could develop to something really beneficial. It is first real experience dealing with students and teaching. we face new experiences and cases. Then, you see yourself in a case that you want to express yourself and you want someone to hear you about what you have seen, about what you have encountered, how have you dealt with it, and whether you are on the right way or not. Maybe, in real life, there will be no person available at all times to hear you. But, there, when you go and blog it, you will gain many benefits. First, you are kind of recording what you are doing now and the way you are dealing with it. The second thing is that your thoughts are read by others and you gain opinions about what you do is right and what could make it better.

R. You also mentioned that blogs support social interactions and reflective dialogues. How can that happen?

(FP2) I remember when I start writing my first blog, all of my peers have blogs and they kept following each other and looking at what their colleagues posted. They posted jokes as we were beginners. Later on, it develops to be used for social interactions with speakers of different languages. There was a French follower who posted comments and I did not

understand what she was saying. So, I did not know how to reply to her. Hahahaa. I sent her emoji of happy faces. Hahahaa.

(FP3) When we come up with an issue whether it is regarding teaching or another thing and then start discussing it, this will support our social interaction as teachers or as even friends. You feel as if you are being validated, especially when someone tells you that I did the same thing or this is something that I have to think of and do with such students. As for reflective dialogues, we read each other's posts and kind of criticise, not always negatively. It could be positively as well. Also, it creates another community that is not restricted by borders or countries. For example, in the sport community, you can find lots of people sharing the same interest. For me, in the fashion group, we share the same ideas and we might talk about the same topics. It is like imaginary communities.

(FP6) They are not monitored by others.

(FP1) Yes.

(FP6) We have a literary expression like there are no big eyes watching you. So, you are free.

(FP3) You just hold your laptop or tablet.

(FP1) Just press the buttons.

R. So, in what ways does that online fashion community you are joining help you?

(FP1) It is kind of self-development. It develops me in many ways. fashion is not only about outfit. It is about nail care, and how to lead a peaceful life.

R. Do you write in English?

(FP1) Yah. All of my internet communications are in English.

R. Do you have international members?

(FP1) Yah. Most of them are from outside. I cannot remember any Omanis. Maybe, they do not say.

(FP3) Because they use nicknames.

(FP6) I sometimes find that I am the only Arab in that blog.

(FP6) Yes, sometimes, we are the only Arabs.

(FP6) All of them are from other nationalities.

R. Do you all have that kind of passion for fashion?

(FP1) Yah, yah. That is why I am saying community because a community shares the same thing. For example, we share ideas about fashion and we comment on each other's. It is the same interest.

R. Interesting.

R. In your view, do blogging activities generate critical thinking?

All participants: yes.

R. In what ways?

(FP1) For example, we read blogs when we have literature. So, we read many posts. For example, I will not stick to one. I will read many posts and think about them and I would comment on them according to my own views. So, I think this is critical thinking like having many ways to gain knowledge. Then, we express our own thoughts about them.

(FP5) Even in the way you write in your blog, you are actually a critical thinker. When you write something, you have to think about the words that you choose in your writing about and even the phrases, as well as your audience. You are not posting anything. You are posting things that you have thought of before posting them. So, this is kind of critical thinking. Also, when you comment on others' work or reply to their comments, you are being a critical thinker because you do not just reply like that, but you think about what you have to say and how you want to say it. So, this is critical thinking.

(FP3) Yes, I agree. I think ideas depend on critical thinking a lot. when a friend shares her piece of writing in a blog, she is in need for comments from you. She will not pass any comments without thinking about them because they will be counted on you as you said it. So, you will not disagree with yourself. Even if you just give her like, it means that you read her piece, thought about it, and agreed with it. I think blogging is about critical thinking.

(FP2) The most beautiful thing that you do in blogs is that you are thinking. The interesting things are when you ask questions, challenge others to think about what they have posted. I remember one of the followers is from America. He used to post some quotes and then used to ask about our opinion. Then, I would send my comments. Then, he would send a long paragraph. But, I would comment briefly. So, we used to have focused communications upon that quotes. In some certain issues about the tribal conflicts and Palestinian issues, you ask questions like: why do not we live in peace? Others post questions while others post poems. So, you are expressing yourself and forcing other people to think. You are at the same time thinking about that issue and how you can express yourself in another way. Because there are callers for different religions whether Islam, Christianity, or Judaism, you as a Muslim have to be expert in writing challenging questions as it is your responsibility to defend Islam and spread the real message about your culture so that they cannot be misunderstood by others.

(FP6) You motivate readers to think and search.

(FP5) you have to question them and challenge them. So, if you do not question them or challenge their ideas, what is the reason behind blogging? So, what is the point behind blogs if we do not question our own ideas and each other's ideas. So, there has to be some kind of questioning, challenging, and sometimes motivating. Motivation does not always mean positively, but also negatively. sometimes, I mean it directly or indirectly. I question them just to make them think about what they have posted and rethink about what they would post next time.

(FP2) Sometimes, when you want to support your ideas and thoughts, you have to provide a link for someone to read. If you get it published, you can copy the link to your blog and ask

the readers to reflect on. Once I posted a link about a translated copy of Quran and then asked people to enjoy reading it. Then, I asked them about their ideas.

(FP5) Also, when there are challenging questions between us through blogs, that makes learning takes place. Because as most professors in the university always say to us if you do not want to ask any question, it means that you do not understand or you do not grasp what has been discussed in the classroom. So, when we question ourselves and question others, it means we are learning and sharing experiences. We learn and teach. There is this kind of relationship.

(FP2) By doing so, you are expressing yourself as being a risk taker instead of being a coward.

R. Interesting.

R. In your opinion, do you find peer comments useful?

All participants: yes.

R. In what ways?

(FP1) For example, I write about one topic, but I do not include all the aspects of that topic. So, when someone comments on it, he/she can highlight important points for us. We can also see what others' interests are. For example, if they are interested in spreading Islam, we can see where the points they think about differently and are misunderstood by others. From their comments, we can understand their thoughts. We can also know what they like most and what they do not like most.

(FP2) Also, peer comments can work as a tool for assessment where we can assess our progress, ideas, and language. For example, if you are part of a blog community where there are language learners, they may comment on the syntactic structure of your sentences. Then, you get benefited from them. At the same time, you get motivated from other people's comments. For example, when you write in a professional way, you might be asked to join a community of writers. So, it is really a good way.

(FP3) Yes, it is useful. First, you post your writing because you need others' opinions, or you want a solution or your problem. Then, you will find it and use it. It is stimulating because their comments push you to post again. If you do not have any interactions with others and you do not get any response from them, this may discourage you to go on. Sometimes, they are stimulating in that what they write in their posts will help you to come up with new ideas. Then, you may write about it and search for new concepts that you have missed.

(FP2) Maybe, the comments are not written in words, but the number of logs you get to your post. For example, when photographers post daily pictures, the number of logs they get or the likes they get show that they are professional photographers. This will encourage them to post more photos.

R. Do you integrate blogging into your teaching practice? Why & How?

(FP3) We have a group, discussing educational issues. Based on your experience with your students, you would post your experience with a teaching method, how it works, what the positive and negative points are.

R. So, do you think blogging activities facilitate reflective teaching practice? If so, why and how?

(FP3) Yes. Sometimes, we do things unconsciously. But, there you can think about it and find it as a chance to think about whether what you did was the right thing or not. Maybe, you can think about what I would do next time if I face the same situation and what would work better. You would be also reflecting on your experience and expecting others to be questioning you. So, you prepare yourself for that.

R. What about the others?

(FP6) I think blogs can facilitate reflective practices. Through blogs, we are sharing other suggestions towards a specific method of teaching. For example, if someone is suggesting that using technology inside the class will really help adding a fun environment for teaching and learning, this will push me to involve technology based on others' experiences. If these experiences are useful for my peers based on their experiences, I will try this method and practise it inside the classroom.

(FP2) As future teachers, we have to integrate blogs into our teaching practice. If we do so, we will get different views, perceptions, and ideas. When you share your experiences regarding teaching methods with students, these methods might not work for me, but might work for others. However, I can adapt it to my situation and further develop it. By doing so, you are actually adding to the teaching field.

R. So, to what extent could blog help you during your teaching practice?

(FP3) As I mentioned before, it is really a good chance to make records of your experiences and the way you deal with it and even the creative things that you have used, especially we are still fresh to the teaching field. We are coming with many ideas of teaching. So, this is a chance to record them. As life goes, it seems that you get bored when you deal with the same cases. So, you will not be able to think of new games. But, when you go back, read your records, and see how you dealt with different cases for the first time, it will be useful for you to refresh your mind. It is good that you can compare your teaching practice. Although it is only for a period of three months, you can still compare between your posts and expectations at the beginning of your teaching practicum with your last posts. So, you can think how you have developed. You can comment on that.

(FP6) Since we are all having our teaching practice experience, of course we have faced a lot of challenges. So, we can post about these problems and read others' views in finding solutions for these problems. For example, how we can deal with hyperactive students and send them the information effectively. As I said, the second environment for students beside home is the school. So, blogs can be a way to share these opinions and suggest solutions from faraway places even if these problems are faced in another country.

(FP2) Yes. We are as trainee teachers, we discuss different topics related to the teaching practice through blogs like the setting of the classroom. Is it a good way that we have students setting in rows or groups? Also, we discuss topics like Bloom taxonomy, multi-intelligent learners, and other issues related to the field of teaching. It is a really good way to share experiences, and ideas with other trainee teachers as we are going through the same experience. What gathers us in this blog is that we have to say something. We have to reflect upon something and help others, so we can improve the educational system here.

R. You mentioned that blogging activities help you develop your motivation. How is that?

(FP5) When the person likes online writing about different things especially things related to himself so that he posts his writings and get good feedback from his followers, his motivation will be increased and will keep doing it. I feel I want to write more and develop myself. Also, you will say to yourself that I want to write about different things to see if others will comment on this writing in the same way or will say something else about me. Their comments are really valuable to the person who sees himself as a writer or as a future teacher. So, their comments are very helpful to increase or motivate you to keep doing what you are doing and even doing it in a better way.

(FP6) There is always a sense of achievement and progress if we are always engaged in this kind of blogging activities. We can notice easily and compare our first-year experience through blogs and our fifth year as university students in terms of academic aspects because our language will be improved of course and the terminologies we use. Another thing is the background information. You can easily tell that this person is a literate person. He has well-rounded understanding of the issues happening around him. So, we will expand our knowledge, develop our writing skills and even our critical thinking skills because it is not enough to rely on our daily discussions with friends and family and attending classes. We have to find another area and another space where we can spell out our way of thinking and our perspectives on life, in general. I think these activities are helpful and develop our motivation to teach in the first place because we are discussing teaching-related issues through blogs. They will encourage you and develop your motivation to try new things because you want to see what their opinions are and whether what you do is good or not. Another thing is that their comments on these activities will develop your motivation towards your ultimate aim. This depends on you. For example, if you want to be an author or a public speaker, you will find that the number of followers increases, and the likes increases. If your followers' comments praise you and say good things about you, you will find yourself going on and find a chance to go.

(FP6) Eventually, you will find yourself that you succeed in convincing and persuading others about a specific idea about Islam or something else. So, it is really a good achievement that you have an influence on someone.

(FP5) When you see yourself that you have really achieved something through your blog and people comment positively about your posts, this will be reflected on your personality. You will be highly motivated. People around you will have a sense of your motivation. They will feel that you are highly motivated and that you are doing your work out of passion and commitment. Because of these positive comments on your blogs, it affects your future career

and personality. People will start to notice that you are a different person now as you are really motivated and passionate about the things that you are doing.

R. Good.

R. So, do you set your own learning goals before blogging?

(FP3) Yes, of course. For me, in the first place, blogging was to practise writing and develop my writing skill. But, now, it is mainly to get someone hear my ideas and because I want to see whether I am doing is good and how I can do it better. Because we are dealing with students, it happens where we face situations, so we are a bit confused about what works better for those students. In each class, you will face students with cases that you have not studied before in your theoretical period of learning. So, you will be in need for others' comments.

(FP5) One of my goals when I started using blogs was to see myself if I am able to have comments from others from different parts of the world because I was not that person who wanted to share her ideas with others. I was somehow restricting myself and keeping my ideas to myself. I was not used to apply technology and different applications like blogs. You can say that blogs are the first gate for me to share my ideas, spread them, and to have some kind of communication with other people from different parts of the world. So, this was one of my goals.

(FP2) For me, my first goal was related to the learning process like improving writing skills and expressing my ideas. But, later on, I found myself setting other goals like reflecting upon ideas. For example, when I read an article, I would like to reflect on its ideas and share it with others in my own words. So, that is one of my current goal. I am also working on a blog in which I take the role of a teacher and my students are the members of that blog. The goal of that is to share extra-curricular activities since students do not have a lot of time during the classroom period to do a lot of activities. So, it is my idea that I am working on right now to give students extra-curricular activities they can do at home. So, it is really a good educational tool to be used.

R. Interesting.

R. So, how do you monitor your learning progress through blogging?

(FP6) I think by comparing others' comments and the way how they form their comments, the use of language, and the use of concepts. You can also raise the percentage of getting your opinion accepted by adding facts and statistics related to that topic. So, people who can see your comment can be persuaded by your comments. I always compare my use of language and concepts with my colleagues because you can see the difference and you can discuss that topic from a different angle or use a different level of words.

