

Implementing Learner Independence as an Institutional Goal:

Teacher and Student Interpretations of Autonomy in Learning
English

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Abstract

This thesis explores how learner independence was implemented as a curricular goal at a tertiary level Preparatory Programme (PP) in the United Arab Emirates. This exploratory-interpretive case study shows how students and teachers at the English programme responded to an Independent Learning Log (ILL) and how they interpreted learner autonomy with respect to the ILL. The study analyzes how various interpretations of autonomy affected the students' and teachers' attitudes towards the ILL. The interviews and the surveys used in this study were conducted between 2012-2014. The data was examined using Critical Discourse Analysis and was coded with NVivo software. As a result of the data analysis, the researcher identified themes related to student and teacher roles in the promotion of autonomy, learner representations in TESOL, and issues of control and agency, in the language classroom and out-of-class. The findings suggest that, in the teachers' discourse, students are assigned passive roles and are often represented as lacking, deficient, and in need of control. Furthermore, the teachers are represented as the agents and controllers of education. These findings are supported by other studies from different cultural settings. This suggests that the US and THEM divide is not unique to the context of this study, but, rather, that it reflects a broader issue that is characteristic of TESOL discourse. In the discussion section, the researcher demonstrates how the themes identified in this study draw on a Social Order perspective in education. It is argued that this conceptual model remains ingrained in teachers' and students' group consciousness as the default model for learning. We conclude that learner independence as an educational goal is incompatible with this way in which students and teachers conceptualise education. In order for autonomy to become a feasible educational goal, we need to re-think how we organise language learning and what roles teachers and students assign each other. Overall, this case study reveals the problems that educators may face when promoting autonomy in a language programme. An understanding of these issues may help future language programmes develop better strategies towards fostering learner autonomy at an institutional level.

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List of Abbreviations

| | |
|----------|---|
| ADNOC | Abu Dhabi National Oil Company |
| CDA | Critical Discourse Analysis |
| EAP | English for Academic Purposes |
| EFL | English as a Foreign Language |
| ELP | European Language Portfolio |
| ELT | English Language Teaching |
| ENEC | Emirates Nuclear Energy Corporation |
| ESL | English as a Second Language |
| IELTS | International English Language Testing System |
| ILC | Independent Learning Centre |
| ILL | Independent Learning Log |
| ILP | Independent Learning Portfolio |
| L1 | First language |
| LI SIG | Learner Independence Special Interest Group |
| NNS | Non-native speaker |
| NS | Native speaker |
| PP | Preparatory Programme |
| SLA | Second Language Acquisition |
| SSF 2013 | Student Survey Fall 2013 |
| SSS 2012 | Student Survey Spring 2012 |
| SSS 2013 | Student Survey Spring 2013 |
| TESOL | Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages |
| TOEFL | Test of English as a Foreign Language |
| TSS 2012 | Teacher Survey Spring 2012 |
| UAE | United Arab Emirates |
| ZPD | Zone of proximal development |

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Nature of the Problem

This thesis focuses on the concepts of ‘learner autonomy’ and ‘autonomous learning’ in second language acquisition (SLA) studies and practice. There are several aspects of autonomy in language education, and education in general, that are often researched and promoted, such as distance learning (White, 2003; Hurd, 2007; Hurd, Beaven, & Ortega, 2001; Richardson, 2013), self-instruction (Fernández-Toro, 1999), self-access (Gardner & Miller, 1999), tandem learning (Lewis & Walker, 2003; Kötter, 2002), and autonomy in higher education (Xhaferi & Xhaferi, 2011). This study focuses on autonomy in teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL) and on aspects of autonomy related to learners, teachers, resources, the classroom, technology, and curriculum. The concept of ‘autonomy’ in language teaching and learning has developed into a significant body of literature in the last 20 years. It has evolved significantly since 1971, when it was first defined and implemented as a learning goal in the language learning scheme outlined by the Council of Europe’s *Modern Language Project* (Little, 1991; Benson, 2011). The aim of the project was to provide adult language learners with the tools necessary for lifelong learning. The development of these tools was influenced by several ideas that were borrowed from the field of ‘adult self-directed learning’. When studying the history of the language projects that have been supported by the Council of Europe, I noticed a definite continuation of the original principles of learner autonomy which are associated with self-directed learning in the 1970s. Currently, the European Council has invested in the *European Language Portfolio* project (ELP) which is based on principles that foster learner autonomy (Little, 2009; *European Language Portfolio*). This brief historical overview underscores the fact that learner autonomy in language learning has strong Eurocentric roots. It also reveals an assumption that is made by many European language teachers and researchers, namely; learner autonomy is crucial to the learning of foreign languages. The definition of learner autonomy or learner independence has been redefined several times since the 1970s. At the moment, the most agreed upon definition of learner autonomy states that it is “the capacity to control or take charge of one’s learning” (Benson, 2011:14). In this study, the terms ‘learner autonomy’ and ‘learner independence’ are used as

synonyms. The discussion of how the definition of *learner autonomy* or *learner independence* has changed over the years is outlined in Chapter 3. In this introduction, I merely wish to focus on the ethnocentric aspect of the concept of 'autonomy'. The ethnocentricity of 'autonomy' was first outlined by Riley (1988), who questioned the transferability of this concept to other cultures. As is often pointed out, the notion of 'autonomy' is not only prevalent in many European educational settings, but it draws on a Western philosophy of education as conceptualized and advocated by thinkers such as Rousseau, Dewey, Freire, Illich, and Rogers (Benson, 2011).

As learner autonomy has become an educational goal in many parts of the world outside Europe and the US, the issue of the ethnocentricity of autonomy in language learning has been further developed by critical writers in TESOL (Pennycook, 1997; Schmenk, 2005; Sonaiya, 2002). One of the most debated issues is the relevance of learner autonomy to cultures that are classified as 'collectivist'. Most of the debate revolves around learners who are sometimes referred to as "Asian students" and generalised "Asian educational settings" (Chan, 2001; Ho & Crookall, 1995). The reason why the debate on autonomy and culture has become so embedded within the Asian educational context may be associated with a prevailing stereotype of "Asian students" as 'passive' and 'reliant on authority' (Kumaravadivelu, 2003). The issues of cultural stereotypes with respect to learner autonomy are discussed in detail in Section 3.2.2. In recent years, arguments about incompatibility of autonomy with "Asian students' learning habits" have been transplanted into the generalised Gulf context.

The stereotypical and indiscriminate notion that students in the Gulf region lack autonomy in their learning is often repeated by researchers. As I argue in the literature review, and the results of this study, many teachers and scholars now assume that a homogeneous group, often referred to as "Gulf students", lacks autonomy. This study explores the concept of 'autonomy' from various critical perspectives. 'Autonomy' is a concept, and as such, is prone to individual interpretations. My aim is to critically evaluate how students, teachers, and administrators interpret this concept within an institutionalised setting. Despite the view that "Gulf students" lack autonomy, the pursuit

of autonomy is at the forefront of research conducted by teachers and scholars in the UAE. For example, the TESOL Arabia organization has its own *Learner Independence Special Interest Group* (LI SIG), which was formed in 2001 by teachers from tertiary level institutions in the UAE. The group has published a compilation of studies on autonomy in the UAE and publishes a regular newsletter which aims to keep UAE teachers abreast of theoretical ideas with respect to learner independence. Finally, learner autonomy is one of the main learning objectives formulated by the English programme that is discussed in this study. The idea of institutionalising autonomy lies at the core of this study. It may seem that institutionalised learning and autonomous learning are at opposite ends of the learning spectrum. My approach to this issue is both exploratory and critical. Between 2009 and 2014, I worked as an English teacher at a Preparatory Programme (PP) in the UAE. At this language programme, independent learning was assessed as part of the student coursework. The student independent work was presented to the teachers in the form of an Independent Learning Log (ILL). During my time at the PP, I observed a number of issues related to the ILL. The prevailing problem was the negative attitude that many teachers and students displayed towards the ILL. By conducting this study I wanted to understand the reasons for this animosity. I explored how the notion of 'autonomy' was interpreted by students and teachers within the PP. In order to expose underlying assumptions about learning English, I analyzed teachers' and students' conceptualizations of autonomy using critical discourse analysis.

1.2 Rationale for the Study

The first aim of this study is critical in that it challenges the assumption that learner autonomy is contingent on students' and teachers' cultural background. As argued in Chapter 3, many studies that question whether 'autonomy' is an appropriate concept to apply in, so-called, 'collectivist cultures' tend to conceptualize 'culture' in a deterministic way. Such perspectives essentialise language learners and rid them of their individual characteristics. As Benson (2004) points out, "even learners with similar backgrounds vary in terms of the psychological predispositions and learning experiences that they bring to the classroom" (p.5). To a modern scholar, the notion of individual learners' differences and diversity may seem self-evident. However, the idea that learners are

individuals is relatively new in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) research (Benson, 2004). A theoretical framework that is often closely associated with recognizing learners as unique individuals is sociocultural theory. Studies that acknowledge learner diversity focus on learner stories and apply qualitative research methods. Benson (2003) analyzes two learner stories to show that students who are taught in an authoritarian educational setting can nevertheless develop their own voice and make decisions about their own learning. The study underscores the fact that “Asian learners are [...] often unjustifiably viewed as *product* of their cultural background in a way that learners from more ‘individualist’ Western cultures are not” (Benson, 2003:24). In Benson’s study (2003), the students develop their individual learning strategies and achieve a high level of language proficiency despite living in a culture that does not foster autonomy. Case studies like this open up research into learners’ autonomy beyond the black and white constraints of ‘collectivist’ *versus* ‘individualist’ ways of thinking. As such, the hierarchical opposition of ‘collectivist’ *versus* ‘individualistic’ can be questioned, as essentialising and leading to stereotypes. The issue of *othering* within the discourse of autonomy and culture is analyzed in Chapter 3. The understanding of *culture*, as discussed in this research, refers to symbolic representations embedded in one’s language and rituals. The fact that one knows and participates in a culture does not, however, predetermine one’s way of thinking or one’s decisions. If culture were deterministic to an extent that it made it impossible for individuals to see beyond it, we would not have undergone the social and cultural revolutions that humanity has experienced. In this respect, we should also note that thinking outside one’s own culture is not a uniquely Western ability. Furthermore, *culture* is defined as a factor that may influence our behaviour but does not predetermine the choices and decisions we make about our lives, including our educational choices.

In addition to challenging the cultural determinism that is assumed by many studies of autonomy in non-Western contexts, this research explores how students and teachers in the Gulf conceptualize learner independence. The study examines a tertiary-level institution in the UAE. The population of the study is students enrolled in the English courses at the Preparatory Programme (PP) and their English teachers. The

management perspective is explored by analysing the official PP syllabi and curriculum which identify 'autonomy in learning English' as one of the PP goals and teaching outcomes. Chapter 2 provides a detailed description of the university, its English program, as well as a brief profile of the students and teachers.

As mentioned above, increased learner autonomy is one of the institutional goals of the PP. How the achievement of this goal is approached by various teachers is one of the discussion questions in Chapter 5. At an institutional level, the notion of fostering learner autonomy or independence is expressed in the PP curriculum. The PP students are expected to develop their language learning autonomy through an Independent Learning Log (ILL). The students' work on the ILL comprises 50% of their final mark. Chapter 2 provides a more detailed description of the ILL, its history within the program, and its structure. As Benson (2011b) argues, the mere presence of opportunities for independent learning does not guarantee that learners are actually engaged in developing their autonomy. Taking this into account, I investigate how effective the ILL is in fostering the students' independence in language learning. The reason why I decided to focus on the ILL is that it provides a good basis for a case study into whether learner autonomy can be successful as an institutionalised learning goal. Because the ILL at the PP carries a significant weight in student assessment, it is of some importance to assess its effectiveness in fostering learner autonomy.

1.3 Research Questions

Taking into consideration the issues and concepts discussed above, this study explores the following questions:

1. How do teachers and students at the PP interpret and implement the ILL?
2. How do teachers and students conceptualise independent learning in English?
3. What role does out-of-class learning play among the PP students?
4. To what extent is learner independence a feasible institutional goal?

Although the main research focus is on the ILL, which is a specific tool used at a particular English programme at a tertiary level institution in the UAE, the analysis of

how it is implemented by students and teachers will provide us with a better understanding of learner autonomy in general. As I mentioned above, 'autonomy' is a concept, and, as such, it is bound to be interpreted in different ways by different people. I wish to explore how the students at the PP, who are generally labelled as "Gulf students" and belonging to a collectivist culture, interpret autonomy in learning English. I investigate how much control they feel they have or should have over their own learning; whether they are interested in taking charge over their learning of English, and, if so, how they execute this power. Finally, I explore what they think about the ILL and how they use it in their English studies. Because many of our beliefs about learning are a result of how we have been taught, I analyze teachers' views on the PP students' autonomy and their attitude to the ILL. To answer these questions, I use the qualitative methods outlined in Chapter 4. The data used in this study comprises of interview transcripts, surveys, document analysis, and participant-observer notes. The results of the study, which are discussed in Chapter 5, are drawn using critical discourse analysis, which enabled me to discover hidden dichotomies and hierarchical thinking.

1.4 Significance of the Study

One of the major constraints of this study is that it is difficult to measure 'autonomy'. As Benson (2011b) explains, "[i]t is unlikely, however, that we will ever be able to measure autonomy in the same way as we measure language proficiency" (p.65). Nevertheless, studying whether a particular language programme helps foster autonomy is a valid research question. Benson (2011b) refers to several studies that aim to assess whether particular learning programmes contribute to student autonomy. His overview shows that most of the instruments that are devised to measure the effectiveness of a programme are qualitative. The researchers used student journals (Rowse & Libben, 1994), discourse analysis (Simmons & Wheeler, 1995), and ethnography (Rivers, 2001). In fact, most of the research into the effectiveness of language programmes on student autonomy is context-sensitive and is designed to test a specific learning programme or approach (Benson, 2011:68). The current study shares the same limitations as the previous studies, in that it, too, is situated in a specific context and is focused on a specific learning tool, namely the ILL. Despite these constraints, the study is significant in that it contributes to the development of a particular language

programme, and by proxy, to the development of similar programmes. Firstly, it provides a depth of understanding into how students and teachers in the PP conceptualize autonomy. Secondly, it provides more understanding of how students organize their work on the ILL. In addition, it examines the strategies that are used by teachers to encourage autonomy in language learning. The study measures how effective the ILL system is in fostering language learning autonomy. The findings of the study will be shared with the teachers at the PP, and should help them reflect more on their teaching practice. The results of the study may also inform changes to the ILL and the PP syllabus. From a broader perspective, the study is relevant to other tertiary level institutions which aim to foster learner autonomy in learning English within their learning programmes. The analysis of the development of the ILL system offers insight into the problems that were faced by students and teachers in implementing it. These insights should help other teachers understand the constraints inherent in an institutionalised learner autonomy programme. Finally, the study deconstructs claims that autonomy is contingent on learners' culture. This has implications on learner representations and stereotypes in TESOL.

1.5 Contribution to Knowledge

There are two areas in which this study contributes to our current understanding of learner autonomy. From the theoretical standpoint, many studies of learner autonomy in Arab students use quantitative methods to measure these learners' autonomy (Demirci, Gobert, & Sikkens, 2014; McLaren & Burke, 2011; Ricks & Szczerbik, 2010). As with many quantitative studies, the results of these studies lack a depth of understanding of the individual student's experience and learning situation. The literature review demonstrates that there is dearth of socioculturally-informed studies on learner autonomy in the Gulf region. This study contributes to this particular research area. By using a sociocultural framework and critical theory to interpret the data, this study reveals several hidden agendas within autonomy discourse, such as the native speakerism and culturism of ELT professionals (Holliday, 2003), stereotyping and racism of non-Western students (Kubota, 2002; Kumaravadivelu, 2003), and finally, the prevalence of traditional power structures within language classrooms which may prevent teachers from allowing their students to take control over their own learning.

These issues are not limited to the Gulf context however. The discussion of the results of the present study, in Chapter 5, shows that the limitation of fostering learner autonomy within an institutionalised setting may be due to preconceived ideas of what it means to learn a language. These preconceived ideas are expressed by both students and teachers. This study exposes the issues of freedom and control that exist within any educational setting, and further contributes to critical theory. It explains the discursive origins of several hierarchical dichotomies that dominate autonomy discourse, both at the PP under investigation, and in other research studies.

1.6 Organization of the Thesis

Several sections of this thesis have already been mentioned in passing to give the reader a better understanding of the scope and the theoretical issues and concepts that are discussed in this study. Chapter 2 contains a detailed presentation of the context of the study; including the students and their teachers, the institution, and the Independent Learning Log (ILL) which is used at the programme to promote autonomy in learning English. The chapter introduces the reader to the students and teachers at the Preparatory Programme (PP) and their cultural backgrounds. It also provides more detail about the institution, which may help the reader understand students' motivations and objectives in studying at the PP. The description of the ILL provides a brief historical account of how it was developed and what its aims are. In this section, samples of the students' ILLs are presented to help the reader conceptualise the main object of the study.

Chapter 3 reviews the literature on learner autonomy in TESOL. This chapter is organised according to several concepts and issues that are relevant to this study. The literature review begins by discussing a paradigmatic shift in the SLA field, and its impact on the way researchers conceptualise autonomy in TESOL. The focus of the present study is on a sociocultural interpretation of learners' autonomy. Thus, Chapter 3 provides a brief outline of the main concepts related to sociocultural theory and their links with the concept of 'autonomy' in TESOL. I discuss here the issues of interdependence or collaboration in language learning and the role of 'more capable

peers' in learning English. Both of these notions are closely linked to the sociocultural interpretation of autonomy. The next issue that is discussed in this chapter is learner stereotypes in autonomy discourse and the *West versus Orient* dichotomy in TESOL discourse. I show how this dichotomy leads to other interrelated discursive dichotomies which lead to stereotypes of Middle Eastern students and their educational backgrounds. These stereotypes inadvertently lead to assumptions of 'learner deficiency' and they help perpetuate the image of Middle Eastern students as lacking autonomy and not being able to take charge over their own learning. Finally, Chapter 3 reviews other studies on learner autonomy in contexts similar to the present study; that is, in tertiary level institutions in the Middle East where Arabic-speaking students are enrolled in an English bridge programme. The focus here is primarily on English programmes that specify learner autonomy as one of their teaching and learning goals. Most of the studies that are discussed in this section are related to extensive reading programmes and the use of technology to promote learner autonomy.

Chapter 4 focuses on the methodology and the validity of the study. I first discuss the relationship between the interpretative framework and the critical framework which informs the organization of the study and the research questions. Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is introduced here as one of the main methods of interpreting the qualitative results. Next, I discuss *quantitative versus qualitative* dichotomies in educational research and provide the *rationale* for using qualitative research methods in this study. Chapter 4 outlines the research questions and the relevant issues that surround these questions. It explains why case study is a suitable methodology to answer these questions. We discuss both the advantages of case study and its limitations. The data that emerges from the case study comprises of interviews, surveys, and content analysis. Each method is explained in detail with a discussion of how it can help provide more depth of understanding with respect to the research questions. The chapter explains the research procedure and the issues of validity and reliability, as related to this study. Finally, the ethical considerations, the challenges and the limitations of the study are discussed in detail, so as to give the reader a better understanding of the validity of the study.

Chapter 5 presents the data and its interpretation. The data analysis is organised according to the main themes identified in this study. These themes are a result of a critical discourse analysis of the interview transcripts, open-ended surveys, and content analysis of the institutional documents and student work. The main findings of this study explore the issue of implementing learner autonomy as an institutional goal. The results show that both students and teachers at the PP struggled to integrate learner autonomy within the traditional framework of English language courses. The problems that they encountered with autonomy were related to various interpretations of what learner autonomy means and various readings of the institutional guidelines. A lack of collaboration between the teachers led to extremely different understandings among the teachers of what the ILL system aims to promote. These divergent understandings have led to further confusion among students. Other themes discussed in this chapter analyze the teacher's role in promoting learner autonomy, as perceived by teachers themselves and their students. The results show that the teacher's role is similar in both the students' and teachers' conceptualisations of the teacher in a language classroom. I then discuss the learner stereotypes that dominate the teachers' discourse. The study shows that discussing the issue of learner autonomy has allowed these preconceptions to emerge. Thus, the students at the PP were classified along the dichotomies as either *lazy and weak* or *hard-working and strong*. Lazy students were deemed unable to be autonomous and take charge of their learning, while the hard-working students were seen as fully autonomous and not in need of help in developing their autonomy. The discourse techniques which lead to such generalisations and their ramifications on student identity and progress in learning English are discussed here in more detail by using learner stories. Other relevant themes that emerge from the data are: (i) the importance of out-of-classroom learning on fostering learner autonomy, (ii) the students' independent use of technology and media to learn English, and (iii) the role of socializing, often using technology, on the students' autonomy in learning English.

The final chapter of this study, Chapter 6, provides an overview of the main findings, their implications for the educational context in which the study was conducted, and

their contribution to SLA theory. The main recommendation that is based on these findings is that if learner autonomy is to be defined as an institutional goal, there has to exist close collaboration between the different teachers at an English department. The teachers, tasked with fostering autonomy, may need support in reflecting on their own professional practice and their autonomy as teachers. One of the main obstacles to fostering learner autonomy at an institutional level is the teachers' lack of autonomy. In this regard, the teachers' autonomy can be delineated as (i) teachers' ability to make informed decisions about their teaching, and (ii) the approval of such autonomy by the programme management. The results of this study show that traditional ways of conceptualising teachers' and students' roles in the language classroom prevent both the teachers and students from taking charge of the learning process. In order for students' autonomy to flourish, teachers must feel able to exercise their own freedom. In other words, learner autonomy is contingent on teacher autonomy. Further research is needed to explore in more detail how teachers exercise their autonomy in different educational settings, and how their freedom affects their students' independence in learning English.

Chapter 2: Context of the study

The present study describes the implementation and development of the Independent Learning Log (ILL) among Preparatory Programme (PP) students at a university in the UAE. The following section provides more details about the PP, a general profile of the students who are admitted to the program, and more information about their teachers. It also gives a brief account of the structure and development of the Independent Learning Log (ILL) since 2007. The following account is based on information available on the university website and in the university's Course Catalogue. The description of the students, teachers, and the ILL is based my personal experience as one of the English teachers who worked at the PP between 2009 and 2014.

2.1 Structure of the Preparatory Programme

The Preparatory Programme (PP) consists of two levels; a regular track and a fast track (see Figure 2.1). The regular track, identified as ENGL 001, admits students whose English language skills were assessed as being below Band 5 in IELTS, or below 60 points in TOEFL. In order to join the fast track, prospective students have to have a minimum of Band 5 in IELTS.

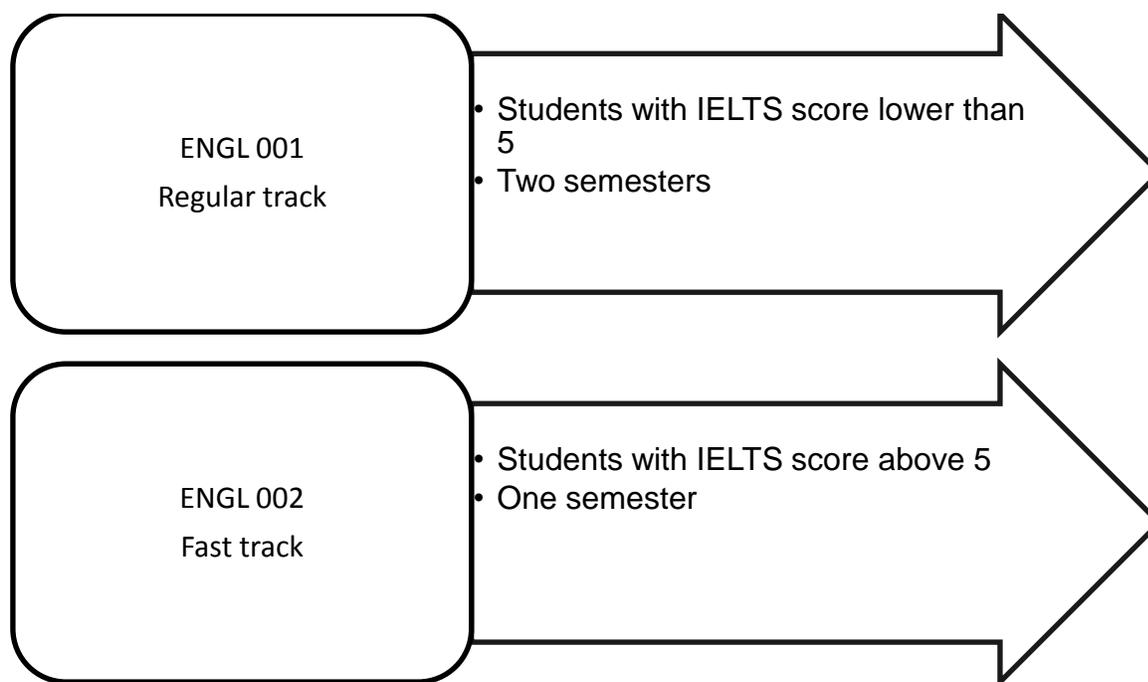


Figure 2.1 The structure of the English courses at the PP

In order to continue from ENGL 002 to the Freshman Year, the students have to pass the course and score a minimum of IELTS 6 or TOEFL 79. In addition to English courses, the PP students study Maths, Physics, and IT. Overall, the students enrolled in the PP have eighteen contact hours per week of English, and seven contact hours of the other subjects. Consequently, they spend a considerable amount of their day in the classroom.

The assessment of the English courses within the PP is unique in that the students are not assessed on their classwork *per se*. The class quizzes constitute 10% of their total assessment. In general, the ENGL 001 and ENGL 002 final mark consist of 50% exams and 50% dedicated to the Independent Learning Log (ILL). The ILL covers the areas of extensive reading and listening, process writing, speaking, and vocabulary development. Figure 2.2 shows a breakdown of the assessment.

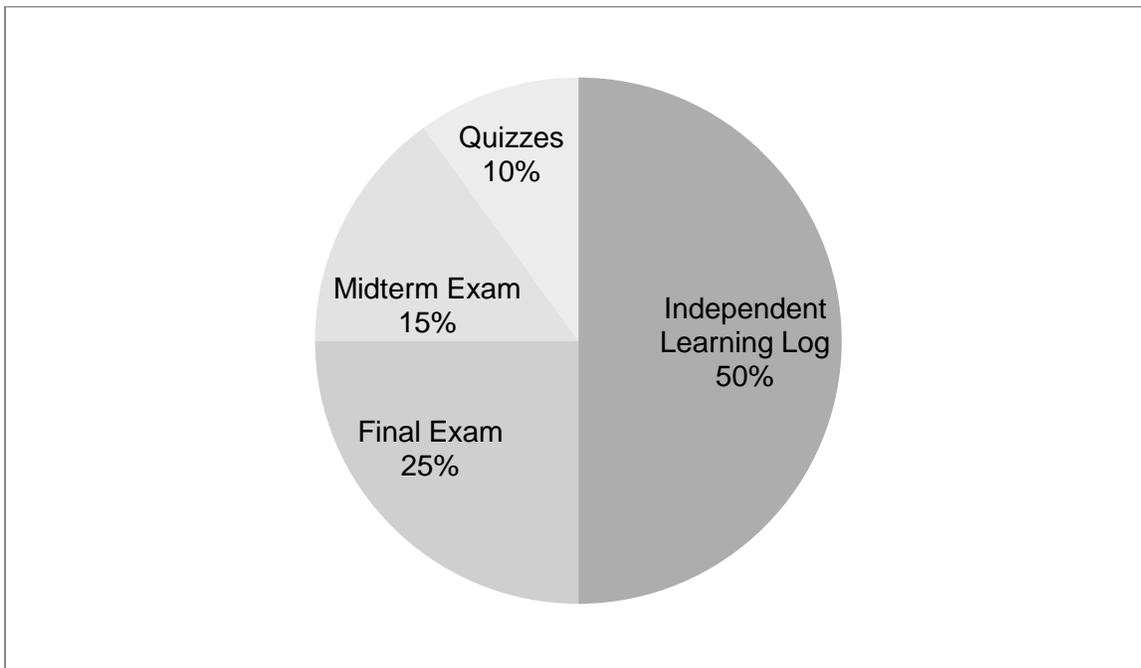


Figure 2.2 Assessment of the English courses at the PP

The independent work is supported and monitored by language instructors and distributed among the teachers so that the extensive reading is assessed by the

Reading teacher, extensive listening and speaking activities are assessed by the Listening and Speaking teacher, the process writing is assigned to the Writing teacher, and the vocabulary work is monitored by the IELTS Prep teacher. This structure requires teachers to collaborate closely. The independent work done by the students is assessed together as the Independent Learning Log (ILL).

2.2 Students' Profile

The university where the study was conducted is focused on providing education within engineering disciplines. Most of the students who join the university and the PP are interested in technical subjects and want to work as engineers in the future. When on campus, the students have to follow a dress code which is often referred to as the 'national dress'. For female students this means a black *abaya*, a traditional black long dress worn over clothes, and a *sheila*, a black headscarf. Male students have to wear a white *kandura* or *dishdash*, a traditional long garment. Wearing a *neqab*, or the traditional face veil, is not permitted on campus. All the issues discussed above suggest that the PP students rely strongly on their parents', teachers', and role-models' opinion and advice, and that a great many of their life-decisions are made by someone else. It is thus interesting to see how these students, who from Western perspective seem to have limited control over their lives, manage independent learning at the PP.

With respect to demographics, the Emirati nationals who study at the PP come from all of the seven emirates. A large proportion of the PP student body come from the Abu Dhabi emirate, but an equally significant number of students come from the eastern, and less affluent, emirates, including Fujairah and Ras al Khaimah. Some students come from small villages on the coast near Fujairah, whilst others come from big cities like Dubai and Sharjah. Thus, the student body is diverse with respect to students' experiences, upbringing, and socioeconomic background. The average age of the PP students is 17-18 years old.

2.3 Teachers' Profile

The English teachers at the PP come from a variety of cultural backgrounds but mostly from English-speaking countries like the UK, US, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. According to university regulations, all of the PP teachers are required to have an MA

degree in Education or in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TESOL) and at least five years of teaching experience. Thus, one could describe the PP faculty as well-trained and experienced. There are, on average, twelve English teachers in the PP. The English teachers have approximately 12-14 contact hours per week in addition to other duties, such as mentoring students in the Independent Learning Centre (ILC), developing course materials, and managing their courses in the Moodle platform. The PP has, on average, around 150 students and the class sizes never exceed 25 students per class. Most of the teachers worked in the Middle East prior to joining the university. Some have been in the region for over 10 years and have taught at various tertiary level institutions.

2.4 Independent Learning Log

The students' independent learning that is recorded by them in their Independent Learning Logs (ILL) has been an integral part of the PP English programme objectives since the initial foundation of the programme in 2007. As it was mentioned in Section 2.1, the ILL comprises of 50% of the course mark in ENGL 001 and ENGL 002. During the period between Fall 2009 to Spring 2012, the ILL underwent numerous changes so as to accommodate the students' and the teachers' feedback. The following section describes some of the changes and the motivation behind them. It also provides a general insight into the students' and teacher's attitude towards the ILL, as observed through programme surveys.

2.4.1 ILL Structure

The Independent Learning Log (ILL) developed over the years from an Independent Learning Portfolio. Whilst this study was conducted between the Spring 2012 until Fall 2013, it is helpful to understand the history of the ILL at the PP and its development outside the research timeframe. In order to conceptualise the ILL, one might consider it as a traditional portfolio of student independent work. Until 2011, student independent reading, writing, and vocabulary work were submitted at the end of the semester in traditional binders, called portfolios (See Figure 2.3).



Figure 2.3 Independent Learning Portfolios Fall 2010

In 2007, the Independent Learning Portfolio (ILP) consisted of four sections: Reading, Writing, Vocabulary, and Study Skills. In 2011, the PP faculty decided to add an Independent Listening and Speaking section. Table 2.1 provides a general overview of the structural changes that were implemented in the ILLs in the period, 2009-2012. It also illustrates the individual grade distribution and weighing within the ILL.

Table 2.1 Transformation of the ILP into the ILL: 2009-2012

| ILP 2009-2010 | ILP 2010-2011 | ILL 2011-2012 |
|---------------------------------|----------------------|----------------------------|
| Reading 30% | Reading 30% | Reading 25% |
| Writing 30% | Writing 30% | Writing 25% |
| Vocabulary 25% | Vocabulary 30% | Vocabulary 25% |
| Independent Learning Skills 15% | Study Skills 10 % | - |
| | | Listening and Speaking 25% |

The change of name in the Fall 2011 from the Independent Learning *Portfolio* to the Independent Learning *Log* was a result of a Student Survey (Fall 2011). The survey showed that 'the Portfolio', as students would refer to it, gained a negative reputation among the students and was often described as 'a burden'. The new name was adopted in the Fall 2012 and the students began to normally refer to the ILL as 'the Log'. The issue of perceiving the ILL as 'a burden' is further explored in the data collection and analysis chapter. The following section provides more insight into the individual parts of the ILL.

2.4.2 The Logs

With the name change, the ILL also underwent a physical transformation. As the university adopted an online learning platform, Moodle, to manage courses and help students and teachers communicate with each other, the ILL became more online-based. The weekly logs were submitted electronically using assignment boxes in Moodle. Thus, the concept of a portfolio that demonstrated the students' independent work in one large, cumbersome opus was changed drastically.

The independent reading section of the ILL consisted of extensive reading, which included graded readers, newspaper articles, and short-stories. The quantity of the reading materials and the level of difficulty differed between ENGL 001 and ENGL 002 courses; for example, ENGL 001 students were expected to read articles of a minimum of 300 words, whereas ENGL 002 students were asked to read articles of a minimum of 500 words. The same principle was applied with respect to the graded readers. Hence, the lower level students would read levels 1-4 and the higher-level students would read levels 4 and up. Each reading text required a written response from the students, which meant using highlighting and margin notes. In addition, the students had to write a short commentary to each reading text. See Appendix B to view samples of student independent reading submissions. The teacher's role in scaffolding the independent learning was significant. However, not all the teachers provided an equal amount of support for student independent learning. Some would leave students to complete their independent reading on their own. In their view, student independent learning should

not be subject to any interference from the teacher. The data analysis chapter explores how different teachers interpreted their role in fostering independent learning and how students responded to these different approaches.

The listening log was very similar to the reading log. It was designed to record student extensive listening or listening for pleasure. The listening log became a part of the independent learning log at the time of the shift towards the digital submissions of the student independent work. The digitalisation of the log made independent listening easy to record and access. It has to be noted that extensive listening has, for many years, been an overlooked and underexplored area in EFL (Brown, 2007; Renandya & Farrell, 2011). One of the reasons for this might be attributed to past difficulties in freely accessing English audio content outside of English-speaking countries. However, nowadays, with the advent of digital entertainment that is easily available to anyone with internet access, extensive listening has become a feasible goal in many language learning programmes. Thus, at the PP, students were encouraged to watch English TV shows and educational programmes, and to listen to podcasts and audiobooks online. To help students browse through the enormous amount of audio and video materials that are available online, teachers would often provide suggestions, e.g., websites that provided new content on a regular basis, or they selected appropriate YouTube channels for the students to watch. The students were expected to watch or listen to a programme on a weekly basis and provide a written response to it. See Appendix C to view samples of student submissions of their listening logs. As we can see in Appendix C, the students were given a link to a website with English programmes. In addition, the student response was prompted with questions from the teacher. Similar to the independent reading log, the issue of how much scaffolding teachers should provide became a controversial one, both among students and teachers. Some teachers felt that there should be no interference from the teachers, whilst others wanted to assist their students every step of the way. These different interpretations with respect to the listening and reading logs derive from the teachers' and students' varied interpretations of autonomy in language learning. The issue of interpretations of autonomy is discussed in more detail in Chapter 5.1.

The writing section of the Log has been the least controversial section over the years. The Fall 2009 survey showed that it was perceived by the students as the most useful part of the independent learning process. The independent writing consisted mainly of the essays written in the Writing class. As part of the independent learning process, the students were asked to select ten of their best essays for final assessment. To receive a full mark, an essay had to contain an outline and/or brainstorming page, include all the drafts with teacher's or peer's comments, and a completed reflection sheet (See Appendix D, which includes a sample of an independent writing log reflection sheet). The reflection sheet was designed to help students identify areas of their writing skills that they need to further develop. In addition, it documented the number of errors and drafts in each essay. It is worth noting here that the part of the Independent Learning Log that required the least independence was perceived by the students as being the most beneficial and was subject to the least amount of debate.

The vocabulary section of the log consisted of student-generated vocabulary lists. The lexical items in these lists were expected to be drawn from the students' English classes, and their maths, physics, and IT lectures, as well as from alternative sources, such as song lyrics, movies, advertisements, etc. In other words, the students were expected to create their own, personalized vocabulary lists which consisted of the words that they came across during the course of the semester. In addition to creating the word lists, the students had to provide evidence that they had worked with these new words. To do this, the students could write original sentences with the new words, create word-family mind maps, write synonyms and antonyms, and illustrate the new words with a picture from the internet. (See Appendix E: Samples of student vocabulary work for the ILL.) The students were allowed to choose which words they wanted to work with and how they wanted to record them in their logs. This freedom was aimed at allowing the students to use learning strategies that were best suited to their learning style. Thus, some students would create quite elaborate graphic narratives using the new words; others would apply arts and crafts in their ILL, while some would use an Excel spreadsheet to record their words. The way different students and teachers

responded to the vocabulary logs created disparities between different student classes. Some teachers and students focused primarily on the number of recorded words, whilst others shifted their focus on creativity and the level of personalisation evident in the new vocabulary. These different interpretations of the vocabulary log led to many inconsistencies in the log assessment and numerous complaints from students and teachers alike. Thus, the idea of the vocabulary log, as described above, was abandoned altogether after Spring 2012 and it was removed from the ILL assessment. Student vocabulary development was, from then on, assessed as part of the reading quizzes that were administered in class and was solely based on vocabulary lists that were compiled from the reading course book.

As we see from the description of the ILL above, different parts of it would often be interpreted differently by teachers. A lot of discretion and freedom was given to the PP lecturers with respect to how they wished to promote independent learning within a particular language skill. Chapter 5.1 discusses in some detail how different teachers understood their freedom and how they conceptualised autonomy in their teaching practice. As was mentioned earlier, a number of changes to the ILL were implemented over the years, which were based on PP surveys that were conducted by the teachers.

2.5 The Role of Independent Learning in the PP Curriculum

The previous section described how independent learning was integrated within the PP English programme in the form of the ILL. Both the course catalogue description and the published English curriculum goals clearly identified 'independent learning' as one of the main objectives of the English courses. The course catalogue description mentioned "study skills and independent study techniques for tertiary education" (Faculty Handbook 2011/12). Furthermore, "development of independent learning skills and information literacy through project based learning" were listed among the course goals (Faculty Handbook 2011/12). Thus, the purpose of the ILL was twofold. On the one hand, it was focused on EAP (English for Academic Purposes) skills, such as the use of academic vocabulary, the development of active reading and listening skills, and the writing academic texts. At the same time, the method in which these skills were developed was through independent work. The rationale behind this approach was to

foster broader learner autonomy which would help students develop not only language skills but the more general learning and study skills necessary for success at the university level. Therefore, in addition to specific language-centred outcomes (Table 2.2), the curriculum lists a number of outcomes which refer to learner autonomy. Table 2.2 summarizes some of the learning outcomes related to independent learning as described in the English curriculum.