(FP3) When you see the number of your followers and the number of likes is increasing, this will tell you that you are doing something good and that you are in progress.

R. Do you think blogging is an appropriate method for language learning and teaching?

(FP2) Yes. if students can access the internet, it is going to be a very helpful way of teaching and learning especially that blog is not an activity that is limited to practising one skill like reading. In blogs, you can do many things at one time. you can read, write, comment, and even you can listen. Sometimes, you have links to watch videos. So, it is a collection of different skills in one post. It saves time and you can learn many things.

(FP6) It is also a good way. In blogs, we do not only include academic topics. We can always find blogs that match our interests like cultural topics, political topics, economic topics. So, it will expand our point of view and perspectives towards every single field in our world, not only the academic field. But, to make it very effective on our personalities, we have to follow academic blogs.

(FP5) If you have a blog with your students for your specific classroom, it will help the teacher to see his students' progress academically. Also, it will help the teacher to get to know his/her students because sometimes they will feel that they are expressing themselves freely without any borders and without any constraints. The classroom limits their expression of ideas. In the blog, they will be able to express themselves and share their ideas. So, the teacher will get to know his students and build a strong rapport with him/her. So, good relationship built through blogs will enhance the atmosphere and relationship inside the classroom. Also, it is good for teachers because students somehow do not prefer writing and they find it boring to do. When we involve them in blogging and posting their writings, this will be really an effective way to encourage them. As we are motivated by others' comments and likes, it will be the same with them. The other thing is that when we teach students this language, we usually come and go back to reality. I mean how we can make it real. Students want it to be connected to the real world. So, blogging will be the right place where they can find how writing can be used in real life.

(FP6) I really like the idea of class blog. By having a class blog, this will help the teacher to evaluate the students' interests towards that specific topic or course. If he is always raising a topic about literary topics, he can judge whether these students are really interested in these kinds of things. So, if he notices that there are no interactions through the blog, he can change the topic. These students are not interested in the old generation days, so I can speak about the current generation and how they are living their life. So, it is a good way to evaluate the students' interests.

R. So, how do you evaluate the blog learning environment?

R. Do you think participating in blogging activities is a worthwhile experience?

(FP3) Yes, it is.

(FP2) Yes, of course. As you said, it is really a good way of learning whether for academic purposes or non-academic stuff. To evaluate this learning environment, as long as we keep that blog alive, it means that you are motivated to post our ideas and thoughts. So, the first intention of the one who invented this blog has been successful since we are using it.

(FP3) As you said, it is an environment where you can practise different skills: reading, writing, speaking, and critical thinking. You know that we are in need for something to enhance us to be critical thinkers. It is related to many issues here in life. At the same time, it

is a chance to communicate with others. It is not just posting an idea, but you will be asked about this idea. So, you should be prepared and make yourself ready to talk about the things behind your writing and be ready to communicate and contact others whether they are native speakers or international speakers.

R. How could blogging environment be improved?

(FP2) Maybe, we can add the feature of Skype.

(FP6) Yah, videos maybe. We have a voice feature, but not videos. But, you can add the link.

(FP3) only the link.

(FP6) Maybe, in the margins, you can post the best bloggers who is highly participating and the most active one to be rewarded, for example.

(FP2) Bloggers do have these things. In the margins, they have their bio and the prizes they get from different places.

(FP6) Or they can reward the best comment by publishing that comment in newspapers or magazines.

(FP3) I was thinking if they have some kind of deal with magazines or newspapers where you have a group blog and say that the followers write about a topic and the winner will get his writing published in that magazine. This will be really motivating.

R. Ok. Interesting.

R. That is the end of our fourth meeting. Thank you ladies for such a reflective discussion.

All participants: thank you.

R. Thank you.

APPENDIX 10

Sample of Focus Group Discussion (Group C, Session 5)

Group C: Fifth Focus Group Discussion (5FGD)

R. Hello Gentlemen. This is our fifth meeting and I am very pleased to see here. First of all, I would like to provide a brief summary of our last meeting to confirm that my understanding of your discussion is exactly what you meant. Interestingly, you emphasised your desire to know about the culture of English-speaking countries as well as your desire to communicate with English native speakers and with other international speakers of English to engage in intercultural dialogues for national and religious affairs. Is this what you meant in the previous session?

(FP12) Yah, mostly.

R. Do you have something else to say?

(FP12) I think we have covered most of it, but there is one thing that I reflected upon and I did not mention. Because of the society we live in there is a space between females and males, sometimes YouTube or any social platforms work as a way to learn or as a window to get into the other gender's point of view. Through following Youtubers, whether they are males or females, we learn more about the other gender. Yah, that is what I wanted to mention.

R. Interesting.

R. Today, you are invited to reflect on your teaching practicum, so let me begin with this question:

R. In your opinion, who is a successful teacher?

(FP12) I think a successful teacher is someone who achieves his goals and objectives that are required from him. The successful teacher who does it in a brilliant way and who is motivated to teach. Then, again, his motivation is transferred to his students. They do not feel as if it is a burden. They are not here to do and go on. This class is not standing between them and their students. It is fun, and it is something you like to do. Another thing is that a successful teacher is someone who always looks for ways to get better. He is autonomous, and he wants to get better in what he knows about the content and knowledge. He also wants to get better in the way he introduces it to his students. So, motivation and autonomy are the two main characteristics of a successful teacher in my opinion.

(FP13) I agree with my friend. A teacher needs to be motivated to be successful. He needs to be responsible for the students' learning. That is the most important aspect, I think. They need to be responsible and they should act in a professional way. when they make mistakes, they need to correct these mistakes and reflect upon themselves. Also, they need to be reflective about their teaching methods. They need to bring about new methods all the time, not the tedious way of giving students knowledge and they receive it. They need to motivate students to be autonomous themselves, not only the teachers. They also need to improve and bring about the drive in the students to be responsible for their own learning rather than receiving the knowledge from the teacher only.

R. Interesting.

R. Can you explain the roles and responsibilities of a teacher?

(FP12) When it comes to the roles besides the responsibilities, the first thing is that a teacher is responsible to get better. But, most importantly, he has a responsibility towards students who do not have interest and are not motivated to come to class. So, he should make the class interesting for them. I remember during my teaching practice that my students were outside for an hour because they had a meeting with the management and the students were really tired and they did not want to study. So, what I did was that I asked them what they like. I know most of them like football and video games. I explained the grammatical rule I had to teach that day in the way they like by using examples that interest them such as Messi. They were still tired, but it was something they could relate to. How did I know that I achieved my goal? After a week when I asked them to give me an example of a grammatical rule, some of them remembered the example of Messi. Hopefully, I was successful in it. Another responsibility is that managing the classroom because there are students who are not motivated, and they can be a little bit trouble maker. You need to strike a balance and you need to make sure that students who want to learn are learning, and those who do not want to learn, at least, make it interesting for them in order to make them learn. Also, sometimes, you are not only the person who gives info. Sometimes, it is the responsibility for the teacher to leave his students to work and let them do their work. You need to set back and let them do the work. Then, you will be surprised as a teacher from the result.

(FP13) Personally, I think that a teacher needs to be mainly committed to their students. Also, a teacher should be committed to be a role model for the students. They see the teacher in many ways as they spend most of the time with their teacher and not with anybody else for about five hours a day. So, the teacher is like a second parent for the students. So, they do not only learn knowledge from the teacher, but also they learn many other things. For example, the teacher might come late to the class, so the students might think that commitment to time is not important. So, unconsciously, they will learn that, and the teacher needs to be aware of this. The teacher also should make the classroom an enjoyable and beneficial experience. The tedious way or the old ways of teaching need to be changed. The teacher should bring new ways of teaching, not only give them knowledge. So, I think the main role of a teacher is being a role model in many ways. So, even if the teacher is used to certain things, he needs to change himself into someone who is good in almost every way, not perfect but good.

R. Interesting.

R. How would you assess your strengths and weaknesses as a future EFL teacher?

(FP12) For me, yah. I always do. there is always one big thing that can be a point of strength and weakness which is not being firm with my students or life in general. I rarely get mad at something. This has been working fine with me because students know that I am laid-back. Hopefully, what I see from their faces that they are enjoying the lesson. I can't spend five minutes without smiling or laughing and that sometimes can work as a double-edged sword. Another thing is that sometimes I did not know that I have this strength, for example, I sometimes make solutions on the go to the problems I face like what I did when they were tired. With regard to the weaknesses, I need to work more on my time management. As a future EFL teacher and based on the past four discussions we have had so far, I want to get better about what I do, so I think that is another strength.

(FP13) I like to talk about the weaknesses as I think more than the strengths. I think my main weakness is that whenever I am interested in a lesson, I project that interest to my students. On the other hand, when I do not like a lesson, I also project that dislike to my students. For example, I always do not like grammar lessons. So, when I am teaching, I notice that after twenty minutes that I have unconsciously projected that dislike to my students maybe through the way I am talking or the tone or not showing enough passion when I am speaking, as these things could affect my students. For example, this week I have been teaching them a story and I like the story, so almost all of them were participating in one way or another and even the week students, at least, said something in Arabic as they do not have the courage to speak in English. So, I encourage them, at least, to say something in Arabic and then to make it up in English. My strong point is that I am interested in teaching my students and that is a good thing since it is the main motivation.

R. Interesting.

R. Do you keep a teaching lesson plan before going to your class?

(FP12) Yah. When we started the first three weeks of our teaching practicum, I always had my lesson plan. Although I am a trainee teacher, I try a little bit to go away from the lesson plan but still achieve the goals that are written in the teacher's book because it is not interesting for my students. What I do in these cases, I make it clear that I know what I am doing so that I need to make changes as some tasks do not appeal to the students. When I am teaching a new lesson, I have to make a lesson plan. Even, sometimes, I tell my students a day before that this is what we are going to take tomorrow so that you need to be prepared.

(FP13) For me, I always carry a notebook. For example, every page has two lessons. I make the headlines and while thinking about it, I keep the details in mind. For example, if there is a certain word they have a difficulty with during the lesson, I write in the notebook. So, when I start a lesson, I open the notebook. While moving from task to task, I try to make a glance at the lesson plan and the lesson goes smoothly. But, sometimes, in some lessons that are so complex or there is a vocabulary lesson, I make a mind map so that I make rules and other things that come about. That is interesting. I did it twice. I think it keeps my lesson going smoothly.

R. Interesting.

R. Do you evaluate your classroom lesson? How?

(FP12) Yah. I believe it is one of the responsibilities of a successful teacher, in general. How do I do it? It is mostly self-reflection and that comes through observing students. For me, how do I know what I do is correct? This can be seen through week students. If they are interested, motivated, and active in class, then I know it is working because good students or who are better in English, they will answer and be active whether you do something new or not. If week students were active, then I did well. If they were not, then I did not do well. So, there is something that needs to be changed. Another thing is that keeping the time whether I manage to finish on time or not. Sometimes, I ask my students what they learned today. If they can answer that, it is an indication that it was a successful lesson.

(FP13) Mainly, what I do is to evaluate my classroom at the end of each lesson. I ask my students if they have enjoyed the lesson and what they have not enjoyed? And what they have learned from the lesson? Some students surprise me with what they have learned. They pay attention to the little things that I say. After the lesson when I get out of the room, I look at the lesson plan again and see what I have achieved and what I have not. Then, I think what I could change that I have not done. Sometimes, I do follow up. Sometimes, the students learn the lesson, as opposed to my expectation. So, I need to make follow up activities, reviews, vocabulary strategies, skimming and scanning reading tasks.

R. Would you as a future teacher be happy to give your students more responsibility towards their learning?

(FP12) Yah. For me, definitely. because this year while doing a teaching practice, I met the only teacher whom I can say that does the student-centred teaching every day. That is literally the only teacher who does so every day, so I have learned a lot from him. Because my age is similar to my students' age with only five years' difference, I was talking to one of them, who is good with English at a middle level, and he was telling me that this teacher is a good one because he does not do what other teachers do. He does not teach and go on with the lesson whether the students are interested in the lesson or not. He does not write the answers on the board and move on with it. For the first five minutes, he tells each one what to do. Then, the students will explain it in front of the class, and then they will answer. He is there to make sure that everything is going well. If the students make mistakes, he is there to correct them. That is his only job. I can see that it is working for him and for the students. I have been learning a lot from him because he is my cooperative teacher. I hope in the future I will be as good as him.

(FP13) I think it is a good way to give students a chance to be responsible for their own learning. It also motivates them to learn other things. For example, I have a student who keeps a notebook with different sections for vocabulary, and grammar. He writes everything he is learning without me telling him what to do. Every week, he shows me what he is doing, and I am surprised.

R. Do you think Omani learners are autonomous? Why/ why not?

(FP12) I think yah. we, who are in this room, are autonomous. We learn and we get better in what we do. Before doing the teaching practice, I was not sure if I want to be a teacher or not. But, after doing it, what I want to teach my students is that not to memorise words, but make it in a sentence that is meaningful for you. I remember that one student, after listening to what I said, told me that the information he learned about water cycle is evaporating; he used this word as a word for word translation from Arabic. I was really happy because he applied the word he learned. Another thing is that I begin my class asking one student a question. Then, I ask him to ask another student a question. Some of them bring up their own questions and some of them repeat what I ask or what others ask. However, that repetition shows that they are in class or aware of what is going on. In one way or another, yes, we are autonomous, and they are autonomous Omani learners.