Table 2.2 Examples of Outcomes from the PP English Curriculum

| Language Skills Outcomes | Independent Learning Outcomes |
|---|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Use a wide variety of general purpose and academic vocabulary based on the 3000 most frequent words from the British National Corpus 2. Use a wide variety of strategies to deal with unknown vocabulary 3. Apply lexical and grammatical rules to achieve greater language accuracy in spoken and written English 4. Use a wide variety of general purpose, technical and academic vocabulary in appropriate contexts 5. Use active reading and listening skills to complete IELTS tasks 6. Listen to general social and academic discussions and lectures and respond appropriately and accurately to a variety of related tasks 7. Produce a written description of data from a limited number of sources such as diagrams, tables, charts and written prompts 8. Use formal academic conventions, including organization, linking words and complex sentences to write paragraphs and short essays 9. Achieve the equivalent of a minimum Band 6 in the IELTS exam | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Select relevant information from a range of extended texts (newspapers, magazines, journals, books, the internet, and IELTS texts) to complete a variety of tasks 2. <i>Demonstrate good reading habits</i> 3. Draft and redraft a piece of writing using self-editing and various sources of feedback to make improvements 4. Be able to recognize what information is needed and locate available resources 5. Search appropriate resources effectively and identify relevant information 6. Evaluate information for its authenticity, accuracy, currency, value, and bias 7. <i>Be able to reflect on one's own strengths and weaknesses</i> 8. <i>Produce evidence of independent learning and extensive reading in an Independent Learning Log completed by the end of the semester</i> 9. <i>Keep a weekly log for reading and vocabulary activities as supporting evidence that the outcomes are being met on a regular basis</i> |

Points 2, 7, 8, and 9 in the Independent Learning Outcomes column emphasise the metacognitive aspect of learner autonomy. Whilst the most fundamental definition of learner autonomy underscores learner's capacity to take control over their own learning, studies into learning strategies have identified a number of metacognitive strategies that

are manifest in independent learning. These metacognitive strategies involve: planning, self-management, self-monitoring, and self-evaluation (Benson, 2011:98). As we can see in Table 2.2, the PP English curriculum stressed a number of metacognitive learning strategies that could foster learner independence in learning English. They are both linked to learner autonomy and carry a strong sense of learner agency. Thus, on one side of this specific curricular discourse we identify the notions of 'autonomy', 'agency', and 'freedom'. The outcomes expect students to be able to evaluate, choose, and use the learning materials that are available to them. However, on the other side of this discourse are ideas of 'control', 'regulation', and 'standardised testing'. They are expressed in a language typical of curricular outcomes; that is to say, they expect students to *show evidence*, *keep records*, and *achieve* a specific score on a standardised language test. There exists a definite ambivalence in this discourse, between expecting autonomy from the learners and, at the same time, controlling and evaluating how this autonomy is executed. This ambivalence instantiates one of the main questions that I address in this study, namely: Can the concept of 'learner autonomy' be successfully implemented within an institutionalised setting? Further to this, I explore how students and teachers respond to autonomy as an institutional goal. Before I begin to answer these questions, it is vital that I present the concept of 'learner autonomy' as it appears in language learning discourse, and how this concept has changed over the last forty years.

Chapter 3: Literature Review

As mentioned in Chapter 1, learner autonomy in education is a broad subject which covers fields such as distance learning (White, 2003; Hurd, 2007; Hurd, Beaven, & Ortega, 2001; Richardson, 2013), self-access (Gardner & Miller, 1999), tandem learning (Lewis & Walker, 2003; Kötter, 2002), learner strategies, individual differences, higher education, and life-long learning. The literature review below focuses on aspects of autonomy that are related to this study; autonomy in TESOL and SLA. The most agreed upon definition of learner autonomy in SLA studies emphasises the metacognitive aspects of language learning; that is, the learner's "capacity to control or take charge of one's learning" (Benson, 2011:14). In this literature review, I wish to shift the focus from metacognitive strategies to sociocultural aspects of learner autonomy. The concept of 'autonomy' in education has evolved significantly since the first studies that were conducted in this area in the 1980s by Holec (1981; 1987), Riley (1988), and Dickinson (1987). Benson (2006; 2011) provides a thorough overview of various trends and the conceptualizations of 'autonomy' over the last three decades. His overview underscores a paradigm shift in studies and research into language learning and autonomy. This paradigm shift draws on the influence of a sociocultural approach in second language acquisition (SLA) theory (Block, 1996; 2003; Firth and Wagner, 1997; Lentolf, 2000; van Lier, 1994) as well as critical approaches (Norton, 1995, 2000; Pennycook, 1997). In their seminal article, Firth and Wagner (1997) point out an imbalance that exists in SLA research which is in favour of cognitive-oriented theories. The authors argue that cognitive theories of SLA tend to conceptualize language acquisition as "an individual phenomenon, its locus being the individual's 'mind' or 'brain'" (Firth & Wagner, 1997:287). According to these authors, this view of language acquisition jettisons social and contextual approaches to the nature of the mind. In response to this, Firth and Wagner (1997) advocate approaches to SLA which take into account the contextual and interactional dimensions of language use. With respect to studies on autonomy, this shift implies an increased interest in learner histories which are interpreted within the cultural and social context in which language learning is taking place. As Oxford (2003:86) explains, the sociocultural approach in SLA focuses on a "social and cultural setting populated by specific individuals at a given historic time". Oxford's (2003)

sociocultural model of learner autonomy is discussed in more detail in Section 3.1. It is important to emphasise here, however, that the sociocultural turn in SLA studies has affected the foundations of SLA research. This shift towards a sociocultural perspective implies a number of epistemological and ontological assumptions that are embedded within this paradigm. These assumptions affect the way in which researchers conceptualise their understanding of *culture*, *identity*, and *learning*. All of these areas are important to the discussion of the concept of 'autonomy' in learning foreign languages. Sociocultural theory views language learning as being mediated through social interaction and, thus, it often uncovers the unequal power relations that are embedded in educational theory and practice. Some critical issues explored by sociocultural research include (but are not limited to) the cultural hegemony of English language teachers (Holliday, 2003; Smith, 2003), the essentialising view of a 'language learner' (Kubota, 2001), and the hegemonic discourse of *native speakerism* (Holliday, 2003; Leung, Harris, & Rampton, 1997). As such, sociocultural theory and critical theory share a number of assumptions about (i) the role of culture and society in language learning, and (ii) the learner's position in the learning process.

In the following literature review I first outline the paradigmatic principles that underlie sociocultural frameworks and further explore the links between sociocultural studies and critical theory. I then explore the points of convergence between sociocultural theory and the models of learner autonomy. The review also includes a discussion of some of the concerns raised by critical theorists who claim that autonomy may be incompatible with the 'collectivist cultures' in the Middle East and East Asia. Finally, I discuss the research studies that have been conducted in contexts similar to this study, that is, tertiary level foundation/preparatory programs in the Middle East. While there is a substantial body of literature on learner autonomy conducted at tertiary level institutions in Hong Kong (Benson, Chik, & Lim, 2003; Chan, 2001; 2003), Taiwan (Lo, 2010), Japan (Aoki & Smith, 1999; Murase, 2008; Smith, 2003), and Vietnam (Humphreys & Wyatt, 2014) there remains a dearth of studies on learner autonomy at the tertiary level in Middle Eastern contexts written from a sociocultural perspective.

3.1.1 Sociocultural Theory and Concepts of 'Context' and 'Identity'

In his brief overview of how sociocultural theory was recognized in applied linguistics and specifically in the field of SLA, Block (2003) underscores the resistance among psycholinguistically-oriented researchers to accept the ontological and epistemological issues raised by sociocultural theory. Firth and Wagner (1998) suggest that the differences between psycholinguistic theories and sociocultural theories are more complex than a simple view of how language is acquired. These differences are based on (i) how each theory conceptualises reality and the world around us, and (ii) how we can gain understanding of learning processes. Sociocultural theorists' call for an acknowledgement of learners as unique individuals, as opposed to "essentialised interlocutors, with essentialised identities, who speak essentialised language" (Block, 2003:4) makes both perspectives seem incompatible. Block (2003) summarizes the socio-psychological hegemony in SLA in three points:

1. The reduction of complex and nuanced social beings to the status of 'subjects'
2. A priming of the transactional view of language over other possible views (e.g. interactional)
3. An interest in *etic* (relevant to the research community) constructions of events

The issue of learner identity lies at the centre of the paradigm shift in SLA theories. From the sociocultural perspective, learner identity cannot be essentialised, but rather encompasses variety of perspectives; that is, how learners see themselves, how others see them, what roles society imposes on them and the social roles that the learners impose on themselves. In this sense, learner identity is never one-dimensional but consists of variety of sources and is a site of constant struggle. As Norton (2000) demonstrated, the interaction between learners' desired identity and how society or their community sees them and what social roles are imposed on them can have dramatic effect on second language acquisition. Thus, from sociocultural perspective learner identity is always fluid and subject to change. In his discussion of various concepts of 'language learner identity' in SLA theories, Block (2007a:12) identifies two prevailing social theory paradigms of, namely, the biological-determinist paradigm, and the social-

structuralist paradigm. While these two paradigms may seem to represent distinct, dichotomous ontologies, their cores are the same; that is to say, they are both deterministic in nature. In the first instance, the source of determinism is our physical body, and in the other, it is our environment. Furthermore, both paradigms assume an essentialist notion of identity/subjectivity, namely, identity which can be described using crude labels and a prescriptive taxonomy. In his summary of Lambert's research from the 1970s, Block (2007a:51) quite rightly points out that the focus of SLA research into attitude and motivation was on "how [successful language learners] might be replicated". The same sentiment is present in Dörnyei's *The Psychology of the Language Learner* (2005). While Dörnyei (2005) acknowledges the influence of context and situated learning on individual learners, his own conceptualization of 'a language learner' is essentialist and static. Furthermore, his overview of the research on language learner characteristics does not mention the growing concern in SLA literature with language learner identities. The AMTB and other similar test batteries may be useful psychometric tools in some scenarios, but they serve to support a theory of language learning that is based on a normative and essentialist paradigm; a paradigm that seeks to *replicate* successful language learners. However, such a theory disregards the individual histories, experiences, and individual learners' conceptualizations of self. Thus, on the ontological level, it assumes a learner's 'identity' to be stable and well-delineated; and not prone to ambivalence and flux, as poststructuralist thinkers would later perceive it to be (Block, 2007a).

Sociocultural theory, as applied by SLA studies, offers an alternative to the determinism of the theories discussed above. The sociocultural perspective in SLA shares a number of tenets with critical theory. Both theories share a number of ontological and epistemological assumptions that allow them to be often applied simultaneously. As discussed above, Firth and Wagner (1997) criticised cognitive and psychological approaches to SLA for focusing on an individual learner in isolation of his or her learning context. A *context* in the sociocultural approach is not understood in a narrow sense merely in terms of the educational, cultural, and social setting in which learning takes place. More important are the factors that affect the learner's identity, self-image, and

learner history. Norton (2000), for example, analyzes language learning stories of immigrant workers in Canada. The learners discussed in her study share a number of similarities, in that they are all adults who came to Canada in search of a new life and struggle to re-gain their social standing. However, when analyzed in depth, they all represent different language learning histories. Viewed from a psycholinguistic perspective, one would explain their differences in language proficiency due to individual *learner differences*, motivation level, or even IQ. However, Norton's (2000) study shows that all these factors are overshadowed by the identity crisis that was experienced by all of the participants. It becomes evident that the learners' perception of a *new* social identity and the symbolic meaning of this new identity influenced their language learning progress. As Norton (2000) explains, the search of a new identity in a new language and in a new country can have either motivational or detrimental effects on learners. Some learners exceed in their learning and progress quickly, whereas others refuse to accept the new social roles, often inferior to their previous roles in their home countries, and thereby refuse to use the new language. It would not be just to claim that the notion of *identity* in SLA is an all-encompassing explanation for language learning success or failure, but it can play a crucial role in language learners' lives. In Norton's study (2000), the context and the individual life stories of the learners play an important role in helping researcher understand their language learning history and the obstacles they encounter in the process of learning English. Thus, the issues of learner identity, equality, and voice are intrinsically linked to the sociocultural approach. With focus on these aspects of language learning, it could be argued that critical theory is contingent to the sociocultural approach in SLA. Firth and Wagner (1997) call for *emic* sensitivity. The use of the word *emic* is symptomatic to sociocultural studies as it draws clear lines between SLA and anthropology.

Another issue critiqued by Firth and Wagner (1997) is the essentialising tendency that emerges in cognitively-oriented theories. While the authors do not use the term *essentialising*, their discussion of native speaker versus non-native speaker identities underscores the limitations of cognitive theories in their account of multiple learner identities. "The fact that NS or NNS is only one identity from a multitude of social

identities, many of which can be relevant simultaneously, and all of which are motile [...] is [...] a nonissue in SLA” (Firth and Wagner, 1997:292). Block (2007), however, emphasises the link between socioculturally-oriented studies and the role of identity in SLA research. The author refers to poststructuralist methodology as “the approach of choice among those who seek to explore the links between identity and L2 learning” (Block, 2007:864). Harklau (2000) applies sociocultural theory, critical approach, and poststructural analysis to explore how ESL learner identities change during the transition from high school to college. In this study, the learners’ undergo a drastic transformation from being ‘good kids’ in high school to being the ‘worst kids’ in college. The study shows that the high school environment was designed to integrate immigrant students and teachers were focused on praising their progress. Harklau observes (2000) that the ESL students in the study had an essentialised view of themselves and thus ‘played the role’ of a determined, hard-working, and teacher-abiding immigrant student. As she describes “When surrounded by U.S.-born peers half-jokingly referred to as ‘lunatics’ and ‘parolees’ by a teacher (I, June 21, 1994), immigrants found it relatively easy to appropriate the representation of the hardworking, diligent immigrant to portray themselves as exemplary students” (Harklau, 2000:49). This representation changed when the students entered college. In this new context, their identity was determined based on the programme of study. Furthermore, the teachers and other students at the college viewed the immigrant learners as cultural novices, despite the fact that at that time the students had lived and studied in the US for a number of years. Their identity became that of poor immigrants who need to be taken care of and shown the American way. Harklau (2000:54) describes the new identity in the following way:

As long-term U.S. residents and citizens, the case study students became ambivalent about the ESL instruction, which appeared to question their ability to function autonomously in college or in the United States at the very same time in their lives when U.S. society conferred expectations of increased autonomy and recognition as high school graduates and adults.

The students were seen as being less capable and in need of help. This representation of their identities became a self-fulfilling prophecy. The students responded negatively to the teachers and the coursework, and consequently, they were labelled as the

'worst'. The issue of learner identities is vital to our discussion of learner autonomy in so called 'collectivist cultures' (Section 3.2). I demonstrate that teachers and researchers often assume a lack of autonomy or even an inability to learn autonomously simply because of the common stereotypes associated with the students' country of origin. As Harklau (2000) argues, teacher assumptions that students are not able to achieve something can become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

The issues of context and identity are at the core of sociocultural theory. Learners who see themselves as passive recipients of learning, or 'vessels' that need to be filled with information from an 'expert' are not likely to exercise their agency and take control over their learning. Furthermore, teachers who assume that their role is to transfer knowledge to 'empty vessels' are not likely to expect, or even allow autonomy, from their students. Both teachers and students may have preconceived ideas about teacher and student roles and may not want to subvert these traditional and culturally-reinforced power positions. Chandella and Troudi (2012) stress that "educational practices are mostly hierarchical" (p.1) and that this hierarchical structure is rigid. They argue that the predominant models of education are based on a hierarchical relation between student and teacher. Such a relation reaffirms the dominant *status quo* and aids to perpetuate the conduit model of teaching and learning. Despite the fact that the transmission model of learning has been widely criticised in education research and practice, it persists to exist as the *natural*, hence non-questionable, way of organising learning. This model is not compatible with the idea of fostering learner autonomy. As Chandella and Troudi (2012) observe, any educational change that questions this outdated model is going to be extremely difficult to implement, because of the implicit or the *hidden* inequality between the teacher and the student. Such a view of learning focuses on cognitive skills as the locus of learning and development, rather than social interaction. It is thus interesting to explore how curricula that are learner autonomy-driven, such as the ILL in this study, can be implemented in the traditional hierarchical setting. The following section explores the links between a sociocultural theory of language learning and the notion of learner autonomy.

3.1.2 A Sociocultural Perspective and Learner Autonomy

The present research project defines autonomy within a sociocultural framework. The traditional understanding of learner autonomy, as defined by Holec (1981; 1987), focused on (i) individual learners, (ii) self-directed learning in a language lab, and (iii) learner training. The original understanding of learner autonomy did not include 'mediation' or 'social interaction' in the learning process. These two concepts are crucial to sociocultural theory, as discussed in papers written by Vygotsky (1978) and his fellow researchers. Vygotsky (1978) criticised educational settings at the time of his research in the 1920s and 1930s for ignoring learning that happens outside the classroom. He emphasised the fact that the development of language is *the* most crucial event in human development. This process takes place before children acquire any formal education. Thus, he argued for studying child development in natural situations and observing how they manage to solve problems and achieve their goals by mediating solutions with their peers. His approach does not assume that learners are blanks who are merely filled with knowledge at school. On the contrary, one of his main contributions to the study of child development was observing that "children's learning begins long before they attend school" (Vygotsky, 1978:84). Whilst other scholars might have been cognizant of this fact too at the time, Vygotsky (1978) drew further conclusions based on this observation; namely, that "what children can do with the assistance of others might be in some sense even more indicative of their mental development than what they can do alone" (p.85). This means that mental and linguistic development of a child should not be measured in isolation from its peers and other people who help the child to learn. The measure of a child's development in the Vygotskian sense is how well he or she can utilise others (i.e. peers, siblings, parents, teachers, etc.), or other symbolic tools, to mediate understanding. This approach to learning and development questions and challenges formal modes of teaching and learning assessment, and is thus relevant to our understanding of learner autonomy. The notion of the zone of proximal development (ZPD) states that learners learn best when *guided* by a teacher or "in collaboration with more capable peers" (Vygotsky, 1978:86). In this sense, ZPD is akin to sociocultural interpretations of learner autonomy.

These interpretations shift focus from learner independence, and learning alone, to *interdependence*.

In the late 1980s, many autonomy scholars redefined autonomy, shifting from a focus on *the individual learning alone* to *the individual working collaboratively* in small groups. According to Benson (2011b), by the late 1980s, the concept of 'autonomy' had undergone significant changes. Some researchers "continued to emphasise that *autonomy* should be used to describe a capacity of the learner, but others began to use it to refer to situations in which learners worked under their own direction outside the conventional language-teaching classroom" (Benson, 2011:14). This re-conceptualisation was influenced by Vygotsky's theories of learning and development. In the 1990s, Kohonen (1992) argued that learner autonomy is contingent on learner interdependence; in other words, learners working together and learning from 'their more capable peers'. Kohonen (1992) maintained that "autonomy [...] includes the notion of interdependence, that is being responsible for one's own conduct in a social context: being able to cooperate with others and solve conflicts in constructive ways" (p.19). This view of autonomy as an ability of working collaboratively to learn from others is supported by other scholars (Little, 1996; Little, Ridley and Ushioda, 2002; Oxford, 2003). In their report on the development of an autonomy project in Europe in 1997-2001, Little, Ridley, and Ushioda (2002) stressed the importance of collaborative work in autonomy projects. They drew on Vygotsky's ZPD to argue that learners develop their metalinguistic functions the most "when [they] work collaboratively to solve problems" (Little, Ridley, & Ushioda, 2002:12). In addition to group work and collaborative learning, sociocultural theory has introduced the concepts of 'social interaction' and 'learning context' to autonomy discourse.

With respect to exploring social interaction and mediated learning, I need to mention the experiments conducted by Mitra (2003; 2013). The 'hole-in-the-wall' experiments are unique in that they redefine traditional teacher-student roles. The study observed that groups of children learned how to use a computer, in English, without any help from a teacher. The design of the 'hole-in-the-wall' experiments precluded any intervention

from an expert, a teacher, or a person in a superior power position. Thus, the learning that took place was mediated by more capable peers and group problem-solving. In this respect, Mitra's experiments support Vygotsky's theory of ZPD and the effectiveness of mediated learning on the child's development. Drawing on the results of these experiments, Mitra (2003) suggests that two-thirds of any school curriculum should be done by children working alone in groups without the teacher's assistance. This model of learning originally was known as 'Minimally Invasive Education', and later evolved into 'Self-Organising Learning Environments' (SOLE). 'Hole-in-the-wall' pedagogy and SOLE have, in recent years, been introduced to TESOL. More robust research is needed to find out the effectiveness of this approach in TESOL.

The idea that social interaction affects how we learn and develop our cognitive skills has opened up new areas of SLA research. In autonomy studies this has entailed a redefinition of autonomy from a capacity developed in isolation and without social influence, to learner agency, which is developed within specific *context*. Palfreyman (2011) defines *autonomy* as a learner strategy that is rooted in a specific sociocultural context. According to him:

Learning strategies can thus be seen as emerging from an ongoing interaction between the individual learner and his/her context. The context consists not simply of physical place, but of a set of affordances, activities, people, identities and communities with which the learner engages. (Palfreyman, 2011:19)

This understanding of autonomy has led to research which explores learner autonomy produced in the interaction between learner and context. It also takes into account the sociocultural factors that either help foster autonomy and empower learners, or deprive them of their sense of agency. This understanding of autonomy also affects the research methods that are used to explore how sociocultural contexts affect learner autonomy. Sociocultural studies into autonomy mostly employ qualitative methods, such as ethnography, learner narratives, and interviews. These methods allow researchers to explore and understand learners' histories and contexts. They do not aim to replicate the ideal learner, but, instead, aim to understand the language learner *in situ*. Chapter 4

provides more detailed support for the use of case studies to research learner autonomy from a sociocultural perspective. Despite the fact that many autonomy researchers underscore the importance of collaborative learning in autonomy, there are some scholars, however, who argue that the notion of 'autonomy' is Eurocentric and is incompatible with collectivist cultures of the Middle East and Asia.

3.2 Criticism of 'Autonomy' as a Western Concept

One issue that is often emphasised in studies that are based in non-Western contexts is whether the concept of 'autonomy' can be appropriated to teaching English in Asian and Middle Eastern contexts. A number of critical theorists have criticised the concept of 'autonomy' as being Western and limited to the 18th century European philosophies of individualism and freedom. In fact, several researchers have pointed out that the concept of 'autonomy' in learning is ethnocentric in that it reflects European and North American values (Chan, 2001; Ho & Crookall, 1995; Jones, 1995; Lo, 2010; Pennycook, 1997; Schmenk, 2005). According to Schmenk (2005:108), "educators risk being culture-blind when they neglect the fact that autonomy is indeed a cultural construct, whose origins can be traced back in Western ideologies." Schmenk (2005) further maintains that the promotion of learner autonomy worldwide ignores local cultures and forces local students to adopt European and North American values. According to Schmenk (2005), the concept of individual autonomy derives from Enlightenment philosophers like Kant who stressed the "human potential to make rational decisions individually" (p.109). A literature review of the articles that associate autonomy with Western culture (Chan, 2001; Ho & Crookall, 1995; Jones, 1995; Lo, 2010; Pennycook, 1997; Schmenk, 2005) reveals the following themes:

1. Autonomy is equated with the Western notion of 'individualism'.
2. Autonomy is incompatible in societies with a 'collectivist orientation'.
3. Autonomy is seen as 'students working alone'.
4. Autonomy is described as 'a method that aims to get rid of teachers'.

The following section will discuss these themes in more detail. It will be argued that a significant portion of autonomy discourse is governed by a West/East dichotomy. Furthermore, this conceptualisation of autonomy in education often can lead to overgeneralisations and the construction of stereotypes of local students and teachers. Understanding of these pitfalls will help us discuss learner autonomy in terms that can be applied in various cultural contexts.

3.2.1 Is Autonomy Incompatible with ‘Collectivist Cultures’?

Presented as an individualistic endeavour, autonomy stands in clear opposition to collective or collaborative ways of learning. For example, Sonaiya (2002) argues that independent learning is not compatible with the culture of the Yoruba people in western Nigeria.

It is uncertain whether the concept of the individual even exists in the same way that it does in Western societies. [...] A method that seems to undermine the communal aspect of learning might not be effective for Yoruba learners, a people for whom participation in a communal setting is of great value. (p.113)

It is not clear from Sonaiya (2002) what ‘learning in a communal setting’ means and why it is contrasted with learner autonomy. As demonstrated above, the modern definition of autonomy or independence embraces collaborative learning and may often resemble ‘a community of practice’ type of learning. It seems that Sonaiya’s (2002) definition of independent learning draws on the philosophical notions of *individualism* and does not consider a sociocultural definition of autonomy in learning. A point similar to Sonaiya’s (2002) is reiterated by Chan (2001:506), who quotes Pierson (1996), stating that in autonomous learning “the locus of control and responsibility lies in the hands of the individual learner”. Again, the researcher has affiliated the notion of ‘independent learning’ with *individualism*. According to Chan (2001), learner autonomy may not be achievable in all contexts around the world due to different social and cultural conventions. It is implied that some cultural conventions may not favour an individualist approach to learning. The view that autonomy is based on individualism is explicit in Schmenk (2005) who defines autonomy as “working individually, independently, and in

isolation” (p.112). The idea that *independent learning* means ‘working in isolation’ is criticised by Little (1991) as one of the most common misconceptions of autonomy in language learning. The research by Sonaiya (2002), Chan (2001), and Schmenk (2005) represents examples of post-colonial criticism of the concept of ‘autonomy’. However, it is of interest to note that the definitions of autonomy in SLA which have been criticised by the above-mentioned post-colonial researchers are outdated, and represent the traditional understanding of autonomy as was presented in the 1970s and 1980s. As it was demonstrated in Section 3.1.1, modern SLA theory has revised its understanding of autonomy in language learning. If we analyze the above comments on autonomy and individualism from a post-structuralist perspective, we observe a number of cultural dichotomies that govern the postcolonial discourse of autonomy in TESOL.

The post-structuralist method is designed to reveal the implicit and unspoken assumptions made by writers or researchers (Foucault, 1984; Fairclough, 2001). The deconstructive method helps us understand the dichotomies which organize our understanding of the world. It could be claimed that the dichotomous organization of discourse is not universal, that is we might assume that different cultures and societies around the globe organize their reality in different ways, and hence the deconstructivist approach is not applicable to this discussion. However, the analyzed texts were written in the Western tradition of academic writing and hence are susceptible to the same discursive practices and conventions as the philosophical texts analyzed by Derrida. According to Derrida (1978), Western philosophy and Western thought is organized around certain oppositions (e.g. writing/speech, mind/body, etc.). Derrida observed that, in Western writing, these oppositions are never equal, but, instead, they are organized in hierarchical way, in that one element of the opposition is always perceived as being better or superior to the other. The deconstructive method has been adopted in critical theory to reveal operations of misogynistic or racist discourses. This review of the literature on learner autonomy in TESOL reveals a number of dichotomies, such as individual/community, independent learner/teacher-dependent learner, critical thinking/rote-learning, active learning/passive learning. All these dichotomies can be represented by the overarching dichotomy of West/East (see Table 3.1).

Table 3.1 Dichotomies Organised around East vs West Bifurcation

| West | East |
|---------------------|-------------------|
| individual | community |
| independent learner | teacher-dependent |
| critical thinker | rote-learning |
| active | passive |
| modern | traditional |

The critique of autonomy as being Western has created a discourse in which non-Western students (and teachers) are portrayed in a stereotypical and often belittling fashion. Because autonomy is associated with a whole set of concepts that are perceived as superior in many cultures, the claim that Asian or African students cannot be autonomous because of their cultures does not do these students justice, and, in fact, contradicts the basic tenets of critical theory. Chan (2001:507), who works at a tertiary level institution in Hong Kong, reiterates a widespread representation of “Asian students”.

Our learners are thus characterised as dependent, reticent and passive (Pierson, 1996). They are reported to be syllabus dependent, lacking in intellectual initiative and incline to favour rote learning over creative learning (cf. Biggs, 1991, 1992). Their passive learning is largely reflected in the constant memorization and regurgitation of information especially in examination. Little room is made for freedom of expression, independence, self-mastery and creativity. [...] So, it could be argued that our learners are less willing and ready than their western peers to function autonomously at tertiary level. (Chan, 2001:507).

This stereotypical portrayal of “Asian students” as being inferior learners, who lack in creativity and independence, is not uncommon. In fact, many studies based in Asia and in the Middle East describe the local students in a similar way. For example, Lo’s (2010) study on using portfolios to promote autonomy at a tertiary level institution in Taiwan describes “Asian students” as lacking in autonomy and not being able to manage their own learning.

Asian EFL students have perceived the critical reflection required in producing portfolios to be confusing and difficult (Rea, 2001; Kuo, 2003; Chen, 2004; Lo, 2007). Part of the reason may be the lack of individual voice from Asian EFL students accustomed to a structured learning environment [...] Researchers have also found that Asian EFL students had difficulties in managing time and learning material. (Lo, 2010:79).

Similar descriptions of EFL learners can be found in studies based in the Middle East. Ricks and Szczerbik (2010) describe tertiary level EFL students in the Gulf as not ready for autonomous learning. The authors blame this situation on Gulf Arab culture:

This is evident in the Arabian Gulf, where western teachers (and those trained in the West) sometimes encounter difficulties when attempting to train their students to be independent learners as Gulf students have not been brought up or educated in societies influenced by this predominantly western concept. (Ricks & Szczerbik, 2010:160)

These researchers claim that because the focus of Gulf Arab cultures is on the collective and the community, students in this region have problems with situations where an individual has to take charge of himself or herself. Webb (2005), who also writes with Emirati students in mind, argues that the tenets of critical pedagogy, which include empowerment and autonomy, are not compatible with collectivist cultures, such as are found in the UAE or Japan. In his attempt to elaborate why critical pedagogy is impossible to apply in non-Western cultures, Webb (2005) relies on hierarchical dichotomies of Western versus Eastern, modern versus traditional, and individualistic versus collectivist. These dichotomies are made explicit in his research question. He interrogates “what happens when the forms of knowledge instantiated in such a pedagogy are introduced to more collectivist societies that place less emphasis upon individual intellectual autonomy and critical reflection in favour of other, socially differentiated values, such as conformity and consensus” (Webb, 2005:328).

The issue of collectivist cultures as not being compatible with autonomy in learning is often supported by the theory of cultural dimensions (Hofstede, 2001). Hofstede (2001)

lists five cultural dimensions, namely Power Distance, Individualism versus Collectivism, Uncertainty Avoidance, Masculinity, and Long Term Orientation. The first three of these dimensions are often cited in autonomy research as having influence on students' attitude to autonomy in learning (Littlewood, 1999). For example, Ricks and Szczerbik (2010) use Hofstede's model to characterise UAE tertiary level students. According to their research, "the UAE has a score of 68 out of 120 [with respect to Uncertainty Avoidance] which indicates a desire among [the UAE students] to know how to find an answer and for the answer to be unambiguous" (Ricks & Szczerbik, 2010:162). Another dimension that affects students' class performance is Individualism. The UAE had a score of 38 out of 120, which indicated that the students "may be more comfortable learning within a group, generating ideas as a group, and making decisions as part of a group" (p.162). Hofstede's model, however, has been criticised for its perception of national cultures as being homogeneous (Jones, 2007). "Hofstede's study assumes that a domestic population is a homogeneous whole. However most nations are groups of ethnic units" (Jones, 2007:5). One could add that most nations comprise not only of ethnic units, but also of various religious denominations, social classes, and immigrant groups. Research into different cultures emphasises the finding that cultures are susceptible to change due to the global forces of technology, economy, entertainment, and communication (Jones, 2007). Hofstede's view of national cultures does not accommodate these changes and perceives culture as static. An argument against using the model of cultural dimensions to describe language learners in various cultural settings is that it leads to broad generalizations and, often, to cultural stereotypes. For example, Demirci, Gobert, and Sikkens (2014) warn against putting "all students in the UAE together into one category" (p.43). As they observe, many students in the UAE are non-Emirati nationals. Many students are of Sudanese, Somali, Pakistani, Palestinian, Egyptian, Syrian, Lebanese, Omani, and many other Asian, Middle-Eastern, and Western origins. In addition, "many of our Emirati students come from mixed-marriage homes where the mother may be of another Arab, Asian, or Western nationality" (Demirci, Gobert, & Sikkens, 2014:43). This means that in any language classroom, teachers will come into contact with students with various ethnic and cultural backgrounds, different family histories, and different family life situations. Another

distinction among Emirati students is the urban *versus* rural divide. According to research conducted at the Higher Colleges of Technology in the UAE, “students who come from major cities, especially Dubai or Abu Dhabi, probably come into contact with English more and this is evident in the system-wide test performance” (Demirci, Gobert, & Sikkens, 2014:43). This brief characterisation of ‘Emirati students’ suggests that their educational background, social status, and cultural expectations may differ within a single language classroom.

The broad generalizations that describe Asian and Arab cultures as *collectivist* and Western cultures as *individualistic* reverberate onto EFL learner stereotypes. Ricks and Szczerbik’s (2010:160) description of EFL learners in the Gulf resembles the previous descriptions of “Asian students” in Hong Kong and Taiwan: “[i]n Gulf public schools, it seems that memorizing rules and facts is very important, while analyzing the content, asking questions, problem solving and synthesizing information – which are all important features of developing learner independence – are not necessarily encouraged” (p.160). According to Ricks and Szczerbik (2010), the poor standards of teaching and learning in Gulf schools are to be blamed on “teachers who are of non-western origin” (p.160). The dichotomy of West and East entails that anything Western is perceived as modern and accurate, while anything Eastern, or non-Western is traditional and thus incorrect. The authors suggest that the non-Western teachers use traditional teaching methodologies, “[t]herefore, it is no wonder that when these students go to a university where many of the teachers come from the West and/or have been trained in a western educational setting, they feel rather lost” (Ricks & Szczerbik, 2010:160).

Syed (2003) reiterates that among the biggest challenges faced by EFL teachers in the Gulf are the poor learning strategies of their students. The main issue with many studies into UAE students’ poor performance in English often compare these students and their teachers to ideal Western students. In a study conducted at a bridge programme at a university in Oman, Borg and Al-Busaidi (2012) observed that the English teachers had a positive attitude towards learner autonomy, yet they did not always manage to

promote it in their everyday practice. Borg and Al-Busaidi (2012) record that “there was a significant gap between the extent to which teachers felt it was desirable for their learners to develop a range of abilities associated with autonomy and their beliefs about the feasibility of doing so” (p.20). The teachers in this study mentioned learner-related factors as limiting their ability to promote autonomy. “Teachers felt that learners did not understand the importance of developing autonomy, lacked the skills to learn independently, and were not accustomed to being asked to take responsibility for their learning” (Borg & Al-Busaidi, 2012:20). Like in other studies into learner autonomy in the Gulf, the teachers blame the students for lack of autonomy. Alwan’s (2005) study of language learning motivation and autonomy among Emirati school children is different in that it does not assume that the students are deficient or lacking, but rather explores how they develop their sense of agency and motivation to study English. Alwan (2005) observes that learners’ sense of agency and responsibility for their own learning increases with age. Her research findings are in contrast with other studies that assume a lack of autonomy among Emirati students and blame a collectivist culture on this *status quo*. According to Alwan (2005), “learners in the UAE tend to take up the responsibility of their own learning as they grow older” (p.307). The older students in the study expressed awareness of their role in learning English and expressed a feeling of responsibility for learning the language. On the other hand, younger students in the study did not perceive learning English as a goal on its own, but rather as one of the school subjects. Although Alwan’s (2005) research has some limitations in terms of its scale and the short time period during which it was conducted, there are two conclusions that apply to this study and can shed more light on the issues discussed here. Alwan (2005) points out that most Emirati students would view English as merely one of the subjects at school or college, rather than as an independent, personal goal. This perception of English may be one of the reasons for the low level of motivation and the perceived lack of autonomy among the students. From this perspective, we can say that English is imposed on the learners and there is no apparent need for them to design their own language learning goals, or work independently. Another contribution of Alwan’s (2005) study is that it is one of few studies written by an Emirati researcher about Emirati student issues with motivation and autonomy in learning English. Her

contribution is unique in that she has the insider's perspective onto the culture and society of the UAE students. It is, thus, interesting to note that her results are in contrast to other studies into motivation and autonomy among Emirati students conducted by expat teachers and researchers (Midraj, Midraj, O'Neill, Sellami, & El-Temtamy, 2007; Ricks & Szczerbik, 2010; Syed, 2003). One of the reasons for the discrepancy in the interpretation of the results in these studies may be the *othering* of the students that takes place (Holliday, 2003a; Holliday, 2003b; Palfreyman, 2005).

3.2.2 Learner Stereotypes in Autonomy Discourse

The literature on learner autonomy and 'professional folklore' tends to polarize language learners into two distinct categories. On the one side, we have motivated learners, who take active part in their learning and are focused on the process of learning; on the other side, we have demotivated learners, who are passive in and outside the classroom, and who are focused on memorizing facts for exams. This polarization is often reflected in a West/East dichotomy, as summarized in Table 3.1 above. The dichotomies presented in the table can be narrowed down to a simpler dichotomy of 'US' versus 'THEM' (Holliday, 2003). In order to deconstruct this dichotomy, we have to question not only the stereotypical representation of the 'East' or 'Other', but also the assumption that the default position, in this case 'West', and its implicit superiority and flawlessness. One of the consequences of this dichotomous way of thinking is the stereotyping of Asian and Arab students. Following the West/East dichotomy, the Asian or Arab students are seen as *non-Western*, and thus lacking and inferior.

The problem of stereotypes in TESOL has been addressed in recent years by researchers involved in critical theory and postcolonial studies, such as Pennycook (1998), Littlewood (1999), Kumaravadivelu (2003), Holliday (2003), Palfreyman (2005). Kumaravadivelu (2003) mentions three common stereotypes of "Asian students", namely that they (a) are obedient to authority, (b) lack critical thinking skills, and (c) do not participate in communicative classroom activities. The researcher questions the ubiquitous 'cultural explanation' for various students' behaviour and maintains that the behaviour of Asian EFL students is a result of "a complex interface between several

social, cultural, economic, educational, institutional, and individual factors” (Kumaravadivelu, 2003:714). The author criticises studies that focus on cultural factors as an explanation for students’ behaviour because these studies have not been able to separate ‘culture’ as a distinct variable that affects learners’ behaviour. The most interesting observation made by this researcher refers to Western students of foreign languages. Kumaravadivelu (2003) points out that studies on Asian EFL learners tend to compare these students to regular Western students who study in their mother tongues. However, research of native speakers of English learning L2 shows that they do not actively participate in all classroom activities. Furthermore, “[w]hen they are compelled to use their still developing foreign language, they report experiencing a debilitating level of anxiety” (p.713). Kumaravadivelu (2003) argues that perhaps EFL students in Asia seem uncritical and passive not because of their culture, but because they lack the language skills that are necessary to express their ideas. A similar point is emphasised by Littlewood (1999) who argues that the stereotypical notion of ‘East Asian learners’ may lead to ignoring learners’ individual needs and backgrounds. Littlewood (1999) provides compelling counterexamples that question the omnipresent representation of “Asian students” as being passive and uncritical. The writer argues that instead of dwelling on cultural characteristics of large groups of people, we should direct our research towards individual learners. “As we focus on individual learners within these groups, the likelihood of finding commonality across cultural boundaries and differences within them become even more likely” (p.83). Drawing on these arguments and to avoid similar stereotyping, this study focuses on individual learners’ and teachers’ experiences with independent learning in the PP.

While this critique of learner stereotypes reveals a number of discriminatory undercurrents in the TESOL discourse, it also draws our attention to an implicit Western stereotype. In Derrida’s theory of hierarchical oppositions, the discursive Other is defined by what it is *not* in relation to the superior counterpart, that is, it is a privative opposition. Palfreyman (2005) demonstrates the existence of this process of *Othering* within TESOL discourse. He defines it as “the ways in which the discourse of a particular group defines other groups in opposition to itself: an US and THEM view that

constructs the identity for the Other and implicitly for itself” (p.215). Another feature of *Othering* discourse is that it simplifies both parts of the opposition into stereotypes and jettisons individual characteristics. In the studies discussed above, the Western educational system is portrayed with broad strokes as modern, engaging, and effective, and Western students are pictured as autonomous critical thinkers. Chan (2003:34) argues that “[c]ompared to *their western peers*, Hong Kong, Chinese students are often perceived as ‘syllabus dependent, passive and lacking in initiative’”. Furthermore, “[i]t is generally accepted that schools in Hong Kong, in western standards, are traditional, rule-bound institutions, where dependence, individuality and creativity are far less valued than obedience, conformity, discipline and diligence” (p.34).

In the discourse of learner autonomy in Middle-Eastern or Asian contexts, the Western educational system is portrayed as the desirable *status quo*. In addition, the students from these parts of the world are represented by the difference to *their western peers*, that is, they are not critical thinkers, they cannot manage their time, and they are not creative, to mention just few of a broad array of features. On the discursive level, ‘Western students’ are assumed not to have problems with motivation and independent learning. For example, the studies into learner independence conducted in Europe (Little, Ridley, & Ushioda, 2002; Little, 2009) do not question the learner’s ability to be independent. The researchers in these studies assume that their learners are able to succeed and accomplish any educational goal. In other words, they do not presume their students to be deficient and lacking. As Harklau (2000) demonstrated, teachers’, parents’, and peers’ presumptions about learners can affect how students perform. The identities that we, as teachers, impose on our students can become the identities that they themselves assume. Just as anywhere else in the world, European or North American teachers struggle to help their students become critical thinkers and autonomous learners.

The discourse of autonomy draws on a representation of the Other that is akin to orientalist rhetoric (Said, 1979). In his study of how the Orient became the discursive Other, and became a term identifying millions of people from various cultures, Said

(1979) demonstrates that anything Oriental is defined in juxtaposition to anything Western. “The oriental is irrational, deprived (fallen), childlike, ‘different’; thus the European is rational, virtuous, mature, ‘normal’” (Said, 1979:40). Furthermore, the Oriental is “something one judges (as in a court of law), something one studies and depicts (as in curriculum), something one disciplines (as in a school or prison), something one illustrates (as in a zoological manual)” (p.40). In summary, the Oriental is the discursive Other, the object of study, and always insufficient in its attempts to become like the Occidental. “An assumption had been made that the Orient and everything in it was, if not patently inferior to, then in need of corrective study by the West” (p.40). This sentiment is evident in the educational discourse of the 21st century. In this discourse, Asian and Middle Eastern students and teachers are the discursive Others, and are, thus, portrayed as inferior and in need of correction by the West. The rhetoric that is used to describe both groups of students from various countries and various socio-economic backgrounds in Asia and the Middle East is similar. This suggests a degree of Othering within the discourse of autonomy. In summary, the Othering in the discourse of autonomy is evident in the works of post-colonial researchers, who in their attempt to ‘protect’ the Asian or Middle Eastern students from Western domination, perpetuate the West/East dichotomies which feed into stereotypes, overgeneralisations, and false assumptions.

It would be unfair to blame any specific group of people for the Othering that I have shown to exist in EFL discourse. Apple (2004) argues that Othering is present in any educational context in the opposition of US-teachers/administrators versus THEM-students. The author maintains that:

[...] educators have developed categories and modes of perception which reify or thingify individuals so that they (the educators) can confront students as institutional abstractions rather than as concrete persons with whom they have concrete ties in the process of cultural and economic reproduction. (p.126)

Whether the Othering in autonomy discourse is related to Orientalist rhetoric or to the broader educational power relations of US versus THEM, in both instances the result is

an *essentialising* of language learners (Atkinson, 2002). The essentialising discourse of autonomy often leads to an inconsistency and dissonance between (a) assumptions about learners, and (b) the results of the research. Jones (1995) maintains that 'autonomy', as a Western concept, is unsuited to students in Cambodia. However, the results of his study show that his students are ready to work in small groups, independently of the teacher. Ho and Crookall (1995) claim that the idea of learner autonomy is alien to the teacher-centred methods that are used in Hong Kong. Despite this apparent incompatibility, their students were willing and enthusiastic to work in groups on a simulation project, in which the teacher's role was limited. The authors conclude that at the end of the project, students "rose to the challenge and opportunity of taking greater responsibility for their own learning" (p.242). Here, the expression that the students 'rose to the challenge' implies that the teacher-researchers did not have much faith or confidence in their students' abilities. In other words, the students proved them wrong. Chan (2001), who portrays her students as "dependent, reticent, and passive" (p.507), finds the results of her research surprising. "It was surprising to find that this particular group of students, who had come from traditional, authoritative backgrounds, demonstrated positive attitudes towards the autonomous approach" (p.514). In the UAE study mentioned earlier, Ricks and Szczerbik (2010) argue that Emirati students are not ready to be autonomous learners because of their culture. However, 85% of the students involved in their survey thought that going to the Independent Learning Centre was beneficial, while 80% of the students agreed that becoming independent learners can help them improve their English. Other studies conducted in the UAE support collaborative learning or interdependence in a language classroom. Murdoch's action research (2013) at a tertiary level institution in the UAE confirms that Emirati students enjoy working in small groups. A majority of the respondents preferred working in groups to working alone. In addition to this, the students had a clear idea about the advantages of collaborative learning.

The discrepancy between research results and prevailing learner stereotypes suggests that the Othering of language learners in non-Western contexts has a strong foothold in TESOL research. Holliday (2003) describes this problem as 'cultural reductivism in

TESOL'. As he explains, a native-speakerist ideology perpetuates the US-THEM dichotomy, and portrays the 'foreign' (EFL) student as the Other and thus *lacking* and *in need of* corrective instruction. In the Middle Eastern and the Gulf context, the cultural difference between the local students and their foreign teachers can lead to conflicts. In Asadi's case study (2013), conflicts between Western teachers and Saudi students in Saudi Arabia were based on cultural, religious, and ideological differences between the English teachers and their students. According to Asadi (2013), "many of the differences had to do with [the teachers] desire to change the socio-political systems in Saudi Arabia, which was often cited as a personal issue to the teachers" (p.87). This attitude of EFL teachers towards their students is symptomatic of context where English teachers come from cultures that are different from the contexts in which they teach. This situation re-enforces the US-THEM divide by essentialising the EFL students' language and culture and viewing them as inferior or deficient (Kubota, 2001).

3.3 Research on Learners' Autonomy in the Middle East Context

The previous section presented some research, from the Gulf context, in which Emirati students are portrayed as lacking experience in independent learning. The lack of exposure to autonomy and a reluctance to take charge of one's own learning are blamed on both an authoritarian and product-centred education system, as well as Emirati culture. It has to be pointed out that many claims about the primary and secondary education system may not apply to all schools. Furthermore, the UAE education system continues to undergo reforms which aim to improve teaching methods and learning outcomes. Therefore, this study will avoid making any generalizations about the students' previous educational background or experience. The aim of this section is to review projects and initiatives taken by language teachers and researchers in the UAE that are aimed at fostering learner autonomy. The following sections review studies aimed at fostering learner autonomy in tertiary level EFL contexts in the UAE. The literature review presented in Section 3.3.1 reveals a strong focus on fostering independent reading skills. Another research area, discussed in Section 3.3.2, is learner autonomy and the use of technology in language learning.

3.3.1 Autonomy and Independent Reading

The development of students' reading skills outside the classroom in tertiary level preparatory programs is one of the major issues that has been subject to research in the UAE. Promoting independent reading or reading for pleasure has been a crucial part of most tertiary level preparatory programs in the UAE. As O'Sullivan (2009) recounts, "extended reading programmes, reading in the community, reading portfolios, reading competitions, speed reading software, intensive online reading, and sustained silent reading" (p.44) have been part and parcel of these preparatory programmes' curricula. The aim of all these approaches is to motivate students to read. Many of these approaches are related to fostering learner autonomy by allowing students to take charge of the selection of the materials, their content, and the quantity of the reading. However, there is no consensus on whether these approaches are effective or not. Studies by Khoury and Düzgün (2009) and Kamhieh (2009) suggest that Emirati students are interested in reading for pleasure. Furthermore, both studies argue against making broad generalizations about Emirati students' reading habits. The Kamhieh (2009) study is interesting in that it gives personal accounts of five Emirati students and their stories of how they became readers. The theme that emerged from all five stories was the role of other people, such as siblings, friends, parents, and teachers in promoting good reading habits. While both studies bring interesting insights into student beliefs about reading outside the classroom, they both have limitations. Khoury and Düzgün (2009) collected their data using a survey. The validity of questions like "What do you choose to read?" and "What do you think of reading?" could be challenged due to their sensitive nature. As Dörnyei (2003) points out, sensitive questions are not limited to illegal or embarrassing subjects, but may refer to social desirability. "Depending on our core values, we are likely to over-report on what we conceive as a positive aspect" (Dörnyei, 2003: 21). University students who study English may be well-aware that reading books and newspapers is perceived as a 'desirable' social behaviour. They may thus over-report on their reading habits to avoid embarrassment. Furthermore, students interviewed by their language teachers about their reading, as in Kamhieh's (2009) study, may feel compelled to please their teacher. As Nunan (1992) points out, the reliability and validity of studies conducted by teachers on their own

students can be compromised by teacher-learner research. Despite these limitations, both studies bring to light the importance of the social context in which the learners are immersed. The issue of social networks and the social context is relevant when we study students' language learning habits outside the classroom. Benson and Reinders' (2011) collection focuses on how people learn languages outside the classroom. In his study of social networks among Emirati students and their families and friends, Palfreyman (2011) applies Social Network Theory. According to this theory, we all live within networks of relationships. These networks enable us to share and transfer resources, such as gifts or information. Palfreyman's (2011) study shows how Emirati students learn English as a social activity, by sharing information about the language with their siblings and friends, by translating for their elders, and by using English in shops and cafés. Palfreyman (2011), like many other researchers, perceives learner autonomy as an approach to learning. However, this strategy is not limited to the language classroom. It is also influenced by the community and the context. The role of social and communal networks in learning English outside the classroom is discussed in more detail in Chapter 5.2.

Other studies report on initiatives to encourage students to read outside the classroom by using graded readers (Johnson, 2009) and social media applications (Ross & Nelson, 2009). The aim of Johnson's (2009) extensive reading programme was to develop the students' intrinsic motivation to read for pleasure and by doing so, to encourage students to read more. In this programme, the students were allowed to choose any book they wanted from the library of graded readers. Furthermore, students were allotted class time to read. A survey was distributed to measure the students' intrinsic motivation during the extensive reading. While all of the 19 students who participated in the programme felt that "the book improved their reading skills", the results were not straightforward. It would be interesting to find out why some of the participants could not choose their own books. In Ross and Nelson's (2009) study, writers give an account of how they integrated a social networking application with their Learning Centre's reading programme. The effectiveness of the programme was measured by using the number of reviews submitted by students on the website. In

addition to the centre's statistics on how many books were borrowed, researchers observed that many students would read during their breaks. Ross and Nelson (2009) admit that there has been no formal measure to assess whether the programme led to a long-term change in the students' reading habits.

Another reason why many independent reading programmes in the UAE are unsuccessful may be the limited choice of reading materials that is made available to students. In their case study, conducted at a tertiary level institution in the UAE, McLaren and Burke (2011) examine the effects of an extensive reading programme on learner autonomy and motivation. The aim of their independent reading programme was to "give students as free a choice as to what they read, and how much they read, even to choose, not to read" (McLaren & Burke, 2011:51). However, as the researchers admit, the students could only select reading materials from the menu pre-selected for them by the teachers. In this respect, I would argue that the students did not have complete freedom over what they could read. This lack of freedom may have affected the results of the case study. In general, the majority of the students did not respond well to the independent reading programme. The researchers blamed 'extraneous variables', such as culture and society, on the programme's failure to promote independent reading. According to McLaren and Burke (2011), Emirati students live "in a society where social, communal and familial interdependence are a way of life" (p.53). This communal interdependence is in contrast with "*Western* principles of individualism and independence" (p.53). McLaren and Burke's (2011) findings are typical of research into independent reading at the tertiary level institutions in the UAE. The researchers 'blame' the failure of an independent reading programme on the students' social and cultural background. According to the authors, the collectivist nature of Emirati society is incompatible with learner independence. This line of reasoning resembles Ricks & Szczerbik's (2010) and Sonaiya's (2002) arguments that learner independence is incompatible with collectivist cultures. However, in the same study, McLaren and Burke (2011) mention several individual students who not only dedicated a lot of time to independent reading but also improved their reading scores during the course of the research.

Murdoch's (2011) qualitative research into fostering independent reading among tertiary level Emirati students had different results compared to McLaren and Burke's (2011) study. The independent reading programme implemented by Murdoch (2011) was very similar to the Independent Reading Log at the PP. In Murdoch's study (2011), the students were asked to select newspaper articles and then write a brief report about their reading. In this independent reading programme, students were given more scaffolding than in McLaren and Burke's independent reading programme (2011). In Murdoch's programme, the teachers would introduce independent reading in class and work on authentic texts with the class first. This helped prepare the students for the independent reading. To find out the learner's response to the independent reading programme, Murdoch interviewed 15 students. The student response to independent reading was positive. Students felt that integrating independent reading with the coursework helped them improve their skills. They also showed awareness "of the positive language learning benefits of reading more in terms of improving their grammar and vocabulary" (Murdoch, 2011:101). Unlike McLaren and Burke's study (2011), Murdoch's study revealed more details about the students' attitudes towards independent reading. For example, students reported that independent reading helped them improve their speaking skills because they felt that they had more ideas to discuss. Furthermore, students appreciated having freedom in selecting newspaper articles, stories, or graded readers. However, a number of students complained about limited library- and Independent Learning Centre resources. In other words, students wanted to have more selection with respect to the reading materials.

Another reason why independent reading programmes fail when introduced within the traditional educational framework is that they often focus on the quantity of the reading, rather than the stories themselves and the impact that they have on the readers. Demirci, Gobert, and Sikkens (2014) describe a pilot programme of promoting independent extensive reading among Emirati students at the Higher Colleges of Technology in the UAE. In the independent reading programme developed at HCT, the students used propriety software which tracked the number of words that they read and

their reading comprehension scores. In order to encourage the students to read on their own, the teachers created a reading competition in which the students who read the most in a given period of time would be rewarded. The competition created a lot of incentive for the students and the number of books borrowed from the library increased during the time of the study. Demirci, Gobert, and Sikkens (2014) monitored the independent reading programme but did not investigate its long-term efficacy and whether it changed the students' attitudes towards reading for pleasure. As they evaluate the study, "the pilot was deemed a success because the students went from reading zero books on their own outside the class to reading an average of six books during the eight week pilot, with the top reader reading 12 books" (Demirci, Gobert, & Sikkens, 2014:46). This focus on the quantity of the reading, rather than on any meaningful interaction with the texts, is similar to the way the PP teachers and students approached independent reading logs. In both contexts, the teachers reward students for the number of books read and not for the quality of the interaction. In both instances, this approach led to dishonesty on behalf of some of the students.

3.3.2 Learner Autonomy and Technology

Another area that has been in focus in the UAE is the use of technology to increase students' autonomy. Cozens, Al Kaabi, and Al Ali (2005) discuss a preparatory English language programme where language portfolios were used to foster learner autonomy. Similar to the results of the portfolio survey at the PP (see Chapter 2.4.3), the opinion of the language portfolio was not positive. The vocabulary log, which required students to collect new words, give their definitions, and write a sentence, was described in the student survey as "collecting rubbish from the sea" (Cozens *et al.*, 2005:235). The language portfolio was not perceived as an effective language learning tool. Accompanying the portfolio was an independent learning activities log. The students perceived it as a waste of time and boring. They "did not feel that there was anything to gain from 'independent activities' as they were not 'part of the test'" (p.235). In order to develop the students' sense of ownership and foster reflection over their own learning process, teachers created a discussion board where the students wrote their reflective journals and shared their opinions and comments. According to Cozens *et al.* (2005),

the online discussion board gave the students a sense of responsibility and allowed the students a certain level of ownership over the topics that were discussed; “by giving the students the freedom to choose subjects and encouraging criticism, students had performed tasks outside the classroom which were more difficult than those they complained about in class” (Cozens *et al.*, 2005:242). Cozens *et al.*'s (2005) study contains some interesting results in that it demonstrates that Emirati students are able and willing to participate in independent learning activities, if the activities are attractive and their outcomes are beneficial in the students' eyes. The limitation of the study is that it does not provide a deep insight into either the students' or teachers' opinion of the use of technology in fostering autonomy.

Similar findings are reported by Tuksinvarajarn and Sojisirikul (2009) who explored teachers' and students' opinions of electronic portfolios used at a university in Bangkok. The electronic portfolios described by the researchers were similar in their goal and design when compared to the ILL used at the PP. The aim of the electronic portfolios was to “provide the path for students to develop self-regulated learning including awareness of thinking, use of language strategies and sustained motivation”; thus, “helping students become more autonomous learners” (Tuksinvarajarn & Sojisirikul, 2009:331). Similar to the situation at the PP, the students at King Mongkut's University were required to engage in autonomous language learning outside the classroom and report on it using portfolios. The teachers' and students' at KMU came across the same reservations and criticism of the portfolios as the PP students and faculty. The main complaints from the teachers were (i) the heavy marking load, and (ii) unreliable assessment. Other criticisms were also similar to those raised at the PP. The students referred to the portfolios “as a boring burden” and did “the work just to meet the minimum requirements of the course” (Tuksinvarajarn & Sojisirikul, 2009:333). The final similarity was that the portfolio generated an enormous amount of plagiarised and ‘shared’ work. The students would copy work from students who had taken the course in previous years. In order to resolve these problems, Tuksinvarajarn and Sojisirikul (2009) developed electronic portfolios to change the teachers' and students' attitudes towards independent learning. According to the researchers, the electronic portfolios

helped motivate the students to work independently and reduced the teachers' workload. Whilst the initial response of the students and faculty was positive, it would have been interesting to see whether it remained the same once the novelty of the new technology wore off.

Other studies conducted in the UAE explore the relationship between technology, motivation, and autonomy. Bray and Durham's (2010) study explores the motivation of Emirati male students and their changing attitudes on a continuum from extrinsic to intrinsic motivation when using technology to learn English. The researchers found that even though the students felt a greater sense of personal responsibility when using technology, the majority of the students (52%) were still extrinsically motivated. In addition, many students found the technology de-motivating when it failed to function. The conclusion of the study is that while technology does facilitate a certain increase in intrinsic motivation, the students needed the teachers' help and support to use it. As Bray and Durham (2010) observe, the use of technology has the potential to facilitate autonomy by allowing students to choose their own materials. The findings support Little's (1991:48) observation, that "even self-motivating adult learners are likely to need assistance in finding materials". Little (1991) mentions two reasons why most learners are not able to choose their learning materials on their own, namely (i) they do not know exactly what will correspond to their needs, and (ii) they do not know where to look for what they need. Similar issues were observed by Kelly (2006) in his study of using video to foster learner autonomy and motivation. Kelly's (2006) context is similar to this study; that is a tertiary level bridge programme in the UAE. As part of his action research, Kelly (2006) used videos four times as part of his academic writing class. The students would access the videos on their own in the university computer lab and answer questions related to the writing course. A survey was distributed at the end of the course to find out the students' response to the videos. The majority of the students declared that 'they learn best' with a teacher and books. According to Kelly (2006), "the teacher remained in the top position near the beginning and toward the end of the semester" (p.269). The study's main limitation is that technology has changed nowadays. Most government colleges and universities in the UAE promote paperless

schools and rely on eBooks and tablet apps. It would be interesting to repeat Kelly's (2006) study in this new paperless era to see whether the teacher's role, as the main source of information, still prevails in students' minds. The notion that technology can replace the traditional teacher role as the conduit of information dominates many discussions on the use of technology in education. As Siemens (2008) argues,

[T]his has huge implications for traditional classrooms which are built on a power relation in which the teacher as expert imparts knowledge to his or her students. Teachers are no longer only conduits to knowledge, not will they necessarily be more knowledgeable than (sic!) their students. (p.157)

The review of the research into learner autonomy in the UAE context has revealed more about the researchers' beliefs of what autonomy is (or is not) than about the students' beliefs or attitudes towards autonomy. Table 3.3 summarizes some of the common assumptions underpinning the research reviewed in this section.

Table 3.2 Common assumptions about learner autonomy and autonomous students in research conducted in the UAE

| False assumptions about learner autonomy |
|--|
| Autonomy means learning without a teacher |
| In the classroom context, autonomy requires the teacher to relinquish all initiative and control |
| Autonomy is a methodology |
| Autonomy is a single, easily described behaviour |
| Autonomy is a steady state achieved by certain learners |

It is interesting that some of the assumptions presented in Table 3.3 are similar to the assumptions critiqued in Section 3.2. The most pervasive is the assumption that 'autonomy' is equated with 'students working alone without the teacher'. Little (1991) argues against this "widespread misconception" that autonomy is synonymous with self-instruction, and "that it is essentially a matter of deciding to learn without a teacher" (Little, 1991:3). Table 3.3 summarizes the five misconceptions of autonomy as outlined by Little (1991). Despite the fact that Little's list of misconceptions in autonomy discourse is quite old, it is not out of date. As presented throughout this chapter,

researchers in different contexts and with different agendas can misrepresent the concept of ‘autonomy’ in language learning.

Table 3.3 Common false assumptions in autonomy discourse (after Little, 1991)

| False assumptions about learner autonomy |
|--|
| Autonomy means learning without a teacher |
| In the classroom context, autonomy requires the teacher to relinquish all initiative and control |
| Autonomy is a methodology |
| Autonomy is a single, easily described behaviour |
| Autonomy is a steady state achieved by certain learners |

Points 4 and 5 in Table 3.3 are especially interesting in light of the previous discussion about the essentialising trends in autonomy discourse. According to Little (1991), autonomy is not a simple, fixed state. That means that certain learners may be autonomous in some disciplines but less autonomous in others. Furthermore, there is no one way to describe an autonomous learner. If we were to update the misconceptions, or false assumptions, listed above with respect to research conducted since their publication, we may consider two more points:

1. Using technology to foster autonomy means working alone on a computer
2. Using technology to learn language means working alone

The teacher’s role in fostering learner autonomy is often conceptualised as that of a *counsellor*. Philips (2012), working at a tertiary level institution in Oman, emphasised the need to view autonomy as a “dynamic and modifiable process rather than as a static or permanent state” (p.25). Philips (2012) identifies the teacher’s roles in promoting learner autonomy as *counsellor*, *facilitator*, *manager*, and *guide*. This view of the teacher’s role is common in autonomy discourse. However, if we define the teacher’s roles in these terms, the hierarchical power relation between the student and teacher

remains. In any of these scenarios, the teacher's role is that of the dominant, knowledgeable, and active counterpart. The student's passive role is thus defined by the teacher's overpowering position.

Another study by Al Ghazali and Etherington (2014) investigates the beliefs about language learner autonomy among Grade 12 students in Abu Dhabi. Their study is unique in that it approached the subject of autonomy in the Gulf region without the common presumptions about the learners' beliefs and abilities. The main limitation of the study is that it is purely quantitative. In the study, the students responded to a number of Likert-scale questions. Whilst this method has many advantages, in that it allows the researcher to obtain answers from many respondents in an efficient way (Dörnyei, 2003:9), it has certain drawbacks. First of all, it provides the possible answers to the respondents. In other words, the students might not have associated independent learning with watching movies or talking to native speakers. But making statements about different autonomous activities, the researcher leads the respondents on, and does not actually explore *the respondents'* beliefs about autonomy. Secondly, a number of questions in Al Ghazali and Etherington's (2014) survey were value-driven. For example, "I use a grammar book to do exercises independently" or "I write down new vocabulary in my English notebook" are both good study habits. Thus, a student may admit to doing these activities so as to conform to the behaviour that is expected from a student. Finally, the adherence to quantitative data left the study with little depth of understanding. It would have been interesting to triangulate the data with observations or interviews so as to gain a better understanding of the students' beliefs and behaviours with respect to autonomy.

3.3.3 Interdependence and the Sociocultural Approach

Very few studies conducted in the Middle East or the Gulf region view learner autonomy from a sociocultural perspective. Al Ghazali and Etherington (2014) note that Grade 12 students in Abu Dhabi are aware of different strategies for independent learning, but that they prefer strategies that "rely on assistance and support from external authorities" (p.295). Furthermore, the students see the teacher as central to their language

education. They rely on the teacher for support, corrective feedback, and encouragement. Al Ghazali and Etherington (2014) suggest that this teacher-centred attitude does not preclude the possibility of learner autonomy. However, they recommend that learner autonomy in the UAE be enhanced by incorporating more activities that foster interdependence and collaboration among peers. The students in the survey showed positive attitudes towards learning through group work. Despite the limitations of their study, Al Ghazali and Etherington (2014) make an important point about learner autonomy in the UAE. They notice a number of contradictions between learners' beliefs about autonomy and their declared activities. For example, most of the respondents declared that 'language development is the responsibility of students', but, in the same study, a significant number of the respondents agreed that 'English teachers should tell students what to study'. The teacher's role in learner autonomy is explored in more detail in the data analysis and discussion chapter of this study.

The notion that learner independence is intrinsically related to the *interdependence* of peers is explored in Abu Shakra's (2006) study at a university in Lebanon. The study is unique in that it explores how Vygotsky's social constructivist theory can be applied to foster learner autonomy and motivation in reading skills. Abu Shakra's (2006) focus was on peer teaching and the social aspects of learning. The researcher examined the effects of peer teaching on the students' reading skills and autonomy. Whilst Abu Shakra's (2006) study does not bear an exact resemblance to the present study, it does investigate the relationship between sociocultural theory and learner autonomy. As such, the study shows that peer teaching results in higher levels of involvement and motivation in students. However, the results of this action research has several validly issues. The first one is that the researcher relied only on her field-notes and her own observations. It would have been interesting to hear the reflections of the students. The research would also benefit from a long-term investigation. It may be that the students' increased engagement and interest could be explained due to Hawthorne's effect (Wellington, 2004:197). To reduce the influence of this phenomenon, it would have been beneficial to continue the experiment over a longer time period. Despite these issues, Abu Shakra's (2006) paper contributes to the study of learner and teacher

autonomy by reflecting on the teacher's role in an autonomous classroom. Just like many other teachers around the world who experiment with activities that foster learner autonomy, Abu Shakra (2006) felt anxious and apprehensive about transferring control of her classroom to her students. As she recalls:

First and foremost was fear of the possible chaos that may arise in the classroom when the instructor gives up the role as the primary figure in control to allow students to take control. This was coupled with the concern that students may perceive that the instructor was not executing his or her duty and providing them with the learning they needed. (Abu Shakra, 2006:147).

This teacher's reflection reveals that allowing students to take control over learning can be coupled with high levels of anxiety and concern on behalf of teachers. It demonstrates that the teacher's role as the dictatorial authority in the classroom is strongly embedded in our collective consciousness. This conceptualisation of the teacher's role may prevent teachers from allowing students to take charge of their own learning. Another issue is that in the students' eyes, it is the teacher's role to *teach* and they may be reluctant to participate in activities that are not centred on the teacher and the book. Smith (2003) recalls his own experience of letting his Japanese students take control over the content of what they wanted to study and in what manner they were to study the material. The teacher observed that he initially hesitated in allowing students to take charge over their own learning. As he recalls it, "I spent a lot of time worrying initially about whether students' plans would work in practice" (Smith, 2003:134). In the initial stages of the programme, in which the students wrote their own study plans and found their own study materials, the teacher-researcher would frequently 'intervene' and give advice. As he later comments, this lack of confidence in his own students is based on a traditional understanding of teacher- and student roles.

[T]here is no denying that the changes in teacher and student roles which accompany this type of approach tend to counter conventional expectations, representing a challenge to established norms of classroom culture in most institutional learning contexts, Western or non-Western. (Smith, 2003:143).

As Smith (2003) later argues, a teacher's ability to promote a strong version of pedagogy for learner autonomy is often contingent on teacher autonomy. The issue of how teacher autonomy can affect the students' ability to take charge over their own learning is discussed in more detail in Chapter 5.2.

To summarize, this chapter discussed how 'the social turn' in SLA theory has affected the definition of learner autonomy. In this respect, autonomy is defined not only as a set of metacognitive learning strategies, but also as an ability to collaborate and learn from more able peers. Autonomy is also contingent on the context and learner identity. I discussed several misconceptions of autonomy, such as *learning without a teacher*, *learning alone*, and *working alone in front of a computer*. These misconceptions provide a simplistic understanding of learner autonomy and do not take into account context and individual learners. I also analyzed arguments against learner autonomy as a Western concept and demonstrated how the Orientalist discourse leads to stereotypes in TESOL. The stereotypes present ESL students as lacking, deficient, and unable to be autonomous. Finally, I analyzed several studies conducted in a context similar to the one in this study.

Chapter 4: Methodology

The theoretical framework of this study, which is sociocultural theory as presented by Vygotsky (1978), Lantolf (2000), Little, Ridley, and Ushioda, (2002), and Oxford (2003), has been discussed in some detail in Chapter 3.1. The focus of this chapter is on how sociocultural theory and the critical paradigm have informed the selection of the methodology, the methods used to collect the data, and the methods used to interpret the data. While both theoretical and paradigmatic frameworks inform the design of a study, its data analysis, and the results, they are not the same things. Troudi (2010) points out that a distinction between the theoretical framework and the paradigmatic framework may not always be clearly discernible. According to him, the theoretical framework “reflects where you stand intellectually *vis-à-vis* your research questions and the way you are going to look at the data” (Troudi, 2010:316). It is related to the constructs that are under investigation. In this study it is the construct of learner autonomy and its interpretation by sociocultural theory that are investigated. The paradigmatic framework, on the other hand, is much broader in scope. It is a world view that informs our assumptions about the nature of reality and the “the nature of knowledge, its possibility, scope, and general basis” (Hamlyn, 1995; in Crotty, 2006). Thus, it is essential to outline the paradigmatic nature of this study before the discussion of the methodology and methods that I used to explore the research questions.

4.1 Paradigmatic Nature of the Study

Troudi (2010) distinguishes three main approaches that can inform a research study: positivist, interpretive, and critical. While the positivist framework is incommensurable with the interpretive paradigm because of its underlying epistemologies and ontologies, both the interpretive and critical paradigms share a number of assumptions about the nature of language and social interactions. The aim of this study is exploratory and critical at the same time. The exploratory part examines students’ and teachers’ perspectives and experiences of the ILL and uses interpretive tools to gain an understanding of these perspectives and experiences. The critical part argues against some common stereotypes of “Gulf students”, especially with respect to their autonomy in learning English. Thus, the paradigmatic framework of this study could be described

as 'critical-interpretive'. The following section outlines the tenets of the interpretive and critical paradigms, and then elaborates why such a framework is suitable to research the concept of 'autonomy' in TESOL.

4.1.1 Dichotomies and Paradigms

Many studies into paradigmatic frameworks within educational research contrast the positivistic paradigm with interpretive and critical paradigms (Ary, Jacobs, & Razevieh, 2002; Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2003; Guba & Lincoln, 2005). However, as Pring (2003) observes, such a bifurcation creates false dichotomies, such as positivist vs interpretive, quantitative vs qualitative, and objectivist vs subjectivist. Such oppositions are often hierarchical, in the sense that positivist, quantitative, and objective research is seen as superior to interpretive, qualitative, and subjective studies. Despite the fact that, in the last few decades, many educational researchers have argued in favour of qualitative methods (Radnor, 2001; Richards, 2003; Wellington, 2004; Holliday, 2007; Tracy, 2013), these dichotomies still prevail in the literature on education research. It has to be underscored that such a bifurcation is simplistic and leads to unfair assumptions about both paradigms. For example, the positivist paradigm is often associated with numbers and statistics, hence the terms 'scientific' and 'quantitative' are often used interchangeably (Howe, 1988; Fetterman, 1988; Gage, 1989). According to Simpson (1982), this is a misinterpretation of the positivist approach which is often associated with Comte. For Comte, "scientific knowledge is not a matter of grasping an objective meaning independent of social thought and social condition" (Crotty, 2006:22). Another postpositivist thinker, Karl Popper, wrote that "the old scientific ideal of *episteme* – of absolutely certain, demonstrable knowledge – has proven to be an idol" (Popper, 1959; in Crotty, 2006:33). Postpositivist scientists, including Feyerabend, Kuhn, Popper, Heisenberg, and Bohr, postulate that "scientific truths are no less cultural in character, and no less socio-political in origin, than any other of the beliefs we hold" (Crotty, 2006:40). This change in positivist epistemology affiliates this traditionally 'objectivist approach' with the interpretive and critical paradigms, and blurs the borders of the positivist/interpretive dichotomy at the level of epistemology. Postpositivist philosophers of science "question positivist science's claim into certitude and objectivity"

(Crotty, 2006:29). According to Wellington (2000:17), “quantitative methods are not always theory-laden or hypothesis-driven, and certainly never (because they are employed by people) value free. Similarly, qualitative research can never be complete fiction; it must depend on some inter-subjective (if not ‘objective’) reality”. Drawing on this criticism of the qualitative/quantitative dichotomy, I wish to reserve these terms to denote methods of data collection and analysis. With this respect, the methods used to collect data in this study are qualitative. They are described in more detail in Section 4.4 below. It will suffice here to say that the reason for choosing qualitative methods of data collection and analysis to answer the research questions is that they seek *emic understanding* of the context and language learners (Tracy, 2013:21). This emic approach is aligned with the tenets of sociocultural theory in SLA as outlined in Chapter 3.

4.1.2 The Critical-interpretive Tenets of Critical Discourse Analysis

The literature review showed that the concept of learner autonomy in TESOL is often politicised. A discussion of learner autonomy brings up the issues of (i) Western hegemony in English language education around the world, (ii) the notions of collectivist versus individualist cultures, and (iii) the position of the learner as the Other in TESOL discourse. On a theoretical level, learner autonomy is intrinsically related to learner empowerment. At the core of learner autonomy are issues of control and agency in learning. Despite the clear relation between learner empowerment and autonomy, researchers seldom approach the issue of autonomy in a language classroom from the broader perspective of power and unequal power relations between teachers and students. This inherent conflict between the need for autonomy and the prevailing power structures in TESOL classrooms lie at the centre of this study. Thus, the approach of this research is critical and draws on critical pedagogy in education and TESOL field. My agenda is emancipatory in that I hope to bring understanding and change to how independent learning syllabi are implemented in TESOL. The aim of this critical study is to explore the reasons for the perceived failure of the ILL at the PP. These reasons, I believe, can be explored by careful analysis of how students and teachers describe their experience of using the ILL. To aid in this analysis, I use Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Hence, the study can be described as interpretive-critical or

critical-interpretive in that it draws on the philosophical tenets of Critical Pedagogy (Freire, 2000; Apple, 2004), and on the ontological and epistemological perspective of interpretive paradigm. The assumption that language creates the reality in which we live affiliates CDA with the interpretive paradigm. Taking on the interpretivist's viewpoint, my interest is in how teachers and students conceptualise and interpret the ILL. Thus, the data collected in the study is qualitative and comprises interviews and surveys. These two sources of data are rich in linguistic information which can be interpreted using CDA.

CDA can be best described as a research methodology and a philosophy at the same time. The reason for this twofold classification is that it explores how texts (written, spoken, visual, etc.) reinforce hidden agendas and ideologies. From this perspective the role of language (or any symbolic communication) is paramount in developing social relations and processes (Fairclough, 2001; Fairclough, Mulderrig, & Wodak, 2009; Fairclough, 2010). CDA has its origins in 'Western Marxism' and draws on works of philosophers from the Frankfurt School (Machin & Mayr, 2012). These philosophers studied how ideologies (such as capitalism, consumerism, or the patriarchy) are reinforced through language used by everyday people and the media. These studies highlighted "the substantively discursive nature of power relations in contemporary society" (Fairclough et al., 2009, loc. 10411). Recent studies have extended the scope of CDA by including social semiotics (van Leeuwen, 2005a; van Leeuwen, 2005b), and studies into the cognitive aspects of ideological thinking (van Dijk, 2009). The understanding of the notion of ideology is crucial to understand CDA.

Van Dijk's emphasis on "the cognitive dimensions of how discourse operates in racism, ideology and knowledge" (Fairclough et al., 2009, Loc. 10252) is especially relevant to the analysis of the data collected in this study. The principal assumption of CDA is that "ideologies are expressed in, and reproduced by, discourse" (van Dijk, 2009, Loc. 10758). Modern understanding of the term *ideology* is not limited to what we would traditionally understand as ideology, for example, a capitalist ideology, a Nazi ideology, or a communist ideology. This definition of ideology has strong negative connotations

and an inherent political stance. In modern cultural studies, media studies, and social studies, the term *ideology* often refers to *the common consciousness of a group of people* or a set of beliefs about the world shared by these people. While issues of power and supremacy are always ingrained within any ideology, the ideologies that we live by are not always malevolent. For example, many professional groups share certain ideologies according to which they establish their standards of practice and their professional codes. These ideologies determine what is important to the given profession and what is not. Van Dijk (2009) defines *ideology* in the following way:

Ideologies, thus informally defined, are general systems of basic ideas shared by the members of a social group, ideas that will influence their interpretation of social events and situations and control their discourse and other social practices as group members. (Loc. 10772)

Van Dijk (2009) argues that the prevailing negative conception of ideology is too narrow and does not reflect the existence of the various forms of ideologies that shape our lives. Thus, many CDA researchers emphasise “the sociocognitive nature of ideologies as the basis of the shared mental representations of social groups which in turn will control the social practices of members” (Loc. 10798). The sociocognitive understanding of ideology is applied in the data analysis and discussion in the present study. The concepts of ‘shared beliefs’ and ‘social cognition’ are further explored in the discussion of the data analysis. The social groups whose beliefs are under scrutiny in this research are teachers and students and the PP. Examining their interpretation and the use of ILL will help bring to focus their beliefs about language learning and teaching, and learner autonomy. The CDA procedures used in this study are further detailed in Section 4.4.3 below, which outlines the specific research methods that were employed. Before I present the rationale for the methodology and the methods, I summarise the research questions that govern this interpretive-critical study into learner autonomy in the following section.

4.2 Research Questions

This research was triggered by my experience of using the ILL at the PP. I observed that many teachers and students held negative opinions about the ILL. To find out the

causes of this negative attitude and to try to improve the syllabi of the PP, the teachers formed collaborative action research groups and conducted regular surveys of student and teacher opinions of the ILL. The surveys were conducted in the period of 2009-2013. These surveys revealed a recurring ambivalence between the students' perceived advantages of the ILL and the negative connotations attached to the ILL. The negative portrayal of the ILL was presented in Chapter 2.4.3. The PP surveys provided a good starting point for this study, because they revealed continued negative feelings about the ILL from the student perspective. After each round of the surveys, the PP teachers would implement curricular changes that addressed different points of criticism of the ILL. Despite continuous self-reflection, re-evaluation, and informed changes, the negative attitude towards the ILL remained. Thus, I decided to find out why this negative point of view about independent learning and the ILL persisted at the PP. I realized that the surveys created by the collaborative action research team at the PP did not provide sufficient depth of understanding or enough qualitative detail to answer this question. Therefore, I decided to conduct more focused research by interviewing teachers and students, collecting samples of the students' work, and conducting more surveys that were focused on the ILL. Thus, this study can be described as exploratory in that I wanted to understand a problem rather than test a hypothesis or theory. The point of exploratory research is to generate understanding.

The nature of an exploratory study is that one does not know exactly where the research will lead to and what shape it will eventually take. The exploratory research design has to be self-reflective and flexible. It is not a linear process in which one can address a clear, pre-determined research question and focus solely on that one question. In this exploratory study, my role was that of a participant observer; in this role, I was continuously confronted with new data and new information. The research question itself evolved and broadened its scope as the study progressed. In my search to find understanding, I had to revisit the initial research questions quite often and adjust the focus of the study in light of new, incoming data. Furthermore, as I gained better understanding of the problem under investigation I was able to re-adjust the research

focus so as to explore any additional issues that came to the surface during the study. The final set of research questions can be summarised as the following:

1. How do teachers and students at the PP interpret and implement the ILL?
2. How do teachers and students conceptualise independent learning in English?
3. What role does out-of-class learning play among the PP students?
4. To what extent is learner independence a feasible institutional goal?