(FP13) Most of them are autonomous as I see through my teaching practice in dealing with Omani learners. Most of the students that I have encountered think that the teaching methods

are boring. I notice that some of these teachers are quite old and they depend on the old teaching methods and they think that they are right, and they should not change. There was a particular student who told me at the end of the lesson that he wanted me to give them another lesson right after I completed my lesson and I asked him why? He said that his teacher is boring, and they do not learn anything in his class. So, I asked the other students if they think so, and they said yes. They wanted something else to learn in my English class. So, I think in one way or another they are autonomous.

(FP12) I always get asked by students how I learned English. What did I do to learn English? That is one way for students to try to learn and get better on their own. They only get our advice and they start working on themselves.

R. In your view, is autonomous teaching and learning possible in the Omani educational system and culture?

(FP12) I think yah. There is one thing about autonomy is that teaching students how to learn. If we are going to spend a class or two classes teaching them that, it means that these three hours will go, and you will not be able to teach them their regular classes. Doing X means you will not do Y. So, that is a price for it, but again it is a price that we are willing to pay. Through that, you make sure that you are not here to do what they have to because they will learn by themselves. And even after two or three years, it will stay with them. I remember someone who said: a teacher who does not teach his students how to learn by themselves is a failure because you are not going to be with them for their whole life. You are going to leave them at the end of the year. They will need what they learn here. There is a whole world outside who want to explore it and they cannot because they need your hand to help them explore it. Also, Islam encourages us to learn, even if you need to go to China to learn. Learning by yourself is even considered sacred in Islam. It is suitable for the culture.

(FP13) I think it is applicable in our educational system. If we look at the English language course books, the objectives, goals, and activities all encourage students to be autonomous and to think independently. But, the way lessons are given to students do not apply what the goals require. It is not really difficult to apply this concept as the Omani students are sociable by nature. So, I think if lessons make students talk more as they are sociable in the first place, they will learn the language very smoothly and quickly.

R. Interesting.

R. How would you promote autonomy through your teaching and among your future students?

(FP12) For me, it is mainly through making it clear to students that if they do not find lessons interesting, they have to make it interesting for them. They cannot always say that the teacher is not good because that is life. You are not always going to get the best teacher, and even sometimes you are not going to get teachers. So, they will need to make it interesting for themselves. They cannot just say that our teachers are bad. That is the way how the teachers work, and they need to adapt to that situation or even make stuff interesting for them. What I am trying to do is that they can suggest any example of what they like. So, I think that is one way to do it.

(FP13) For me, in every lesson, I start introducing my lesson with anything in English. I remind them that English is not only in the textbook or for tests. English is for life, taking with other people and using the language to communicate other things. As some of the students tell me that they want to talk in Arabic, so I try to encourage them that they should speak in English about anything they are doing. I also encourage them to use the language in their free time even to say anything that is in English, not necessarily in a particular context.

R. How do you imagine yourself as a future EFL teacher?

(FP12) I hope I will be the teacher who implements a student-centred learning through different strategies that I am learning nowadays. Even I want to be someone who is motivated, waking up in the morning to go and teach the students. I will be someone who is committed to teaching. Last week, I saw in social media that a doctor can fail, and an engineer can fail. But, when a teacher fails, he sees his failure walking in front of him like he sees his students walking and not being able to talk in English. Sometimes, there are other factors. Mostly, it is either you take it or break it, and that is what happened to us. I hope that I will be the teacher that will cause the change in my students, hopefully.

(FP13) when I think of myself as a future teacher, I think that over the years I have devoted myself to learning and move from the basics and foundations upstairs. But, when I am going to be a teacher, I will return to the foundation to build the students' foundation in every possible way and teach them the language, and our values. So, the teacher should redirect them to the right path and teach them to preserve their cultural values. So, I think I am part of that foundation for the students to grow up.

R. Do you integrate social technologies into your teaching practice? How?

(FP12) It is mostly through our WhatsApp group. We have a group for student-teachers here and we always exchange experience if we are teaching the same classes and grades in different schools. We ask each other how to present a specific lesson and what to do, as we mostly have the same level of students; there are of course good and weak students. We exchange the learning strategies and the teaching methods we have. Also, we can go online. Having a goal and trying to implement it as a student-centred, we can always go to blogs and YouTube to think of a way to teach them. Asking a friend or using blogs or YouTube videos can help a lot because it shows different ways of teaching as people are creative. Even one thing is that you want to get better and you want to share experiences with your classmates, I think it works a lot and you do not need to meet them. You can just send them a message or e-mails and they will reply.

(FP13) Actually, I depend mostly on talking to my friends through WhatsApp or other apps. For example, if I want to implement a new strategy in my teaching, I would search in twitter as some people write tweets with new headlines in education and teaching. Also, there are teachers who share their experiences in teaching. For example, I was watching a teacher who was talking about words that teachers should not say in the classroom, so they should be careful. These videos in YouTube help me a lot to look at things that I might not think about.

R. Do you share your teaching practice experience with your fellow students and support each other? If so, give examples to justify your answer?

(FP12) With male students, we do it through WhatsApp. But, with female students, we communicate through twitter or Facebook. As I said, it is a matter of sharing experiences and learning from others. Yah, we do that, and it is mostly through social media because, as mentioned in the previous meeting, there is a gap or separation between females and males in the society.

(FP13) Actually, we have a group of student-teachers and we are sharing different things.

(FP12) Yah.

(FP12) Every day, there is at least three questions that anybody could ask, and others follow and share what they did in their classes. So, it is an everyday experience for anybody in the group. Even those who do not write, they read what others have experienced.

R. What do you think of the two research methods being used in my study?

(FP12) the thing we are doing now which is the conversations. They help a lot in a way because we generally have a similar background, but we have different experiences. So, each one of us is bringing his own experience to the table. What I have been saying throughout the meeting is different than what others are saying. So, that helps a lot. Another thing is that even the language learning histories we are writing about our experiences help us to reflect on ourselves and what works for us and what not work. They help a lot.

(FP13) I think this is a good way since not every person will like to speak. Maybe, they are good at writing their experiences. For me, I might write about things that I have not said in the focus group. Some people might think that through groups they are encouraged to speak more rather than writing by themselves. For me, I do not really like writing much. I do not like writing, in general. So, I prefer to speak in the focus group, and then I write about what I have spoken about and I might add to clarify things.

R. Would you employ them in your future classrooms as a teaching method?

(FP12) For me, yes, definitely. As I have mentioned, it helps us reflect on ourselves. This stuff has worked with us, so it will help students. It will help them to reflect on the stuff that helped them and the stuff that did not work so that they can change it or present it in a different way. Another thing is that because of the discussions that are going on, students can learn from each other. So, I think it will help.

(FP13) I think the focus group discussions can work more with the students since they are sociable. So, if I make a group of students, they will talk more rather than talking with the teacher all the time. So, the focus group might bring new experience in learning, as they are at the same age. On the other hand, the teacher is from a different generation and their interaction could be restricted in some way or another.

(FP12) Even it is another way for them to practise English.

R. Ok.

R. Do you think of incorporating language learning histories writing into your classroom?

(FP12) Yah. It will help them a lot to reflect because they will get the pros and cons of what worked for them and what not. Even each week, I think we do reflections on grade 12. I remember writing a reflection about the way teachers were teaching. In a way, if the teacher is not as interesting, you make it interesting for yourself. I think that way will help students to get better at what they do.

(FP13) For me, I think this way may help some students rather than others, as some students maybe shy or restricted to talk or do not want to talk during focus group or with their classmates. So, to give them the opportunity to write and know about what they think. So, they would write at home in a different environment and are encouraged more to write about what they think about the lesson or anything in general like what they learned and what they liked and what they did not like. So, that helps me also to change anything that I have missed in the lesson or need to focus more.

R. Would you help your students to realise their possible selves? How?

(FP12) Yes, definitely, because it is one way that you know what you want to do. You know what you want, but making it explicit and making it clear for yourself that you want to do that. What I did in my class in the first week when I was teaching grade eighth was that I asked them what they would like to be in the future. Some of them did not say what they wanted to do, but others said they wanted to be pilots, teachers, and so on. Through their imagination, I asked them why they would like to be so and so. I even help them when they are having difficulties. If the student wants to be a doctor and he is not working as hard as he should be in the English lesson, I would tell him since you want to be a doctor, then you need to work better or you need to work harder because doctors need to learn English and you need to do so. In that way, it helps them make them conscious of their choices and make them know what they want to do and have a certain goal. Because if they do not have a clear goal at this age, they might get lost and they are at grade 12.

(FP13) I think it is a good opportunity to let them speak about themselves and what they could be in the future. As I am teaching young children who are 12 to 13 years old at grade 6 & 7, they are at a suitable age where they could be much motivated, and they have their dreams and imagination. So, I need to motivate them and give them this opportunity even if it is at the cost of the lesson time, at least for two or three students in every lesson.

How would you help them to do that?

(FP12) It is mainly having them say that. For example, a student says I want to be a doctor. Why? He says it in front of the class and it helps others to raise awareness about setting a goal. It is mainly through the first main classes when you get to meet them, you know how ambitious that student among his peers. Through the first few classes, you get to know them better. That is the best way, I think.

R. OK.

R. Would you encourage your students to find their popular cultural resources and communication technologies? Why and how?

(FP12) For me, definitely, because it worked for me. Every time I hear about Greek mythology or about film making and so on, I remember some stuff that I can relate to and can refer to because these are the stuff that I am consuming everyday whether through video games or watching movies. So, they help me even in one way or another through English learning. When I think of the word mad, I remember the movie Mad Man. I know the meaning of the word, but I know its association through the movie. I think association is a powerful tool for us. It helps me a lot and I think it will help others because in one way or another it shows that students can use English to talk about stuff they like. If it is a popular culture, it is well-done. If it is football, it is something good. So, it helps them to say the thing they like, and I can talk about it in English. It is not that hard. Another thing is that it helps me in growing up and it will help them, too.

(FP13) I think it is a good way. For example, students are naturally like stories. When I was teaching another class, I brought with me a story about the Indian culture. So, I told them about the story and the English level. I think they have learned a similar story in their course book. But, they like the way I was telling it. using other resources like novels might be a good way to teach students as novels are not taught in school because of the level of difficulty. But, they can use novels that are at a low level of difficulty. There are novels that are published in Arabic but could be translated into English like novels about the Prophet Mohammed peace be upon him. It is not very hard and could be used for children.

R. Ok.

R. Would you like to contribute to the shaping of technological applications for language learning in Oman? How & Why?

(FP12) For me, yah, definitely. I have been learning English at the university for five years and I am part of the Omani culture, so I think I know what interests me as a learner and I think that will help me reflect on what I will be developing. One article I wrote in my website is about how to improve learning English through video games and it was mainly about tips. That was the most highly viewed through the blog that I have. Definitely, I am in.

(FP13) I really like technology for learning instead of the old ways of using books. Through watching a video, I was teaching the class about present continuous. I showed them a video of Mr. Ben and the subtitle about present continuous and present simple. I was surprised that after watching the video, students were able to distinguish between the two. Previously, they did not understand the difference between present continuous and present simple. So, I think it is a good way to create new technological applications for teaching and learning. I also know another teacher who teaches history and he makes presentations on PowerPoint because his students do not like reading from the course book. It is all about reading. So, he is making presentations on PowerPoint and that makes the students motivated throughout the lesson.

R. In your opinion, do you support the incorporation of Web 2.0 technological applications into your language teaching and learning at a tertiary level?

(FP12) Yes, definitely. In the university, it helps a lot because we have the Moodle and we use it a lot. It helps a lot because if I write something on twitter, I would probably remember that info forever. So, I think yes definitely. I think it helps and it will be helpful.

(FP13) I really support this idea. At the tertiary level, most students are at different levels of learning and knowledge. So, interaction with other people through these technologies might help them a lot, as not to depend on the classroom. So, in the classroom, there is a teacher and most of the students might be from the same culture. Through web 2.0, they could interact with other students from other cultures, so they could learn and share their experiences with them.

(FP12) We are learning while we are having fun.

R. Would you like to recommend alternative ways for teaching and learning English in Oman?

(FP12) Students need to be aware that the role of the teacher is not to give them the answer and leave, but they need to learn by themselves and be autonomous. So, this is one way. Another thing is to have confidence on your students that they can do it. One day, when the supervisor was visiting me, I had a lesson about two tasks only. I thought that my students would not finish it. But, while doing it, I was surprised that I had 15 minutes more. On that day, they were better, and I was surprised. So, we must not underestimate students, and even give them the chance to learn by themselves, to teach each other, and give them the chance to do presentations and talk in front of the class without a paper. Allow them be the teachers. When they are teaching, they will find a way to explain it better because they know the students better than us. Yes, I think this is one way.

(FP13) I would really like to give the students the chance to talk with their peers, but I would like to search for another method to prevent them from speaking in Arabic. So, I would like to think of something to make them speak with their peers in groups in English. It is about making a fundamental change to the whole lesson rather than using the textbook. They could make something so that they could learn through practice, not only through writing and reading from the textbook.