After the first round of the interviews, it became apparent that direct interrogation of the efficacy of the ILL was futile and counterproductive. I came to understand that measuring autonomy in language learning is contingent on numerous variables that would be difficult to control in this relatively short period of study, such as the learner's age, level of motivation, interest in English culture, learning styles, family background, previous language learning experience, aptitude, other academic interests, and so on. As explained in Chapter 1.4, measuring autonomy in language learning has a number of limitations. The question is whether we want to measure learner autonomy (which I believe is an impossible task) or whether we want to explore different dimensions of learner autonomy using an emic research approach. Thus, my research changed its focus from the purported efficacy of the ILL, to the ways teachers and students conceptualise the ILL and learner autonomy. By careful examination of the discourse used to describe how teachers and students use the ILL and how they describe independent learning, I put forth their shared set of beliefs. I approached these beliefs using CDA and searched for opaqueness, omission, and contradictions. The reason for doing that was to reveal how teachers and students conceptualise the ILL and how this affects the way in which they use it. Finally, as a result of the initial data analysis, the question whether learner independence can be a feasible institutional goal emerged. By answering all of these questions, I create a better understanding of the implementation of learner autonomy in an institutionalised setting, which may help other institutions with similar independent learning programmes.

4.3 Research Design

The methodology used in this research is 'case study'. As a methodology, case study is difficult to define in one specific way. As Nunan (1992:74) points out, "[m]ethodologically, the case study is a 'hybrid' in that it generally utilizes a range of methods for collecting and analysing data, rather than being restricted to a single procedure". This entails that a case study can adopt a range of methods and sometimes methodologies, like ethnography or action research (Nunan, 1992). According to Stake (2005), case study should not be defined by the methods used to study the case, but by "interest in an individual case" (p.443) or, as Wellington (2004) defines it, 'the unit'. Stake (2005) emphasizes that while the case can be studied "analytically or holistically, entirely by repeated measures or hermeneutically, organically or culturally" the underlying epistemological question in case studies is "what specifically can be learned about the single case" (p.443). In language teaching and learning, a case can refer to a particular learner or a teacher, a class, a school, a school administrator, a specific group of students, a language program, or a specific course. The case study can focus on a group of people such as a school, or a class; thus, it should not really be defined in terms of the singularity of the case, but rather, as a *bounded system*. Stake (1988) defines a bounded system as "the systematic connections among the observable behaviours, speculations, causes, and treatments" (p.255). In his definition, "[t]he unity of the system depends partly on what you want to find out" (p.255). With respect to the present study, the case is defined by the *ILL*, its structure and educational aims, the students and teachers who use it, and the educational context in which it is applied. Figure 4.1 below illustrates all of the components of the bounded system that were investigated in this case study.

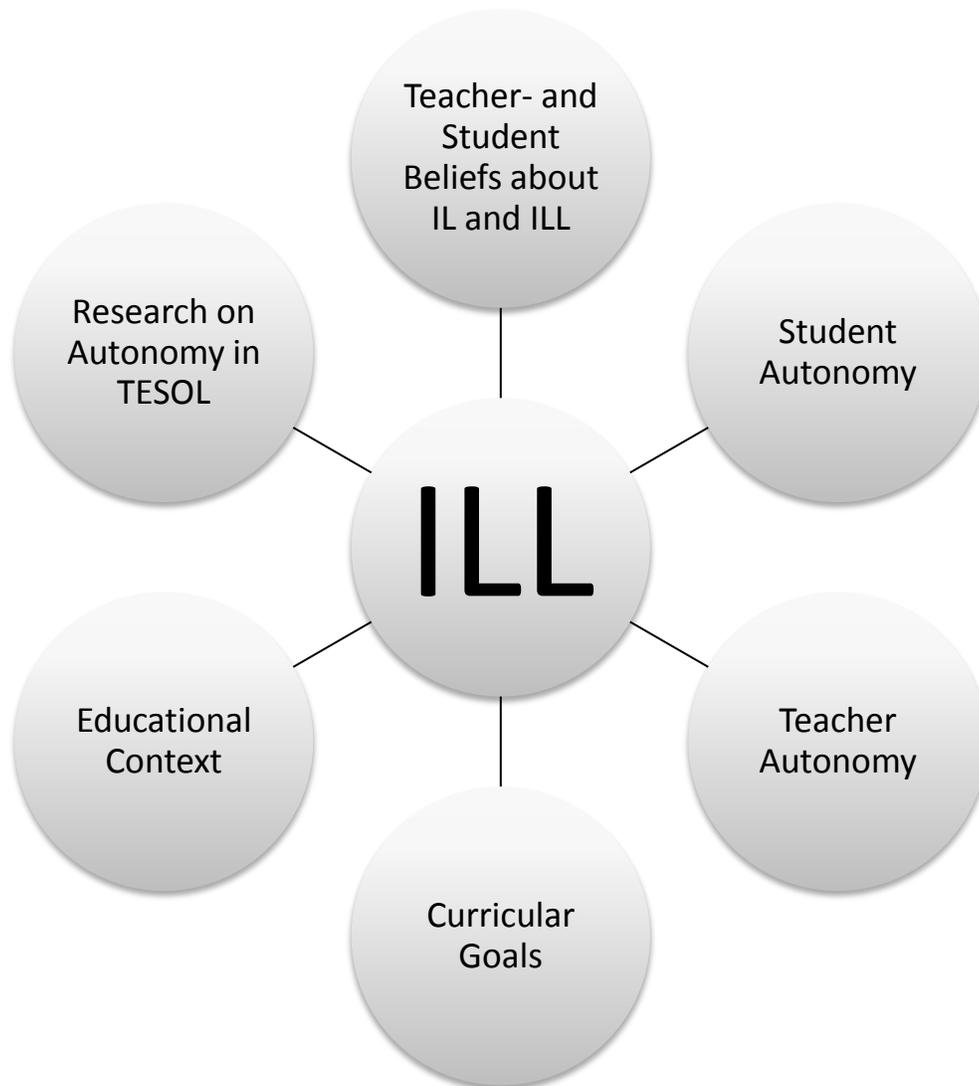


Figure 4.1 An outline of the case study of the ILL

The motivation for conducting this case study can be described in Stake’s (2005) terms as *intrinsic*, in that “the study is undertaken because, first and last, one wants better understanding of this particular case” (p.445). Richards (2003) advocates the use of case studies in TESOL in order to bring depth of understanding of particular educational contexts. The author maintains that “[i]n a field as broad geographically, socially and intellectually as TESOL, where generalisations are likely to be blandly true, suffocatingly narrow or irresponsibly cavalier, the power of the particular case to resonate across cultures should not be underestimated” (Richards, 2003:21). Richards (2003) reiterates

the argument that the traditional definition of external validity in educational research is inadequate (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). A more detailed discussion of the qualitative alternatives to validity follows in Section 4.5 Validity and Reliability.

The case study as a methodology is particularly suitable to investigate the research questions outlined in this chapter because of its epistemological focus on the *case*, which, in this instance, is the ILL. As a case, the ILL can be conceptualized as a key element of a bounded system where the students, the teachers, their learning and teaching experience, the learning context, and the curriculum are all interrelated. An analysis of these elements through interviews, surveys, and participant observation can help us to understand the role of the ILL as a language learning tool. Furthermore, the analysis of the ILL, with its components and its influence on stakeholders, can help us answer the question of its role in promoting learner autonomy in a specific educational context. The focus on the educational context is essential to case studies. This characteristic allows the researcher to provide a ‘thick’ description of the setting, the people who are involved, and their perspectives. Such an approach to educational research may not always be *generalizable*, but can often be *relatable*. As Wellington (2004:96) points out, “the ability to relate to a case and learn from it is perhaps more important than being able to generalize from it.”

Yin (2012), Nunan (1992), and Wellington (2004) emphasize the claim that the lack of generalizability may cause a serious threat to the validity of the case study. However, I would argue that generalizability may not always be a desirable outcome of educational research because it jettisons the particular and specific features of a context and draws causal relations in broad strokes. Ushioda (2010) argues against using this reductionist approach in SLA studies.

This search for cause-effect has largely defined research perspectives on language motivation. Of course, this is very much in keeping with the positivist psychometric tradition of this kind of research. The aim is to make generalisable predictions about what kinds of motivation might lead to what kind of learning behaviour in what kind of context, and thus to identify what kind of pedagogical intervention might be needed to change maladaptive

patterns of motivation, and so improve learning behaviours and outcomes.
(p.218)

While Ushioda's remarks focus on language learning motivation research, they emphasize the potential trap that causal explanations in language learning research may pose. The researcher indicates that this type of linear, cause-effect explanation do not help us understand "how a particular student might think and feel about language learning" (p.219). As a result of the sociocultural paradigm shift in SLA, the research focus is not so much on 'commonalities' but on 'idiosyncrasies'. Qualitative researchers argue that such generalised observations, once applied in a new context, may fail to deliver the projected educational outcomes (Richards, 2003). The reason for this is that, by focusing on the general aspects of a case, we may be prone to overlook the particular features that made the case interesting in the first place.

4.4 Research Methods

The previous sections of this chapter emphasized the rationale behind using CDA and case study to investigate the influence of the ILL on particular students and teachers. It was emphasised that the aim of this case study is 'intrinsic' in that it focuses on gaining understanding of the ILL in the context of teaching and learning English at the PP. The data was collected using: (i) surveys of the PP students and teachers, (ii) a group interview with the students, (iii) individual interviews with teachers and students, and (iv) content analysis of the students' ILLs. Table 4.2 gives an overview of the data collection methods and the respondents.

Table 4.1 Overview of the data collection methods (the respondents' names are pseudonyms)

| Time period | Surveys | Interviews with students | Interviews with teachers | Sample student work |
|-----------------------|---|---|---|---|
| Spring 2011/12 | Student Survey Spring 2012 (online - 28 respondents) Teacher Survey Spring 2012 (online – 9 respondents) | | | |
| Fall 2012/13 | | Group Interview: 12 students (IELTS 4.5.-5.5) | Individual interviews: <u>George</u> (over 10 years in the Gulf) <u>David</u> (over 5 years in the Gulf) <u>Jack</u> (less than 5 years in the Gulf) <u>Emma</u> (less than 5 years in the Gulf) <u>Ann</u> (over 10 years in the Gulf) | |
| Spring 2012/13 | Student Survey Spring 2013 (online – 17 respondents) | Individual interviews: <u>Ahmed</u> (IELTS 8) <u>Salem</u> (IELTS 6) <u>Sultan</u> (IELTS 6) <u>Marwan</u> (IELTS 5.5) <u>Abdullah</u> (IELTS 5.5) <u>Aysha</u> (IELTS 6.5) <u>Sara</u> (IELTS 5.5) | | Samples of student coursework from: Marwan Hamad Aysha Ahmed Salem Mohammed Mariam |
| Fall 2013/14 | Student Survey Fall 2013 (paper-based – 50 respondents) | | Individual interviews: <u>Claire</u> (over 10 years in the Gulf) <u>Eve</u> (over 5 years in the Gulf) | |

The table shows that the first two surveys were distributed online in the Spring of 2012. One survey was aimed at the PP teachers and the other was aimed at the current students. The student survey contained multiple choice questions and open-ended

questions. The teacher survey contained open-ended questions. The data from this initial set of surveys was analyzed separately using topics and codes; this method of coding is outlined by Radnor (2001). After this data analysis, conducted in the Summer of 2012, I noted there were several common themes related to how teachers and students perceive the ILL and independent learning that were similar across these two data sets. Therefore, during the final data analysis in 2014, conducted using Nvivo and with the use of the CDA tools, I coded the qualitative data from both teachers and students as part of one set. The coding procedures are explained in more detail in 4.4.3 below.

The different cohorts of the PP students were surveyed again in the Spring of 2013 and in the Fall of 2013. Overall, three different groups of the PP students were surveyed. The quantitative data from the student surveys was analyzed using descriptive statistics and these findings are used in the data analysis chapter to support the themes and observations drawn from the qualitative data analysis. Using both qualitative and quantitative data to support my findings has been one of the steps in ensuring triangulation of the data type. Triangulation of data type and data sources is a well-established method of increasing the trustworthiness of a qualitative inquiry (Richards, 2003; Shenton, 2004; Holliday, 2007). According to Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2003), it refers to “the use of two or more methods of data collection” in order to present a given phenomenon in its richness and complexity. As such, triangulation is also used to strengthen the validity of a study. In order to ensure the triangulation of data sources and type, I used the qualitative and quantitative data from the four surveys and the qualitative data from the interviews. I conducted three types of interviews: a group interview with twelve PP students, seven individual interviews with teachers, and seven individual interviews with students. All these interviews were semi-structured in that there was a set of questions that all the interviewees were asked, but there was also scope for open discussion of the ideas mentioned by the speakers. The following sub-sections provide detailed description of the data collection and analysis methods.

4.4.1 Surveys

I started my inquiry into the ILL and independent learning with two surveys. One was designed for the students and the other was designed for the PP teachers. The reason for choosing surveys was that they allowed me to canvas a lot of people, both students and teachers, in a time-effective manner. In the course of this study, the students' opinions were surveyed three times and the teachers' opinions once. Figure 4.2 below provides a brief outline of the surveys that were conducted during the research period.

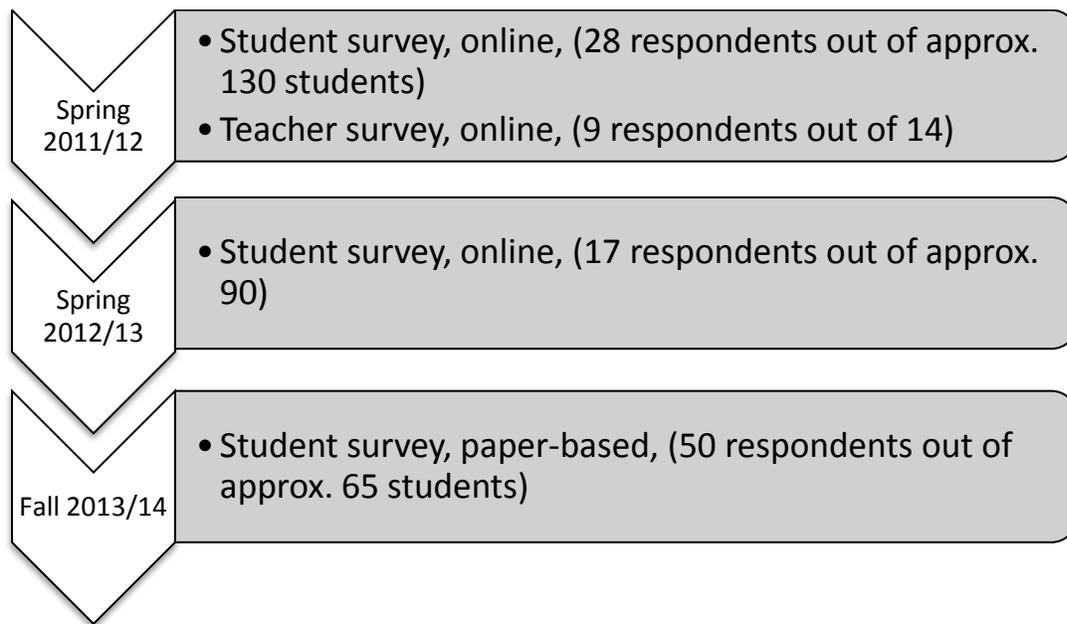


Figure 4.2 An outline of the surveys conducted in the period Spring 2012 to Fall 2013

The reason why the students were asked to complete their surveys on three different occasions is that, in each survey, different cohorts of students were asked to participate. Thus, these three student surveys provided a good range of opinions and voices. The student surveys contained both open-ended questions and Likert-scale questions. Not all of the students wrote their comments in the open-ended sections of the surveys. The teachers' survey, on the other hand, contained solely open-ended items. The reason for doing this was to gain a better understanding of their opinions and to allow them to explain their opinions and give examples. The teacher survey was conducted once because the composition of the faculty did not change in any drastic manner during the period of the study. The teachers who participated in the survey were asked to indicate

whether they would be interested in a follow-up interview. The teachers who were invited for the interviews were selected from that group of volunteers.

The surveys conducted in the Spring of 2012 were written in collaboration with other faculty members. Their primary aim was to find out the students' opinions about the ILL and the programme. As a member of that collaborative action research team, I requested my colleagues' and the respondents' permission to use the data collected in the survey for my own research. The aim of the survey was to improve the programme and the results were discussed at a faculty meeting. The second student survey was conducted a year later in the Spring of 2013. At that stage, I was already investigating issues of learner autonomy in language learning and so the aim of the survey was to gain an overview of the students' opinions and attitudes towards the ILL. Furthermore, I wanted to see how the students defined their perception of autonomy in language learning and how they view the ILL as a language learning tool. Both student surveys, Spring 2012 and Spring 2013, were conducted using the *surveymonkey* platform. (A copy of the paper-based survey can be found in Appendix F). The links to the surveys were emailed to the students using their university email addresses. The third survey was conducted in the Fall of 2013. It was again part of a collaborative action research project among the PP teachers. During that semester, we conducted a number of experiments with independent listening and wanted to find out the students' response to these experiments. In addition, we wanted to map out our students' previous experience with independent listening and how often they listen for pleasure in English. A significant number of the questions in this survey were related to issues of learner autonomy and out-of-classroom learning. The survey allowed us to gain a good understanding of the listening ILL.

4.4.2 Interviews

Interviews have become the hallmark of qualitative research in social studies (Richards, 2003). Many researchers describe a qualitative interview as 'a conversation with a purpose' (Radnor, 2001; Richards, 2003). However, using the term *conversation* may be misleading, since the rules of interaction during a research interview differ drastically

from a regular conversation. As Richards (2003) explains, “[i]n interviews we are concerned only with encouraging the speaker, not with putting our own point across” (p.50). Wellington (2004) emphasizes the notion of ‘probing’ as the purpose of a research interview. Thus, an interview is different from a conversation, in that researcher is not supposed to question or disagree with the other person’s point of view; “the exchange should be far more in one direction than another” (Wellington, 2004:72). Radnor (2001) describes the interviews as ‘active listening’. This means that the researcher’s role is to be found in encouraging and helping interviewees develop their points by asking for examples, explanations, and expansion. The data collected during an interview can help us develop a deep understanding of a learning context or a person’s attitude towards a learning tool, in this case the ILL. Using interviews to collect data is in agreement with the sociocultural tenets in SLA which underscore that learning is “a social and inter-mental activity” (Mitchell & Myles, 2004:218). Thus, research conducted from a sociocultural perspective should respect the individual learners and the social and cultural context in which they are embedded. Interviews allow the researcher to probe by asking for clarifications, elaborations, and examples (Wellington, 2004). Therefore, they provide data that is rich in description and of exquisite relevance to the respondents.

The first interview was conducted in the Fall of 2013 with a group of twelve students. The rationale behind the first group interview was exploratory. I wanted to check whether some of the initial themes and ideas that emerged from my analysis of the Spring 2012 surveys were correct. I also wanted to canvas general ideas about the ILL and independent learning. I hoped that this group interview would help me develop a set of questions to ask in the following individual interviews. Another reason for interviewing these students as a group was because of their low level of language proficiency. Their English level was at IELTS band 4-4.5 and thus not all the students in this group would have been able to fully express their ideas in an individual interview. However, by discussing the issues with some more able peers who helped them translate, they were given an opportunity to give their opinion. The transcript from this interview was included in the final data analysis with the other interview transcripts.

Following the group interview with the students, five English teachers from the Preparatory Programme (PP) were invited to individual interviews about learner autonomy and the ILL. The PP at that time consisted of fourteen teachers in total. The sample was selected from the teachers who were engaged in the ILL in the Fall semester of 2012. In order to gain an understanding of how teachers interpret the ILL and how they perceive it with respect to fostering autonomy in their English classes, the interviewees were selected so as to obtain a variety of perspectives. Consequently, the sample included one respondent who had worked at the PP from almost the beginning of the Abu Dhabi campus, that is since 2009, one who had worked there for three years and had performed a number of administrative roles, two respondents who had worked in the PP for two years, and one respondent who joined the programme in the Fall of 2012. Two of the interviewees were female and three were male. All of them were over 30 years in age, and all of them have worked as English teachers for more than 10 years. The teachers who were interviewed all have MA degrees in TESOL or SLA, and all of them had experience teaching overseas. Three of the five interviewees have worked in the Gulf region for over ten years. All of the teachers who were interviewed are American citizens who completed their first degrees in the US. This nationality bias reflects the composition of the PP which is dominated by American teachers.

All of the teachers who were invited to the interviews agreed to participate in the research process. They were informed about the purpose of the research and some initial questions were e-mailed to them before the interview (Appendix G). The reason for providing the interviewees with the questions was to give them the opportunity to reflect and formulate an opinion. Using Cohen and Manion's (1980) categories, I would describe the interview format as semi-structured. This is reflected in the fact that I formulated the interview questions and sent them to the respondents before the interviews. While I allowed a certain degree of freedom with respect to the issues and ideas discussed by the interviewees, I wanted all the interviewees to answer the same set of questions.

The interviews were conducted in a semi-formal setting, which was the faculty meeting room. The respondents agreed for the interviews to be recorded. In order to gain more insight, I maintained an audio diary after the interviews. The reason for maintaining a research diary was to capture any apparent themes and ideas that emerged after the interviews. Another reason was to document the respondents' attitudes and emotions during the interviews; in other words, any behaviour which could not be caught on the recording. Like the teachers, the students who were interviewed for this study were also selected with a specific purpose in mind. The interviewed teachers were asked to suggest students from their classes who could be interviewed. Based on the teachers' suggestions, I contacted a number of students via email with a request to participate in the study. As a result, seven students were invited for an interview. In the student sample, two students excelled in their ILL submissions and were mentioned by different teachers for their outstanding work (Ahmed and Aysha). The other four students had varied degrees of interest in the ILL (Sultan, Marwan, Abdullah, and Sara). Their varied interest entailed that these four students excelled in some sections of the ILL and ignored the others. One of the interviewed students (Salem) failed his English course because he did not submit the ILL coursework. The reason why students with different attitudes towards the ILL were selected was to explore different standpoints and attitudes.

Overall, the sampling of the interviewees could be described as resulting in a purposive-convenience sample. Wellington (2004) argues that convenience sampling is often "the only option open to a project or an individual" (p.59) because it helps overcome the problem of access and gaining trust. Furthermore, this type of sampling is often the most logical alternative to a participant-observer conducting research in her own educational setting. A more detailed discussion of the ethical procedures related to the data collection methods are discussed in 4.5.1 Ethical Considerations.

4.4.3 Critical Discourse Analysis

The collected data was analyzed using critical discourse analysis as outlined by Fairclough (2001; 2010) and Paltridge (2012). Such an analysis entails focus on the 'hidden agenda' within educational power structures and entails exposing the discursive

tactics that help maintain unequal power relations in different social settings. As a method of interpretation, CDA focuses both on texts (written and spoken) and discursive events. In this study, critical discourse analysis was applied to interpret the interview transcripts and the qualitative survey results. It was also applied to help understand the sociocultural setting and the teaching methods used by the PP teachers. According to Fairclough (2010), the main aim of CDA is to uncover *opaqueness* and power relationships. The term, *opaqueness*, is especially important in that it brings the researcher's focus to things and meanings that are not self-evident or easily describable. Its focus is on what is omitted, silenced, or covered-up. As Machin & Mayr (2012) explain, "ideology obscures the nature of our unequal societies and prevents us from seeing alternatives" (p.25). The things that are hidden or obscured reveal the nature of the ideology that informs the group consciousness of a given society or professional group. Van Dijk (2009) sees ideologies as sociocultural knowledge shared by communities. "This means that ideologies are a form of *social cognition*, that is, beliefs *shared by* and *distributed over* (the minds of) group members" (van Dijk, 2009, Loc. 10820). With respect to the present case study, the teachers and students at the PP are defined as *one* community and it is their *shared* beliefs and opinions that are under investigation. I assume that both teachers and students develop their opinions about teaching and learning by drawing on familiar educational discourses that they have encountered through their own education, life experience, and the media.

The data from all the surveys was first coded in January, 2014. During this initial coding, the data from the teachers and the students was treated separately. I identified a number of themes and observed that there were numerous points of convergence between how teachers and students interpreted the ILL. Therefore, I decided to code all the data, the surveys and the interviews, together. All the qualitative data was coded using NVivo software in October, 2014. Note that the NVivo software allowed me to identify and code common themes from various sources, but it also allowed me to see the sources of the specific quotes. Therefore, I was able to list themes and similarities in the PP discourse, but I was also able to portray individual points of view of teachers and students. During the final coding, I used CDA to explore any hidden agendas and

unequal power relations. Table 4.1 summarises the tools used in this study to reveal hidden agendas and unequal power-relations in the PP discourse (based on Machin & Mayr, 2012).

Table 4.2 Summary of CDA tools used in this study (based on Machin & Mayr, 2012)

| Type of analysis | Description |
|---|---|
| Lexical analysis | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • analyses lexical choices made by speakers • evoking semantic fields • using connotations to convey implicit meaning • structural oppositions |
| Naming and representation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • analyses how individuals and groups are represented • representational strategies that assign people identities and roles • representational choices bring associations of values, ideas, and activities • classification of social actors: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - individualisation versus collectivisation - specification and genericisation - objectivation • pronoun versus noun: the 'us' and 'them' division • suppression of the agent |
| Analysing transitivity and verb processes | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • analyses what people are depicted as doing, and refers to who does what to whom • shows us who is mainly given a subject (agent/participant) or object (affected/patient) position |
| Nominalisation and presupposition | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • strategies of concealment: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - nominalisation obscures agency and responsibility for the action • effects of nominalisation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - people are removed and thus responsibility for the action is removed - hides both the agent and the affected • in presupposition, meaning is presented as given |
| Rhetoric and metaphor | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • metaphor as fundamental to human thought • metaphorical thinking affects the way we understand concepts • metaphors can conceal and shape understanding, while giving the impression that they reveal them • metaphors can hide underlying power relations |

A CDA analyst focuses on the linguistic features summarised above. It would be misleading to single out one of these discursive devices as a dominant one. During the data analysis of the surveys and the interview transcripts, I often employed a combination of these devices. I specifically looked for linguistic tropes that conceal a hidden ideology or power-relation. These were revealed at the lexical level, the syntactic level, and the semantic level. The lexical analysis helped me delineate lexical fields which gave rise to certain connotations. Connotations, as such, lead to assumptions. They allow the speaker to take semantic shortcuts or to evoke images without stating them overtly. These images are often about other people, and inform us how these people are represented in the discourse and what roles they are assigned by the speakers. I used this type of lexical analysis to outline how teachers and students conceptualise the ILL, and the roles they assigned each other with respect to autonomy in language teaching and learning. In order to explore the notion of agency and autonomy in education, I also focused on syntactic tropes, for example who is assigned a subject role and who is given passive roles. Furthermore, I focused on modal verbs and nominalisations to identify who controls independent learning at the PP. Such an analysis of subject roles helps expose situations where agency is hidden or is denied with respect to certain participants. People can be objectified or othered through grammatical manipulation. This is especially relevant to exploring the notion of 'learner independence' because it is closely related to the concepts of 'agency' and 'individualism'. At the macro-level of CDA, there are concepts and world-views that are shared by communities. These can be often identified by exploring how prevailing lexical and syntactic tropes lead to a coherent world-view or ideology.

The CDA toolkit as outlined by Machin & Mayr (2012) is much broader. The list of the analytical tropes outlined in Table 4.1 refers to the types of analysis used in this study. Thus, for example, the lexical analysis of the semantic fields, connotations, and structural oppositions has brought forward the way teachers and students conceptualise the ILL. Specific links between the CDA tools listed in the table above and the research findings are discussed in the introduction to the data analysis in Chapter 5. Using CDA to analyze the interview transcripts and the qualitative comments in the surveys allowed

me to understand the findings in a manner that went beyond a mere list of themes and topics. It helped me understand the discursive tactics that were used by teachers and students to talk about the ILL and independent learning. Furthermore, it has made it possible to relate the findings to other studies of education discourse. As I demonstrate in Chapter 5, the teacher and student ambivalence towards independent learning is, in fact, contingent on a much bigger educational discourse, or, as I argue in the next chapter, an educational ideology.

4.5 Validity and Reliability

Collecting data through an interview may seem straightforward. However, there are number of associated issues that could pose a threat to the validity of the study. The threats are related to the way the interview was conducted and the researcher's bias in interpreting the interview. Some of the common problems that may affect the validity of a study are related to the mechanics of conducting an interview. For example, Richards (2003) mentions that scheduling the interview at an inconvenient time may lead to superficial responses, that is, if the interview is conducted during the teacher's lunch break or between classes. Another issue is related to the place where the interview takes place. It is essential that the space where the interview takes place guarantees privacy and make the interviewees feel comfortable. Other factors that may pose a threat to the validity of a study are the researcher's position or relation to the respondents. If the interviewee is of a lower academic rank, he or she may not be willing to be candid or express their honest opinion. Finally, we have to consider the technical issues of recording the interview and transcribing it. Technical problems during the interview may interrupt the flow of conversation and distract the respondent.

In order to avoid these threats, a number of precautions were taken into account when setting up the interviews, during the interviews, and afterwards. First of all, the interviews were scheduled on days when the respondents were not very busy. It was ensured that the interviewees were free at least 30 minutes before and at least an hour after the interview was scheduled. Richards (2003) points out that interviews that last over an hour can be exhausting for both the interviewees and the interviewer. Thus, the interviews conducted in this study did not exceed fifty minutes in duration. The

interviews were conducted on-campus in a familiar space. Understanding the context or the culture was not an issue because I was a teacher at the PP. My role was that of a colleague and not a supervisor; thus, the power relation was one of equals and did not cause obstacles during the interviews with the teachers. With respect to interviewing individual students, I ensured that the students were invited for the interviews after they had finished their English courses, so that they would not feel pressured to 'satisfy the teacher'. I knew some of the students, but it was essential that the students who participated in the research did not feel that they have to provide the 'right answers' merely to please a teacher. In order to maintain the internal validity of the study, the transcribed interviews were sent to the respondents for conformation. According to Radnor (2001), this approach "gives the interviewee the opportunity to review what she or he has said, make corrections, add points and so on before analysis begins" (p.62).

4.5.1 Ethical Considerations

The research design of this study was informed by the ethical guidelines of the British Educational Research Association (BERA) and the ethical guidelines of the University of Exeter. Ethics in educational research are often described as principles that govern (i) the mode in which the researcher gains access to a group of people, (ii) the approach used to collect the data from the people, (iii) the data analysis, and (iv) the dissemination of the results (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2003; Wellington, 2004). Unethical conduct may occur at any of these stages; for example, if the researched group is misinformed about the aims of the study, or if the researcher discards results that contradict the working hypothesis. A disregard for ethics will lead to unreliable results and will eventually discredit the study. This section elaborates in detail the ethical considerations that were taken so as to ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of this study.

Because of my role as a teacher, gaining access and building a rapport with the teachers and students was not a major concern. I obtained a permission to conduct the research from the director of the PP. Since the aims of this research and its results are directly linked with the PP's curriculum and syllabus, the study was conducted as part of the researcher's professional development process. An additional aim of the study was

to shed more light onto the role of the ILL within the programme. From an ethical point of view, the study aimed to benefit the teachers and the students. In addition, all the teachers and the students were informed that I was working on my doctoral dissertation in the field of TESOL.

After gaining initial approval from the institute's management, an e-mail interview invitation was sent to selected teachers and students. The e-mail outlined the aims of the study and the topic. Before each interview, the teachers and the students were informed again about the research aims and topic. Furthermore, the interviewees were informed about the confidentiality of their opinions. They were assured that should I use their opinions in any publication, their names and the names of other people that they might refer to would be changed. In addition, at no stage would their identities be revealed. After the verbal insurance, I asked their permission to record the interview. Before the recording, the interviewees were informed that they would have an opportunity to read the interview transcript and add and/or delete any information or statement they were not satisfied with. The reason for doing this was to ensure that the interviewees, and their opinions, were treated with dignity and with respect. All the interviewees in this study are referred to by pseudonyms.

Following the ethical guidelines of the University of Exeter (UK), all the interviewees signed a consent form. The form informs them of their right to withdraw from the project at any time, informs them about how the information gathered during the interviews may be used, and ensures them of confidentiality and anonymity. Each interviewee received a copy of the consent form and I kept my own copy. As Cohen, Manion, & Morrison (2003) point out, it may not always be possible to ensure anonymity, especially when the data is collected through an interview. The authors maintain that “[a] subject agreeing to a face-to-face interview [...] can in no way expect anonymity. At most, the interviewer can promise confidentiality” (p.64). In this situation, the researcher can ensure non-traceability, which means that the respondents will not be identifiable from the information given in the report or study. Non-traceability and confidentiality are related in that confidentiality guarantees that the respondents' true identity will not be

revealed publically. Thus, to respect the respondents' confidentiality their names have been changed in the dissertation. Furthermore, to warrant non-traceability the data analysis and discussion does not contain information that might help identify the respondents. The latter provision may have affected the depth of understanding or analysis in that the reader of this study will be deprived of all the details which may help understand some points of view presented by the respondents. However, this 'trade-off' is inevitable if we are to follow a code of ethics which guarantees the respondents' confidentiality. In addition to the interviews, the study examined samples of the students' work. These samples were obtained with the students' permission. The samples of student work published in this study were altered to remove any personal information.

The ethical procedures related to the online surveys were much more straightforward because of the nature of this instrument. The online surveys were distributed through university e-mail. The link to the student surveys was emailed to the students who had just completed the PP English programme at the end of the Spring semester of 2012 and again in 2013. The students were informed about the aim of the surveys, that is, to obtain their opinion of the ILL and independent learning. Furthermore, it was stressed that participation was voluntary and that their responses were completely anonymous. The respondents completed the surveys in their own time. Using online surveys is an easy method of ensuring anonymity. The surveys did not contain any questions that might reveal the students' identities. The only two personal questions were related to their gender and their IELTS score. Considering that the PP has on average over 130 students, these two variables would be insufficient to definitely identify any of the respondents. In order to follow the ethical guidelines of the British Educational Research Association and the guidelines of the University of Exeter, the first page of the survey contained information about the aims of the study, its purposes, and likely publications. It emphasised that the participants may withdraw from the study at any time and that their responses would be anonymous and confidential. As a form of informed consent, the respondents were requested to tick the appropriate boxes that described their rights and gave me permission to use the results of the survey.

In addition to the ethical procedures related to gaining access and data collection, one has to consider ethics in data analysis, presentation, and findings. As Wellington (2004:55) emphasizes, some unethical procedures exist such as manipulation of the data by “selectively filtering out qualitative data from interview transcripts if it does not ‘fit’ your hypothesis”, or being disrespectful to the respondents by revealing their identities or portraying them as stupid. Furthermore, the findings may be unethical if they make recommendations that are harmful or discriminatory to a group of people. Preventing these unethical practices is closely related to securing the internal validity in a qualitative study. As was mentioned above, one way to ensure that our analysis, presentation, and findings are valid and trustworthy is by being honest and open about the procedures. Therefore, the complete coded transcripts of the interviews and coded responses to the open-ended surveys are attached to this study (Appendix I), together with the coding sheets which include the relevant topics, codes, and categories (Appendix J).

Finally, in addition to the researcher’s responsibilities towards the participants, Wellington (2004) mentions responsibilities towards the teaching profession and to the research community. According to Cohen, Manion, & Morrison (2003), the researcher has the responsibility towards colleagues to “protect their safety, protect their well-being, protect their reputation, enable further research to be conducted, expect them to behave ethically, and ensure that they adhere to correct and agreed procedures” (p.75). Overall, the procedures used in this study have adopted these principles of honesty and openness. Respect for the participants, the institution, and the research community have been the guiding principles for the decisions made during the course of the data collection, analysis, presentation, and the statement of recommendations. The following section provides an overview of some of the validity and reliability challenges that were faced during this study.

4.5.2 Validity and Reliability Threats

Despite their proven value and importance to educational research, qualitative studies often face criticism and scepticism. Their research methods and procedures are also scrutinised to a great degree, to prevent data manipulation and unethical behaviour. So far, I have discussed the validity and reliability of the research design of this study in terms of the methodology and data collection methods. However, several, perhaps grander, concerns regarding validity and reliability remain to be addressed here. These can be listed as follows:

- i. Researcher bias
- ii. Triangulation
- iii. Validity of data analysis

The traditional definition of validity states that “a particular instrument in fact measures what it purports to measure” (Cohen *et al.*, 2003:105). This definition assumes the ability to measure or test a phenomenon. However, this ability to conduct a controlled experiment does not always apply to social contexts. Furthermore, the positivist definition of validity is not compatible with exploratory studies like this one, in which the researcher observes social behaviour and then builds a theory drawing on these observations (e.g. grounded theory). Because of this evident incompatibility with exploratory and interpretivist studies, qualitative scholars have, over the last three decades, devised new ways of ensuring quality in their research. In the 1990s, Lincoln and Guba replaced the traditional concepts of validity to fit qualitative inquiry (Shenton, 2004). Thus, they redefined the positivist notions of ‘internal validity’, ‘generalisability’, ‘reliability’, and ‘objectivity’ with the new concepts of ‘credibility’, ‘transferability’, ‘dependability’, and ‘confirmability’. (See Figure 4.3.)

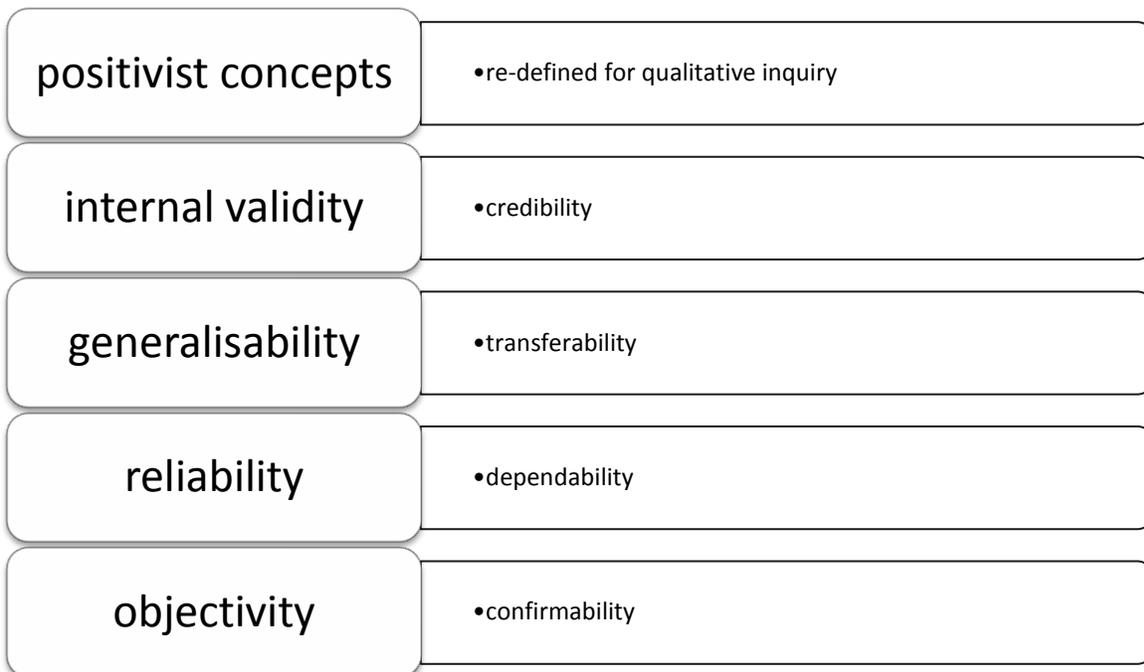


Figure 4.3 Re-framing the concepts of validity and reliability for qualitative inquiry in the 1990s

As a consequence of the search for validity and reliability standards in qualitative research, the concept of ‘validity’ has been extended immensely. Currently, it encompasses ideas such as *content validity*, *concurrent validity*, *jury validity*, *predictive validity*, *catalytic validity*, and *ecological validity*, over and above the traditional notions of ‘external validity’ and ‘internal validity’. According to Cohen *et al.* (2003), all of these kinds of validity can help ensure that a study is honest, deep, rich in data, and ethical, as well as value- or judgement free. In a similar fashion, Guba and Lincoln (2005) delineate five criteria that can be used by constructivist researchers. They are: “fairness, ontological authenticity, educative authenticity, catalytic authenticity, and tactical authenticity” (Guba & Lincoln, 2005:207). The validity debate in education research has led to the development of many new notions. However, when we examine them closely, we will see that they refer to the issues of the research procedure discussed in this chapter in great detail, such as the rationale for the selection of a particular method, ways of collecting data, the variety of the data, ethical behaviour, fair interpretation of the data, ability to trigger change, relatedness to other contexts, and so forth. Thus, as we read various qualitative reformulations of the concepts ‘validity’ and ‘reliability’, we

will notice that they strive to be different, but do not stray far from the original concepts. For example, the criteria outlined above by Guba and Lincoln (2005) are similar to the kinds of validity outlined by Cohen *et al.* (2003). Despite great efforts by qualitative researchers to develop alternative ways of scrutinising and defining research, the scientific concepts that they apply to their research echo those of the post-positivist philosophers of science. Popper (2008:22) identifies validity with 'objectivity' in the Kantian sense; as he explains: "scientific knowledge should be *justifiable*, independently of anybody's whim: a justification is 'objective' if in principle it can be tested and understood by anybody". Since, as he admits, "scientific theories are never fully justifiable or verifiable[...]the *objectivity* of scientific statements lies in the fact that they can be *inter-subjectively tested*" (p.22). Inter-subjective testing entails a "mutual rational control by critical discussion" (p.22). Presented in this way, the often scorned notion of 'objectivity' resembles closely the concept of 'confirmability' proposed by Lincoln and Guba in the 1990s (Shenton, 2004), and made manifest in the ideas of 'peer debriefing' and 'member checking' (Richards, 2003:287). As Hammersley (1995:17-18) explains:

We must recognize that absolute certainty is not available about anything, and that attempts to produce absolutely certain knowledge by appeal to serve data, or to serve anything else are doomed to failure. However, accepting this does not mean concluding that any view is likely to be as true as any other, or that anything can be true in some other frameworks if not in ours.