R. OK. That is the end of our fifth meeting. Thank you, gentlemen, for such a thought-provoking discussion.

APPENDIX 11

Sample of Focus Group Discussion (Group B, Session 6)

Group B: Sixth Focus Group Discussion (6FGD)

R. Hello ladies. This is our last meeting and I am very happy to see you here.

To begin with, I would like to summarise the main points of our previous meeting to confirm that my understanding of your discussion is exactly what you meant. You reflected on your teaching practice, highlighting your perceptions and perspectives in this regard. Finally, you recommended alternative ways for teaching and learning English in Oman. Today, you are invited to self-report the impact of the present study on your understanding of autonomy, identity, and motivation. So, let me ask you this question:

R. Why have you chosen to take part in this study?

(FP7) Honestly, I chose to be part of this research because I was really interested in the whole topic. It is something that I have not done before. I thought that would be really a good experience as a new thing and because it is in a field that I am interested in so that was really encouraging. Also, I see myself as a researcher in the future. Having taken research courses, it was really encouraging to see that in real life rather than just in a course. So, those are the reasons that really encouraged me.

(FP10) The first thing that came to my mind is that I would have the opportunity to speak out my thoughts and to share them with others and know others' ideas about teaching and learning as well. I wanted to know how others feel about being a teacher, so that's why I participated.

(FP11) Because we are nearly graduating, I think this is the perfect chance for us to start participating in these things. If it is not now, then when? So, this is the perfect chance for us. I also wanted to challenge myself to know that I can do this. Also, to add to our experience and share our experiences as well.

(FP9) For me, it is the same. I was interested in the topic. And kind of spontaneously I do it, agreeing to participate and participating in this research. Also, it is something we have never heard like group discussions. what is it exactly? And how is it done? I have never had the chance to do it, so that what encouraged me to participate. Also, it is a group discussion on a topic we are all interested in. Also, we are participating by ourselves and we are not forced to participate. It is not compulsory. I thought by doing this in a group discussion, I kind of foresee how the outcome and the benefits I am getting by participating. So, I enrolled in it.

R. Interesting.

R. Has your participation in the study influenced your visions of your future L2 selves?

(FP9) Being a researcher is one thing. I know now how group discussion is done and I have the chance to compare it with questionnaires. I realise now that I can do it only at a beginning point to get the basic information I need for the research. But, the group discussions give more elaborations. There is no kind of authority, so the participant has more freedom to express their ideas. When I put the questions in the questionnaires, I am kind of restricting participants as if I have the direction for them. But, in the group discussions, I can make some changes throughout the interview or someone can add new dimensions to the research. So, one point is that I want to be a researcher. I know now more about the concept of identity,

motivation, and how this is linked to Web 2.0 tools or virtual spaces. By linking all of this and building the knowledge we came up at the end of the research by participating in these discussions, I have some kind of highlights or conclusions that I can kind of link it to the theories that I have already read. By adding or commenting on the teaching methodologies that we are now taking and see what their weak points are and adding some changes, so it fits the new generation.

R. Interesting.

(FP7) It is pretty much the same. It is like exploring the whole process we are having, beginning from the type of collecting data, and going through it, and realising the different aspects of the whole thing.

(FP10) What I mostly like about the research is that you do not visualise yourself as a number in the research, but you visualise yourself as an individual that all his ideas being listened to and analysed. So, this is what I like most about the study.

(FP9) It is also about collaboration in learning because we have now the chance to build knowledge through these discussions and kind of being aware if we want to apply this process. So, we are aware how students will be in group discussions.

(FP7) I think we will not just leave this discussion without taking it away with us and practise it in the future. It is very intimate and does not contain any negative aspect from other individuals. It is really beneficial and an effective way of teaching as well for certain topics at least when you have your children and students around you so that you discuss intimately with them without having barriers in front of you and discuss topics with them and have them practise the language. It is really beneficial. We can apply that in the future.

R. Can you describe your initial expectation of the research project prior to the first conversational session? Did you find your expectation similar or contrary to your actual experience during the sessions?

(FP7) Initially, I did not know what was going to happen because everything was new.

(FP7) The topic was the only thing I know because I am interested in virtual social spaces. But how we are going to link it to teaching and how it is linked to identity, I have never heard someone discussing that before like identity in the virtual space. I heard arguments that people are hiding their identities, but I did not realise how it is related to autonomy and teaching. So, I use it as a tool for learning, but applying it was vague to me. But, now, at the end of these discussions, I really benefit from it. And form a shape of the research, in general, how the questions are built, how it is going to benefit me, and how it is linked to my interest and my future identity I am seeking and my goals. So, I had some kind of questions, initially.

(FP10) For me, I thought we are going to argue a lot and finding a hard time for discussing. It is like you are opening the door for silent people and whenever you open the floor for them, they will speak out and never stop talking. But, I think they are much more professional than what I expected, and we came to understand each other. So, that is what I liked about it.

(FP7) I was worried about the environment. I just could not imagine how the environment would be with strangers and talking about something I am passionate about. They might have

their own perspectives about these things. Are we going to argue? Is it going to be a boring interview? Those were my initial expectations.

R. And then? Were your expectations similar to or different from what you have actually experienced?

(FP7) Very different. Actually, the environment is constructive, I would call it because I am not only giving my opinion but also others are giving their opinions and commenting on mine which makes me think about my opinion twice before saying it. It makes me analyse what I am going to say. We did have arguments, but in a professional way of course. They are not like boring interviews.

(FP11) For me, I thought we would come here and throw our experiences. But, I found that it was a worthwhile experience because we have got to share our experiences and I found myself thinking about it.

R. Are there any advantages you have gained by participating in these conversational sessions? If yes, what are they? Give examples.

(FP7) I have never been in a setting where my peers have to share their opinions on such topics. It is usually done in workshops. I can't really think of other places where it happens. So, these discussions are something new. One of the advantages is that I get to practise discussions with my peers and get to know their opinions and how they think about these things. I am not alone on many aspects. Another advantage is that it will not stop here because I will use it in my future research, my teaching practice, and any other workshop I give.

(FP10) For me, it made me think of what I have been through when I was in school and what I am going to do next. It makes me more passionate about my plans for the future and makes my plans much stronger and pushes me to achieve them.

(FP9) For me, I used to say I am reflecting on my learning and that I have a goal and kind of evaluating my progress. But, after having these discussions and talking about reflection, evaluation, and collaboration, I realise that what I am doing is kind of a shallow evaluation of my progress. So, what I learned from this experience through discussing with my peers is that when I evaluate my progress in these virtual spaces because we are so autonomous. So, we do not have a structure we are having in schools. So, it helps me to build a structure or a rubric to evaluate myself. During these discussions, I learn how to evaluate myself, comparing what happened in the past and what is happening now. We learned from these discussions that we cannot be alone, we are belonging to a society, belonging to a group or community. So, we have to build some kind of encouragement or motivation to be more proficient in the language. Also, from these discussions, I realise that reflection can be self-reflection or peer-reflection, reflecting on our strategies. It is rarely to have such kind of discussions with peers, so it is really a worthwhile experience.

(FP11) For me, I think it added to both my professional and personal development. For my professional development, I got the chance to know the importance of incorporating technology into our teaching practicum and how to incorporate them. For my personal

development, I got the chance to develop social skills; for example, respecting each other, turn taking strategies, agreeing and disagreeing with each other.

R. Interesting.

R. What advantages (if any) have you gained by writing your reflective language learning histories?

(FP7) Because writing is such a high cognitive process, it brought so many unconscious things that happened in the past to our present. It brought back some of the things that I never thought of like how home/family environment inspired me to learn the language without even feeling it and what I did in school that affected the whole learning, what the teachers did, and how my peers looked at me, the activities I was involved in, and how the whole process of language learning was affected by these aspects. So, yes, it brought unconscious things to the conscious level through those reflective writings.

R. Interesting.

(FP10) What I mostly like about them is that sometimes we write things that we did not discuss here in the discussion group. It also changes our mind about things because of what we shared with each other and the different insights we get. So, we write them to benefit from it later on.

(FP7) It also encourages us to go and look up things. You know, sometimes you write about something and you would want to know more about it and read about it to see how that affects your opinion about it. So, the whole process adds to your knowledge.

(FP11) Also, we do not only write about our experiences, but also write down our feelings and how we felt at that moment. We can also look back at it anytime we want. In that way, we can feel proud of ourselves because we finally did it.

(FP7) Well, I do not have something else to add to what they have said. I just emphasise the importance of the advantages we got from this experience or writing about it. In each discussion, we focused on a particular topic. So, going back to the discussion and see how my friends have commented on that topic and also how my previous beliefs were, it gives me the chance to think why I had that belief and now it is kind of changing. It is a high-quality process because it is not like how we are now speaking spontaneously. When we are writing, we are thinking and going back to it and looking up for new information. Then, it becomes like a habit. Before, I used to write diaries and see how I did. But, now, because I had a discussion about it earlier, it motivates me to write about it. Also, it makes me proud especially if I have a strategy and my friends start to use it. So, you have a sense of producing something instead of saying I am using twitter or virtual space just to learn or that is how I formed my identity. I see it as a product in a physical shape. So, it is a vivid image of what I am doing now. Also, it helps me to see what I am going to do in the future. So, it becomes like a habit to look carefully about my progress. So, it is really beneficial to write about it instead of just speaking about it.

R. Good to hear that.

R. What is the potential impact of sharing and exchanging your language learning experiences with others?

(FP7) At the beginning, it is something courageous to do it because not everybody can share it as it is personal. Also, sometimes we fear to open up our identity to people and how we are learning. So, this is something courageous. Doing that after time, we realise it is very beneficial because it is like what we have done in these discussions. We are going to continue doing outside. After these six discussions, we might extend our discussions to social platforms to get evaluative feedback from different dimensions on our language learning strategies. Also, because we learnt from the social media how to reflect and critically think about the feedback we get, it is beneficial. Also, sometimes it is rarely to find a specialist to guide you. However, you can get it freely and easily through these platforms.

R. Interesting.

(FP7) Actually, I have given some of my reflections to professionals in the field, experts, and having their feedback and discussing with them was very encouraging. It was really a very unique experience to go through because they told me not to be so rough to yourself because it is the nature of things in this field. So, if I am promised to be given feedback, I am more likely to give my reflections to others to read because that way will be more realistic to write and people will not only read it, but also give feedback.

(FP9) I want to ask you [FP7] a question. You said that you give your reflections to specialist to get feedback. Do not you think that those specialists or experts in the field underestimate your abilities or instead of encouraging you they just do the opposite?

(FP7) Yah, that can be possible. But, thanks to God, I was not in that environment. I was in a very positive environment. After being in a class and each one did a micro teaching, then they all wrote their reflection on how it went and how would they like to improve, how they felt. Then, they were taking it personally and professionally. They were very positive actually, but not flattering you. They do not tell you the good side only, but also the areas of improvement which is very valuable, I think.

(FP9) I asked that because sometimes it is easier to give it to a friend because you are at the same level or we are learning together.

(FP11) It is better to give it to a person you know.

(FP9) If we are going directly to a person is different, but publishing it or posting it in social media where there so many people around is like I am not forcing them to give me feedback, as most of the time they reflect by themselves and give you the feedback spontaneously.

(FP11) I think also it is unfair because you have experienced something, and you learned something and then you do not share it with others. So, what is the use of it? We learn from it and let others learn from it, too.

R. Interesting.

(FP9) It also encourages you because if we are using reading techniques or building up a strategy for reading novels, it is sometimes difficult to do it. We kind of get encouragement

and motivation in the beginning, but as time passes by we feel fed up. I feel if I share it with someone else, they will encourage me. For example, if I use Goodreads, I see people setting goals and they keep going and achieving their goals, so that motivates me to see my friends doing it while I am behind. I have to keep going and doing the same, so it is like encouraging and inspiring myself.

(FP10) If you learn something and you do not share it with others, things will change by time. I am not supposed to stick to something I am thinking about, so by sharing I think that maybe others can change our minds about something to improve our thinking. So, this is one thing about sharing it with others to change our minds about fixed ideas.

R. How would you assess your involvement in this research project?

(FP7) A+.

All participants: Hahahaa

(FP9) For me, I was interested and motivated in this topic and participating in it. But, because it is a new experience for me, I felt shy in the beginning of the meetings.

(FP9) At the beginning, we were using different terminologies than what we are using now. For example, we know identity in its simple term, but we did know its link with motivation and social media. But, by discussing together, we have improved and knew better than before about it. So, we are progressing and the impact of it goes beyond the discussion time. Honestly, it affected my life because I have never experienced to speak and discuss like this for an hour or so, exchanging ideas with friends, focusing on one topic each session, sharing different ideas, and looking at it from different dimensions. I know that I am autonomous when using social media, but it does mean I learn alone. I have to see others and learn from others which is really interesting. It also taught me the importance of collaboration not only in language learning but also in learning other things. Language learning is not to get certificates, but it is bigger than that because we cannot separate it from our life. It is like asking if I have a separate online account for language learning, it is ridiculous because we cannot separate language learning from our life. It is kind of our identity. That is how I see it

(FP10) I think self-assessment is really hard, but this is the importance of reflective language learning histories because you jot down your thoughts and then you see how you have improved and how much you have learned.

(FP7) I can say that I hope I have added something to the whole discussions and certainly I take a lot from these discussions. Yes.

(FP11) I also benefited a lot. Thank you.

R. Would you participate in future research studies? Why/why not?

(FP10) Yes, it will add something new every time.

(FP10) Because we have done this field now, I would choose another field by focusing on another area that is something new again with new feelings, new experience, and new reflections. It will be very interesting, and I would love to participate in such discussions.