I completely agree with this observation. Even though my own theoretical position is interpretive and postmodern, I am convinced that validity checks prevent researchers from perpetuating ideologies as defined by van Dijk (2009). An awareness of the issues outlined above means that now, more than ever, the researcher is responsible for the provision of sufficient information about their research design. I hope that by providing detailed descriptions of the methods and data collection procedures, I have ensured that this study be trustworthy and relatable to other contexts.

As discussed above, the problem of researcher bias is something that can threaten any study. In order to reduce my researcher bias, I have ensured that there is:

- (i) a variety of data types
- (ii) a variety of data collection methods
- (iii) a variety of informants.

As Shenton (2004) notes, triangulation involves “the use of different methods, especially observation, focus groups and individual interviews” but it can also involve “the use of a wide range of informants” (p.64). Triangulation is crucial in a qualitative study because it increases the credibility and trustworthiness of the research and reduces researcher bias. In this study, the data was collected through online surveys, focus group, and interviews. Most of the data is qualitative, but it is supplemented with quantitative findings from the surveys. Finally, the data was collected from a broad range of informants; students from different courses in the PP and teachers with varied amounts of experience. These measures help ensure that the data that was collected is rich and that it represents various points of view and perspectives. I believe this is the case in this study. This now leads us to another validity and reliability issue, namely data analysis.

Even the most meticulously designed research may be threatened by researcher bias in the data interpretation. Leaving aside situations where data is manipulated on purpose so that the researcher ‘discovers’ a *desirable* result or the result that the researcher *expects*, there are several, more benign threats to the data analysis stage in a qualitative study. To start with, the way we interpret texts is often contingent on our world views and our cultural background. This poses a potential threat to the validity of data interpretation, in that a researcher may be predisposed to see (or even seek) familiar patterns in the informants’ interview transcripts, observation notes, or other data. In order to reduce this threat to the validity of the data analysis, a researcher can check their interpretation of the data with other members of the research team and the members of the group under investigation. To ensure the validity of the data interpretation, the data presentation and discussion chapter was sent to the teachers who were interviewed in this study.

Another threat to the validity of the data interpretation lies within the method of the critical discourse analysis. Antaki, Billig, Edwards, & Potter (2003) present several common problems in studies that claim to use discourse analysis.

- (1) under-analysis through summary
- (2) under-analysis through taking sides
- (3) under-analysis through over-quotation or through isolated quotation
- (4) the circular identification of discourses and mental constructs
- (5) false survey
- (6) analysis that consists in simply spotting features

The final threat to the validity of a data analysis using CDA is identifying features of a discourse, but not interpreting them. According to Antaki *et al.* (2003, Concluding Comments section, para. 3), “analysis means a close engagement with one’s text or transcripts, and the illumination of their meaning and significance through insightful and technically sophisticated work”. I hope that an awareness of these shortcomings helped me in the data analysis stage of this research project. I argue that I have supported the data analysis with sufficient evidence from the interviews and the surveys, and that I have presented a trustworthy analysis of the way teachers and students at the PP interpret the ILL and learner autonomy.

4.6 Limitations of the study

Most of the limitations of this study can be related to the validity and reliability issues discussed above. Other limitations of this study are related to (i) the assumptions embedded within the conceptual framework, (ii) sampling, and (iii) data collection procedures. Writing from a critical-interpretive perspective entails a number of assumptions about the nature of reality and how the human mind makes sense of the world around us. As pointed out by post-positivists like Kuhn and Popper, one cannot work outside one’s own paradigm of knowledge. These paradigms of knowledge are “arbitrary and culturally bound [...] and they limit our view of the world and how we can

investigate it” (Machin & Mayr, 2012:214). However, I would argue that a paradigm is only limiting if we assume it blindly and fail to make attempts to acknowledge the assumptions hidden within it. Thus, in this study, several assumptions are made about the nature of reality and language. The first one draws on the theory of linguistic determinism which claims that our language affects the way we make sense of the world. In other words, we cannot see the world beyond the words that are provided to us by the language(s) that we speak. At the ontological level, this means that there is no objective reality which is independent of our cognitive processes (which are, in many cases, mediated via language). This assumption leads to other assumptions about language. For example, in this study I assume the existence of a shared discourse. This means that a group of people related by a job, a cultural background or other social factors shares a language that is distinct to a degree from other groups. Furthermore, I assume that analysing this language can shed light onto the group’s values and beliefs. The former assumption has led to criticism of CDA as presenting discursive events as *typical* of a particular ideology. Critics argue that CD analysts often state “that what is found in the text they analyze is characteristic of a broader discourse” (Machin & Mayr, 2012:208). To overcome this limitation, the findings of the CDA in this study are compared with findings from other TESOL contexts. Furthermore, the study is not limited to a single text, which is often the case in CDA studies, but is rich in data types and sources.

With respect to procedural limitations, there are a few areas that could have been improved. First of all, the surveys could have been shorter and more focused on the research questions. However, due to the exploratory nature of this study, the main research questions were only finalised after the surveys were conducted. As a result of this somewhat lack of focus in designing the surveys, there was a great deal of superfluous data that was collected and that was not used in the thesis itself. In addition to this, the surveys played a double purpose. They were administered to obtain the students’ opinions about the programme. The secondary aim was to collect data for this research. The rationale for doing this was so as not to overburden the students with a multitude of surveys about their English classes. The third limitation of the surveys was

in their uneven response rate. The last student survey had a much better response rate (77%) than the first (22%) and the second (19%) survey. The response rate could have been improved by distributing the surveys earlier in each semester or by distributing all of the surveys on paper. The last survey was paper-based and had a very good response rate. I assume it was because students felt a higher sense of responsibility when they handed something physical by their teachers. The reason for using online surveys was due to their effectiveness in collating data. Being a full-time lecturer, I had to use my time wisely and online surveys appeared to be effective at the time.

Another limitation related to data collection was the limited number of the interviewed students. The students were interviewed only in one academic year and the interviews took place after their English courses had ended. The reason for this was so as not to influence their responses during the English course. However, the result of conducting the interviews during the inter-semester break was that not all the invited students were able to come to the university to participate in the interview. Secondly, looking at the results now, I would have liked to have interviewed more 'average' students. The student interviewee sample mostly consisted of high- and low achieving students. While I feel that the study reached saturation level during the analysis, it would have been beneficial to conduct a few more student interviews. Unfortunately, this was not possible by the end of the Spring semester, 2014, because by then the format of the ILL had changed drastically, and so a fair comparison with the opinions expressed in previous interviews could not reasonably be made. Another limitation with the interviews was the occurrence of technical problems. Two of the teacher interviews (Jack and David) had poor sound quality and could not be transcribed. I used my interview notes and post-interview reflections when referring to these two interviews. However, they could not be included in the CDA. This limitation could have been avoided by testing the equipment and the recording software more thoroughly before the interviews.

The final limitation concerns the quantitative data collected in this study. The quantitative data was collected in the surveys together with the qualitative comments. The quantitative data was used at the PP meetings to learn about student attitudes

towards the programme and the ILL. The data was presented in percentages, but no statistical tests were conducted. In this respect, the quantitative data used in this study is purely descriptive. It helps to confirm some of the interpretations drawn from the interviews, but it does not meet the standards of quantitative analysis. Despite these limitations, I hope that the study provides a depth of understanding and a thick description of such nature that its validity is ensured within a qualitative framework.

Chapter 5: Data Presentation and Discussion

The qualitative data that was collected for this study was analyzed using CDA. The rationale behind using this method of data analysis and its tenets were explained in Section 4.4.3. The interviews and the surveys were coded using NVivo software. Appendix J contains an overview of the main themes and related sub-categories. The following data is presented according to the themes and concepts that I identified using CDA. Table 5.1 illustrates how these themes are aligned with the research questions and which CDA tools were used to identify the themes.

Table 5.1 Overview of the research questions and the relevant themes

| Research Questions | CDA Tool Used | Relevant Themes |
|--|--|---|
| 1. How do teachers and students at the PP interpret and implement the ILL? | Analyzed lexical choices made by speakers and semantic fields Analyzed connotations and structural oppositions | ILL seen as 'busy work' Focus on the guidelines: teacher autonomy |
| 2. How do teachers and students conceptualise independent learning in English? | Analyzed structural oppositions Analyzed individual- and group representations and the roles that are assigned to them Associations related to the discursive roles The use of pronouns US and THEM as a tool of controlling agency and identity Analyzed subject and object roles | Teacher roles in fostering autonomy: from a Whip to a Parent Student representations: good students <i>versus</i> lazy students |
| 3. What role does out-of-class learning play among the PP students? | Analyzed structural oppositions and lexical choices Analyzed verb processes to show who is given a subject role and who takes a patient position | <i>Out-of-class</i> learning not seen as a legitimate form of learning Role of technology and socializing in independent learning Independent <i>versus</i> interdependent learning |

| | | |
|--|---|---|
| 4. To what extent is learner independence a feasible institutional goal? | Identified conceptual metaphors in the PP discourse These conceptual metaphors hide underlying power relations and obscure an education ideology | Metaphors of teaching and learning used in the PP teachers and students discourse Issues of <i>power</i> and <i>autonomy</i> |
|--|---|---|

I begin the discussion by presenting the data related directly to the ILL. In this section, I explore the teachers' and learners' experience with the ILL and the ways in which they conceptualized it. To be able to understand these conceptualizations, I concentrate on the lexical choices made by the respondents when talking about the ILL. I analyze the semantic fields, connotations, and structural oppositions related to the ILL. Thus, in answer to the first research question, I discuss two interrelated themes. The first one is related to the perception of the ILL as 'a burden' and 'busy work'. The second one is with the predominant focus that was made by the teachers and students on the ILL guidelines and 'covering' the material. To answer the second research question, I analyze a number of structural dichotomies from the interview transcripts and surveys. These include *good students* versus *lazy students*, *independent* versus *interdependent* learning, *in-class* versus *out-of-class learning*, and *US* versus *THEM*. These dichotomies lead to group representations that affect individual's sense of agency and control. I use the CDA tools listed in Table 5.1 above to explore how these discursive representations affect students' and teachers' actions. The analysis of the structural dichotomies and representations suggests that the way teachers and learners conceptualize education and language learning/teaching might, in fact, *hinder* their ability to be autonomous as learners and teachers. To support this interpretation, I analyze several learner and teacher stories so as to demonstrate that the way learner autonomy is conceptualised does not always accommodate learners whose language learning goals are different than those assumed by the syllabus. In fact, my interpretation of the data suggests that, in the teachers' eyes, *doing all the homework* is often labelled as *being independent as a learner*. At the same time, students who do not follow the prescribed programme are often perceived by teachers as *dependent, lazy,*

and *weak*. Drawing on this, I further examine representations of the teacher's role within the autonomy discourse and with respect to the ILL. Finally, I discuss the question of agency, both that of learners and teachers, and how the concept of 'agency' relates to learners' and teachers' autonomy. The analysis of the sense of agency and control is conducted by analysing the verbs used by the respondents to express their sense of duty and ability. All of the above-mentioned themes help me answer the overarching question of whether learner autonomy is a feasible institutional goal. The answer to this question is discussed in Section 5.4, where I conclude that the way teachers and students conceptualise language education is not always compatible with learner autonomy. Finally, I discuss the issues of power in a language classroom and how its unequal distribution may hinder development of learner autonomy.

5.1 Teacher and Student Interpretations of the ILL

One of the premises behind the ILL was to take advantage of the English that the learners encountered outside the classroom and integrate it with their more formal, in-class language learning. Given that the UAE is a multilingual society, where English newspapers, books, and movies are easily available to anyone, one would hope that language learners would explore these out-of-classroom resources. The goals of the ILL were explained in terms of bringing learners' out-of-classroom experience with English to the fore and helping them learn from it. The idea was to merge the language learning experience outside the classroom with the more formal language instruction that the students receive. These goals of the ILL were expressed in the *Faculty Handbook*:

The Independent Learning Log is a record of the work that a student completes outside of class to help improve their English. This work will be given a grade, and accounts for 25% of the overall score for the English course. (*Faculty Handbook*, 2012).

Following this description was a summary of what such a log should consist of. In general, the ILL guidelines were detailed and prescriptive. For example, they recommended "a minimum of TWO different readings per week in addition to class

work” and “at least 30+ words and treatments per week of material from the wordlist” (*Faculty Handbook*, 2012). In addition to specifying the quantities of the various reading, vocabulary, writing, listening and speaking assignments, the ILL also stipulated the types of ‘acceptable’ responses, for example “[r]eadings must show quality interaction e.g. reflections / questions / reviews / highlighted vocab” (*Faculty Handbook*, 2012). The official description of the ILL specified not only the quantity of the material that students were to submit but also the types of assignment. The only suggestion of freedom for the teachers and students to have choice over their teaching and learning is found in one sentence “Instructor discretion can be used” (*Faculty Handbook*, 2012). In practice, instructors exercised a lot of discretion in how they interpreted these guidelines. Thus it was interesting to see how teachers interpreted these guidelines and how they conveyed them to their students. Figure 5.1 below provides an overview of the most dominant interpretations of the ILL that were mentioned by the teachers and students in their interviews and surveys.

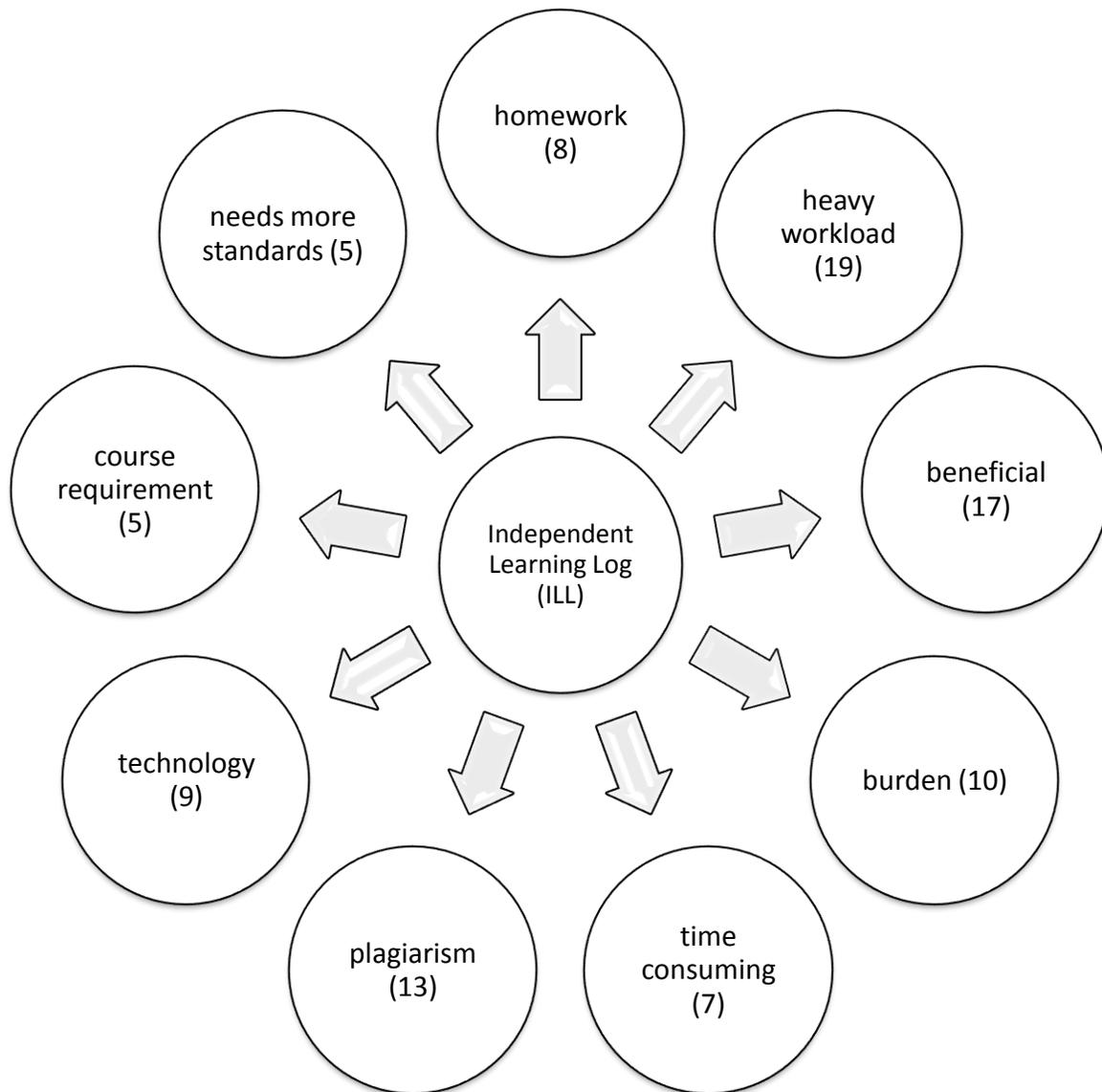


Figure 5.1 Teacher and student interpretations of the ILL (number of references)

According to the themes in Figure 5.1, there is a certain ambiguity in the way the respondents conceptualised the ILL. On the one hand, they saw it as *beneficial*, but on the other hand they called it a *burden* and *time consuming*. In addition to that, *heavy workload* related to the ILL was most often mentioned by both the students and teachers. These ambiguous interpretations suggested a conflict in the way the PP

teachers and students interpreted the ILL. Another issue was the view of the ILL as predominantly *homework* and a *course requirement*. Few respondents perceived it as a way to foster *learner independence*, *reflective learning*, or *critical thinking*. The teacher- and student focus was primarily on the submission of a specific number of logs. The following section demonstrates these two themes in more detail.

5.1.1 ILL and ‘ticking the boxes’

One of the most dominant views shared by teachers and students was that ILL was a *burden*. This view had been well articulated by students in the course evaluation surveys that were administered at the end of each semester (SSS 2012, SSS 2013: See Appendix K: Surveys: Quantitative Data Summary). In both surveys, the majority of the students (85.7% in Spring 2012 and 64.5% in Spring 2013) reported that the ILL helped them become more independent as learners (See Table 5.2 below). The students in these surveys reported that the ILL helped them to improve in specific language skills such as reading, writing, vocabulary, and listening. However, it was also evident that most students felt that the amount of independent reading and listening prescribed by their teachers was too much. In Spring 2012, 81.4% of the students reported that the amount of reading in the independent reading logs was too much and 62.9% reported that there were too many listening logs to complete. Students also reported plagiarising and cheating on the ILL work to meet the course requirements. Overall, while the students could see the benefits of the ILL, they struggled to complete the sheer number of assignments for the ILL. They would often take shortcuts, such as choosing the first programme on the website for their listening ILL or the shortest book for their reading ILL. In Spring 2013, students reported on a preference for selecting short and easy articles (70.6%) and selecting the first programme that they saw on a recommended website for their listening log (47%). Finally, the students rarely enjoyed doing the independent work. In Spring 2012, 59.3% of the students commented that they did not enjoy reading for the ILL, 70.3% did not find the listening interesting, and 44% did not like the vocabulary logs.

Table 5.2 Student experience with the ILL

| Student Survey Spring 2012 | Strongly Disagree % | Disagree % | Agree % | Strongly Agree % | n/a % |
|---|----------------------------|-------------------|----------------|-------------------------|--------------|
| I feel that I have become more independent as a learner. | 3.6 | 10.7 | 57.1 | 28.6 | |
| I sometimes borrowed old logs from friends who had already completed the ILL so that I could get credit. | 42.9 | 35.7 | 10.7 | 10.7 | |
| The amount of assigned reading for the ILL was too much. | 0 | 14.8 | 48.1 | 33.3 | 3.7 |
| The amount of assigned listening was too much. | 3.7 | 29.6 | 40.7 | 22.2 | 3.7 |
| I sometimes completed the questionnaires without listening to the whole passage. | 11.5 | 11.5 | 50 | 23 | 3.8 |
| Student Survey Spring 2013 | Strongly Disagree % | Disagree % | Agree % | Strongly Agree % | n/a % |
| I feel that I have become more independent as a learner. | 29.4 | 5.9 | 41.2 | 23.5 | |
| Reading Log helped me improve my skills in English. | 5.9 | 5.9 | 29.4 | 52.9 | 5.9 |
| I prefer to read short and easy article. | 5.9 | 11.8 | 29.4 | 41.2 | 11.7 |
| I think that the Independent Reading Log is a waste of time. | 52.9 | 35.3 | 11.8 | 0 | |
| The Listening Log helped me improve my listening skills in English. | 11.7 | 11.8 | 35.3 | 41.2 | |
| I chose the first programme that I saw on the internet. | 23.5 | 23.5 | 0 | 29.4 | 23.6 |
| I sometimes borrowed old logs from friends who had already completed the course so that I could get credit. | 52.9 | 11.8 | 0 | 17.7 | 17.6 |

The student perceptions of the ILL were similar to those of their teachers. Most teachers shared the students' opinion and described the ILL as 'cumbersome', 'time-consuming', and 'busy work' (TSS 2012). The teacher's focus with respect to the ILL was on assessment and grading ILL submissions. Teachers reported spending a lot of time marking the weekly log submissions and noticed that these submissions were often done "without real care and reflection" (TSS 2012). Some teachers described marking the ILL as "ticking the boxes" (Claire) done without any care or thought. The expression of 'ticking the boxes' suggests mindless, bureaucratic activity. In other words, the teachers saw the ILL as busy, paper work designed to keep them and the students busy

but with no educational outcome in sight. According to Claire, teachers would “get bogged down in what [they] have to do as teachers and [they] forget the main aim [...] to encourage students to listen outside the classroom”. Seeing the ILL as “a check box exercise” (Claire) made teachers focus on the quantities of the logs that were submitted, instead of the aim of the independent learning. Eve described her experience with vocabulary logs as ‘busy work’. She recalled that “a lot of it was lifted from the internet or reused or recycled and so uh, it was more busy work I think [...] they didn’t see the benefit of it“(Eve).

In everyday practice, the teachers focused on the quantity of the reading and listening logs and made sure that learners completed the suggested number of reading and listening logs before the end of each semester. Thus, a lot of the ILL work was done in class. One teacher commented that “if I want the students to be able to be getting passing grades, I have to allocate class time and ‘feed’ some of the materials to them” (TSS 2012). This comment indicated that the ILL was a kind of burden to teachers and the students. It was something that *had to be done*, and it was the teacher’s responsibility to make sure that the students finished their logs. As a participant-observer, I had often seen that class time was allocated to allow learners to complete their logs. In Spring 2012, 82% of the students related that they ‘received enough help from their teachers while working on the ILL’. Another example of teachers making sure that students completed their logs involved providing students with reading materials or vocabulary for their independent reading or vocabulary logs. This practice resulted in some students reporting not having enough freedom in the choice of reading and listening materials for their logs. 64% of the students claimed to have a lot of freedom in selecting the listening programmes for their ILLs (SSS 2013) but 56% wanted to have more freedom in selecting programmes for their listening logs (SSF 2013).

The data analysis indicates that the ILL was perceived as something that was imposed both on the teachers and the students. As one teacher assessed it: “time can be better spent [...] it takes away from real study time” (TSS 2012). There is a contrast here between *real* language learning and the ILL. The teachers did not see the ILL as a tool

in autonomous language learning, but as a series of assignments that created a lot of 'busy work' with no 'real' language learning outcomes. This conceptualization of the ILL suggested that, within the discourse at the PP, *in-class learning* was contrasted with *out-of-class learning*. From this perspective, the work that learners did outside the class on their own was not seen as *real* language learning. The student stories presented below demonstrate that there was no space in the ILL for the independent out-of-classroom activities that students reported doing in their free time, such as watching English movies and TV shows, listening to music, and talking to native speakers outside the classroom. In terms of hierarchical dichotomies, *in-class learning* was perceived as the superior, default position. In opposition to it, any other forms of learning were seen as inferior and lacking. Within such a discourse, the formal type of language learning is the legitimate one, thus any language learning done outside the classroom does not seem relevant and is hence dubbed as 'busy work'. The notion that the things that language learners acquired outside the class were not *real* language learning was also evident in the way students conceptualized the ILL as 'boring homework'.

According to the students, ILL was perceived as homework. As they described it, "that [is] a duty; we should do it to improve our skills" and "things we have to do them by ourself to improve our skills" (SSS 2012). When talking about the ILL, the learners would often use modals of obligation and duty, for example *should*, *have to*, *must*. This meant that they did not see it as work that they had set up for themselves to improve their own language skills, but rather as something imposed on them. During the time when I worked at the PP, many students reported to me that when they first entered the programme and heard about the ILL, they were upset with the amount of work that they were told to do. They reported panicking and having a negative attitude towards the ILL from the beginning. One student recounted the pressure felt by the students: "The ILL is consist of more than four parts and this is the worst thing happened because it's like four or five subjects and with too pressure, for example no one can remember 30 word every week, there is a limit for everyone we are not machines" (SSS 2012). The student's frustration with the amount of work was evident by comparing himself/herself to a *machine*. This comparison has two connotations. Firstly, it implies the mechanistic

and mindless nature of the “independent” work done by the students. Secondly, it equates the student to a machine; a passive and subordinate being that performs mindless tasks. A similar feeling of compliance and powerlessness combined with the focus on the quantity of the material that needed to be covered was evident in teacher interviews. Claire observed that the amount of the recommended reading was too much, “I mean realistically they’re not going to read ten books [...] I think there’s something actually wrong with the assessments themselves, like you must write fifteen reading logs” (Claire). Despite this observation, she forced her students to submit the required number of logs. To ensure that her students completed the logs, she would often devote her reading class time for the ILL. She recalled feeling forced to make students do assignments that she herself did not believe in. Her experience was similar to that of many students. As she states, “I hate the reading logs [...] it became a check box exercise [...] and I didn’t feel their reading, or their love of reading improved any, by forcing them to do these reading logs, it was like oh we have to get these done for the assessment” (Claire). Claire’s experience indicated that both students and teachers felt forced to do the ILL. Another teacher, George, commented that the ILL requirement of record keeping might be getting in the way of student independent learning. He recalled his own experience as a language learner and empathised with the PP students: “I got irritated with teachers telling me what to read because I was reading something [...] I would probably gripe most about reading, especially having to type something or write something up” (George). The ILL requirement of keeping track of the independent logs created a lot of busy work for the students and teachers. As a result of the pressure to complete the ILL, the teachers’ and students’ focus turned to the number of the independent assignments and their frequency rather than individual goal setting and thoughtfully exploring the available language learning resources.

Most students interpreted the ILL as working *alone* at home. As one student explained, “If I heard it for the first time the first that will come to my mind is a kind of works, homeworks or assignments that we will do it alone without any help to learn more and new things” (SSS 2013). In theory, the ILL should have allowed learners to choose their reading and listening materials and to adjust the level and amount of reading to their

own needs and abilities. In practice, however, learners often focused on the minimum requirements and chose 'easy' materials. For example, a Reading teacher noticed that advanced students would sometimes read graded readers below their level, or select books to read based solely on the number of pages. When asked about it, the students explained that they wanted to finish the books quickly and get a high grade. They did not want to challenge themselves by reading longer and more advanced books and run the risk of getting a lower mark. Aysha, a student, described her experience in the following words: "I didn't witness the spirit of independent learning; they [other students] were just doing it to have these marks and convince the teacher of something and that's it." The way Aysha described her classmates shows an attempt to distance herself from them. This discursive tactic was used by several other students who did not approve of their peer's attitude towards the ILL. They saw themselves as more hard-working and more able than others, and were eager to list their classmates' flaws. A similar sentiment was observed among teachers. Some teachers would complain that they had done more than other teachers. Several teachers criticised their colleagues for not exploring the freedom that independent learning offered teachers and students. According to teachers and students, one of the main problems of the ILL was the lack of strict guidelines. The issue of guidelines was often mentioned by the teachers and students who were interviewed.

5.1.2 Interpreting the Guidelines

The ILL guidelines were published in the *Faculty Handbook* together with the course documents and syllabi for each year. The handbook was available to all teachers before the semester, both as a hard copy that was distributed to all teachers and as a soft copy. The handbook was revised every summer by the English faculty themselves. Both the syllabi and the suggested assessment scheme were discussed at faculty meetings. Thus, the English teachers had a lot of input into the ILL guidelines and assessment criteria. Despite the existence of such a document, many teachers employed a variety of assessments and often set up their individual criteria. As any policy document, the *Faculty Handbook* was interpreted by its readers in many ways. In fact, some teachers would regularly experiment with the ILL and explore different ways of promoting it, whilst

others followed the written guidelines to the letter. The differences of how teachers interpreted the ILL were evident in student accounts of the ILL.

The different ways in which teachers interpreted and implemented the ILL are based on the student accounts from the interviews, teacher interviews, and researcher's participant observations. The way teachers showed their autonomy in implementing the ILL can be conceptualised on a continuum from 'No Freedom' to 'Complete Freedom'.

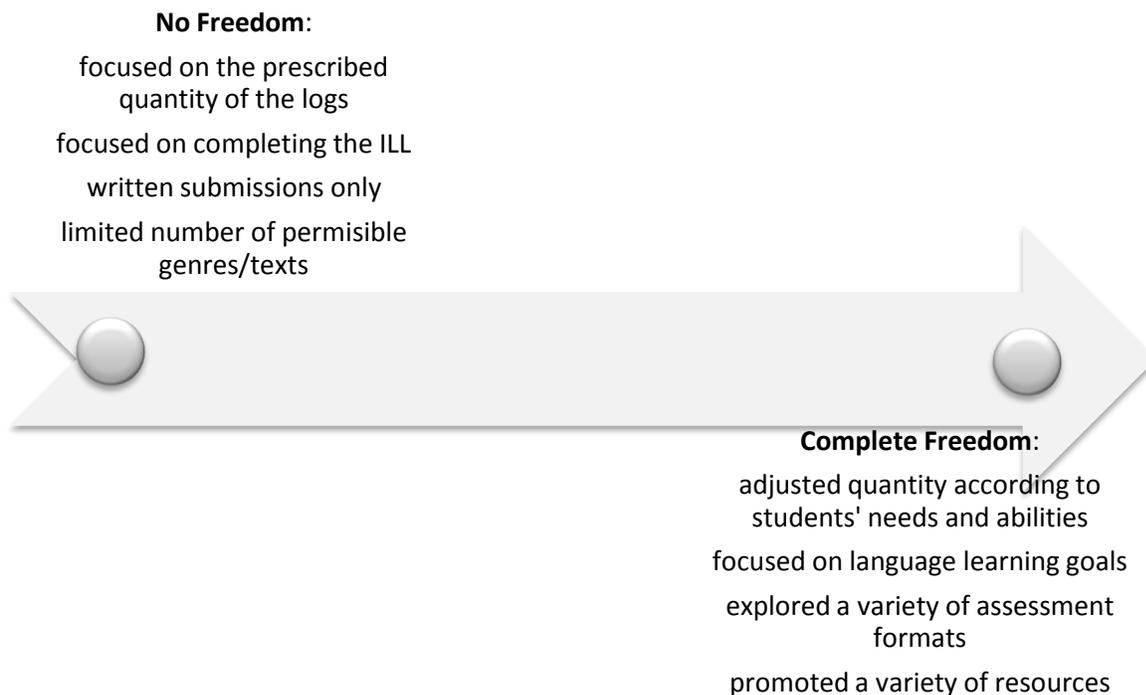


Figure 5.2 Teacher autonomy in interpreting the ILL guidelines

The teachers who showed 'No Freedom' in their interpretation of the guidelines would often focus on the suggested quantities of the weekly logs. In the interviews, they would stress the exact number of the reading or listening logs and explained that they focused on getting the work done. They were often stressed about trying to keep up with the assessment and did not allow themselves any discretion with respect to the assigned work. They seldom diverged from how they interpreted the guidelines and were often frustrated when they found out that others had not followed the guidelines in the same

way. They often pre-selected materials for the students to read and listen to and did not trust their students to work independently without their supervision. On the other end of the scale, there were teachers who interpreted the guidelines loosely and focused more on the aims of the ILL rather than the number of assignments. They encouraged their students to choose any out-of-classroom resources to learn English and encouraged their students to be creative and show initiative in their independent reading and listening reports. They often allowed a variety of formats for the logs, like audio book reports, visual responses, or art instead of solely relying on the written reports.

Among the interviewed teachers, Ann showed the most flexibility and freedom in how she interpreted the ILL. In her opinion, the ILL rubrics were flexible:

[...] so there's a rubric and the rubric says that the students knew and understood the reading to a high level, so that rubric should be flexible enough that the teacher can [...] use for a discussion circle, [...] for a book presentation, for a webpage students do about a book
(Ann)

Ann believed that the ILL allowed teachers to be flexible in what kind of tasks and in what quantity they assign to their students. For example, Ann would often experiment with different literary genres, like song lyrics, *manga*, and Arabic poetry and would encourage students to look for the type of reading that *they* found interesting. She would have long conversations with the students, both in-class and after class, about the reading they did and what type of texts they liked to read. When she explained the independent reading to a new class, she stressed innovation and creativity. In her opinion, being creative with a text showed involvement. Her students would submit their reading logs in a variety of formats that included cartoons, pictures/posters, recorded responses, power point presentations, and websites. She associated showing initiative with learning and being autonomous. She mentioned that she preferred it when students did something creative instead of just following the guidelines. In her eyes, following the guidelines blindly was the opposite to independent learning. According to Ann, "if teachers are in the strait-jacket, the learners are in the strait-jacket" (Ann). This understanding of autonomy suggests that learner autonomy is contingent on teacher

autonomy. It is interesting to note that, in discursive terms, Ann compared institutional guidelines to a *strait-jacket* and thus associated the guidelines with control and a lack of freedom. Furthermore, the negative connotations of *being in a strait-jacket* suggest being limited and constrained as a teacher. Despite her creative attempt at fostering independent reading and listening, some of the interviewed students complained about her way of teaching. Aysha and Ahmed expressed frustration with respect to her lack rigid guidelines or strict set of rules.

On the other end of the scale were teachers who interpreted the ILL in terms of numbers; that is, they focused solely on the number of logs submitted by the students. These teachers often focused on helping students complete the ILL. They understood the ILL as an assessment tool. Thus, teachers would set up specific guidelines for their students. For example, Sara reported that her Reading teacher asked them to read one graded reader per week. At the same time, another student reported having to submit *two reading reports* every week. According to the student, "I liked all the parts of the ILL but the idea of having lots of them was upsetting sometimes. For example, we should submit two book reports every week!!" (SSS 2013). In addition to the different number of the logs, Sara's teacher, for example, would not accept other genres, such as newspaper articles or young adult fiction. The teacher strictly followed his interpretation of the reading logs and did not allow learners to be independent in their reading selection or how they responded to the reading materials. The same teacher who limited the students in their choice of reading materials complained about the reading logs and questioned their usefulness. Another teacher would send learners a link to a video that he had selected for them and then quiz the students on the content of the video in the classroom. This again did not allow learners to choose materials that they may have been interested in or respond to the text in a creative and personalised way. Students complained about not being given freedom in the choice of the reading and the way they were to report on the reading. For example, one student commented that book clubs where students report on their reading by discussing it with their peers would have been a better idea to promote independent reading: "i think the reading log gives a lot of pressure to students i prefer the idea of book clubs, let the students have the

option to choose the club that interest them” (SSS 2012). Another student complained that they would have preferred to focus on reading novels rather than news articles: “reading novels was the most beneficial thing, while the article was not that much” (SS 2012). These examples showed that different teachers’ interpretations of the ILL guidelines limited the students’ freedom in their independent learning. I would also argue that these teachers did not display autonomy as teachers. The issue of teacher autonomy and independent learning is discussed in Section 5.2.3. During the interviews, the teachers who interpreted the ILL in a prescriptive and teacher-centred way explained that they would have liked to have more guidelines and more standardisation in the programme; whilst the teachers who showed initiative and creativity were satisfied with the guidelines.

Finally, to place the PP teachers rigidly at one or the other end of the autonomy scale would not have been just. Like any conceptual model, the scale discussed above serves the purpose of clarifying the issues. None of the teachers were completely autonomous or completely syllabus-dependent. For example, Ann and George who were flexible in their interpretation of the ILL guidelines from the handbook made sure that the assessment criteria and the guidelines presented to the students were in line with the curricular documents. Some other teachers, who did not show a lot of engagement with the ILL, did nevertheless experiment occasionally and strayed from the prescribed format. The common denominator among the PP teachers was that, despite their dissatisfaction with the ILL, the teachers continued *forcing* it upon their students. This ambiguous behaviour raises some fundamental questions of power and agency in a language classroom. The questions are discussed in Section 5.4.

The majority of the teachers expressed a need for more guidelines and more standardisation across different sections of the same course. Teachers mentioned that the guidelines and the assessment rubric for the ILL were too fluid and subjective and that they should have been standardised across the level. One teacher commented that “[i]t seems that the actual percentages allotted for each skill should be discussed. Aspects of the ILL are subjective in many respects and this should be possibly standardized

across the level” (TSS 2012). Another teacher, David, mentioned in his interview that he would have liked to see more assessment rubrics for all of the sections of the ILL. He felt that there should have been more standardization and he gave examples of more structured systems in similar programmes in the country. Emma mentioned that, when she first joined the programme, she needed guidance from her peers to understand the ILL requirements as presented in the *Faculty Handbook*. She recalled the help that she received from her colleagues: “The faculty was good, and um, walking me through it X was certainly supportive, in helping me with what I didn’t understand...specifically the listening, the speaking” (Emma). Other teachers, Claire and Jack, mentioned that when they first joined the programme they did not initially use their discretion in interpreting the ILL guidelines, but focused on the prescribed numbers of logs. Claire mentioned that, in her first semester, she followed the ILL guidelines from the *Faculty Handbook* to the letter. Even though she was not convinced by them, she did not alter them and taught the reading course following a narrow interpretation of the ILL. As she recalled: “I found myself doing a couple of reading logs just to physically give them the time to get them done [...] Which is pointless, I mean that's check box, isn't it, and I don't like feeling that I'm in that position” (Claire). As Claire explained in the interview, a couple of time she selected the articles for the reading logs for the students and did the reading reports as in-class assignments. Her account presents a clear conflict between what she believed was good teaching and what she was forcing the students to do so as to meet the course requirements.