(FP9) When I decide to participate in this research, it comes to my mind it is something valuable. So, I will not participate in any research unless it is valuable for my country, society, or whatever the focus of the research. So, if I have the chance to participate even if it is a little thing I can add, so yes. Why not? Also, because we are going to be future teachers, it is important to participate in the topics that are related to what we are going to do so that will set the focus of ourselves and see what kind of improvement I can do. Also, if someone of us wants to be a researcher, she can build another research out of this research or focus on a certain area of this research. Also, participating in the research is also educational for us because it teaches us how the research is conducted and see not only the positive side of the research, but also the limitations of the research so that we can develop it. If we are going to do our own research and because we are now in the place of participants, we understand that instead of using questionnaires, it is beneficial to use focus group discussions. It is a great opportunity.

(FP11) I think this is only the beginning and we start from here. I hope this experience will open up other doors for research participation in the future.

R. Interesting.

(FP11) And I want to be a researcher.

R. That is great.

R. Would you continue to develop your language learning and teaching methodologies online? How? Give examples to justify your answer

(FP10) For me, yes, because some of my classmates introduced new applications for me or maybe old applications but I was not interested in them like Facebook. I was not really fan of it, but now I feel I am missing all the knowledge and fun with the articles posted there and everyone there, so I feel the need for it. I was already fan of twitter and now able to reflect on my learning process.

(FP7) Me, too. I agree with you. From these discussions, I built kind of a structure like writing my goals and yes keep learning. I realise from these discussions that it is very beneficial, as was able to see the progress that I have made and that inspires me to continue.

(FP7) We all know that a language is a big world and there is no stop from learning it. There is always something to learn from this field. There is always something new as well. There are always new teaching methodologies. There is always something beneficial to be discovered every day and researched every day, so we just need to find what suits us and apply that in our life.

(FP11) I also intend to expand my knowledge in these applications and use them all and think of the appropriate one that I am going to adopt for my teaching.

R. Can you list the main ideas and topics being discussed in this research project?

(FP9) Identity, motivation, autonomy, virtual spaces.

(FP7) We are already using virtual spaces, as we are the generation of the digital age and we are already engaged. But, of course, it gave us a new dimension to the whole thing. So, we will take that with us.

(FP9) Most of us are aware of virtual space, but it gave us more dimensions and more values like collaboration, evaluation, reflection, critical thinking. We are linking that to the learning process.

R. In your view, is there any connection between Web 2.0 technology and autonomous learning? Explain your answer

(FP7) Web 2.0 technologies are very well-known for being a web-site that encourages user-generated content and here the users (learners), for example, take responsibility for the whole process of generating that content & refining it, looking at the good side & the bad side of it, and refining& improving, and then posting the content in the web 2.0 platforms. That way makes them autonomous and take responsibility for their own learning and make sure there is a message in it. There is quality in it and it is not only about quantity. So, they focus on important aspects not only negative ones. Also, being aware of some dangerous aspects of viruses or spams or whatever is available and learn how to avoid them to prevent themselves from becoming victims is one way or another of being autonomous and knowledgeable in this field.

(FP9) We download these apps to our mobile phones without being told to do so. We start with one application, then we move to the other one. We discover these apps on our own, looking for them in YouTube and discussing about them in the social media. That is how it is linked simply. Throughout the six group discussions, we have seen how Web 2.0 is linked to the whole learning process, reflection, and how to think critically. Simply, no one forces us to use it. There are some kind of rules on how to use the programme, but how to deal with it and how to put the content in the social media gives you the freedom to do it. That is how I see it linked to autonomy.

(FP11) I think it makes us feel accountable for our own choices. We are the one who decides which tool to use, when/where to use it, we feel the responsibility of using them. For example, in teaching, we do not depend on the teacher, we get the chance to go outside the book and search for things that we use and learn from them. So, it is our responsibility to do this and not depend on others.

(FP9) We talked about one application or one virtual space, but there are different ways of using it. So, it proves what autonomy is in the virtual space like each one of us has his own way of using it. Although it has the same function, we utilise it by ourselves in the way we want it and according to the goals we want to achieve.

R. If I were to replicate this research in the future, what alternative ways for improvement would you suggest?

(FP10) You are good so far. Maybe, if it is done online, it would be better. I know that face to face is much better, but online would be much suitable for you because you can analyse it smoothly and adding more participants would be much easier.

(FP7) Maybe adding experimental work or focusing on one social media, as it will give you the chance to delve deeply into one technology and discuss or see the impact of these activities or concepts like identity, motivation, and autonomy.

(FP7) Maybe adding more participants within a group because I would like to hear others' opinions on the same topic and on the same question. It is really nice.

(FP9) It is good to have a controlled group or a group that do not have any experience with social media before, and then just see their knowledge by raising their awareness. At the beginning, get a sense of their knowledge about it and then give them an experiment or expose them to one of these technologies and see what the results at the end. But, I think it will be more controlled and see the authentic results. But, while we are now participating, we have different backgrounds and different experiences. Some of us are well-exposed to the social media while the others use the virtual space but not the other because our goals are different. It is the first research conducted in this context in Oman, and looking at the limitations beginning from arranging time, finding participants and so on, I see it an excellent research and the chosen instrument is well-conducted. It is also good to have group discussions because we have different backgrounds and different experiences. Also, we have not been exposed to it before, so it was very beneficial to choose this one. If you had chosen the questionnaires only, then I do not think you will get much information.

R. Thank you, ladies. I do sincerely appreciate your participation and truly value your input.

All participants: thank you, too.

APPENDIX 12

Sample of Language Learning Histories (FP5, Group A)

LLH Written by FP5, group B.

➤ My Language Learning Experience at School and University

I really enjoyed learning English during my school days, yet I had a very different and strange feeling about it at the beginning. We were introduced to English when we reached grade 4 which is considered to be too late according to today's standards. I was excellent, and I was able to learn the language very easily. At the very beginning, I learned English for the sake of grades but nothing else. Then, everything changed when I gave myself reasons and purposes to learn the language, so I started to like and enjoy learning a second language. The school and the classroom weren't equipped with the needed facilities such as technological aids. My teachers didn't vary their teaching methods. The problem was that they were forced to finish the curriculum in a fixed time. Sometimes, they wanted to do something else with us, but the time limitation prevented them from doing anything unrelated to the curriculum. The curriculum that was used with us was essentially simple. To be honest, some of my teachers really had a great influence in my life. They motivated me to learn the language and keep learning it through their words, actions and their enthusiasm while teaching. In the university, my experience in learning English has been enriching. I loved that language because I had and still have so many opportunities to learn and practice the language with anglophone speakers or international speakers of English through the virtual space. This kind of communication raised my confidence and made the person that I wanted to be: a caller for Islam. During the past years at the university, I have learned so many things, not only about the language or my study, but also, about myself and what I can do. Sometimes, I felt that this experience is overwhelming, but then, I have realised that it was all for my benefit if I want to be the person and the teacher I want to be. I grasped some opportunities outside the classroom; some of them were having discussions with other teachers, participating in courses and committees, conducting my own workshops, and finding opportunities using different technologies. I love using blogs to write my dairies and to reflect on my learning experience. Also, I use YouTube to find out more about the world around me and search for something that will help me improve myself and my proficiency in the language. In my opinion, the successful learner is the one who believes in his/herself, accepts the challenges and finds solutions, tries hi/her best to be a better person, seize all opportunities, finds way to help others, initiates, thinks realistically but keeps dreaming. My experience at the university will remain memorable and successful because it shows me that I am a successful learner and person and that I can do whatever I want just if I believe and work hard.

➤ **English Language Learning Through Virtual Social Spaces**

During my study at the university, I have learned that learning a language requires me to find other ways to master and don't rely only on the teacher as I did at school. I found that using technology might do the trick since it provides us with a wide range of activities and information. I found myself in desperate need of using technology and learning English online. One of my friends stimulated my interest toward the different applications and virtual spaces, so I decided that it was the time to be a digital learner. Fortunately, the internet was available at the university and we have free access to WIFI. The university has many computer labs that we can use freely. I like using blogs because I love writing; you don't know how much I love writing. I also want to share my learning experience and learn about what others are doing to learn English. Somehow, I use blogs to reflect upon my experience and express my thoughts. Before getting to know how valuable an online experience can be, I used to be afraid from using any app. I don't know why, but I preferred to stay away from them. When I saw how much my friends were progressing, I felt small inside and that I am a poor creature. Then, I decided that it is the time for change. If I want to achieve my dreams, I have to wake up. I started to use different applications and different websites, mostly to read in English or to have some practice in the grammatical areas. Before engaging in such activities, I used to write my goals or what I want to achieve while using the Internet with its all different spaces. Some of these goals were reading two short stories, chatting with English speakers or one of my friends, do online quizzes, watching English channels, writing about an event or a person in my blog, commenting on others' writings and so on. Whenever I accomplished a goal, I would put a tick beside that goal and this made me so happy. Of course, when using any app or any Web 2.0 virtual spaces, each one must be aware of his/her roles and responsibilities to avoid any problem. I am very careful in choosing the website or the activities that I want to be engaged in. I believe that each one should have control over his/her activity online. I usually use the Internet for the sake of learning because I really want to achieve my goals and dreams. I don't want to be a burden in my society rather I want to be a builder. For sure, there will be obstacles and difficulties in my way of learning the language, yet the most important thing to me is to keep working and trying. It doesn't matter if I failed in doing something. What matters is that I don't fail again. I used to have a difficulty in communicating my message or my thoughts and that prevented me from participating. When I started to use Blogs and write as much as I want and comment on others' blogs, I felt that I was able to do it and so it was. Even my writing has improved. Every application or virtual space I am using has helped me to develop my English Language learning. For example, podcasts helped me to improve my speaking and listening skills. It helped a lot when it comes to the articulation of sounds. Blogs has helped me to improve my writing and communication skills. Using them to communicate with others, read their comments and provide my own comment helped me to evaluate my progress. When someone responds to your writing and then, you start a conversation with that person, this means that you are able to communicate in the language which means that you have reached the communicative competence. My online progress was

transferred to my study in formal classrooms and in my assignments. I got high scores and that made me flying out of happiness. It had a great effect on my motivation in the sense that I became highly motivated to complete my journey and achieve my dreams. Frankly, this progress in learning a second language made me feel special and unique. I don't struggle when I want to speak or read or write. I feel confident and am able to communicate with everyone regardless of their background or nationality. I am able to understand what others might find difficult or irritating. This is because I am an excellent English learner. When I see others, who don't know English or struggle to communicate in the language, I feel that I have to help them. My peers and friends were – and still are – an important part of learning journey. We used to conduct small online groups as we are from different parts of Oman, so we discuss anything related to our study or learning English. They always provide me with feedback whether orally or online as a written feedback. Consulting them widen my view toward the world and give me new strategies on how to change something to be better. Now, while we are doing our teaching practice, we advise each other on how to teach in a better way, how to deliver the content and how to deal with the students. This sense of belonging to this group, to the community of the university, to the society, to my country, to my family, to my hometown, to the Arab and Islamic World, to the humanity, and to the community of teachers makes me understand why I am here and what I should do. It motivates me to work hard and make the needed change starting from myself and ending in the humanity level. Because of this, I have created my own virtual space on Facebook, Twitter, Word Press, Sound Cloud and others. I wanted to share my views, thoughts and attitudes. I wanted my voice to be heard. Sometimes, in the formal classroom, I can't say whatever comes to my mind or let me say, whatever is in my mind. Through the online space, I can release my thoughts and speak my mind, showing the world that I am not a blind follower, rather I am a critical thinker and believer. I am aware of the restrictions and limitations and I am not going beyond that, yet I want to cross the line and speak. Working or learning online has promoted my autonomy to take responsibility for my learning. It teaches me how to be an independent learner who seeks opportunities everywhere to improve. I am not with the idea of not learning in a formal classroom, yet I am with the idea of linking online language learning to classroom learning. As teachers, we can make use of technology in our classroom. We can use online games, videos, blogs, chat rooms or any other spaces to enhance the quality of our teaching and to make the learning environment funny and engaging. The most important issue is that these classrooms should be prepared and equipped with the necessary facilities and technological aids. Regarding my language learning strategies, I use online websites and blogs to improve my writing skill. Also, I chat with my friends in English. Sometimes, I talk to myself and keep imaging myself in certain situations and act as if they were real. This might sound crazy, but it really helps me to motivate myself and develop some aspects of the language.

➤ **My Future L2 Selves**

When I think of what I want to be in the future, my family comes to my mind. They always view me as a strong, helpful, ambitious person. Because of that, I want to be that person and teacher. I really want to be a better person; a change leader. One day, my students would say, "Miss [...] has a great impact on us. She changes our life". This is what I want to be in the future; a great teacher and this is not an easy task. It requires hard working and commitment to the message we- as future teachers- are carrying and the roles we are playing. I am a future English teacher, so English plays a major role in my future self. It is the core of my career and life. I will be using it with my students, colleagues, and people from around the world. I am not going to limit my communication to the school's or the country's level because I really want to reach the communicative competence and the native-like proficiency. Because of that, I always visualise myself speaking in English everywhere. I am not saying that I will be speaking it all the time because I am an Arab and my Arabic is part of my identity. What I am visualising is that I am using English to reach my high goals, to be able to converse with and understand others from different parts of the globe, and to share my ideas and speak in a wider range. As I mentioned earlier, I am an English teacher and learner, so speaking it and using it in different contexts and with different people will definitely contribute to my success. Looking at the stage I am in now, I am fully aware that I have an advanced level of English and I am able to communicate in it, so I am successful. Because I want to be that great person and teacher in the future, I am working hard on my strategies of learning. My learning behavior has changed since I started to realise that I want to be someone who contributes to the prosperity of humanity. I started to use different technologies and applications that I have never used before. Sometimes, I keep talking to myself just to improve my speaking skills or even imagine situations and try to think and write solutions. Having personal accounts on Twitter, Facebook and WordPress helped me a lot to realise my future self and achieve some of my goals when posting my comments or sharing my ideas and thoughts. They are all about me; they reflect different aspects of my personality. All my posts are somehow showing how I view the world and things around me and they are originally my ideas, thoughts and perspectives. They connect me to the world and give me the chance to express anything inside of me. You can say that they are self-expression tools. They show you that, in today's world, it is a MUST to learn English if anyone wants to reach their goals. It is really necessary to learn English so that we know how to face any problem and reach our full potential. Because I have learned English and I am fluent in it, everyone around me is amazed and thinks that I am special. I mean by everyone my family, friends, teachers and others whom I don't know. This really motivates me to keep going and work hard to show them that nothing is impossible. In Oman, English is needed and required. It has a very high status in the society. People think that those who speak English and are fluent in it are

very unique, well-educated and prestigious. Now, everyone is learning or trying to learn English because they know that to reach that ultimate success, English is an essential part of the journey. People tend to learn English through online courses and because of that technology becomes important. It is true that not all places in Oman have a network connection, yet technology is wide-spreading. Nowadays, schools are equipped with different technological aids and are enhanced through the use of Web 2.0 technologies. Keep learning, working hard and never giving up our dreams help us reach our future self.

➤ **Educational Affordances of Blogs**

I have my own personal blog where I share my ideas, thoughts and attitudes or anything I find and like. Most of my posts are my own writings. Because I love writing, I like to post my writings and share them in my blog. Some of them are on academic issues, others are about general issues. I like to write about different things and read about different things or know how people view these things. Blogging helped me to realise my potentials and what I am able to do, to express my thoughts, to show my view, to say my opinion, to share my experience and improve my writing, communication and critical thinking skills. When I comment on my friends or followers, questioning or challenging or just responding to them, it helps me to think critically before I post anything because every word is counted on me. My comments and their comments are very useful to both sides. In blogging, we are taking and giving. Sharing in itself is a valuable experience. When someone provides me with feedback, I start to realise my own strengths and weaknesses. I will know the areas in which I should improve. I wished I could use blogging with my students while I am doing my teaching practice, but they are children and they are not exposed to such technology yet. Maybe, in the future, I will be able to use blogs with my students because I believe that they will help them a lot in their language learning journey. To me, blogging helps me to reflect upon my teaching practice. Actually, every week, I write a reflection. Sometimes, I write daily reflections because I feel that I have to do so, and I really want to express my feelings and thoughts. I just want to go through the experience one more time and see what I was doing right and what I was doing wrong. When I read my posts and reflections, I feel that I want to do something or let me say I want to change and lead change not only in my students' lives, but also in my own life as a person and a teacher. It motivates me to do my best and try to achieve my goals. Writing in my own blog gives me a chance to show the world who I truly am and gives the world a chance to see my inner self. I believe that through blogging, people will not judge me based on some unfair prejudices regarding religion and race before even hearing from me. Rather, they will see the true me. Academically, their comments and feedback will show me my progress especially if I am in the journey of learning; learning anything. My communication and conversation with them will ensure me or tell me if I am on the right path.

➤ **Reflections on Teaching Practice**

While I am doing my teaching practice, I always think of who the successful teacher is and I believe that this person is the one who accepts the challenges, works hard to achieve his/her goals, inspires his/her students, changes their life to the best, encourages them to dream and work hard to achieve these dreams, stimulates their interest on the subject, facilitates their learning journey, guides them in their path of being autonomous learners and loves his/her job and students. Every teacher has his/her own strengths and weaknesses. For me, I know that I can be or I should say I am a successful teacher, yet I need to improve my classroom management strategies. I love teaching especially children, yet I know that they might be very active and energy-consuming. Because of that, I always plan my lesson and know what to give them. I always prepare plan B in case plan A doesn't work. Thank God, my lessons go smoothly and most importantly, my students are learning. I can tell this from their participation and their performance in the different activities during the lessons. Sometimes, I assign roles to my students and give them the chance to lead an activity because I want them to learn how to be responsible for their own learning. I would be so happy to see them taking charge of their own learning. Many educational institutions are working on the concept of autonomy because they want their students to be independent learners and they want to prepare them to face the world with strong personalities. Our culture encourages autonomy that is linked with unity. This means that you are responsible about your own learning, yet you have to work collaboratively with others to be successful. We are in the era of technology, so I believe that technology should be used to enhance the learning and teaching process. Online social platforms can help build autonomous learners when they are encouraged to find their popular communication technologies or websites. These platforms will help them express themselves in a more comfortable way and show their creativity because the classroom environment limit students' autonomy. Regarding the methods used in this study, I am thinking of using them with my students. I like the idea of writing language learning histories or journals, so I might ask my students to keep one, and then share it with me. I would like to shape the technological applications for language learning in Oman. Through learning more about them and taking courses to practice them and how the work, I would be able to contribute to the shaping of these technologies. Because I believe that technology might do the trick and ease the teaching and learning process, I am with the integration of it into language teaching and learning at the school and university level.

➤ **Reflection on my Participation in the Research**

Why have I chosen to take part in this study? Well, because I have different reasons for this. First, I did a research paper on technology and autonomy in language learning and this study sheds light on a different angle, so I wanted to know more about it. Second, my friends said that they will participate, so I wanted to be with them. I see myself as a professional and well-educated person by taking part in this study. Actually, I wanted to see myself and ensure that I am applying all what I have learned. At the beginning, I thought that there will be individual interviews, so I felt that it is going to be overwhelming. Then, I found out that there will be group discussions. Then, I thought that they are going to be boring. But, everything was just amazing, and I really enjoyed while discussing different issues with the researcher and my friends. I can say that my participation was so useful not only for the researcher, but also for me and my friends. We came to articulate our unconscious thoughts about ourselves and our plans for the future and writing the LLHs made the experience much more enjoyable and wonderful. If there will be future studies, I would absolutely participate. I start to love research!

The topic of the study was really great and there were so many important concepts such as autonomy, identity, motivation, Web 2.0 technologies, future selves and so on. It is another proof of how technology can promote autonomy in language learners when having their own accounts and sharing the world their experience; taking and giving at the same time. If this study is going to be repeated, it would be more enjoyable and applicable to the research if it is done online like having a blog where these discussions are held. This study motivates me to continue developing my teaching and learning methodologies online and find innovative ways of teaching my students and guiding them to reach the autonomy level and achieve their dreams.

APPENDIX 13

Sample of Language Learning Histories (FP7, Group B)

LLH written by FP7, group B.

My Experience of Learning English at School and University

Being a part of a multilingual family has deeply affected my learning of the English language. All of my three older siblings are able to speak English fluently. This made me naturally curious about English and learning it automatically became one of my main goals that I thought will inevitably happen. My peers at school had a negative attitude towards the language. They thought of it as a hard language to study and that it was unnecessary to learn. I was the absolute opposite. I loved it just as much I loved Arabic. Seeing my siblings fluent in English made me believe that I can learn it and become fluent as well. Though, at times, it was challenging, but it never demotivated me, mainly because these challenges were very rare. I would actually become demotivated when they weren't there.

The curriculum was too easy for me with little challenges here and there. Speaking was my favorite part and, unfortunately, it was the rarest part. We were not given few chances to practice speaking. Grammar, however, was very structured and not much effective exercises were given.

As a high achiever, my teachers would always have me participate in the English club of the school and would always encourage me to participate in the presentation competitions between the schools in the area. Yet, the teachers didn't pay much attention to the students who needed intensive help, nor did they provide challenges for the high achievers. I was one of the high achievers and I didn't find much challenges. I was actually demotivated when the teachers wouldn't allow me to answer because they were trying to give a chance for other students to participate. This got me bored and has affected my enthusiasm. I was also asked to help the weaker students in the language in certain tasks, and by help I mean telling them the answers without much discussion or explanation. My assistance to those students might have been better, if I were taught how to peer tutor those students.

In my school days, I didn't have well defined goals. However, now my major is English language teaching and I chose it because it is what I love. I'm very confident in it and what's better than teaching what you love to others and confidently! I just couldn't imagine my future without this language and being a university student makes me very grateful because it

has provided me with so many opportunities to improving and using English outside classroom through virtual space that was available in my university. The online space provided me with such a positive and supporting environment. Through cyberspace, too, I met students who share similar interests and goals as I. They help me to be concentrated on my goals and push me further to improve and develop as a person and as a student. After all, a successful learner is the one who knows their weaknesses and seeks to overcome them by searching for chances outside the classroom to put their language into practice.

English Learning Through Virtual Spaces

I believe most of my language learning has been done outside classrooms. That's through reading and watching videos online. I'm a lover of YouTube. I just enjoy watching videos on it and hear people using the language in their real life which makes the importance of this language more authentic. I also enjoy reading quotes and people's tweets in English which adds a lot to my vocabulary as I sit there surfing through Twitter. I feel that the reason behind me being attracted towards these virtual spaces is that I have the freedom to choose the content. I get to choose what I want to read, watch and listen. This option, unfortunately is not available in a classroom environment. Moreover, being a visual and auditory learner, virtual social spaces have helped me to match my learning process to suit my learning styles. Social media also give me control over the time and the duration. I get to choose when to start and for how long. In addition, by having good social media I get to make my own personal goals, unlike school where the goals are already set by the teachers. For example, I'll go on YouTube and choose to focus on the usage of a certain grammar tense. My goals are usually around using the language proficiently and speaking accurately, yet I find myself focusing on aspects that I hadn't intended as I watch a video. For example, instead of focusing on a certain tense only, I find myself looking up the new vocabulary, trying to pronounce them accurately, and practicing to use the new structures. This assures me that I do actually have full control on my learning. Online learning doesn't bother me because there is no test at the end of the session, nor is there a teacher to ask me about my learning process. It's only me experiencing the language and trying to flow with it towards my ultimate goal of proficiency and accuracy.

In these virtual spaces, I am a member in many of the groups related to learning and teaching English. I don't quite post in these groups, but I do certainly read their posts. These groups

are very beneficial as they project some very important issues in the field and they provide me with an opportunity to respond, ask questions, reply and give my opinion on these matters. Other than the groups, there are so many accounts that I'm subscribed to. What is good about these accounts is that I don't have to go to them, but they come to me in my homepage as I surf one of these social media applications or websites. This is one way of personalising my accounts on the social media. One way is to put these accounts in different categories. For example, on Facebook, I have so many pages that I have liked, so I would put all the pages related to writing under one-page list. Whenever I click on the title of the list, I will have all the pages related to it below.

I believe that online language learning is very different from formal classroom learning. Online learning provides more freedom to choose the content, duration, the time, the location and the learning style. I believe online learning really encourages autonomy. Users try to take responsibility of their own learning and encourage themselves by themselves, set goals for themselves and evaluate their progress. There are of course ways of merging online learning with classroom learning by integrating technology and the use of social media in the curriculum. This integration encourages me and adds to my responsibility in my future teaching practices to push my students towards autonomy. People, however, should be careful when they are learning online because they have to choose the suitable materials that they would like to learn about. They also should be careful because they don't want to be attacked by viruses, spam or false accounts. They must make sure that whatever they are subscribing to goes along with their values and their beliefs.

My Future L2 Selves

I picture myself to be a successful lecturer of English and a researcher in the future. I would not only be using the language in my practice at my work, but I will also be conducting research with this language. I also picture myself speaking English with all my students at all times as well as my colleagues, boss and friends. I do believe that speaking in English is a significant part and it will highly contribute to my success. Having this strong image of myself in the future, it always encourages me to do well in my studies to reach the goals that I have set for myself. It also encourages me to participate in extracurricular activities, as they also add to my skills, experiences and knowledge. The internet as well helps me reach my goal by following and looking at models in the virtual world and seeing their issues, reading

about their experience which really helps me to pursue my goal. This also has affected me in the way I personalised my own social media account which is related to teaching and learning. I appreciate my friends' and family's support because they always encourage me to learn English and perfect it. Yet, I never found myself under pressure to learn English. I don't think I would have enjoyed any subject as much as I have enjoyed learning English.

Many Omanis are learning English language. It has become one of the most important languages to be added in one's CV in order to get accepted in a job. Technology, too, is developing in Oman, being adopted and integrated in different fields such as education and the government. For those who were not able to learn English at school, technology would enable them to be responsible of their own language learning.

L2 Community and Its Culture Through Online Social Spaces

All my ideas about English speaking countries is formed by movies, pop songs, YouTube Vlogs and English literature. Yet, I do not have any desire to get immersed into Anglophone cultures. I do appreciate their positive values such as respecting the time and being polite. This makes me excited to have a conversation with someone from this culture and technology has made this very easy. However, I don't believe that English language belongs only to those countries, as it has become an international language that belongs to the whole world. English is used in scientific research and social media; it is the language you need when you travel abroad. English is very helpful in spreading knowledge about my country, its traditions, language, culture and values to the world. Technology made it way easier to do that. For example, I can do that at home from my desktop through all the virtual spaces available to the world. Therefore, I don't think that English is a threat to my culture.