Claire focused on the number of the reading assignments that had to be submitted and did not introduce much variety or give her students choice. Her interpretation of the ILL changed dramatically at one of the teacher professional development sessions organised by the PP teacher. One of her colleagues, Fiona, who was also teaching a Reading course that semester, gave a presentation about the independent reading activities that were introduced in her class. The presentation discussed activities like reading circles, giving presentations instead of writing book reports, and even drawing pictures to illustrate the content of a book. Fiona did not require written book reports, but, instead, helped her students organise book discussions and give oral

presentations. All these were done to facilitate the independent reading and were assessed as part of the ILL. However, in contrast to traditional written book reports, the oral reports allowed students to react to the reading in an authentic manner and reduced the amount of work for the teacher. Fiona’s decision to incorporate oral book reports was partly based on informal discussion among the reading teachers whether writing weekly book reports did not diminish the students’ willingness to read. In the student survey from 2012, 59% of the students reported that the reading ILLs did not help cultivate enjoyment for reading. Furthermore, while 53% of the students felt that writing the reading report was a good idea, 74% preferred oral book reports in which they discussed the reading materials with their teacher or in the form of mini book clubs (see Table 5.3 below).

Table 5.3 Student opinion about writing the reading reports for the ILL (SSS 2012)

| Questions | Strongly Disagree % | Disagree % | Agree % | Strongly Agree % | n/a % |
|---|---------------------|------------|---------|------------------|-------|
| The reading log helped me to enjoy the reading. | 0 | 59.3 | 22.2 | 14.8 | 3.7 |
| Writing the reading reports is a good idea. | 7.7 | 34.6 | 50 | 3.8 | 3.8 |
| I prefer to tell my teacher about the stories. | 0 | 22.2 | 37 | 37 | 3.7 |

While some teachers experimented with alternative forms of the reading log submissions and assessment, these experiments were not officially discussed at the faculty meetings and there was a definite lack of collaboration among the reading teachers in how they implemented the reading ILLs. Eve summarised the different attitudes among the PP teachers in the following way:

I think that maybe all of the instructors should have a discussion about what the real purpose of a log is, because I [...] know for a fact that some instructors see it as these little book reports [...] why can't you have a little two minute discussion with the student, what did you read, who was the protagonist, did you like it, would you recommend it to somebody else, check [...] (Eve)

Eve's account demonstrated how different teachers interpreted the ILL guidelines in different ways. According to Claire, seeing how her colleague, Fiona, interpreted the ILL opened her eyes to broader interpretations of the ILL guidelines. She said that she had followed the prescribed ILL and had focused on the quantity of the reading assignments, but did not question it. She believed that one of the reasons why she followed a narrow interpretation of the ILL guidelines was her previous experience as a teacher. As she explained: "I realize that we have actually quite a lot of freedom. I've come from a system where there wasn't. It was very rigid" (Claire). Claire and other teachers had similar experience in their first semester. They often followed the guidelines in a rigid way, even though they were told by course coordinators and their peers to exercise discretion in how they implement the ILL. According to George, a reason for this could be that the teachers "want to know what am I supposed to be doing with the students [...] and how it's going to be assessed [...] and how can they defend themselves if a student questions a mark" (George). Reflecting on this experience, few teachers mentioned the need for more collaboration among the PP teachers. As Claire described it:

I still found it useful just to get together with everybody else who's teaching it to find what resources there are here, what people have done here with their students [...] But I think there's maybe not enough discussion maybe at the start of the semester of how things are. (Claire)

A lack of collaboration between the PP teachers was made evident in the discrepancies in their interpretation of the ILL and how it was to be implemented. Ann described resistance among faculty members with respect to the idea of holding regular meetings to discuss the ILL. "I mean we need to have more of these meetings and kind of get on board, see how do we do this [...] I remember [...] there was a resistance to get together and talk about how we do this whole thing" (Ann). According to Ann, there was a need to explain to the new faculty the philosophy behind the ILL. However, this did not always happen. Furthermore, Ann's comment supports Claire's view that there was not enough collaboration among the PP teachers. The notion of 'collaboration', or 'interdependence in autonomy', is discussed in more detail in Section 5.3.3. During the period of the

study, the PP English teachers did not hold regular meetings. Thus, most of the collaboration across courses was done informally.

The varied interpretations of the ILL by the teachers resulted in varied responses from the students. As described above, students who took the same course but with a different instructor had a different experience of the ILL. For example, Aysha, whose teacher was liberal and allowed students a lot of freedom with the choice of the reading materials, criticised it. According to her: “[The] independent learning reading report could have been better, if we made it more strict; for example, if we asked the students to look for longer texts, longer than just 400 or 600 words, and force them to look for academic articles.” Because her teacher allowed a variety of reading texts and a variety of responses, Aysha felt that the ILL was unfair and that it did not encourage students to challenge themselves. She viewed education and especially the teacher’s role as that of an *enforcer of the law*. In her words, it was the teacher’s job to *force* learners to search for more challenging articles. Her dissatisfaction with the way her teacher implemented the ILL was evident in the number of changes and suggestions that she listed during the interview. She mentioned that the number of the articles read should be less, but that they should be longer and more academic. She wanted other learners to write longer reading reports and to “make it obligatory [...] make the students look for academic, an academic only, topic” (Aysha). In her case, the feeling of injustice came from two sources. Some learners in her class used oral reading reports instead of written reports. In the audio reading reports, students would record their response to a reading material using recording software. Aysha felt that audio reports were too easy, even though it was a valid option, open to any student in the class. Another source of discontent was that some students in her class used song lyrics as part of the independent reading logs. Aysha felt strongly that such non-academic genres should not be allowed in the course. According to her, the main problem with the ILL was that “it was free” and some students chose easy articles to read just to fulfil the requirements. As she observed: “I didn’t witness the spirit of independent learning, they were just doing it to have these marks and convince teacher of something and that’s it.” Aysha felt disappointed with her colleagues, but also with herself. In the interview, she mentioned that she did not

achieve all the goals that she had set up for herself, because half-way through the semester she became bored and tired of the ILL and did not always choose the most challenging articles. There is a clear relationship here between the way teachers interpreted the ILL and their students' experience of the ILL. Most students professed an understanding of the usefulness of the ILL, but they did not really understand the "spirit of independent learning" (Aysha); they did not focus on their personal language learning goals, but on the number of required assignments instead.

Another teacher who was flexible with the reading log guidelines, George, focused on fostering independent reading rather than writing reading reports. His interpretation of the ILL guidelines showed a great level of autonomy. George avoided giving HIS students prescriptive guidelines. As he explained:

What I want from them as proof that they're doing this is a reaction, [...] and that's pretty wide open as to how you react to what you've read, no prescriptive summary that it must be this many words, none of that, so they have to choice as to how they're going to react [...] I find if I am too prescriptive, that's all they will give me. (George)

This approach to independent reading caused frustration among some of his students, who expected clear guidelines in terms of the quantity of the reading and the format of the written book reports. However, not all of his students were discouraged by this lack of strict guidelines. One of his students, Mariam, not only excelled in her reading reactions but also engaged her family in the process. Mariam came from a small village in the Eastern region of the Emirates. Mariam would translate the books for her younger brother and tell him about the stories that she was reading for her English course. As one of her teachers, George, recalled, Mariam would call her home daily and would translate the stories to her younger brother on the phone. She would also discuss what she had read with her sibling. In addition to her detailed and personalised reaction to the independent reading, she included a photo of her brother with the book. Mariam's experience is symptomatic of the students who not only benefited from the ILL, but also fully engaged with it. In my experience, there had always been few students who would excel in the ILL, in that they would challenge themselves, be creative with their ILLs,

and be able to personalise them. However, there is no direct correlation between the teachers' expectations and requirements and these students' success. It cannot be said that one teacher's approach directly helped foster these learners' autonomy. I would argue that these successful students were already independent when they joined the programme.

Overall, the teachers' approaches to the ILL guidelines were not uniform and led to many discrepancies in the way different courses were taught and the ILLs assessed. The lack of standardised assessment caused some level of frustration among teachers and students. This issue raises questions whether we should even try to standardise our attempts at fostering autonomy. The notions of standardised assessment and learner autonomy are mutually-exclusive. As described by the teachers and students above, giving students prescribed guidelines forced them into a mould and thwarted their creativity. In many cases, the language used by the students to describe their work was expressed in terms of 'obligation' and 'duty', imposed on them by their teachers. In metaphoric terms, the students conceptualised 'education' as something that 'had to be'. The different interpretations of the ILL guidelines and course objectives may be dependent on how the teachers conceptualised their own roles within the PP and how they view their students.

5.2 Teacher and Student Conceptualisations of Independent Learning

The analysis of the interviews and the surveys revealed how teachers and students perceived their roles. These representations emerged from the analysis of the lexical fields used to describe teachers and students, the grammar used to describe each other's roles, and the syntactic oppositions that appeared within the discourse. The analysis of these linguistic features uncovered a discourse in which students were portrayed as 'lacking', 'deficient', and 'in need of improvement'. This representation was not attributed solely to the teachers' discourse; it emerged from the analysis of *all* the data. This means that students saw themselves as lacking and in need of help from the teachers. This perspective is not unusual among people who have been assigned the role of the Other. In contrast to this inferior position, teachers were portrayed as 'fixers',

'controllers', and 'enforces of the law'. Their role was described in terms of forcing the students to do the ILL. This division of roles reflects what Holliday (2003a) calls 'native-speakerism' in TESOL. Figure 5.3 summarises the different themes related to student and teacher representations. 'Native-speakerism' has been used in the data coding to label utterances that reinforce and draw upon the US-THEM ideology. The following section starts by presenting the native-speakerist features of the PP discourse. Then I demonstrate how the assumptions that underlie this type of discourse inform the teacher and student representations of their roles of fostering autonomy in an English classroom.

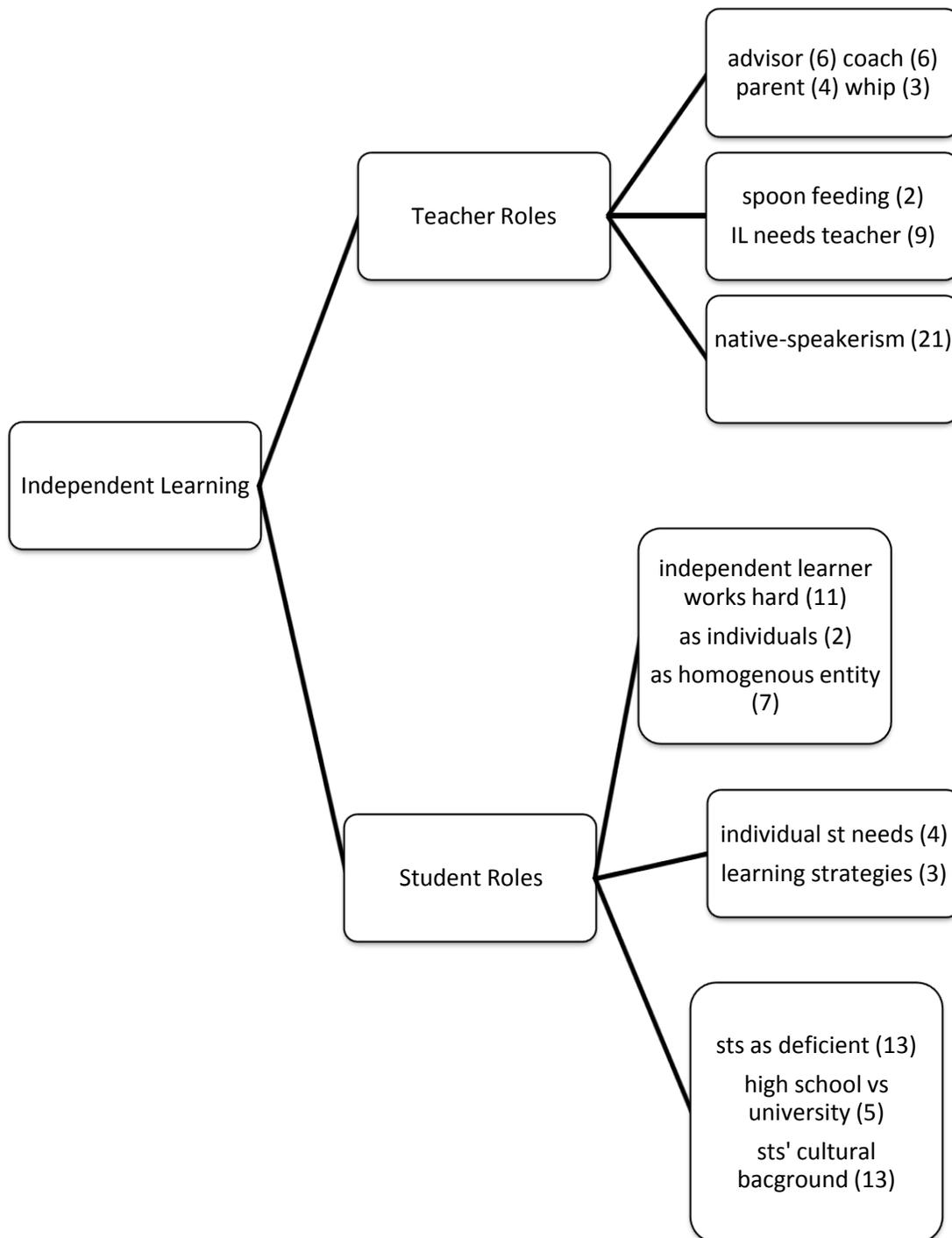


Figure 5.3 The conceptualisations of the teacher and student roles in the ILL (number of references)

5.2.1 Native Speakerism and Learner Autonomy

According to Holliday (2003a, 2003b), the native-speakerist discourse presents EFL students as *passive, lacking, and in need of corrective training*. These characterises of students are in direct opposition to autonomous learners who are described as: *active and able to take charge for their own learning*. The native-speakerist discourse assumes that ‘foreign’ and ‘non-native’ learners are deficient. They are presumed not to have autonomy. This ‘presumed deficiency’ is blamed on (i) their culture, (ii) previous educational experience, or (iii) poor standards among local teachers. All these three ‘explanations’ were present in the teachers’ and students’ interview transcripts. Both teachers and students blamed their high-school teachers for not being autonomous. A student, Aysha, explained, “none of my teachers during my high-school and middle school...none of my English teachers taught us how to learn English on our own, where to find appropriate English or appropriate ways of learning English”. This statement was echoed by a teacher, George, who speculated, “we’ve got to break some bad habits or different ways of thinking about education and who is responsible...for education it does take I think on our part a lot of training and discussion with the students”. George’s and Aysha’s descriptions of high-school teaching were indicative of how high-school teachers were generally represented in the PP discourse. The theme that *in high-school students just did whatever they were told* and did not develop any autonomy is a common theme in TESOL discourse. The last two statements contain several discursive strategies. First is the opposition of *high-school teachers versus university teachers*. High-school teachers are portrayed as ‘lacking’ and ‘incompetent’. The same argument was used in Ricks and Szczerbik’s (2010) article to explain their university students’ lack of autonomy. Another issue is the idea that (a) there is a ‘proper’ or ‘appropriate’ way to learn/teach English and (b) that this way is better than what the students did in high-school. In Holliday’s (2003a) discussion, this is referred to as ‘true learning’. In the native-speakerist discourse, ‘true learning’ is the domain of the native speaker teachers whose role is to ‘train students’ how to become independent. In the Spring 2012 survey, several teachers expressed the idea that the students *need to be trained* to be independent. Table 5.4 summarises some common assumptions about students and

their background related to the native-speakerist discourse that I identified in the process of the qualitative data analysis.

Table 5.4 Native-speakerist themes in the Teacher Survey, Spring 2012

| Excerpts from TSS 2012 | Native-speakerist assumptions |
|--|--|
| “[ILL] trains the untrained” | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • students need training to be ‘true learners’ |
| “Perhaps we should give more direction as a group.” | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • teachers need to fix bad habits acquired in high-school |
| “[...]students who have come from a traditional learning environment” | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • high-schools did not foster learner autonomy and focused on assessment |
| “as students develop the learning skills needed and understand the value of the log” | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • students do not have the learning skills needed for independent learning |
| “[ILL] improves students study habits.” | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • students do not have ‘good’ study habits |
| “[S]tudents are not mature enough to take on ‘full independence’” | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • students are immature and need teachers to help them become independent |

The assumptions listed in Table 5.4 reiterate a stereotype of an EFL student as ignorant and lacking the ability for self-directed learning. The native-speakerism of the PP teachers and the prevailing representation of the PP students as lacking and in need of training may have contributed to the failure of the ILL as a tool for fostering autonomy. One teacher’s case may help us understand how the US-THEM discourse can completely destroy teacher-student relations and prohibit autonomy in a language classroom.

Emma’s case is symptomatic of the native-speakerist attitude towards students. During her first semester at the PP, Emma experienced a lot of problems teaching a particular

class. As she recalled, the female students in the class would ridicule her loudly and talk about her in their mother-tongue. This made Emma feel angry and alienated from the students. It also affected her teaching and how she felt about all the students in the class. At the same time, the students in the class made many complaints about Emma to Student Services and other teachers. The student attendance in the class dropped significantly as the semester progressed. After a few weeks of teaching in this hostile atmosphere, there was no chance for any type of positive student-teacher relationship to develop. As Emma reflected on this experience, she pointed to a certain US-THEM discourse that she felt was pervasive at the PP.

I think that we often speak to them like they're buffoons, [...] I do think that exists here [from] teachers towards the students [...] I've realized it in myself. [...] enough hostile comments said among the teachers about the students that I, I think it is somewhat pervasive. (Emma)

Her analysis of the situation suggested that Emma approached the students with a predetermined idea about them. She observed that the hostility that she had experienced in her class might have been an effect of the prevailing hostility from teachers to students. In her eyes as a new faculty member, she felt that the teachers spoke about the PP students as if they were 'silly buffoons' whose opinions and ideas did not need to be taken seriously. As she recalled, this attitude among the PP teachers had made her behave openly hostile towards the students from the beginning. In Emma's case, her perception of the students as inferior and lacking displayed itself in her action and her negative attitude towards the class. These kinds of teacher-student conflicts were not uncommon. What they brought forth was the deep-seated US-THEM divide inherent in teacher-student relations. While this divide is not always explicit, it can be observed in the way teachers and students see their roles in fostering learner autonomy.

5.2.2 Teacher Roles: from a Whip to a Parent

The way in which the teachers described their own roles within the independent learning system and the PP was not always explicit, but could be delineated by careful analysis of the language used by teachers to describe their work. The teachers' own

conceptualisations of their roles varied between 'a coach', 'a parent', and 'a law enforcer'. Students, on the other hand, defined the teachers' roles strictly in terms of 'an enforcer' or 'a whip', namely someone who *forces* you to do something. The ways in which the teachers and students conceptualised the teachers' roles had many points of convergence.

The first view that was made manifest in the teacher surveys and interviews was that *teachers are coaches* who lead their students to success by training students how to achieve their language learning goals. One of the teachers, George, described his role in following words: "I feel I have to build them up to being autonomous, being able to make their own choices." He mentioned that his role was to *train* the students in noting what resources were available, and he would spend a considerable amount of time discussing with them what they could read and how to select books. According to George, "it's our [teachers'] responsibility to have a discussion with [weaker students] so that they understand that they should be responsible for their own education." There are distinct parallels between the way George described his role with respect to independent learning and the way a coach might think of his team. He used expressions like *build them up*, *train them up*, and *help them*. At the same time, he believed in their abilities by saying, "I think that they are very willing and capable of understanding [...] they just haven't considered it before." In addition to being a 'coach', George saw himself as a 'parent'. Even though he did not mention it himself, the interactions that he described with his students were reminiscent of a father-child relation. For example, he would have conversations with students about them wasting their time. As he recalled talking to one of his students: "[...] and so, you are staying up all night not studying, just chatting with your friends or playing Play Station or fooling around....It's just making bad decisions...and I do have that conversation with students too." The shift from the third person into the second person implies speaking directly to a student. It also resembles a parent *having a conversation* with his child. George would often tell the students about his own experience as a freshman: "you know, as a freshman, in college I made some bad decisions, here's what happened[...]now some of you need to think about the decisions you're making, is that the best decision for you in this point in time". It is

evident that George wanted to share with his students his own experience to help them to avoid making the same mistakes. In his eyes, they were children. As he pointed out: “a lot of times we do forget that they are young.” In their interviews, the teachers would often refer to the PP students as “kids”. For example: “we don’t have books for kids interested in these topics” (Ann), “these were the kids who failed the logs” (Emma), “these kids seem so young for their age” (Emma). The ‘parent’ approach did not preclude the teacher enforcing deadlines and controlling the students’ learning, however.

George mentioned the importance of “forcing deadlines” to teach students about responsibility. The idea that the teacher’s role is to enforce the law is evident in both student and teacher responses. The comments in the teachers’ survey and the interviews were filled with expressions such as: “stay on top of it”, “need strict deadlines”, “they need strict timelines and guidance”, “they’ve got to be led to autonomy”, and “I was on their back”. These indicated that the teachers felt that they had to keep the students in check in order to get the work done. It also suggested that the teachers did not believe that the learners would do the independent work without close supervision. Whilst the teachers defined their role in terms of having to remind students about independent log deadlines and having to help them choose materials for the ILLs, the students had much narrower understanding of what they expected from the teachers. Many of the interviewed students used the verb *force* to describe the teacher’s role, for example “force them to look for academic articles”, “we must force them to look for academic texts”, “force the students to do more”, “you have to force them to do work”. One of the students, Marwan, mentioned that if his Reading teacher did not *force him* to read graded readers and articles, he would not have done that. Even though he saw the benefit of independent reading, he felt that he needed someone to enforce the independent reading. The issue of enforcing deadlines and making sure that the students do the independent work is obviously a controversial one. Marwan’s honest response that he would not have read if his teacher had not forced him to do so is symptomatic of many other students in the PP.

Marwan's statement may also reflect a common understanding of the teacher's role that permeates educational contexts, namely *the teacher as law enforcer*. This representation of the teacher's role dates back to times when it was socially acceptable for teachers to physically punish students for missing homework or for disobedience; the time when corporal punishment was almost synonymous with public education. Even though corporal punishment is not legal anymore in most countries around the world, including the UAE, the remnants of this 'educational model' may still linger in the way both students and teachers understand and define the teacher's role. In other words, the teachers assumed that it was their job to set up *strict deadlines* and the students expected to be *forced to keep up* with the assignments. The use of the word *strict* in the teachers' comments, and in general educational discourse, indicates that the old relationship between *strict punishments* and a *failure to meet the deadline* is, nowadays, represented by the expression: *strict deadline*. Whilst teachers no longer use physical punishment to force students to do their work, this understanding of the teacher's role perseveres in the way that teachers are seen as being responsible for their students' performance. Seeing the teacher as the agent and controller of education is in clear conflict with the idea of 'learner independence'; portraying teachers as power figures, such as a parent or a law enforcer, denies students of the ability to take charge of their own learning.

Thus far, I have outlined several ways in which teachers and students conceptualised the ILL and their roles with respect to teaching and learning. Some of the conceptual metaphors that were used by the respondents are those of 'bureaucratic system', 'factory', and 'prison'. These metaphorical conceptualisations affect the way teachers and students interpret their roles and duties. Thus, teachers see themselves as disciplinarians and supervisors, whilst students assume the passive roles of factory workers. The conceptual metaphors of education as 'prison' or 'factory' may seem farfetched at first glance, but they are not that shocking if we consider the student and teacher comments about their roles. In his writing on the history of the modern penal system, Foucault (1984) analyzed the roles assumed by different participants in a penal colony in Mettray in the 1840s. He remarked that the people who controlled the

prisoners had a number of different roles to fulfil including that of a judge, a teacher, a foreman, an officer, and a parent. Their role was to control and supervise the inmates' every move in order to create submissive subjects, or, in his terms, 'docile bodies'. According to Foucault, the first penal colonies of the early 1800s created a matrix by which other modern institutions control people; these institutions include hospitals, school, and factories. As he writes, "It was the emergence or rather the institutional specification, the baptism as it were, of a new type of supervision – both knowledge and power – over individuals who resisted disciplinary normalisation." (Foucault, 1984:237) Foucault's implication that modern schooling is based on similar structures of knowledge and power, as modern prisons, may help us understand the ambivalent ways in which students and teachers approach independent learning programmes. On one hand, they both want to exercise more power and freedom; but on the other hand, their socially-imposed roles do not allow them to transgress. With this in mind, I wish to discuss student representations within the independent learning curriculum at the PP.

5.2.3 Good Students, Lazy Students, and Learner Autonomy

According to Apple (2004) and Kubota (1999; 2000; and 2001), educators often *thingify* individual students and portray them as homogeneous abstractions instead referring to them as real individuals with individual life stories. One of the more common ways in which teachers label their students is according to the dualism of *good students* versus *lazy students*. This dualism was evident in the way teachers described the PP students and their commitment to independent learning. The following comments from the teacher survey reflect this dichotomy: "[the ILL] separates the wheat from the chaff", "the better students understand [it]", "the ILL acts as a good discriminator between the diligent and lazy students", "not very independent with weaker/lazier groups". According to teachers' comments, the *hard working, motivated, and diligent* students submitted all their logs on time. Being a *good student* was equated with not disrupting the class, keeping to the deadlines, and following the teacher's guidelines. The students who did not do the prescribed work were labelled *lazy, unmotivated, and weak*. Teachers suggested that in "weaker/lazier groups" they had to "allocate class time [for independent learning] and 'feed' some of the material to them to use" (TSS 2012). In the

teachers' discourse, words such as: *weak*, *unmotivated*, and *lazy* were used as synonyms. These adjectives described a student who was unable to help himself or herself, whose English skills were weak, or who had no interest in studying. Teachers often interpreted a student's lack of interest in the class with lack of autonomy or motivation. On the other hand, students who submitted their work on time and followed the ILL guidelines to the letter were described as *autonomous* and *motivated*. This dichotomy of *good students* versus *lazy students* is symptomatic of other dualisms that determined the way teachers talked about and represented their students. These dualisms included: *motivated/unmotivated*, *weak/strong*, *good/lazy*, and finally *independent/teacher dependent*. Such dualisms are always hierarchical and assume that the superior half is the norm and the desired *status quo*. In addition to this, once a group of people is labelled with one of the inferior adjectives, then the other labels follow indiscriminately. In other words, these hierarchical oppositions lead to other lexical fields and connotations. Foucault (1984) described this discursive process as "the normalisation of the power of normalisation" (p.237). That is to say, people who are in charge, in this case the teachers, describe their inferiors in a way that seems normal, straightforward, and innocent. Such a discourse hides the normalising power of dualism and makes it seem benign. However, if teachers view their students along these dualisms, they may often miss the differences that make them unique, as individual human beings. A student who is unmotivated in his English class may be extremely motivated in the Maths class. A student who appears lazy in the Writing course may be diligent in the Reading course. If we describe the students along the dichotomies listed above, we discard the intricate social and personal characteristics that make a person unique. To illustrate how thinking along these dualisms can blur our ability to see the real person behind the label, I wish to describe two learner stories. The first student is Salem who was often labelled by his teachers as *lazy* and *weak*. The other student is Sultan who was often described by his teachers as highly *motivated* and *hard-working*.

Salem started the Preparatory Programme with an IELTS Band 4.5. He was described by his English teachers as 'disruptive and unwilling to learn'. As he admitted in his interview, he did not like the English programme. He would hardly ever speak English in

his English classes and when he did, he uttered single words. As one of his teachers in his first semester at the programme, I had often seen him disrupt the Writing lessons by shouting jokes in Arabic and making other students laugh. He failed all of his English courses in the first semester, but when faced with the possibility of being dismissed from the university, he started to work on his English in the second semester. During that period, he expressed some strong opinions about the ILL. For example, he would not keep vocabulary logs because he did not see the value of making vocabulary lists. He mentioned that he would have preferred to write original sentences with the new words, instead of writing definitions. To improve his English vocabulary, he would listen to songs and watch movies with subtitles. When he heard a song on the radio or on the Internet, he would find the lyrics to that song. He would not do any speaking or listening logs because, in his mind, they were not related to the IELTS exam which was his ultimate goal. As he explained, “On the IELTS you must listen hard, I don’t care about the listening logs, I made record and go away or cheat from each other” (Salem). What he meant was that his Listening teacher would prepare a selection of listening programmes available in Moodle. The teacher was able to monitor who listened to the programmes and whether they completed the task. In order to get credit for the activity, Salem would just play the audio file but not actually listen to them. He would then copy the responses from other students. He also ignored the speaking logs because he felt that he was not being given enough feedback on how to improve his speaking. On the other hand, he worked hard on his reading logs. Even though his English skills were limited at the time, he read a whole novel of 180 pages and read newspaper articles on a regular basis. As he explained, he enjoyed reading the novel because he could see that he was learning new vocabulary. His account of reading the novel showed that he started to guess the meaning of new words from the context and was able to learn some new words without the help of a dictionary. As he recounted, “The articles are not interesting but if you read the books, the books have they share vocabulary so if you first time don’t know what the meaning of the word, next time you see it in the next paper...on the next paper. That happened when I read *Scorpio* I don’t know the meaning of *victim*, after ten pages I read *victim* and I learn” (Salem). A year after he

entered the programme, Salem managed to receive Band 6 in the IELTS exam which allowed him to start his undergraduate studies.

Describing Salem's experience with the ILL, many teachers said that he lacked autonomy or was not ready to be an independent learner. He refused to do significant parts of the ILLs. However, I would also view his resistance as a sign of independence. His personal goal was to achieve Band 6 in IELTS. Surprisingly, while most English teachers had a negative image of Salem, as being the stereotypical *lazy student*, it turned out that Salem had an excellent reputation among the computer programming professors who perceived him as extremely bright and hardworking. His academic interests and motivation were clearly in science and computer programming. He joined the university to become a software engineer and he excelled in a language unfamiliar to most of us. Unfortunately for him, English is a requirement in all degree courses in the UAE. Thus, learning English was just not his main goal at the university, but rather an obstacle that kept him away from what he really wanted to study. Salem explained that he did not do many ILL assignments because they did not appeal to his strengths. According to him, to be independent means to "learn by yourself and not by the teacher, because most teachers' style is different from me [...] I like to move, I try to be comfortable" (Salem). Overall, Salem decided for himself which parts of the ILL were helpful and worth doing and which ones were not helping him improve his English to get the required band in the IELTS. I would say that the ILL format did not allow Salem to incorporate his interests and to develop a personalised independent learning plan.

In comparison to Salem, Sultan was on the other side of the *good student/lazy student* dichotomy. He was a quiet and unassuming student. He was always respectful to his teachers and other students. He would submit all his assignments on time and would make sure they were of a good quality. When he joined the PP, his English skills were tested at Band 5 in IELTS, but he managed to increase his score by one band in one semester. During that semester, Sultan worked consistently and did all the independent work that was required of him. However, during the interview he distanced himself from the ILL. He discussed it in the third person, saying for example: "So when someone

read books and articles he, he got the idea of studying, like it is then when he will read a newspaper or a book it will be easy for him” (Sultan). Using the third person to describe the ILL may suggest that Sultan did not take ownership of his work or did not believe in the usefulness of the independent learning assignments. He relied on his teachers to design to whole language learning programme for him and completed some assignments even though he did not think they were useful. He complained, for example, about the listening logs. According to him, there should have been more independent listening logs. Considering the flexible nature of the ILL guidelines, it is interesting that Sultan did not take the initiative and listen to more online programmes in his own time. To rationalize his behaviour, I would suggest a few, possibly interrelated, explanations. The first one is related to the representation of the teacher’s role. Perhaps, in Sultan’s eyes, it was the teacher whose responsibility it was to decide what and how to study. Thus, taking initiative and doing something that had not been prescribed by his English teacher would have appeared as disobedience or even subversion. Related to this representation of the teacher’s role is the dichotomy of *in-class learning* versus *out-of-class learning*. If one conceptualises language learning along these lines, then in-class learning is more important, more valuable, and more legitimate than out-of-class learning. It may be the case that the students did not see their out-of-class activities as *real* language learning.

Overall, both learner stories suggest that labelling students along the lines of *good* versus *lazy* blurs the complexities of their personalities, personal language learning goals, and language learning styles. It also assumes that students have one static identity, which is *being a student*. One of the teachers, Eve, expressed the idea that, in order to be autonomous, students need to see themselves as *students*. For her, being a student was a distinct identity. As she explained: “I think what happens is that many students when they enter university there’s just that shifting a little bit to introduce that sliver of pie that says student, where it doesn’t become their role, it doesn’t become who they are.”

While Eve argued that the students did not see themselves as students but were torn among various other social roles, I would argue that their teachers saw them solely as students and did not see all the other social roles that the PP students often played out in their private lives. I believe that the teachers' inability to see the students as individuals was yet another obstacle in fostering learner independence among the PP students. In the students stories described above, both students exercised *some* independence in learning English, but in completely different ways. Salem expressed his independence by disregarding sections of the ILL that he felt were not helping him. They were not useful to him for two reasons; either because they were too advanced for his language level or because they had no clear relation to the proficiency exam that he was required to take. Sultan, on the other hand, followed the ILL to the letter, even though he was critical of certain sections and felt that some ILL parts needed improvement. Even though Sultan did not exercise a lot of agency as the PP student, he took personal steps to improve his language skills. For example, in his free time he would seek English-speaking people to chat with. Analysing these two cases leads to two more concepts that need to be discussed; 'out-of-class learning' and 'learner agency'.

5.3 Out-of-class Learning

Benson (2011a) raises the issue of the current dearth of research into out-of-class learning in TESOL. Despite the existence of some evidence that shows that "learners who achieve high levels of proficiency often attribute their success to out-of-class learning" (Benson, 2011:7), there are few studies into language learning beyond the classroom. According to Benson (2011a), what defines out-of-class language learning are: (i) location, (ii) formality, (iii) pedagogy, and (iv) locus of control. By 'location' the author refers to a physical space, such as a classroom or a school. Considering the recent changes in how *classroom* or *school* are defined, in terms of such as a 'flipped' classroom, 'cloud learning', or 'distance learning', I would argue that 'location' is no longer a defining attribute in a discussion about out-of class and in-class learning. In my opinion, what defines a 'class' in out-of-class learning are (a) the level of formality and (b) who is in control over the material and the pedagogy. In this sense, out-of-class

learning is never formal or imposed on learners. It might mean a chat with an English speaking barista or going to see an English movie. It might mean a group of friends listening to an English song or watching a TV show together. Whatever the activity, it has no formal boundaries or restrictions, and the control over the activity is fully in hands of the learner. In this respect, out-of-class learning has many points of convergence with learner autonomy in that the locus of control is with the learner and not the teacher or an institution. I would argue that the out-of-class learning that students engage in is a marker of their level of autonomy and motivation. The data analysis shows a discrepancy in how the PP students conceptualised the ILL and independent learning and the different types of out-of-class learning that they engaged in. Figure 5.4 summarises different themes related to out-of-class learning and learner autonomy.

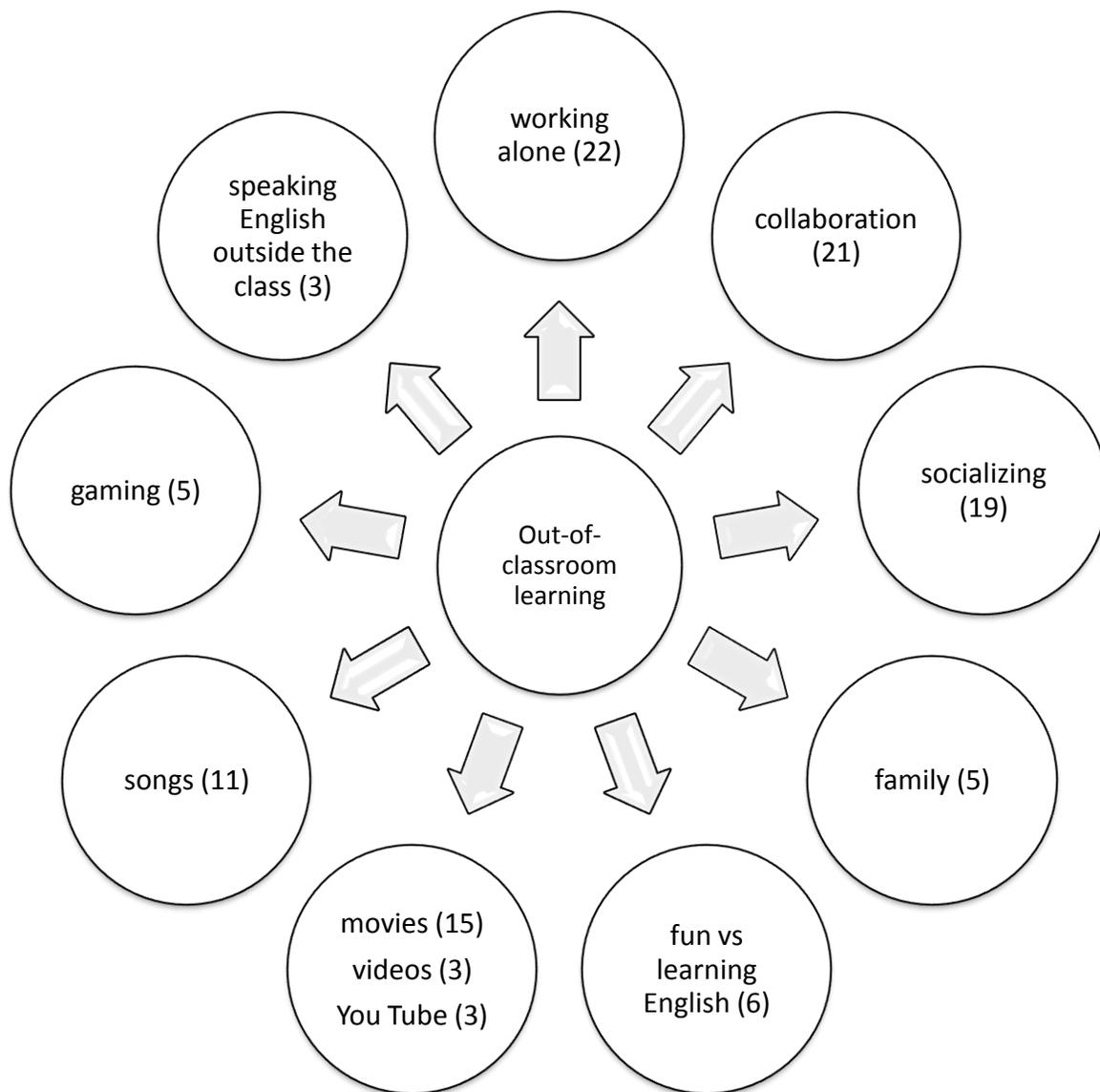


Figure 5.4 Out-of-classroom Learning Reported by the PP Students

Overall, the majority of the respondents defined independent learning as ‘working alone’. Both teachers and students perceived the ILL work as *working on your own independently of others*. This definition of independent learning is in contrast with the sociocultural definition of autonomy which includes both working alone and learning from more capable peers. Collaboration among learners and learning whilst socialising, that is watching English movies and TV shows together, sharing music and books, were

mentioned as students preferred ways of learning English, but they were not associated with the ILL work. In fact, most teachers did not allow any room in the ILL for collaborative projects and sharing among learners. In this sense, the word *independent* in ILL came to mean 'individual'. However, when asked about out-of-class activities that the learners engaged in so as to improve their English, the PP students identified a wide range of free-time activities. The Student Survey from Fall 2013 was especially designed to find out more about these out-of-class activities. The following section presents how the PP students defined out-of-class learning and how they engaged in it to improve their English.

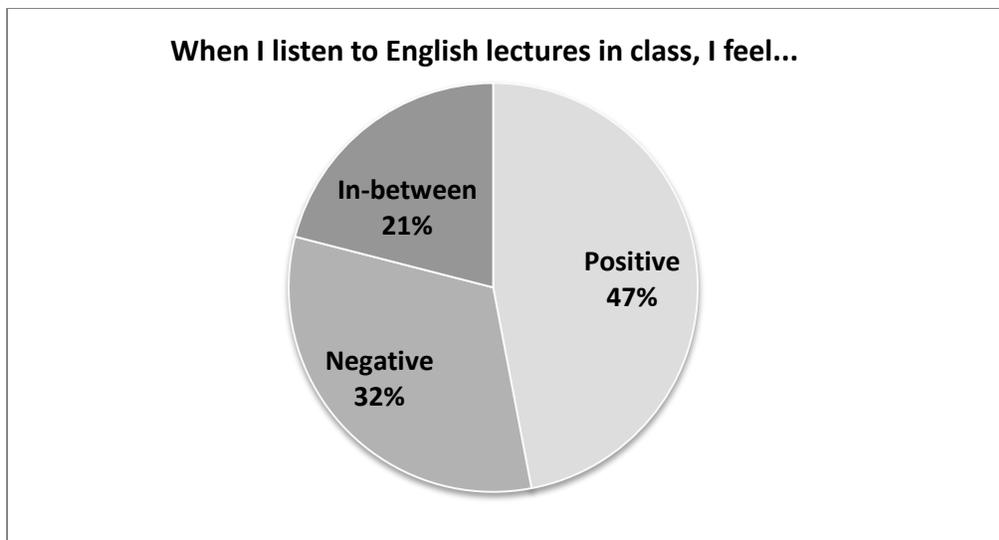
5.3.1 The dichotomy of in-class-learning and out-of-class learning

Analysing the teachers' and students' comments about the ILL, one notices that there was a clear disengagement between *in-class activities* and *out-of-class activities*. Even though one of the main tenets of the ILLs was "to report on the language learning activities that students engaged in *outside the class*" (Faculty Handbook 2011/12), it seems that neither the teachers nor the students were willing to bridge the gap between these two learning contexts. The interviews and the student surveys revealed that, in the students' eyes, out-of-class activities are often viewed as fun, interesting, related to their hobbies, and engaging. However, they did not perceive the out-of-classroom language learning as *real learning*. There was a clear demarcation between teacher-led language learning conducted at the university, and the less structured but more socially-engaging out-of-classroom activities. The *in-class* learning was seen as more legitimate and thus superior to *out-of-class* learning. The *in-class/out-of-class* dualism generated several contingent dichotomies and assumptions. The in-class-learning was seen as 'teacher-centred', 'boring', 'structured', and yet 'legitimate'. On the other hand, the out-of-classroom language learning activities were viewed as 'learner-led' and 'fun', but 'not organised' and 'lacking legitimacy' (see the summary of the dichotomies in Table 5.5 below).

Table 5.5 Student Conceptualisations of in-class language learning and out-of-class language learning

| In-class learning | Out-of-class learning |
|-------------------|-----------------------|
| teacher-centred | student-led |
| boring | fun |
| structured | disorganised |
| legitimate | lacking legitimacy |
| paper-based | technology driven |

In the Fall 2013 survey, students were asked to complete two sentences: “When I listen to English lectures in class, I feel...” and “When I listen to English outside the classroom, I feel...” The responses to these two questions were coarsely classified as ‘positive’, ‘negative’, and ‘in-between’. Figure 5.5 below summarizes the students’ responses to these two questions.



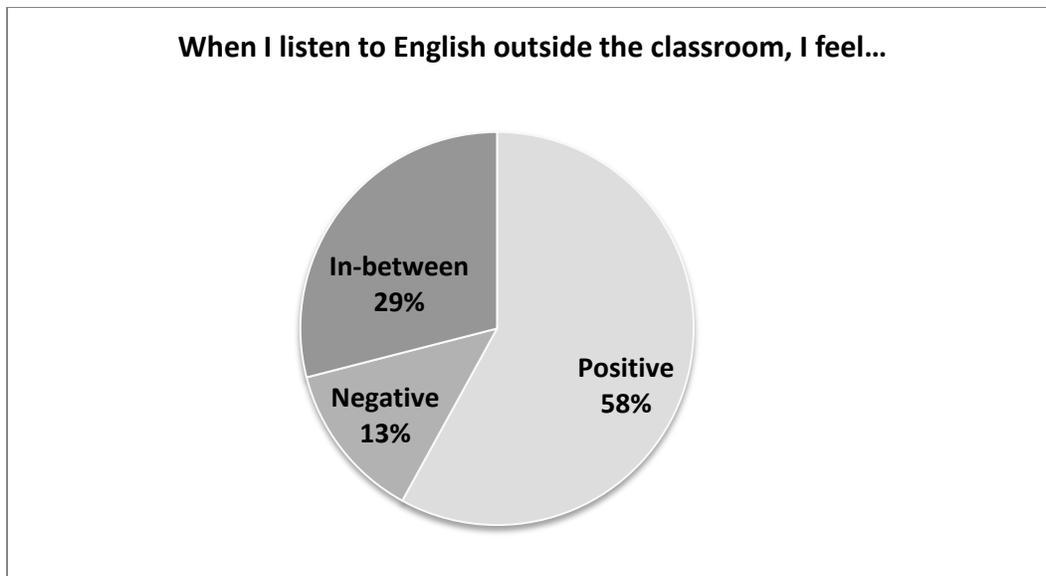


Figure 5.5 Student opinions about listening to English, in-class and out-of-class

Figure 5.5 shows that out-of-class listening had a much higher positive response rate than in-class listening. Here students mentioned feeling *comfortable*, *happy*, and *relaxed*. They felt sense of achievement and *feeling proud*. The negative comments towards out-of-class listening were related to a lack of interest in listening to English and *anger* and *annoyance* about English educational programmes. The most common in-between comments showed ambivalence towards listening outside the class. Those students reported feeling happy and comfortable when they could understand English outside the class and frustrated when they could not. As one student explained, “Sometime comfortable when I listen some word I know it, but sometime I feel I listen to Chinese language” (SSF 2013). In contrast to out-of-class listening, only 47% of the students had positive feelings about in-class listening. Students mentioned feeling *motivated* and *excited* that they could follow the lectures. The positive comments were concentrated around the sense of achievement and feeling of improvement in their English skills. Almost a third of the students had negative feelings towards in-class listening. The words used to describe how they felt were: *bored*, *sleepy*, *tired*, *difficult to understand*, and *not interesting*. The in-between responses mentioned that their feelings about the lecture depended on the topic and the speaker. A typical response in this category was: “Excited sometimes and bored other times, it depends on the speaker

and the topic” (SSF 2013). The answers to these two questions show that students conceptualised in-class and out-of-class learning along different categories. In-class learning was focused on acquiring specific skills and improving English, such as note-taking and understanding the teacher. Out-of-class learning focused on affective factors, such as comfort and feeling relaxed. This discrepancy in the students’ responses shows how the in-class and out-of-class dichotomy can affect learners’ attitudes towards independent learning outside the classroom. In this survey, the results are limited to the listening skills. It would be useful to conduct more research on out-of-classroom learning with respect to all four skills.

Another significant observation is that there was a vast discrepancy between (a) the out-of-class activities that the PP students engaged in on their own and (b) the material that they were allowed to submit as part of the ILL. When asked about their favourite ways of learning English, students mentioned a variety of technology-based activities, such as: watching movies, watching YouTube videos, playing online video games and chatting with players from different countries, searching for song lyrics, reading news headlines on Twitter, and reading online about their hobbies. Table 5.6 summarizes the most common out-of-class activities that the PP students reported doing to improve their English (SSF 2013).

Table 5.6 SSF 2013, Students’ out-of-class learning habits

| Student Out-of-Class Activities | |
|---|-----|
| Watching English movies with Arabic subtitles | 52% |
| Listening to English songs | 46% |
| Watching English TV shows | 44% |
| Watching YouTube videos | 44% |
| Watching movies without the subtitles | 24% |
| Listening to English radio | 16% |
| Using language learning websites | 4% |

The list of the activities showed that the PP students actively engaged in various sources of English entertainment that were available to them. In the UAE, the cinemas screen English movies in their original language with Arabic subtitles. There are also

numerous English radio stations that broadcast news and music in English. According to the data, the majority of the PP students took advantage of this easy access to authentic materials. In theory, the PP students' engagement with these resources should have formed a significant part of the ILL. However, these resources and the learners' willingness to use them were not utilised when doing the ILLs. For example, only one teacher allowed students to use song lyrics in the ILL. Figure 5.6 shows that listening to music was the dominant out-of-class listening activity among the PP students.

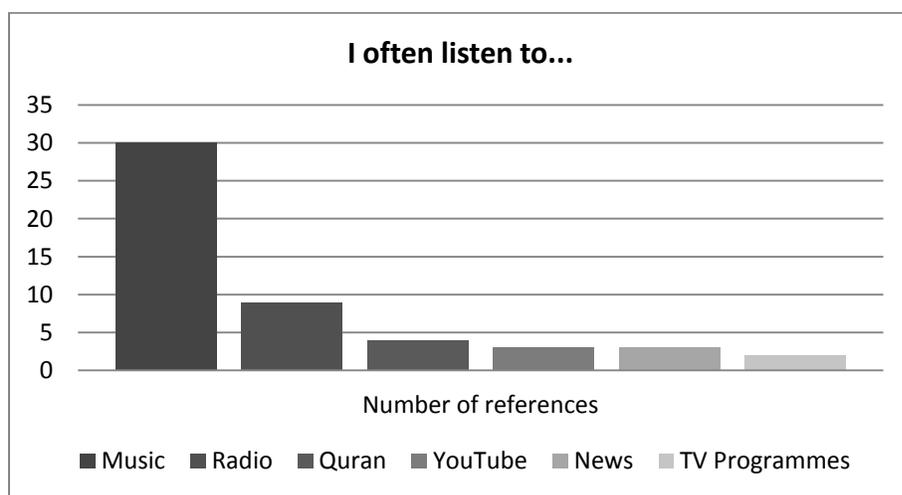


Figure 5.6 PP Students' out-of-class listening activities

In the Fall 2013 survey, 30 out of the 50 respondents mentioned music. Many of these respondents did not specify what kind of music, but 43% of them mentioned *English songs* and *English music* in particular as their favourite free time listening activity. In the same survey, 62% of the students mentioned English songs as the most useful in learning English and 48% mentioned movies. Despite the prevalence of these out-of-classroom activities in the students' lives, the majority of the teachers did not mention any of them as being important to fostering learner autonomy. Furthermore, no attempts were made to incorporate these out-of-classroom activities with the ILL. When the results of the Fall 2013 survey were presented to the PP faculty at an intra-departmental mini-conference, some teachers were surprised at the importance of music and movies in students' lives. Reflecting on the findings of the Fall 2013 survey, Claire commented

that she would have more confidence to explore different types of listening genres with the students. As she explained, “I would have more confidence to give students who wanted the opportunity to learn by songs to do that and also [...] television programs [...] If they’re asked to listen to something that they find boring then it becomes a tick box exercise.” Another teacher, Eve, commented on the survey findings: “it actually makes me think that if it’s independent learning then students should do whatever they want in order to learn independently”.

Like few other teachers, after hearing about student preferences, Eve was keen to introduce other listening genres into the ILL. More importantly, the survey findings made her think about how teachers set up parameters for the students and how these parameters or guidelines can limit not only the learners’ choices but, in fact, their autonomy. The survey results (see Table 5.7) showed that the students felt that there was a lot of freedom available to them to choose which programmes to watch. Despite that, 56% of the students wanted to have more freedom over the listening material.

The disparity between the students’ preferred ways of independent learning of English and the ILL guidelines as presented by teachers was evident in the interviews. Many students mentioned watching movies with subtitles as extremely helpful not only in learning new vocabulary, but also in improving students’ speaking skills. According to Abdulla, if you watch movies “you can get the concept [...] how to talk their way from the movies, but you have to have background about the grammar and vocabulary [...] some people by watching movies can speak.” Aysha, who used to watch soap-operas as a child, thought that it was the best way to learn how to speak English. The data suggests that the students saw a discrepancy between the way teachers and students spoke in the classroom and the way native speakers talked to each other. Thus, watching movies helped them understand connected speech. A number of students mentioned that reading subtitles helped them in improving their reading skills. Marwan explained that it was difficult at the beginning, because he had to read fast. Students reported that watching movies helped them, “learn a lot of new words, and it will make a student listen carefully to understand the show.” (SSF 2013) Students mentioned that when they

watched a movie, they could guess the meaning of new words from the context and body language of the actors. In general, all of the students mentioned activities in which they can hear English and read the text at the same time as being beneficial to their language learning.

Table 5.7 Student opinion about Independent Listening Logs (SSF 2013)

| | | Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree | Don't Know |
|----|--|----------------|-------|----------|-------------------|------------|
| 1 | I enjoyed doing the Listening Logs every week. | 8% | 58% | 18% | 4% | 12% |
| 2 | There was a lot of freedom to choose which programmes to listen. | 36% | 54% | 8% | 2% | 0% |
| 3 | I think the teacher should choose all the programmes for us. | 8% | 12% | 36% | 30% | 14% |
| 4 | I think we need to have more freedom when we choose programmes to watch. | 20% | 36% | 30% | 0% | 14% |
| 5 | Some students worked together on their Listening Logs. | 0% | 28% | 20% | 12% | 40% |
| 6 | I sometimes recommended programmes to my friends. | 0% | 56% | 24% | 8% | 12% |
| 7 | It was the first time I watched and listened to English programmes online. | 6% | 26% | 42% | 16% | 10% |
| 8 | Doing the Listening Logs was too much work. | 4% | 16% | 62% | 14% | 4% |
| 9 | I will continue listening to English programmes after this course. | 20% | 50% | 6% | 2% | 22% |
| 10 | I would recommend doing the Listening Logs next semester. | 16% | 54% | 14% | 4% | 12% |

Another area of out-of-classroom independent learning that was reported on by students was listening to English music and following the lyrics. Salem, whose level of English proficiency was the lowest of the interviewed group, described that reading song lyrics and listening to music at the same time was the most useful way in improving his vocabulary. In contrast, he described making vocabulary lists, which was part of his Independent Learning Log, as useless, because he would forget the new words in a week. However, when he heard a new word in a song he could understand

the meaning from the context and remembered the new words much better. Some students would use the Internet to find the meaning of new words while others would ask their friends. According to Marwan, “Some music is translated on YouTube. Like the melody is playing and they translate the title [...] I saw it with my friend. He showed it to me. The melody was playing and the words were written on the video. So the words are clear to understand.” From the students’ accounts of how they used music to learn English, it is evident that it was usually a social activity. They listened to music with friends and asked each other about the meaning of unknown words, or shared videos with lyrics. It was interesting that even though music and song lyrics seemed to be popular and effective in learning English, only one teacher reported allowing students to use them as part of their independent work. According to the teacher, Ann, students should have been allowed more freedom in the selection of the reading and listening materials.

Many of the out-of-classroom language learning activities that the students engaged in on their own, outside the ILL or the English course requirements, could be categorised as extensive listening. While in the second language acquisition literature extensive reading is viewed as extremely beneficial in improving learners’ language skills, extensive listening has only just started to emerge in language programmes as an activity that can help improve students’ language skills (Renandya & Farrell, 2010; Chang & Millett, 2014). In the Fall 2013 survey, 64% of the students reported improvement in specific language learning skills related to extensive listening, such as learning new vocabulary, being able to guess the meaning of the new vocabulary from the context, being able to listen to ‘natural’, spoken English and distinguishing between a variety of dialects and accents, learning the pronunciation of new words, and improving speaking skills. (See Figure 5.7.)

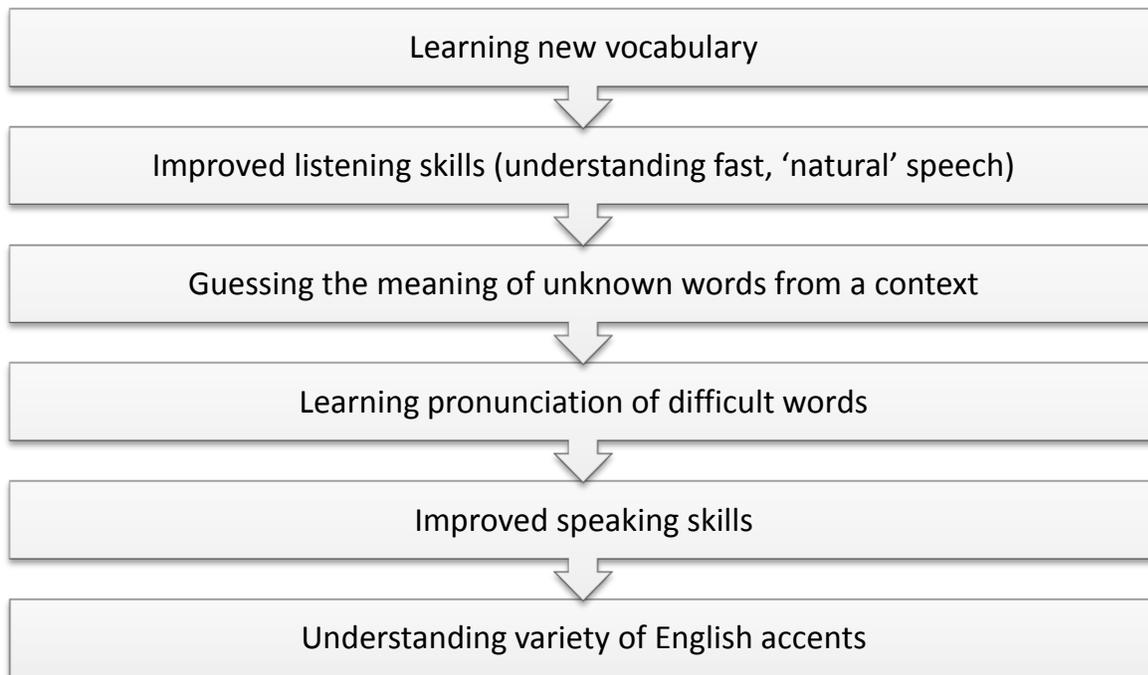


Figure 5.7 Specific language learning skills associated with extensive listening

Similarly, Benson (2011:16) notes that “vocabulary emerged as the most prominent aspect learned by the students of English out-of-school.” According to the PP students, movies and TV shows helped them “understand the difficult word meaning by seeing the situation or the presenter body language” (SSF 2013). Another student commented that “[w]hen I listen to English songs, it’s drive me to improve my accent and to listen for difficult words” (SSF 2013). Yet another student wanted to improve their pronunciation: “For me the most useful is English TV shows because in my opinion that when we use to watch English show we’ll improve our pronunciation” (SSF 2013). These comments were not isolated and they showed that the PP students had a good awareness of the different aspects of second language acquisition. They also showed that the learners were able to identify their language learning needs. These findings support the importance of out-of-classroom learning where learners have full control over the material and the way they want to use it. In addition to language related skills, out-of-class activities were described by the students as anxiety-free and interesting. The PP students perceived out-of-classroom listening activities as *fun* and *not real learning*. As one respondent emphasised: “Watching English movies without Arabic subtitles [is] fun, we will never felt boring, I will never say that I don’t want to watch more movies, it’s fun”

(SSF 2013). Another student argued that listening to songs and watching TV programmes were the best ways to improve their English: “It’s the most joyful [...] and I also figure some daily English words” (SSF 2013) and “I think it’s more interesting and I will learn better to improve my listening skills and learn new vocabulary” (SSF 2013). The respondents mentioned affective factors, such as increased motivation, a high level of interest, and low anxiety when explaining why these out-of-class listening activities were among their favourite ways of learning English.

5.3.2 Technology and Sociocultural Aspects of Learner Autonomy

One of the main misconceptions of learner autonomy as outlined by (Little, 1991) was the perception that autonomy means *learning alone in front of a computer*. In the recent years, the links between learner autonomy and technology have been explored to a great extent. The relationship between technology and learner autonomy is not new. The first research into learner autonomy was initiated by studies into learner behaviour in the 1970’s language labs. In these language labs, learners would practice a foreign language by responding to prompts from a tape. I would say that, nowadays, technology and independent language learning go hand-in-hand. At the PP, the students were given university laptops, free Wi-Fi access across the whole campus, and dedicated computer labs with language learning software. Most students also owned smartphones and tablets, which they often used in their classes. Despite the prevalence of technology and an online based learning platform on campus, most PP teachers did not encourage their students to explore how they might use technology for self-directed or independent learning. Despite the fact that most PP teachers did not promote the use of technology with the ILL, the students would often find online applications to help them with the ILL. For example, with respect to the Independent Reading Logs many students would use Twitter to browse through news headlines, in order to find interesting articles to use for their independent reading reports. The students’ accounts of using technology for self-directed learning disprove the misconception that independent learning is simply sitting learners in front of a computer to learn English online or using language learning software (Sonaiya, 2002). In the modern world, especially in countries like the UAE where access to technology is easy and affordable to most students and teachers,

technology is an inevitable medium through which students will learn languages. Within the context of autonomy, technology has extended our understanding of autonomous learning. Modern technology is no longer treated as a repository of resources and materials. Technology itself can provide a venue for social interaction and entertainment. It can lead to language learners developing distant communities of practice.

Kuure (2011) describes a case study of extensive video-gaming communities that communicate using English. The study provides evidence that sitting in front of a computer is no longer a lonely and antisocial behaviour. In fact, many PP students reported belonging to international gaming communities. For example, Ahmed, whose English proficiency level was very high, reported learning English by participating in online video game forums and discussing games with players from all over the world. He used YouTube to watch others play video games and shared comments about the games. He learned English by reading the complex narratives and participating in the scenarios designed in the games. These games attract young people from all over the world, who then have to communicate in English. Another student, Sultan reported listening to English music on YouTube to improve his English. According to him, he and his friends would listen to English songs and follow the lyrics together as a type of social interaction. Sultan reports on a common activity among young people; which is spending time together and watching videos on YouTube. What is important to note here is that technology is just a tool or medium for socializing and learning English together. These two informal out-of-class activities, gaming and reading song lyrics on YouTube, were reported by many students as a good way to improve their English. The student stories that described how they use technology to improve their English had strong social underpinnings. They stressed students working together to find out the meaning, sharing texts and applications, and helping each other find new materials.

In contrast to the interpretation of autonomy as an 'individual' endeavour, many contemporary researchers point out that *learner independence* is often contingent on *learner interdependence*. As Benson argues:

[O]ne problem with the use of this term [independence], however, is that it can also be understood as the opposite of *interdependence*, which implies working together with teacher and other learners towards shared goal. [...] Many researchers would argue that autonomy does imply interdependent. (Benson, 2011:15)

In this study, I observed that students often solved their language learning problems by working with peers, setting up study groups, or working on group projects as a team. From this perspective, being able to work in a group and learn from one's peers is a sign of an independent learner. Such an understanding of autonomy resembles the community of practice apprenticeship model and has strong sociocultural undertones. From a sociocultural perspective, autonomy cannot be viewed as completely self-directed. According to Benson, Chik, and Lim (2003), "As much as one tries to create and retain individuality, humans are ultimately social and cultural products of their societies. Identities and personalities can be constructed through language and interaction" (p.36). The data collected in this study shows that there is a certain level of ambivalence in the way students and teachers at the PP conceptualised 'learner autonomy'.

One of the students, Ahmed, saw learner autonomy in the sociocultural terms described above. He argued that "[i]ndependent is not only study by yourself...taking all the information from the teachers, instructors, and your friends and processing it into your studies in the way that suits you, and recognizing your strengths and weaknesses." Ahmed saw being independent as learning from, and with, his teachers and peers. However, most respondents understood *independence* as 'learning alone' and did not incorporate group work or student collaboration in their definition of *autonomous learning*. In contrast to this conceptualisation of autonomy as an individualistic endeavour, the PP students reported on sharing interesting listening programmes and reading materials with their peers. In the Spring 2013 survey, 47% of the students reported sharing interesting reading articles with friends (Appendix K). In the Fall 2013 survey, 28% of the students reported working together on their independent listening logs, and 56% recommended listening programmes to other students (Table 5.7). Students reported on working together on an article or a listening programme,

discussing it, and then writing separate reports. They would often share ideas and correct each other's reports. This type of peer collaboration reflects the sociocultural learning model. The learning that takes place here is scaffolded according to the individual student's level, and the student develops his or her skills within the zone of proximal development. That is, the language develops in collaboration and problem-solving with a peer.

Figure 5.4 above shows that many students defined *learner autonomy* as 'working alone'. They described it as being a "[...] lonely person [...] so you have to do all the work by yourself, you can't count on other people to do your job" (Sara), or as having the "[...] ability to do work alone, you don't have to ask adults" (Marwan). In other words, they perceived an independent learner as someone who works alone, who does not have to rely on authority figures to help them do their homework. Therefore, when asked whether they perceived themselves as independent learners, most interviewed students disagreed because they preferred to work in groups or study with friends. For example, Sara, who seemed independent and who had a clear idea about her language learning goals, said that she would not describe herself as 'independent' because, according to her she, was sociable and liked to work with people. She described her learning style as follows: "[W]hen I am study I have to have more than one skill, like I can't just read and write; I like to talk to my friend maybe she knows something I don't know. She might help me with that, so I think that group work is much better than independent learning" (Sara). In her response, there is a clear contrast between independent learning versus group work and collaborative learning. Her self-presentation as not being independent was also in stark contrast with the narrative in which she described the process that she used to choose books to read in English. From the interview, one came to see a student who was independent, not only as a language learner, but also as a student in more general terms. The same ambivalence was clear in Marwan's description of independent learning. Marwan also described *being independent* as 'working alone'. He expressed dislike for independent learning because he preferred to work in teams. He pointed out that different types of assignment may require different types of student interaction. Because of the bifurcation

of *independent learning* versus *interdependent learning*, some students did not see the value or usefulness of independent learning. According to Marwan, “[being independent] is not that much useful, because [...] when we work together is more useful because you get more information about what you are focused on” (Marwan). It was evident that some students did not see the relationship between working with peers and being independent.

5.3.3 Agency and the ILL

The final issue that emerged from the data analysis was related to the notion of ‘agency’ with respect to the ILL. Figure 5.8 outlines the concepts and ideas related to ‘agency’ with respect to the ILL. The traditional definition of learner autonomy by Holec (1981) stressed *control* and *responsibility*. The often-cited definition varies slightly from publication to publication, from *taking charge for one’s own learning*, *taking control*, to *taking responsibility*. In a sociocultural interpretation of *learner autonomy*, the notion of ‘agency’ has been used to convey the three ideas of *taking charge*, *taking control*, and *taking responsibility*. According to Kalaja, Alanen, Palviainen, and Dufva (2011), learners are viewed as “social agents collaborating with other people and using the tools and resources available to them in their surrounding environment” (p.47). Benson and Reinders (2011) emphasise the importance of the *locus of control*; the person who makes the major decisions about learning and teaching. According to Figure 5.8, the question of choice or lack of choice was raised most often by the respondents. A related issue concerned ‘freedom’. The line between *giving someone choice* or *giving someone freedom* can be sometimes blurred. ‘Freedom’ is much broader than mere ‘choice’. With respect to the ILL, the PP students were often given a selection of materials to choose from, but they were hardly ever given complete freedom.

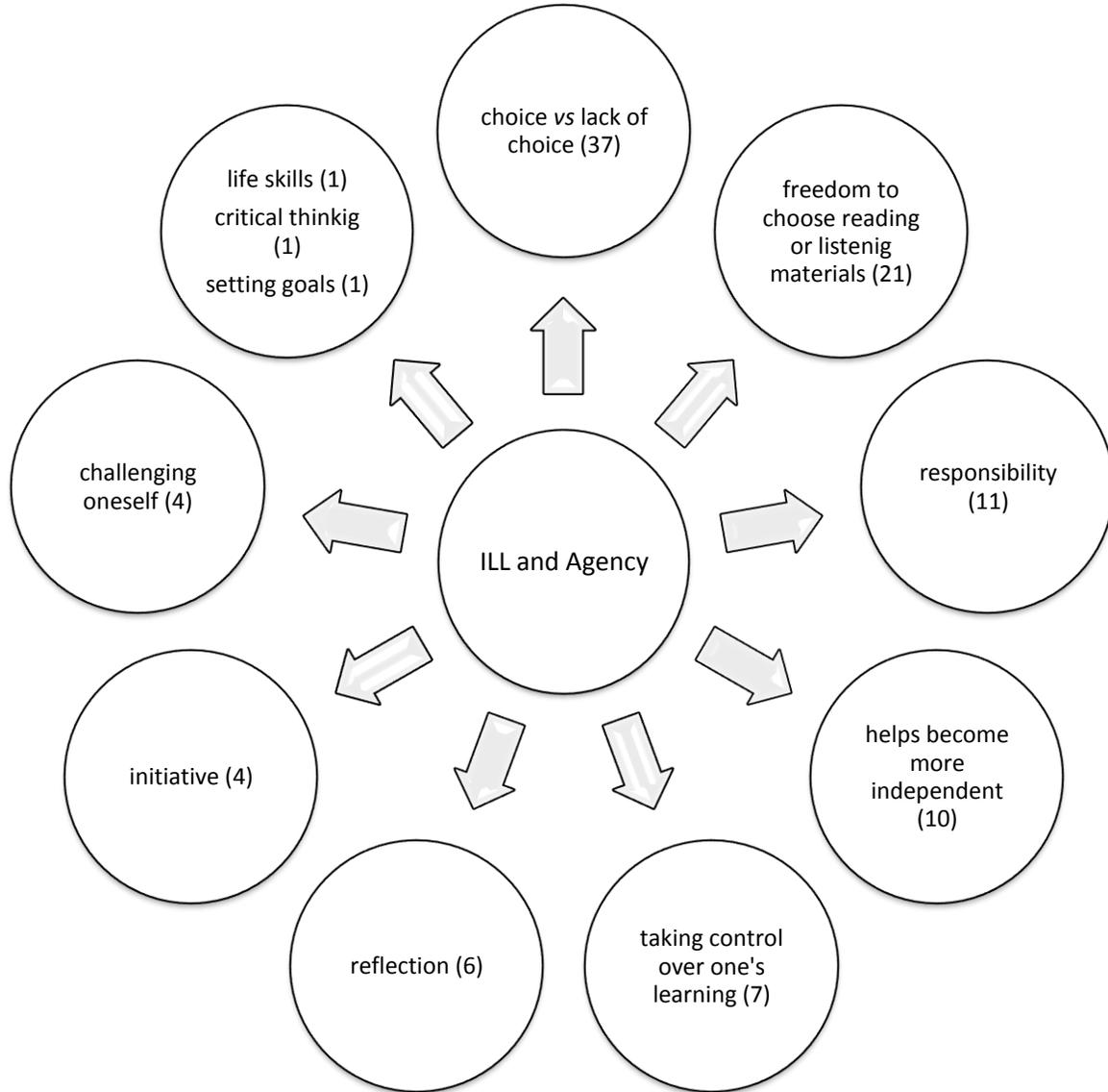


Figure 5.8 Notions of 'agency' and 'control', as related to the ILL

The issue of choice and freedom in selecting materials for the ILL was the most debated by the respondents and generated the most conflicting ideas. On the one hand, both teachers and students seemed to support the notion of freedom and choice, but on the other hand, they felt that a certain level of control should remain.

The interviewed students often felt confused about the choice or freedom that the ILL allowed them. For example, Ahmed commented that: “There was a lot of leeway to choose whichever book you like, of course it can’t be any book...it should be something that will improve your language”. At first glance, Ahmed’s account of the independent reading ILL appeared positive. One might have felt that the ILL was successful as a tool for fostering learner independence. Ahmed’s opinion showed awareness of the benefits of independent reading. Despite that, he admitted that he himself would choose the easiest route for his ILL submissions. He recalled that his teacher would allow the reading reports to be submitted in audio form. This was easy for him and did not take him a lot of time. He described the situation in the following way: “She told us to read 3 articles above 500 words. [...] and to write the whole thing about them, but I didn’t do that I found a loophole in the system, to tell the truth and used audio...so I read an article, I record for 2 or 3 minutes, that’s it done!” (Ahmed). Ahmed did not report on any interest in improving his English or learning from the articles. His focus was on the easiest submission. Because his level of English proficiency was one of the highest in the whole cohort, Ahmed’s minimal amount of work was sufficient to get him through the course. Another student, whose was also quite proficient in English, experienced the same change in her attitude. Aysha recalled starting the semester by selecting challenging articles and setting herself goals. However, as the semester progressed, she would challenge herself less and less. According to her, “the report that you ask us to write it didn’t have any strict laws or...so once I found myself lazy, I somehow looked for some easy articles or didn’t look for too many vocabulary although I wanted to” (Aysha). According to student surveys, the ILL offered them a lot of freedom in selecting their reading and listening materials (see Table 5.8).

Table 5.8 Student responses to ‘freedom’ with respect to the ILL

| | Question | Strongly Disagree % | Disagree % | Agree % | Strongly Agree % | n/a % |
|--------------------|---|----------------------------|-------------------|----------------|-------------------------|--------------|
| Spring 2013 | I had a lot of freedom in selecting the reading materials for my Reading Log. | 11.8 | 11.8 | 23.5 | 47 | 5.9 |
| Spring 2013 | I had a lot of freedom in selecting the listening programmes for my Logs. | 17.7 | 11.8 | 35.3 | 29.4 | 5.8 |
| Fall 2013 | There was a lot of freedom to choose which programmes to listen. | 2 | 8 | 54 | 36 | 0 |

Freedom and having choice were mentioned by the respondents as being beneficial in fostering independent learning. The respondents explained that “learners have to have a lot of freedom” (TSS 2013), “[ILL] makes learning a language more fun by allowing students to choose material that interests them” (TSS 2013), “it’s having as much choice as possible into what materials a learner uses” (George), “I think for the reading ILL it shouldn’t be strict it should be more selection on part of the students” (Ann), “choosing our own topic was a good idea” (Sara). What was interesting in the student reports was that, despite the freedom (which varied from teacher to teacher as discussed earlier), the students did not report on having control or a sense of agency over their independent learning. First of all, even quite proficient students (Ahmed and Aysha, for example) did not challenge themselves, but rather submitted whatever was the easiest for them. The locus of control in the PP discourse was the teachers and not the students.

When reporting on the issue of choice and freedom with respect to the ILL, teachers used verbs like *let them*, *allow them*, and *have them*. For example, “to let the students explore” (George), “allowing students to choose material” (TSS 2013), “allowing students to choose” (Claire), “I let them do it without a lot of direction” (George), “to have them read something” (Claire). These phrases are symptomatic of a power relation between teachers and students. In this discourse, students are never agents or active participants, but, instead, passive recipients of the treatment. In other words, learning is *done to them*. This unequal power relation is also evident in the student responses about their own choices and freedom at the PP. This issue has been discussed in

Section 5.2.2, where I analyzed teacher and student representations. It is worth reiterating some of the student opinions here, however, in light of the discussion about 'control' and 'agency'. Students reporting on the ILL rarely presented themselves as active subjects of their actions. Most of their responses used modals of obligation, like *should*, *have to*, and *must*. Thus, students reported on their ILL work as an obligation that should be done in a certain way: "I shouldn't leave everything to the last moment, I should do my works" (Group Interview), "we have the due times, the deadline and we should do it" (Group Interview), "you should write a paragraph to deal with this sentence" (Ahmed), "We should bring a reaction and choose an article" (Group Interview), "we must read and write" (Salem), "if you are working independently, you must work alone" (Marwan). Some used the expression *force to*, like "you force us to read or to read the book" (Salem) and "you have to force them to do work... for example, I don't read books, but you force me to reading book and I read" (Abdulla). The way that the students talked about their independent work for the ILL did not contain sense of agency or of them taking charge. In fact, it was their teachers and the syllabus that were in control of their learning. The areas in which the students expressed a clear sense of agency were related to out-of-class learning, such as watching movies, videos, and talking to native speakers. For example, Sara explained that she had improved her English by watching movies without subtitles:

by this I can learn more words, new words, I improve my listening, I can understand the meaning from the action movie, from what they say, from the whole sentence. If I missed one meaning, when I hear the rest of the sentence, I might guess what's the meaning is. (Sara)

In this student's account, there is strong sense of agency. It is the student who is in control over her own learning. In addition to this, Sara's account showed great awareness of her own language learning process. Another student, Salem, showed agency when he decided to watch movies to improve his English. As he recalled, "when I come to university my English was poor [...] in the second semester I improve, so I start to watch movie in English. I think that [...] better than now, and I love movies, most of - [anime]" (Salem). Overall, the same sense of being in control over one's own learning was evident in student reports on the out-of-class language learning activities

that they initiated themselves. However, it was missing from the learners' accounts of their ILL work. The following section brings forth a discussion over whether learner independence can be a feasible institutional goal.

5.4 Learner Independence as an Institutional Goal

In the discussion presented so far, I have occasionally referred to various conceptual metaphors in the PP discourse. The idea that metaphorical thinking can reflect hidden agendas and ideologies draws on cognitive linguistics (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003). The analysis of conceptual metaphors is used by CDA to bring forth conceptual models that may not be self-evident. The study of conceptual metaphors has also been adapted by many researchers in language education, including TESOL (Alger, 2009; Batten, 2012; Clarken, 1997; de Guerrero & Villamil, 2000; de Guerrero & Villamil, 2002; Farrell, 2006; Lumby & English, 2010; Oxford, Tomlinson, Barcelos, Harrington, Lavine, Saleh, Longhini, 1998; Rodney, 1997; Saban, 2010; Saban, Kocbeker, & Saban, 2007; Thornbury, 1991; Wan, Low, & Li, 2011). In SLA, conceptual metaphors are often used to explore teachers' and students' beliefs about education, language, and teaching. The assumption in these studies is that students and teachers share a common discourse that is used to describe their experience in learning languages. As Oxford et al. (1998) point out, "the most fruitful method for uncovering teaching-related metaphors has been the *narrative case-study approach* employing personal stories" (p. 5). In their study of student- and teacher personal narratives, Oxford et al. (1998) identified a number of metaphors that were used to describe, and thereby structure, the experience of teaching and learning languages. These metaphors were then aligned with dominant social and educational perspectives. Table 5.10 summarizes the metaphors that were identified by Oxford et al. (1998). Oxford et al. (1998) shows how these metaphors represent four distinct educational perspectives and their corresponding pedagogies.

Table 5.9 Metaphors about classroom teachers and corresponding theoretical perspectives (Oxford et al., 1998)

| Perspective | Social Order | Cultural Transmission | Learner-Centred Growth | Social reform |
|--|---|---|--|--|
| Metaphors | Teacher as Manufacturer Teacher as Competitor Teacher as Hanging Judge Teacher as Doctor Teacher as Mind-and-Behaviour Controller | Teacher as Conduit Teacher as Repeater | Teacher as Nurturer Teacher as Lover or Spouse Teacher as Scaffolder Teacher as Entertainer Teacher as Delegator | Teacher as Acceptor Teacher as Learning Partner |
| Language Learning Methodologies | Audiolingual Method | Grammar-translation Method | Communicative Approach | Critical Pedagogy |

From the four educational perspectives, Social Order is the dominant one in terms of its prevalence in TESOL discourse. Learner-Centred Growth perspective has strong sociocultural orientation and Social Reform draws on critical pedagogy. Neither of these perspectives is dominant in TESOL discourse. This suggests a gap between SLA theory and practice. Whilst sociocultural and critical stances are dominant in theoretical discourse, they are marginal in the way teachers and students talk about their language learning experience. The Social Order perspective, identified in other studies by Clarken (1997), de Guerrero and Villamil (2000; 2002), and Wan, Low, and Li (2011), is also evident in the students and teacher discourse analyzed in this case study. It is a view of education in which “the interests of the student are secondary to those of society [and] the teacher has the important role of maintaining control” (Oxford et al., 1998, p. 16). As Oxford et al. (1998) explain, in this perspective of teaching, “if the students also want some degree of control or autonomy, the situation can lead to a competition between teacher and student” (p. 16). This suggests that the PP discourse described in this chapter reflects a broader TESOL discourse. Furthermore, it indicates the existence of

an educational ideology that is shared by English language teachers and students in various educational contexts. Although I do not provide a detailed analysis of the conceptual metaphors within the PP discourse, I think that further study into conceptual metaphors and autonomy discourse in SLA studies may help researchers uncover the conceptual models that inform how we interpret learner independence.