Educational Affordances of Twitter

Twitter is one of the virtual social spaces that I am fond of. I like to represent it in a way that suits my needs and my goals. One simple way of representing my Twitter account as well as many of the social media accounts is by following or adding the accounts that I am interested in so that when I go to my homepage, I find what those accounts are posting. Another way of representing it is by adding information about myself in my bio section. This is useful because it tells my followers who I am and what my interests are. I can follow them back, as it is most likely that my followers may have the similar interests as mine. Some of these

interests that I stated in my bio are related to my academic life. On Twitter, I follow people who have an interest in educational matters and some of those people are my peers as well as ministries, organisations, and teachers. I like how twitter enables me to respond to their tweet, discuss them, give my opinion, share and re-tweet their ideas. I find myself motivated when I respond to my peers by commenting on their tweets, replying to them, discussing issues with them more than any other people.

There are many advantages of using Twitter. One important feature on Twitter is that I can only use 144 characters When I write a tweet. This feature really forces me to be critical of what I am going to say because I have to choose words wisely and within these 144 characters. I have to convey my ideas as clearly as possible within this limit. Another advantage of using Twitter is that it enables me to keep up with the trending hashtags. Whenever there's a big event happening, Twitter has the feature of displaying the trends in a certain country. Hashtags also help me to find topics directly related to your concerns through the search bar. One beautiful feature of Twitter is that in order to keep up with a certain account's tweets, I don't have to go to the application to read others' tweets because this feature brings the tweets to my notification bar. I can also receive the tweets as a text message. Also, reading about others' experience in the field of teaching and learning English always raises comparisons to my own practices, making my reflections more critical. During teaching practice, too, I use Twitter to communicate with my peers about issues I am encountering and discuss solutions related to them. I also share ideas, new methods of teaching and activities to do with my students in class.

Interacting with other teachers motivates me to interact more with them, tweet more on different subjects and wait for others to respond and give opinions on my tweets. My goals are generally about improving my experience of learning English and learning from others' experiences. I usually assess myself by looking back at my old tweets and see how I've improved. This encourages me to improve in the future by interacting more, getting to know more people in the field, discussing matters with specialist as well as keeping up with the latest news or trends in the field of education.

Reflection on Teaching Practicum

To me, a successful teacher is the one who builds knowledge with her students, bearing in mind the students' learning styles as well as relating everything she teaches to the real-world

use. Encouraging learners to be autonomous must also be an ultimate goal. One of the teachers' responsibilities is to be up to date with all the trends that are happening in order to practise their job in the best way possible. Whenever I think of my weaknesses as a teacher, error correction comes to my mind first because I would like my students to master the language. Yet, a teacher always has to emphasise the language focus of a certain lesson rather than just goes in general with the language. This is a very challenging thing to do because there are so many techniques to follow and to choose a suitable one is confusing and critical. However, my strength as a teacher trainee is, I believe, that I provide a role model for my students and I can teach them different strategies from my experience of learning the language effectively.

Every teacher is aware of the importance of a lesson plan because it guides you towards meeting the objective set for a lesson. It also helps to decide a way to evaluate or assess. Therefore, in a well-organised lesson, there is no time is wasted. I usually evaluate my students by their application of the materials studied on a certain day and their confidence level when they are using the language in focus. I am aware of the new trend of autonomy in learning and moving from teacher- centered to learner-centered approach; therefore, it has become important for all teachers to give more responsibilities and opportunities to the students to take care of their own learning. I believe that there are so many students who are autonomous in our schools. They just need to be further encouraged by the teacher. A teacher can do so by discussing with students to check their progress, providing them with new dimensions and by introducing new resources for them. However, autonomy is still a new trend here in Oman. It is still not fully achieved because school teachers are still traditional and not provided with enough workshops or training that can help them understand the ways with which they can apply the different methods to encourage students' autonomy. Small things like having the student looking up a new word instead of spoon-feeding them the meaning of a certain word. I would encourage them to look for it on their own. I would have them analyse texts and contribute to the class rather than just giving them all the information. One other important way through which we can promote autonomy is helping students identify their learning styles and the strategies related to it that can help them learn effectively.

As a future teacher, I see myself to be having very interactive classes where I inspire students to always improve and get them to depend on themselves only not anybody else. In this

journey, I believe that social media would be my partner because it provides such rich experiences of teachers from around the world. It also provides a way to contact them and discuss the practices with them. It is always a plus to share my experiences and discuss them with others because it provides living models and it give you something to think critically about. It also motivated you to apply the new methods in the future practices.

From my point of view, I found this research discussion quite intimate and reflective. Therefore, I would actually enjoy applying it in my teaching practices because I would like my students to speak their minds freely without being afraid. At the same time this would encourage them to think critically while they do it. writing LLH is also very effective because speaking is different from writing and because they have the time to go back and check their writing, look up evidence to support their argument.

Everybody has their own preferred cultural resources and communication technologies. As a teacher, your role remains in showing students the positive and the negative sides of these resources and let them decide for themselves what is more suitable to their learning style.

I am a lover of Technology. I always try to attend workshops related to technology and education here in the university. I do have a big interest, yet I'm not able to create a professional website or an application. However, I think I can really help the developers and whoever wants to link their products with education. As a teacher, I can help in evaluating the effectiveness, measuring and reviewing it, too. I can connect the developers to the students and ask for the students' opinions and give it as a feedback for the developers. I believe this link between developers and teachers should always be there. I'm definitely for the integration of 2.0 technologies in language learning at the territory level. Even though it is very rare in our school system, it's definitely worth it because the students are born in a digital era. As teachers, we should encourage them to think critically about what they are going to use and their dangers.

Teaching English in Oman can improve is by providing continuous workshops for teachers so that they can improve, and they become aware of the newest trends. They can learn how to engage their students more in the most effective way. Teachers should also take care of each student and not be in a rush in the class. There should also be a special time for weak students. There should be more time specialised for those students after class, after school, or extra classes because no child should be left behind.

Reflections on Research Participation

I have chosen to take part in this study because it was something new that I have never done before. I was really motivated because it is related to my major- language and education- which is my greatest interest. I have never been a part of a research before, so I thought of it as a good chance to know what happens in the process of conducting a research. I have taken research theoretically, but never been in the practice of it.

By reading participant information sheet, I get to know that there will be discussions. Initially, I thought that it is going to be boring. However, the real discussions were actually the opposite. They were very encouraging, very warm. I'm really glad that I participated in this research because I had the chance to sit with my peers and discuss some issues with them. This experience allowed me to see how my peers saw things related to teaching and the education system here in Oman and how they are dealing with issues. Having them accept and support my input is what I really do appreciate. After the discussions, writing the reflective language learning history was a beneficial process. Because I have discussed most of the topics with my peers in a discussion form, I would really like to share my language learning history in a social online platform.

I hope that I added valuable contributions to these to our discussions. After this experience, I am motivated to participate in future research studies because learned quite a lot that we don't usually learn or experience outside this environment. I learned from my peers, how they improved their language through social media, which encouraged me to try new ways of learning. For example, my peer used Facebook and she would discuss different issues with her friends there. I am now more motivated to actually go on these social media and be more active in a productive way. I believe that it is exactly what the connection between Web 2.0 technologies and autonomous learning is; it encourages people to participate more than just receive and this encourages them to be able to acquire critical thinking skills, good writing skills, and convincing skills.

Overall, I'm very grateful for this experience as it brought some of the unconscious ideas and practices of mine to the conscious level and made me aware of them. I appreciate that I was given the chance to sit with my peers to discuss different issues because it rarely ever

happens in such settings. I'm also grateful for this experience because it is related to the current trend of autonomy, Web 2.0 technologies and their integration in our educational systems. I'm grateful for this study because it encouraged me to participate in future studies and to learn from them as they provided a real-life experience of conducting research, not just theoretically as we do in most of our courses.

APPENDIX 14

Sample of Language Learning Histories (MP12, Group C)

My language Learning Experience at School and University

My English learning experience at school was not the most entertaining thing I had. Each class had two or three students who are of a really high level in English, so the class becomes really boring since the teacher cannot focus on these students only. I was one of these and I, along with my friends, had to take a step back when it comes to participating in English classes to give a chance for our classmates to participate more. Most classrooms had over 34 students and a lot of the time the period of the lesson was less than 40 minutes, so the teacher had a lot of students to teach but not a lot of time to be flexible and give each student an activity that is suitable to his level.

Another thing was that learning in schools was boring. Most of the topics were about the environment, health and many other topics that we had a lot of experience with in our previous years and we became familiar with. Moreover, most of the examples in the classroom weren't real and they were simply boring. I admire some of my teachers who tried to change this and were creative in the classroom. I remember one teacher who taught me for three years for being one of the people who changed me and how I view English. He kept pushing me to improve and advising me to get better until I ended up at the university, and I know that he is proud of me for making it there.

I am learning English at the university because simply it is my major and I have to. That's the obvious answer, but a more personal one is that I am someone who loves getting exposed to other cultures through different mediums (books, movies, videogames... etc). I will not be lying if I said that I learn English in order to be able to understand books that are written in a sophisticated English or a game that has a lot of references to other cultures in it and learning English is the way to understand them.

Learning English at the university is quite different from when I was in school. In school, the material was from a lower level than mine and it didn't create a challenge. At the university, the situation changed, English became way harder than it was. So, I had to meet the challenge by practising my language authentically and reach a high communicative competence. I was fortunate enough to search the virtual space because it was available at the university so that I participated enthusiastically in the online environment to communicate with English speakers around the world and improve my English skills. I also had the chance to contact professional Omani speakers of English through online clubs. Unfortunately, I did not have that chance during my school days. My English learning experience at the university is not limited to the classroom or the teacher's guidance, but I am keen on making seizing those small chances to learn something new. I am always in a quest to get better and I want to learn more, and I adapt new ways and techniques to make learning easier for me. I am not limited by the classroom or the teacher; I work on my own without guidance and I am getting better. Whenever I feel bored learning the language, I look for ways to refresh the experience and

spark their interest in it again and again. To me, learning English is not me sitting in a classroom and having to hear the teacher talk. English is used everywhere and opportunities to learn it are always in our reach. Moreover, I learned and am still learning new vocabulary everyday from videogames, TV shows, books and other types of media. Whenever I hear a new term, I try to search for its meaning in the dictionary and become familiar with it.

My experience with web-based technology is a pretty deep one. First of all, I love playing videogames and I consider the industry to be the ultimate form of entertainment and I learned a lot from it. My interest in the industry did not stop at playing the games but got deeper into keeping up to date with the news and watching live conferences of the companies. Finally, in 2011 I started a website in which I have a weekly podcast about gaming, reviews of the latest games and my YouTube channel.

I am also a heavy listener when it comes to podcasts. I listened to podcasts like Bill Burr's Monday Morning Podcast and Serial, but I also listen to other podcasts to learn new things like Stuff You Should Know, Stuff to Blow Your Mind, and many others. Listening to podcasts improved my English in a great way and I find podcasts to be a great friend in my daily routines to and from the university.

I am also a user of social networks like Twitter and Instagram. I started using these to get to know more gamers from around the world and even in Oman. Now, I have friends whom I have been in contact with for over four years and I've got to meet some of them who visited me in Oman and I met some of them while covering events for the website in Dubai.

English Language Learning through virtual spaces

I use Online spaces to learn English and many other things that are useful. The thing about online spaces like twitter is that the user builds his experience and timeline through choosing the people whom he's following which creates a result that is different for each user. I use twitter because I can be reading a tweet about a football match, but the tweet after it will be about videogames and the next one describes how popular a certain word is in English.

Aside from Twitter, I use an app called Duolingo, which is an app for language learners. I am taking course this semester and the app helped me a lot in learning through vocabulary. The thing about this app is that it asks the user about his level of seriousness when it comes to learning the language and then it tailors itself for the user's goal. If I am casual about my learning it will give me a normal load of exercises but if I am serious it will give me more exercises to do each day. Moreover, no one around me talks Arabic, so it helps a lot.

The most important technological machine I use for learning languages is my Playstation. Aside from the vocabulary and getting better in my grammar because of it, I also use online games to play with my teammates who come from around the world. I have online friends from Germany, UK, the US and many other countries whom I practice English with.

When I use these online spaces, I don't really have a goal except for using the language in an authentic way. The advantage of online learning is that the learner is not limited to one place. If twitter did not work for him, he can google what he wants to learn and he will find hundreds of other websites. Moreover, if text-based content is hard to understand, the learner can go on YouTube to watch videos explaining the topic or grammatical aspect he is trying to learn.

As for the online activities I seek, I always try to mix education with entertainment. When I go online, I would prefer that my learning experiences to be blended with aspects of entertainment. Some challenges and difficulties might appear throughout the road, but I usually overcome these by changing the way I am learning. If I had difficulty pronouncing a written word, I write it on YouTube and listen to it... etc.

Online spaces helped a lot in developing my English in a lot of ways. Blogs and Twitter helped me a lot in improving my writing skills and grammar. Since my writing will be out there for people to see, I always make sure that it is clear and grammatically correct for the readers. Listening to podcasts helped me a lot in improving my listening skills. I remember the first time I listened to a podcast in English, it wasn't an educational podcast. So, the hosts didn't use formal English and they talked really fast. I couldn't understand half of the episodes. Nowadays, however, I can listen to podcasts in English without losing focus and understand 99% of the topic and language used. I even upgraded myself to listening to audiobooks which is another way through which I improved my listening skills. This kind of improvement shows that there is a change in my level and that I am getting better in these skills and not just having fun doing it.

My motivation in learning English is always high, but it gets even higher every time I notice myself getting better in the different skills. In addition, there is the fact that positive scores I get in assignments help a lot in raising the level of motivation because it shows that what I am doing is correct and that I am going through the right path. The better I get, the more confident I feel about myself.

I use online spaces to communicate with my peers who are mainly limited to both WhatsApp and Twitter. Through the groups we have in both of these, we discuss our learning experiences at the university as well as our teaching practicum at schools. We give each other hints and tips on what to do in certain assignments and how to accomplish certain goals.

Online, I try to use English mainly to communicate with native speakers of English or those who speak it as a second language. The main reason is that I get to use the language more often. Most importantly, I use it in 'real life situations' that we were not exposed to in the classroom. Through contacting my gaming peers, I improved my speaking and even communication skills because I get to use it with real people in real situations. Most importantly, however, is that I am having fun which makes learning more interesting and the experience more rewarding. Also, my peers try to correct my mistakes whenever I make some which helps correct my tracks. It helps that they are not ignoring my mistakes because

when I get to use the language in a real-life situation, I would choose my friends to laugh at my mistakes instead of someone random on the street.

When I graduate, I am keen on looking for ELT online groups and joining them because I believe that learning cannot be achieved in a vacuum. In this community I will be able to share my experience with other teachers from all over the world and learn from their experiences and strategies.

This way, and by interacting with speakers of English from all over the world, I get to not only use the language and practice it only but I get to share my ideas with the world. Unfortunately, there's this stereotype that Muslims are terrorists and Arabs have an oil field in their backyards from which they get their money which isn't true. By sharing my ideas with the world through such communities or even through my own social spaces, I get to show the world how I feel about what's going on in our planet and express my ideas regarding different issues publicised through social media, and hence rectify any wrong information.

I use Twitter, Instagram. I also have a website which I started with my friends. I created it mainly to contact others world-wide and share my thoughts on the latest games, books and shows I am exposed to. Most importantly, however, I want to express my Omani identity and get the world to know about our country and culture.

As for online learning, it is different than learning in the classroom because when you learn online you can go on your own pace and stop and rewind the lecture as much as you like. You can do it at 8 in the morning or 2 after midnight. The teacher is not worried about the time and motivated learners are not getting distracted by unmotivated students.

Having access to the internet means that the person has no reason not to learn or search for the answer to a question that has been puzzling him. Whether it's a simple question like the meaning of a simple metaphor in the language or a deeper one about how to write a thesis statement, online is the answer and we have to learn by ourselves sometimes. We, as teachers, can link and merge online learning by giving students questions to search for their answers online or by sending them links that could give them more information about the topic.

My Future L2 Selves

In the future, I would love to be a video game developer. My plan B is to be a lecturer at one of the colleges in the country and get an MA in literature, psychology or education because I have interest in these three fields.

I have been using English for a huge portion of my life, especially online and it is the main language I use to search for information online or even in contacting companies in the videogames industry. I think this will expand even more in the future depending on where I am going to end up working. Yes, I am proud of my Arabic language, but if my colleague cannot speak it then how am I going to talk to him then? As for families and friends, I use English with them to practice the language more. English has also become part of who I am. English gives the person leverage in the Omani job market and being fluent in it can be a life changing experience for the person.

Visualising my future self affects how I learn heavily because its part of my intrinsic motivation. Whenever I see a negative picture of myself due to my failure in acquiring English, it pushes me to work really hard on achieving it. It affects my behaviors a lot.

Before I established my website, I thought that being in the videogames industry is easy. After experiencing it online, however, I saw what goes on backstage and that it is harder than what I used to think. It is not just people playing the game and talking about it. Every day, I have to send several emails and contact companies from around the world about their games and help them market it.

From the beginning, I start every personal space online with a goal. Some are simple like my twitter page, but other are grand and need more work like the website. When working on it, I try to be as authentic as possible. I also try to make a worthwhile content.

For me, learning English is a matter of survival. First of all, being a good English speaker means that I have a better chance of getting jobs in the country more than others. Also, being good in English helps a lot when visiting other countries. It also helps expose the learner to other cultures online. The internet is full of English sources that are way higher in numbers than Arabic ones.

My friends and family always encourage me to learn English because they know how important it is in the country. Oman is working now to be a digital country that cuts a lot of corners in order to make the lives of its citizens better.

I always imagine myself in the future teaching in a class or working in an office and having meetings with other companies in order to get better results which ultimately means that the country gets better and higher in the international view. This helps a lot in boosting the level of motivation I have especially after having a bad day at the university.

Another point is that the language of a country is a key to knowing that culture and I have learned a lot about the American and British culture through the type of entertainment I

consume whether its books, movies or videogames. Every one of these is a mirror of its culture and it helps me as someone who cannot visit the country to know how things go in there. Most importantly, however, I find it really inspiring when I read a story about someone who started from scratch and achieved something in his life and ultimately people know his country because of him which I think is the ultimate badge of honor one could have.

I love getting to know other people's culture because it shows how we as humans are a product of not only the time we live in but also the people we encounter and live with. Of course, one must be careful and always have his filters working because there are some traditions in other cultures that go against the Islamic way of doing things.

I love talking to diverse speakers of English around the world because of many things. First of all, a lot of them don't know a lot about the Middle East except that it is not a place one wants to visit and a lot of them haven't heard of Oman. Most importantly, talking with them and getting to know them better helps in breaking the stereotypical view they have about us and the one we have about them which is a win-win situation.

English does not threaten my religious faith and culture. Just because I use English, it doesn't mean that I am not praying at the mosque. Using English can help us convey the true principles of Islam. At a national level, I cannot deny that English is important to develop Oman. One must have his filters ready and his identity will not be shaken easily.

The goal of my website is to offer gamers in Oman and the Arab world a content that is worthy of their time and I am proud of the work I am doing and the response I am getting from my virtual audience.

Educational Affordances of YouTube

I have a YouTube channel which I share with my others who are interested in video gaming. I have it to share my experience in gaming and our reviews of the latest games. But, most importantly, I try to raise awareness about videogames and that they do not aim to encourage violence. They are like other mediums of entertainment, they must be used in a certain way for a particular age group. Through our "Omani" way of doing things, I keep it real and simple for everyone looking for useful videos.

I do not have an academic blog because I do not feel that I have reached a level in my academic life where I can be a source of information to people. Yes, I like reading such blogs, but making them needs a lot of time and energy.

When I started, I only had an experience with audio editing. Now, after four years, I learned how to shoot videos inside and outside. I learned how to edit our content and present it in a professional manner and I learned how to write an analytical essay of the games we play. My way of speaking in front of the camera improved. Moreover, sometimes what I discuss needs

to be researched thoroughly, so I always make sure to get the news from a reliable source in order to give my audience the most accurate news.

Through my YouTube channel, I have learned many things, but I also learned how to look at my product with a critical eye. Why did one video get very low views while other videos were really high? Is it because the topic was not interesting? Was it something with the quality of the video? Or was the material written poorly? In addition, doing videos on YouTube means that people get to see you and discuss your ideas which gives you different insights into others' views which you might not have thought of before.

Moreover, making videos on YouTube is not just a process of shooting and editing and then publishing it immediately. But, there's a lot of thinking behind it. The internet is full of videos, so the creators think of ways to make their content unique and different. The more creative you are with your content, the more attention you will probably get. Most importantly, however, publishing on YouTube is a personal experience to many people, so you express yourself in whatever way you want and no one will edit it out or delete the video.

Receiving my peers' comments is an essential part of the experience because these peers, especially if they share my interests, want me to get better at what I am doing. If they do not know my vision, however, it might cause a clash between their comments and what I am aiming at. Comments, on YouTube especially, have a bad reputation of being random and not the most authentic one, and I can agree with that to some degree. This makes me only have much interest and think more about those comments, including feedback on how to make my content better because I know that that viewers want to see me succeed.

I share my experiences of teaching practicum with my fellow trainee teachers through the different social channels and they've been quite useful in getting more ideas and ways to implement lessons. Seeing how my friends are committed to their practice and how they keep their lessons interesting is one way that makes me reflect on myself and how committed I have been to the practice. Our discussions can go even beyond that and talk about future selves and how we are planning to acquire certain skills.

These interactions with my fellow trainee teachers helped me boost my motivation in a great way because I get a lot of feedback and positive comments regarding my teaching strategies and how I approach different lessons.

When we started these groups, the goal was to just share whatever could help make our experience better. As the semester moved on, our goals started changing and we kept expanding them more and more. I believe that we have benefited a lot from this way and it helped us in many ways and can help language learners no matter what their level is. I never thought that my time is wasted in these groups because I benefited a lot from it.

Reflections on my Teaching Practicum

A successful teacher is someone who is passionate not only in the topic he teaches, but in the way he teaches it. He always finds ways to make his classes interesting and he manages his classes in a way that he gets to befriend his students without risking his status as a teacher. A successful teacher always looks for ways to get better and never misses a chance to help his students. After all, that's a responsibility on his shoulder and he needs to meet it. He also has different roles to play and hats to play. He must be a facilitator at times and a guarding angel at others.

Before going to class, I keep a lesson plan in my head with alternatives just in case something goes wrong. After the class, I sit with my cooperative teacher and sometimes alone and evaluate my performance. How good did I do? Did I finish all the activities? Did the students interact well with me?

As a future teacher, I would be more than happy to give my students more responsibilities because it makes them take control over their learning which can boost their performance. I believe that Omanis in general are autonomous, and my friends and I are the nearest examples I can think of. We are majoring in English language at the school of Education at the university even though a lot of us have never been outside of the country. We improved our English through reading, playing videogames and participating in online discussions, which were not definitely the activities we did in schools.

The concept of autonomy works perfect in our cultural and religious setting. On one hand, Islam taught us that we need to learn and that learners have an easier way to heaven and that we must learn even if we need to go away from our family and loved ones. On the other hand, the Omani culture is a proud culture of its heritage and we all, as a community, do whatever we can do to give back to this great land. Autonomy can be implemented in classrooms by not spoon-feeding students everything and giving them the time and the chance to think and take control of their learning.

I imagine myself in the future as a helpful teacher who tries to help his students get better and push their potential to the limits. I hope that I will be a teacher who will be remembered by his students as someone that really affected their lives. I would not like to be an ordinary teacher who does the same routine every day. One way of achieving this is by using online sources and platforms to exchange comments with my students just like I exchange my online experiences with my friends through WhatsApp and Twitter.

My experiences with research methods are limited to surveys and individual interviews. The group discussion, however, is an interesting type of research methods because every participant brings his own experience to the discussion which results in a fruitful one. As for the LLHs, it works at a deeper level because we write at our own pace, and we are not limited by time or a place.

I find the LLHs method quite useful because it helps put all my ideas on the table in front of me and I get to see where I am doing well and where I need to improve. I can see it works in the future in my classes. I think it will help students realise their future selves, working as a reminder and a planner of what they want to be in the future.

Oman is currently aiming towards a digital future which can change the country. I would love to be part of this through my implementation of different technological aspects in my teaching which is a win-win situation. Students will engage more in their learning activities and they will which makes me satisfied, and ultimately they would go to the field they like and hopefully help the country thrive.

One method which think would really help in making students interested in learning English is through integrating the English language in well-tailored videogames that have intriguing stories and great elements of gameplay. Students will play it for fun but learning the language will be as an inevitable result to the experience that could ultimately reap different results depending on the learner.

Reflection on my Participation in the Research

I chose to be part of this research because we, in Oman, are a collectivist community and we are expected to help each other. However, after reading the participant information sheet, I saw that it could be a chance for me to help change the way things are going and literally shape the future of Oman. I have always been a critic of how things are going in the country when it comes to education and I can't run away when I get the chance to make possible changes in the community.

Initially, I had an expectation that it would be a give-take kind of meetings. I did not think that I would spend hours discussing my personal experiences and how it affected me in becoming who I am today.

I've had many advantages by participating in the group discussions we had. One thing is that I finally got to see how much thought and work is being put into it. Another thing is that by participating, I've got the chance to build knowledge with my colleagues that is completely new and in an unexplored area in Oman. As for the LLHs, it helped me organise my thoughts and see what I've been doing throughout my learning experience.

Sharing my experience with others helps in letting them know that learning is not limited to the classroom and can go beyond that. Most importantly, if my way of doing things worked for me, then I think it would work with others too because I am not a genius.

Participating in this study was a worthwhile experience and didn't think of it as a waste of time. I've learned a lot about myself and my friends and I worked with them to hopefully create a better future for this great country. It was a fruitful experience which I will be more than willing to experience it once again.

I would continue to improve my English and my teaching methods because routine can kill creativity. Consequently, the classes will be boring, and students will not be motivated to come to the classroom which is something that no teacher wants to experience.

Throughout these meetings, we've discussed concepts of identity, motivation, autonomy and Web 2.0 and how it is linked to autonomy is an interesting situation because it's an intrinsic factor that motivates the learner to learn and get better, not for the sake of grades or a certificate. Interestingly, the topic of the research is related to our daily lives and interests, resulting in stimulating discussions. I really enjoyed these discussions to a great extent.