Taking into account the Social Order perspective outlined above and its effects on how students and teachers define their own roles, I wish to answer the last research question, namely: To what extent is learner independence a feasible institutional goal? In many of cases discussed in this study, the ILL did not promote learner autonomy. The CDA of the data suggested that the ILL was incompatible with many of the students' and teachers' ideas about learning English. The PP discourse was governed by a model of education which does not promote creativity, freedom, and learner control – which are some of the prerequisites of learner autonomy. The few cases in which ILL did foster learner autonomy were contingent on the teacher's autonomy. The teachers who displayed autonomy in their interpretation of the ILL managed to promote autonomy among their students. According to Benson (2011b), “[i]n order to create space for learners to exercise their autonomy, teachers must recognize and assert their own autonomy” (p.187). As discussed earlier in this chapter, the way teachers and students conceptualised their roles with respect to the ILL did not always leave space for autonomy. The failure of the PP to fully promote learner autonomy as a curricular goal resembles that of other institutions discussed in Chapter 3. Whilst this case study confirms the existence of several issues that teachers face when promoting autonomy as part of a curricular goal, my unique contribution lies in answering the question: *Why might autonomy fail as an institutional goal?* Understating the issues related to implementing learner autonomy may help us design syllabi and curricula that are aware of the pitfalls outlined in the data analysis.

In several of the studies discussed in Chapter 3 (Cozens, AlKaabi, & AlAli, 2005; Ricks & Szczerbik, 2010; Kelly, 2006; Tuksinvarajarn, Ananya, & Sojisirikul, 2009; Reinders & Lazaro, 2011; Borg & Al-Busaidi, 2012), I noted that teacher-researchers came across

obstacles in trying to implement autonomy as an educational goal. However, these studies do not provide a convincing explanation of *why autonomy failed* at these language programmes. In these studies, the teachers and students complained that the independent learning tool that was used by their institution (portfolios, logs, or diaries) was a burden and time-consuming. In some of these studies, the teacher-researchers blamed the students' cultural and educational background for the failure in promoting autonomy in the language programme. The unique contribution of this case study is that, with the use of CDA, I managed to bring forth issues of power, agency, and control in a TESOL classroom, and I explored how these issues affect implementation of independent learning. I was aware of the US-THEM rhetoric and highlighted it in the discourse. I demonstrated how such rhetoric can have a detrimental effect on a learner's sense of agency. I took care in giving voice to the learners and in exploring how they conceptualise learner autonomy. In this respect, giving voice to the students who have often been stereotypes was essential in understanding autonomy in a language classroom. Other studies (Borg & Al-Busaidi, 2012; Reinders & Lazarou, 2011) help us understand teachers' beliefs about learner autonomy in TESOL. However, they fail to observe the inferior position given to the learners in the teachers' discourse. In most of the studies discussed in the Literature Review, the students were left voiceless: they were the discursive Other. I hope that by including student voices in my research, I have managed to demonstrate that the problems with implementing learner autonomy in an institutional setting are not solely learner-related, but derive from the model of education that both teachers and students share. This model predetermines the roles taken by the teachers and students. It also informs our expectations about language learning. Thus, learner autonomy as an educational outcome is incompatible with the way teachers and students conceptualise education. However, being aware of the hidden agendas and the roles imposed on us by society and our professional discourse can help us understand what changes are needed to make learner autonomy a feasible institutional goal.

In recent years, autonomy researchers have observed a need to reconceptualise the concept of 'autonomy' in the language classroom. Gao and Lamb (2011) point to

theoretical perspectives that focus on learner identity in language learning, and to the links between identity, motivation, and autonomy. These re-conceptualisations call for a sociocultural approach to learner autonomy where autonomy is mediated through social interaction. Murray (2011) emphasises the current imbalance in research into autonomy which is found in the focus on the learner's capacity for autonomy and the learner's freedom. The authors call for a more complex view of autonomy that encompasses learner autonomy in learning and in their lives. I can contribute to this discussion by emphasising the need to focus on the semiotics of autonomy discourse and to explore the inherent power relations in any educational discourse. Without uncovering the hidden curricula, we cannot successfully implement autonomy in a language classroom. Furthermore, in order to make learner autonomy a feasible institutional goal, we need to re-think the way that we organize language education. This would require a deep reformation, not only of the administrative structures (including standardised testing, syllabi, and curricula), but, more importantly, the way we, as teachers, think about education. As discussed in this chapter, the dominant TESOL discourse draws on the Social Order perspective. It is an ideology that permeates how we teach and how we portray our students. Whilst the works of an ideology are obscured by 'common-sense' and tradition, it does not mean that an ideology cannot be abolished. It can be done by revealing its works, rhetoric, and by subverting its *status quo*.

In the last fifteen years, a number of experiments have been conducted with the aim of subverting the traditional educational models and empowering learners. In Chapter 3, I mentioned Mitra's 'hole-in-the wall' experiments and SOLE classrooms (2003; 2013). What is of interest to the present discussion were the TESOL teacher's responses to Mitra's suggestion with respect to reducing the teacher's role in the language classroom. His conference presentation at the IATEFL 2014 in Harrogate prompted a wave of criticism on TESOL forums and EFL teacher blogs (Harrison, 2014; Dellar, 2014). Most of the criticism addressed Mitra's idea of reducing the teacher's role in teaching English. The TESOL practitioners who expressed their ideas on the web forums were doubtful whether any learning can take place without the teacher organizing it and controlling it (Harrison, 2014; Dellar, 2014). Others were worried about

the future of their jobs. Their responses to Mitra's experiments suggest that SOLE exposed a number of fundamental issues in TESOL. On the theoretical level, Mitra's experiments put into practice a sociocultural theory. The experiments showed that children can learn from each other and solve complex problems without help from a teacher. Furthermore, they embody the idea of independent learning and learner empowerment. SOLE pedagogy is context-sensitive and learner-centred. All these are well-cherished TESOL ideals. Therefore, the TESOL backlash towards SOLE remains baffling. It seems that not all TESOL teachers want to relinquish their power and control over their learners.

Finally, I believe that the controversy created by Mitra's experiments demonstrated that the dichotomy of theory versus practice still dominates in TESOL. In his call for a postmodern pedagogy, Kumaravadivelu (2001) closely examined the existence of the dichotomy of theory versus practice. In such a dichotomy, theory is superior to practice. This hierarchical opposition often results in negative attitudes of language teachers towards researchers, and vice versa. Teacher-research is often seen as a middle-ground between theory and practice. However, as Kumaravadivelu (2001) explains, teacher-research created yet another demarcation, that of theorists' theory and teachers' theory. To overcome this demarcation, teachers need to develop their autonomy. They need to become competent and confident in their research and their practice. According to Kumaravadivelu (2001), "[s]uch competence and confidence can evolve only if teachers have the desire and the determination to acquire and assert a fair degree of autonomy in pedagogic decision making" (p.548). A postmodern pedagogy requires autonomous learners and autonomous teachers (Kumaravadivelu, 2001). Learner autonomy can be a feasible institutional goal, but only from a postmodern critical perspective.

The last chapter of this study provides a brief summary of the findings of the study and their implications for the PP. Several recommendations are made on how to make learner autonomy a feasible institutional goal.

Chapter 6: Conclusion and Implications

As I discussed in the first half of this thesis, the concept of 'learner autonomy' was established in TESOL in the 1970s. Since then it has been re-defined and re-conceptualised according to new research trends in SLA theory. In this study, I viewed learner autonomy from a sociocultural perspective. I explored how learner autonomy is made manifest through mediated learning and social interaction with more able peers, teachers, and resources that are available to the learner out-of-classroom. My analytical stance was critical. My aim was to examine the power relations and discursive representations that govern autonomy discourse at a specific language programme in the UAE. I wanted to investigate how the teachers' discourse and the students' discourse affected their respective understanding of autonomy in language learning and teaching. To explore these issues, I investigated a case study of Independent Learning Logs (ILLs) used at a Preparatory Programme in the UAE. The analysis of teacher and student interviews and surveys was guided by four main questions:

1. How do teachers and students at the PP interpret and implement the ILL?
2. How do teachers and students conceptualise independent learning in English?
3. What role does out-of-class learning play among the PP students?
4. To what extent is learner independence a feasible institutional goal?

I used Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to interpret the data. This method of data analysis helped bring forth ideas about teaching, learning, and TESOL that were hidden in the discourse of the PP students and teachers. As discussed in the previous chapter, the way the PP teachers and students conceptualised learner autonomy are representative of a broader TESOL discourse and not limited to the specific language programme. The present chapter first summarises the main findings of the study. I then discuss the implications of these findings for the PP, and for learner autonomy research in general. Based on the results of the study and its implications, I make a number of recommendations with respect to the PP syllabus. These recommendations may well be applicable to other language programmes which strive to implement learner autonomy as an institutional goal. Following this, I outline research areas in learner autonomy

studies that may need further investigation. These areas are based on the theoretical gaps uncovered in the present study. Finally, I share a number of reflections on my research journey, the self-reflexive nature of this exploration, and teacher-led research in general.

6.1 Summary of the Main Findings

The main contribution of this case study is in its explanatory and analytical approach towards the issue of implementing learner independence as part of a curriculum. While a number of other studies have pointed out issues and problems related to implementing autonomy in the language classroom, they are not always successful in explaining the reasons for this failure. The most common explanations for this failure in promoting autonomy included the students' poor aptitude, lack of motivation, lack of skills, or their cultural background. In the present case study, I began by exposing this US-THEM rhetoric and focused on giving both students and teachers voice. I demonstrated that autonomy is not culture-specific and exposed some common learner stereotypes that may prevent teachers from promoting autonomy in a language classroom. My unique contribution to the SLA theory is in using CDA to analyze the discourse of learner autonomy. By using CDA, I uncovered several themes that help us understand the intricate power relations between teachers and students, how teachers and students conceptualise their roles in language learning, and the students' own understanding of their agency. The main findings of this study were categorised according to the four research questions listed above.

The starting point of this critical-exploratory research was PP teacher and student opinions about the ILL. The CDA of the data revealed complementary themes with respect to interpretations of the ILL. The view of the logs as a *burden*, a *ticking-boxes exercise*, and *time consuming* dominated the teacher and student responses. This suggested that many teachers and students conceptualised the ILL as a bureaucratic exercise aimed at producing and marking a lot of papers, but with no clear learning outcomes explicated. Some students admitted to submitting their weekly logs in a thoughtless and carefree manner, and teachers shared this observation. Some teachers complained about the amount of work involved in marking the weekly ILL submissions.

A few teachers took shortcuts to reduce their workload by doing the ILL in the classroom and/or selecting the 'independent' reading and listening materials for the students. The interpretations of the ILL varied between teachers. They were based on each individual teacher's understanding of the ILL guidelines described in the *Faculty Handbook*. Some teachers showed a high level of teacher autonomy with respect to how they implemented the ILL in their classes. Others interpreted the ILL in a limited way and focused on the number of ILL submissions and the quantity of work produced by the students. It was pointed out during the study that there was a lot of discretion given to teachers in how they interpreted the ILL guidelines. There were no external checks of the ILL work that was done by each class, and the responsibility for how the ILL was interpreted was solely in the hands of each teacher. This freedom that was provided to the teachers made the PP case study especially interesting in investigating autonomy in TESOL. As some teachers admitted, it took them some time to realize how much freedom the PP teachers had in how they could adapt the PP syllabus to their individual classes. Consequently, it was of particular interest to discover that, despite being granted this freedom, many teachers at the PP did not (fully) explore it. In contrast, some teachers enforced on themselves and their students a workload that was not actually required. These self-enforced limitations regarding independent learning suggested that the teachers' and students' conceptualisations of language learning were incompatible with learner autonomy in TESOL. This finding was reinforced when I analyzed the teachers' and students' ideas about independent learning.

When analysing the data that was related to the second research question (*How do teachers and students conceptualise 'independent learning in English'?*), I discovered a number of student representations that made me question the efficacy of listing learner autonomy as an institutional goal. Teachers and students described their roles and responsibilities in learning English at the PP along strict hierarchical lines. First of all, the US and THEM divide was marked in the PP discourse, where the students were represented as the discursive Other. They were portrayed as *lacking*, *deficient*, and *unable to be autonomous*. Said's (1979) claim that the Other is 'in need of corrective training' was evident in the roles that the teachers and the students ascribed to

themselves, and each other. The teachers saw themselves as parents, coaches, and whips. They felt that their role was to make students stick to deadlines, make sure that the ILL work was done, and to give students general advice about their life and studies. None of the students perceived the teacher roles as that of a parent or a coach. The students expected the teachers to be line managers; to make them complete the components of the ILL and to directly assign work to them. Both students and teachers shared the teacher representation of that of a whip or line manager. This shared representation of the teacher roles is part of the Social Order perspective evident in the PP discourse. This perspective is also reflected in the way that teachers assign student identities according to the learner's performance. Hence, I observed the dichotomy of *good students* and *lazy students* that was prevalent in the teacher discourse. Overall, I found that the way many teachers and students at the PP interpreted their roles did not always promote learner independence.

The third research question explored different areas of out-of-classroom learning performed by the PP students. The aim of this question was to find out whether the ILL allowed students to incorporate language learning that was performed by the students outside the classroom. The data analysis showed that there was a discrepancy between (i) the out-of-classroom activities that were undertaken by the PP students and (ii) the independent language work submitted for the ILL. The students reported that watching movies, TV programmes, and listening to English songs were most useful activities in learning English. These products of English-speaking cultures were not incorporated into the independent language work submitted as part of the ILL. Only one teacher, Ann, encouraged the use of popular media to foster independent learning. Another discrepancy that I noticed was between the teachers' and the students' use of technology in learning English. In their self-directed out-of-classroom learning, students predominantly used technology-mediated materials. However, the teachers preferred paper-based resources. I discovered that there was a clear divergence between the independent work ascribed and assessed by the PP teachers and the out-of-class activities performed by the PP students on their own. One of the aims of the ILL was to record the independent work done by the students outside the classroom. The study

found out that the ILL failed to promote out-of-classroom learning and did not record the *true* independent work that was being done by the students. The 'independent work' that was submitted to the ILL was mostly assigned by the teachers, and the students had but little control over it. This finding led to a discussion over the use of technology in mediated learning and the issues of power and control in the language classroom. The findings helped us to question one of the common misconceptions of learner autonomy as 'learning alone in front of a computer'. The analysis of the student stories of how they use technology to learn English showed that most of the independent language learning that was done via technology is social in nature. Students often listened to music and watched movies with friends. When they were doing this, they would help each other mediate the meaning of new words and discuss language issues. Students shared English resources, such as online TV programmes and movies with their family and friends. Some of the interviewed students exhibited a strong sense of agency and self-direction when learning English outside the classroom. These findings support a sociocultural definition of learner autonomy. In this definition the focus is on *interdependence*; that is, learning from more able peers.

The final issue that I identified in the process of the data analysis was that of control. The original definition of learner autonomy emphasised 'control over one's own learning'. This study showed that the issue of control is central to understanding learner autonomy and how learner autonomy should be implemented in language programmes. The data analysis revealed that, at the PP, control was in hands of the teachers. The PP teachers saw the students as unable to take charge of their own learning and thus proceeded to *feed* the independent learning assignments to the students. My argument was that, in order for learner autonomy to be a feasible institutional goal, the locus of control should be in hands of the students. I discovered that the way teachers and students viewed their roles with respect to the ILL did not empower the students nor did it help them foster their independence in language learning. On the contrary, the students were seen as children who needed to be controlled and supervised.

All of the data presented and analyzed in this study suggest a hidden ideology that governed the PP discourse. I argued that the PP discourse draws on the Social Order perspective. By comparing the findings of this study with other studies, I suggest that the ideology underlying the PP discourse is not an isolated case, but that it reflects a wider TESOL discourse. The hidden agenda of the Social Order perspective is to maintain the established power relations between teachers and students. For learner autonomy to become a feasible institutional goal, teachers and students need to re-think the way they conceptualise their roles in education. We also need to develop models that empower students rather than assume that the students are deficient in some way. Taking this into consideration, I wish to discuss how these findings may affect the PP in particular and TESOL theory and practice in general.

6.2 Contribution to TESOL Theory

In this case study, I explored how teachers and students at a particular English language programme in the UAE implement Independent Learning Logs (ILLs). The study revealed a number of ambivalent feelings towards the ILL. On the one side, the students and teachers reported that the ILL was useful in learning English and that it helped students become more autonomous. On the other hand, both students and teachers expressed negative attitudes towards the ILL and often referred to it as 'burden'. Several other studies in the region and in other parts of the world have documented a similar ambivalent attitude of the students and teachers towards independent learning portfolios (see Cozens, AlKaabi, & AlAli, 2005; Tuksinvarajarn, Ananya, & Sojisirikul, 2009). In other studies, researchers have reported that teachers were unable to combine the demands of a course syllabus with the fostering of learner autonomy (Borg & Al-Busaidi, 2012; Reinders & Lazarou, 2011). Whilst these studies reported on the teachers' and students' attitudes towards independent learning, they were unable to explain the source of the ambivalence. In this respect, the present study contributes to our understanding of the obstacles that are faced by students and teachers when implementing independent learning as an institutional goal. Recommendations based on this understanding are summarised in Section 6.3 below. One of the main issues with implementing the ILL at the PP was that it failed to report

on the students' out-of-class learning. Instead, it became a list of weekly assignments that did not always reflect independent learning. This created a clash between the theoretical tenets of independent learning and practice. The study demonstrated that there exists a deep incompatibility between the teachers' and the students' beliefs with respect to education and the concept of 'learner autonomy' in TESOL. This incompatibility may explain the ambivalence of teachers and students towards learner autonomy. It may also account for the obstacles faced by teachers in different contexts in implementing learner autonomy as part of their language learning syllabus.

Another contribution of the present study to TESOL research is the results of the exploration of students' attitudes towards autonomy. In this respect, this study is unique because it has applied qualitative methods to investigate the UAE tertiary level students' opinions about independence in learning English. As discussed in Section 3.2.1, many researchers have reported on Arab learners' perceived inability to take charge of their own learning by using quantitative methods and culturalist explanations (Midraj, Midraj, O'Neill, Sellami, & El-Temtamy, 2007; Ricks & Szczerbik, 2010; Syed, 2003). I argue that many post-colonial researchers, who dismiss learner autonomy as a Western concept, draw on learner stereotypes (Chan, 2001; Sonaiya, 2002; Schmenk, 2005). In this study, I avoided the use of broad strokes and categorising learners according to their culture and traditions. I presented a selection of student stories related to how they take charge of their English language learning. The student stories revealed that learners who were dubbed by the PP teachers as 'lazy' and 'unable to be independent' had clear opinions about how they like to learn and in what way. They reported that their individual learning styles were incompatible with their teachers' expectations. On the other hand, the students who were referred to as 'good' students reported that they completed their ILLs in a mechanistic way. They reported that they took shortcuts just to fulfil the requirement and that they did not challenge themselves when they chose their reading and listening materials. These findings have a twofold meaning. First of all, they suggest that the teachers' negative representations of students can have detrimental effect on second language learning. This finding is supported by Harklau (2000), who demonstrated how teachers' representations of their students affected the students'

learning. Secondly, they show that different students in the Gulf hold varied interpretations of learner autonomy. These interpretations were not contingent on their culture and tradition, but rather on individual learning styles and family backgrounds. In general, the students who participated in the study revealed a strong sense of agency and an ability to reflect on their own learning. They showed a preference towards autonomy, as defined in sociocultural terms; that is, learning in groups and as part of a collaborative discovery. Interestingly, the ILL, as interpreted by the PP teachers, did not allow students to collaborate or learn from each other. Overall, the ideas about learner autonomy presented by the PP teachers and students were in stark contrast with their interpretations of the ILL. It was this discrepancy that was part of the reason why the ILL was not a successful tool in fostering learner autonomy.

The final contribution of the study is at an institutional level. The surveys used in this research were developed in collaboration with the PP faculty members. All of the teachers were provided with the opportunity to add their own questions or comments to the online surveys before they were distributed. The results of the surveys were presented and discussed at the faculty meetings. They helped us make informed decisions about changes in the ILL. For example, the Spring 2013 survey revealed the students' dissatisfaction with the listening ILL. The PP students wanted to have more freedom in the selection of the listening materials. This led to collaborative action research in the Fall of 2013. During that period, the listening teachers tested different listening resources that were available online and different forms of listening reports. At the end of the Fall of 2013, the listening teachers and I conducted a new survey to examine the student opinions about the changes to the listening logs. Furthermore, the findings of the Spring 2013 survey inspired one of the reading teachers to experiment with the reading ILL. She decided not to use written book reports but to organise book discussions and class presentations instead. The results of the experiments with the listening and reading components of the ILL were presented at the university's annual professional development symposium in February 2014. The PP teachers who experimented with the ILL shared their ideas about alternative ways of organising student independent work. These presentations prompted further discussion among the

other PP teachers who were surprised by the open interpretation of the ILL that was held by some of the English teachers. After the symposium, other teachers tried to experiment with different assessment formats. Unfortunately, because of the limited timeframe of this study, I cannot report on whether the teachers' interpretation of the ILL actually changed because of the shared action research. At the time of writing, the ILL is no longer part of the PP syllabus. It was replaced with the term 'coursework', which most teachers have interpreted as being suitably instantiated by class quizzes and assignments. It has to be reported that most teachers were satisfied with the change and did not regret being rid of the ILL. It would have been interesting to hear more about their opinion of the ILL, now that it does not constitute an official part of the syllabus. Taking all this into account, I would say that the implementation of independent learning into a course syllabus requires a great deal of careful consideration and thought. The following section summarises the obstacles that were faced by the PP teachers and students in implementing the ILL. I then make a number of recommendations how these obstacles could have been dealt with.

6.3 Recommendations

The following recommendations respond to the issues that were encountered in fostering learner autonomy at a particular language programme in the UAE. However, the lessons learned from this case study may be applicable to other tertiary-level bridge programmes in different contexts. The first problem with implementing the ILL lay in the interpretation of the ILL guidelines. The study showed that the PP teachers interpreted the ILL guidelines in different ways. Some teachers allowed their students a large amount of freedom in the selection of the independent learning resources; whilst others interpreted the ILL as consisting of weekly assignments that had to be completed following a specific format. The teachers focused on the quantity of the assignments instead of fostering independent learning. In short, the teachers interpreted the ILL by following a familiar educational model. Some teachers remarked that when they first joined the programme they did not understand the ILL. These findings suggest that, in order to implement an independent learning programme, in-depth discussions and professional development meetings must first be held for the teachers. Teachers

themselves need to thoroughly discuss and thoughtfully reflect on the issue of learner autonomy before they can begin to promote it to good effect. As observed in this study, the level of teacher autonomy has a direct effect on learner autonomy. In other words, the teachers who demonstrated their own autonomy in teaching were more able to promote learner independence among the PP students. Thus, in order to make learner autonomy a feasible institutional goal, there needs to be more time devoted to professional development, action research, and collaboration among teachers. The focus on these activities should be on exploring different issues related to learner- and teacher autonomy. A lack of collaboration and discussion among faculty members was reported by teachers who had just joined the programme. They reported that they struggled to understand the ILL guidelines and the assessment criteria. This could be avoided by holding structured workshops at the beginning of the term which could be led by more experienced faculty.

I reported in this chapter that some teachers experimented with the ILL and then presented their findings to the rest of the PP faculty. This was a successful way of starting a discussion and inspiring other teachers to try to interpret the ILL guidelines in a way that promoted learner independence. The presentation of the results of these experiments made some teachers question their assumptions about what students like to listen to and read, and how they prefer to present their work. Considering the fact that the PP faculty teaching load was 12-14 hours per week during the time of the study, I would recommend that the teachers engage in collaborative action research on the ILL. The benefit of collaborative action research is that the work is shared by different teachers who are interested in similar issues which are directly related to their students. I believe that an annual collaborative action research project would have helped the PP faculty reflect on their own practice and help them understand the issues related to learner autonomy. Another benefit of conducting collaborative action research would have been helping teachers understand the student needs and preferences better. In this case study, I described a situation in which teachers made decisions about their students' independent learning which were based on their own assumptions about the students' needs and preferences. They did not allow their students to take charge of

their own learning. I think that engaging in action research would assist teachers to understand their students better. It would also improve the rapport between students and teachers. Doing action research could have thus mitigated many of the native speakerist issues that are discussed in this study. Finally, in order to help students understand what independent learning is about, there should be more discussion and workshops that help students reflect on the learning process and thereby enable them to identify their own individual learning objectives. 'Learner autonomy' is a complex concept and it can be interpreted differently by different people. Students should be aware of these issues as they develop their own definition of learner autonomy. At the time of the present study, there was no time or space devoted within the programme to help students reflect on their language learning needs or to help them understand the concept of 'learner autonomy'.

The last recommendation that I wish to make deals with the ILL format. Because of the way the ILL was interpreted by the teachers, it became a collection of weekly assignments submitted via the Moodle assignment box. As a result, it was seen by both students and teachers as a burden and a mere tick-box exercise. In the Fall of 2013, a few teachers conducted experiments on developing alternative ILL formats. The results of these experiments suggested that less-conventional ILL formats may be more suitable for the promotion of independent learning. For example, the idea of writing book- and article reports was heavily contested by the PP teachers and students. However, only three teachers experimented with these genres and substituted the written reports with oral book reports, class presentations, and book clubs. These were considered to be viable alternatives to written book- and article reports. There were three positive outcomes of using oral reports for the independent reading log. First, the students shared and discussed their reading with their peers. Not only did this prompt mediated learning, but also it resembled the way we read in real life; that is, we tend to share interesting books and articles with friends and family. Consequently, it was a wonderful way of promoting books and texts that might be of interest to the students. Secondly, the students read more because they were not daunted by the task of having to write a report after their reading session. Because their energy was not focused on

writing, some students were creative in how they reported on their books. There were no restrictions on the format of the reading reports. As a result, they created posters, video presentations, and class performances. These showed a high level of involvement with the texts that they had read. The final benefit of these alternative forms of ILL submission was that the number of cases of plagiarism was reduced significantly. The reasons why this occurred need to be investigated further. My suspicion why this was the case was that the students did not want to lie in front of their peers or face-to-face with the teacher when they gave an oral book report.

Overall, my recommendation for the implementation of learner autonomy as part of an explicitly stated programme curriculum is to limit the number of guidelines and instructions to the minimum. This would allow for more open interpretations of independent learning by the teachers. Instead of written guidelines, there should be more collaboration, discussion, and action research among the English teachers. Teachers should be encouraged to explore their own autonomy as language teachers. Furthermore, independent learning cannot be part of the assessment system that is currently used by language teaching institutions. As such it is quite incompatible with syllabi that are driven by standardised outcomes and tests.

6.4 Suggestions for Further Research

During the data analysis, I identified several issues that deserve further investigation. The first issue is the correlation between teacher autonomy and learner autonomy. At the moment, the relationship between teacher autonomy and learner autonomy is anecdotal. Whilst some researchers report on the importance of teacher autonomy (Aoki, 2002; Benson, 2011; Thavenius, 1999; Vieira, 2003) in promoting learner independence, the specific nature of the correlation between these two phenomena needs further research. Furthermore, it would be of particular interest to observe how teachers' lack of autonomy affects their students' performance. Another issue that was brought to light in this study was the relation between learners' identities and their autonomy. During the course of the data analysis and presentation, I suggested how different students exercise their power and control over their language learning process. More detailed examinations of student stories which discuss how students have

developed their autonomy are needed in TESOL. Student learning narratives are especially interesting because they give us insight into the language learning process over a long period of time (Benson, Chik, & Lim, 2003; Benson, 2004; Malcolm, 2004). They can show us how learners' attitudes towards learning English change over time. They can help us explore the intricate relation between language, identity, and learner autonomy. Learner stories of how they regained control over their own learning, perhaps after a period when they felt that they were making little or no learning progress, may be especially enlightening. Related to this is the issue of 'learner representations'. There is a definite gap in the current research into how positive and negative student representations may affect their autonomy in learning languages. Finally, the relationship between 'freedom' and 'autonomy' is not a straightforward one. For some researchers, these two concepts are synonymous. Other autonomy researchers discard 'freedom in education', and claim that it is unachievable. The issues of freedom and autonomy in TESOL require more discussion.

6.5 Personal Reflection on the Thesis Journey

Looking back at my research journey, I can say that it showed to me that researching one's own professional environment is never linear or direct, despite being immersed within it. When I first started formulating my basic research question, I was interested in the issues of learner empowerment and critical pedagogy in TESOL. However, I could not immediately see how these would be related to my own teaching practice. I then decided to focus on a specific language learning tool that was being used at the PP. I was interested in finding out whether it was an effective tool in fostering learner autonomy. After the initial survey, I was surprised to find out that the PP teachers and students saw it as a burden. At that stage of my research, I had a lot of data that described the teachers' and students' experience with the ILL, but I could not explain any of these experiences. As a mere collection of statements, they held no explanatory value. They were just a collection of different opinions and ideas. My breakthrough came when I started to focus on the contradictions and ambivalences that were present in the data. After several readings of the interview transcripts, I started to focus on the language that was used by the respondents. This is where I noticed the US versus THEM dichotomy at first. To engage in a more rigorous analysis, I read more on CDA

and read my data again using the CDA methodology. That is when I observed different student representations, assumed teacher roles, and teacher- and student beliefs about education. It was by moving my focus away from the concept of 'autonomy' onto broader issues of educational ideology that I began to understand the ambivalence between the respondents' views with respect to the ILL and the concept of 'learner autonomy'. That was when my research took on a critical stance and was focused on exploring the power relations between teachers and students and how these affect autonomy in TESOL. With these findings in mind, I had to revisit some of my research questions. The issue of the effectiveness of the ILL was no longer a valid one. I had already known that the ILL was a failure. I wanted to find out why the ILL had failed to promote learner autonomy or as I phrased it, whether it can be a feasible institutional goal. I did not want to dismiss the possibility of learner autonomy being part of a language learning programme. Overall, when I started my research, my attitude towards the ILL was positive. I perhaps hoped to report on how it helped students become more independent. I wanted to be able to present a matrix for how learner autonomy could be successfully implemented at a language programme. Instead my research helped me understand some crucial errors in the implementation of independent learning at the PP. These were not the fault of any specific person, but rather a result of an educational model that does not allow learners' to take charge of their own learning. Overall, I came to understand that the failure of the ILL to promote independent learning at the PP was not the fault of any specific teacher or student, but that the ideals of independent learning clashed with the way teachers and students conceptualised education, and their own roles within it.

In summary, this case study has allowed me to understand issues that go beyond learner- and teacher autonomy in TESOL. It has also brought to my attention some more over-arching issues in TESOL; issues that deal with 'power' and 'representation'. Whilst these critical issues have been at the forefront of TESOL research for the last 20 years, they have not made an impact on TESOL practice. During this research, I saw how an ideology can permeate a professional group of people, how it affects their teaching practices, and how an ideology is reproduced. The study has helped me

formulate my own position with respect to learner autonomy and learner empowerment. Whether my liberal approach to education is feasible is yet to be seen. On a personal level, the positive outcome of this study is that I started to see my students as individuals rather than a homogeneous mass. I explored how the US and THEM ideology works in everyday practice and I hope that this understanding will help me, as a teacher, avoid such dichotomies in the future. If I were to conduct this study again, I would have kept a more detailed researcher journal. This would have helped me better understand my own research journey. Furthermore, I feel that I would have benefited by interviewing some of the respondents again. As the design of this study was exploratory, I did not exactly know what I was looking for during the interviews. I feel that second interviews with some of the respondents would have given me, as a researcher, a somewhat better understanding of the issues outlined in this study. However, there was no time left in this study to do that. Finally, I feel that there was a lot of quantitative survey data that was not utilised fully. Some of the survey questions did not correspond to any of the research questions. It may be a common error for doctoral students to collect a lot of data because of the fear of not having enough. As it turned out, I had a lot of data, but not always of the type needed for my analysis. I hope to take these lessons with me to my next research project.

Appendices

Appendix A: Independent Learning Log Teacher Instructions

The Independent Learning Log is a record of the work that a student completes outside of class to help improve their English. This work will be given a grade, and accounts for 50% of the overall score for the English course. Each student will submit an ILL for the semester, which will contain a Reading, Writing, Vocabulary, and Listening & Speaking Skills section. Moodle submissions may be included.

Summary of what the Log will include:

| | |
|---|--|
| <p>Reading</p> | <p>About 1-2 different readings per week in addition to class work. Target 20+ readings for the semester. Readings must show quality interaction e.g. reflections / questions / reviews / highlighted vocab. / marginalia. Instructor discretion can be used, however typical menu of inclusions would be as follows:</p> <p>5 books (Graded Readers) 5 Short Stories, SRA, or Footprints 10 articles (300 words or more/ dated after 1st September 2011)</p> |
| <p>Writing</p> | <p>10 pieces of completed, edited, and re-drafted essays, of which</p> <p>5 Task 2 5 Task 1</p> <p>Grammar Quizzes (account for 5 points)</p> |
| <p>Vocabulary</p> | <p>A Least 30+ words and treatments per week of material from the wordlist.</p> <p>A total of 300 words</p> <p>Vocabulary Quizzes (account for 5 points)</p> |
| <p>Listening & Speaking Skills</p> | <p>10 Extensive Listening responses completed through Moodle 10 IELTS Speaking practice recording posted to Moodle (4 will be selected by the instructor and marked for quality) Constructive feedback provided to at least 6 different peers 2 Listening practice activities created and submitted to instructor to be added to Moodle</p> |
| | |

Formative feedback

Learning Outcome:

To challenge yourself in your choice of reading material by reading short stories, novels, articles and other written texts that will enable you to develop your English and enlarge your vocabulary.

Why should I keep a reading log?

Reading logs are an important part of becoming an independent learner. Through the use of the reading log this year, you will learn how to think critically, analyze readings and organize your thoughts. You will also improve your English!

| | Teachers comment |
|--|------------------|
| Quantity | |
| Choice of reading material | |
| Treatments and summaries | |
| Personal response (reflection/critique) | |
| Grammar and mechanics in treatments | |

Reading Log Summative Evaluation

| | 4 Exemplary (exceeds expectations) | 3 Accomplished (meets expectations) | 2 Beginning (approaches expectations) | 1 Beginning (does not meet expectations) |
|--|--|---|--|--|
| Quantity | | | | |
| Choice of reading materials | Has consistently challenged self in choice of reading. Read a wide variety of different materials | Has shown some willingness to challenge self in choice of reading materials. Some variety in reading materials | Only occasional challenge to self in choice of reading. Limited variety of materials chosen | Little or no personal challenge in the materials chosen. |
| Treatments and summaries | Summary or treatment is very clear and precise; is informative and strong in content. Has noted formative feedback and acted upon it | Summary or treatment is reasonable in length, content; may lack some detail. Has sometimes noted formative feedback and acted upon it | Some summaries or treatments are better than others but a good standard is not maintained consistently. Has rarely noted formative feedback. | Summary or treatment is too short or too long; inadequate, weak in content and difficult to follow. Has ignored formative feedback |
| Personal response (reflection/critique) | Offers a strong, in-depth personal response. Careful, thoughtful | Offers in depth personal responses and thoughtful opinions but high standard is not always | Gave a reaction but offered no explanation Brief personal response but it fails to | Little or no personal response (opinion) to the reading material |

| | | | | |
|---|--|--|--|--|
| | <p>opinions on aspects of the reading materials</p> <p>Explained reactions in detail using clear explanations and examples from the texts</p> | <p>consistently maintained</p> | <p>offer any in depth opinion or thoughts. Did not expand on reasons or give examples.</p> | |
| <p>Grammar and mechanics in treatments</p> | <p>Very well organized with excellent links between ideas. All aspects of the task/s are completed fully and thoroughly. Error free or a few minor errors.</p> | <p>Well organised writing. Ideas are well linked. Most aspects of task/s completed fully. Some errors which distract reader from the work.</p> | <p>Some aspects of task generally well covered and organized but Work has not been carefully proofread / edited.</p> | <p>Poorly organised, lacks information related to task/s. Too many unchecked errors.</p> |

Appendix B: Samples of independent reading submissions

Abu Dhabi from a seat on a Seawings flight >>

Christine Iyer

Nov 16, 2012

Save this article

✓

One-page article

Standing under a shady tree on a hot afternoon at Yas Marina, I mull over how ironic it is that we have been waiting more than three-quarters of an hour for a 20-minute flight over Abu Dhabi's main attractions. But Calvin, my usually impatient 10-year-old, manages to keep busy, watching the fish in the canal, shouting "Airbus" or "Boeing" each time an airplane thunders across the sky, or trotting behind a staff member and asking innumerable questions.

The only scenic flights operator in the UAE and the Middle East, Seawings offers flights to 15 water strips and 10 airports across the UAE, including Yas Marina and Emirates Palace in Abu Dhabi. Shweta Pednekar, the company's press officer, admits demand in the capital hasn't picked up yet, mostly because the tours were introduced only a few months ago. But Dubai, where Seawings has been based since 2007, is a different story. Tourists and residents - at a 60-40 ratio - are apparently queuing up to fly around this city of superlatives, sometimes with stops in Abu Dhabi, Fujairah or Ras Al Khaimah. In fact, 15,000 people flew with Seawings last year, up by more than 20 per cent from 2010.

It's not exactly inexpensive, though. I tell Pednekar that at Dh795 per person, the price of the 20-minute flight is roughly twice as much as a return economy airfare from Abu Dhabi to Muscat. Just as she launches into an explanation about operating costs, the plane arrives.

We hear it before we see it: for a full minute all of Yas Island seems to reverberate with the loud droning of its engine. Hands clamped over our ears, we turn in the direction of the noise, and the aircraft suddenly appears around a bend in the canal. Squat on its pontoons, skidding on the water with its propeller-fronted nose high in the air, it looks a lot like a goose trying to take flight.

I joke about this to Calvin, who stops jumping up and down and gives me a look of utter disdain. "That's a Cessna 208 Caravan amphibious plane. Respect, Mum," he says, and runs off towards the pier to be the first to climb aboard.

I liked that the flight is to introduce the main attractions.

Very numerous and countless.

Related

- Dubai seaplane company spread its wings to Abu Dhabi
- Dubai from the sky - no runway required

Topic Abu Dhabi Abu Dhabi development
Abu Dhabi transport Transport

It's a new information I didn't know it's the only scenic flight

I think it's expensive in general.

A boat or some other floating structure

A device having a revolving hub.

Figure 7.1 A sample of student reading log: a newspaper article with student comments and marginalia

Marriage is all about sacrifice and parenting even more so _ Written by Hala Khalaf

Sep 10, 2012 ✓

In marriage, there is a certain degree of sacrifice required by the husband and wife. This is something both Mr T and I learnt early on, and were willing to embrace in our efforts to compromise and build an equal partnership that made sense for the both of us.

Comment [u1]: I like her attitude about the marriage and how she is going to figured that ✓

Whether it's my willingness to incorporate fewer eggs in my diet because Mr T is allergic to them, or his having to adapt to a banana-free home, considering how much I detest them, we each make allowances for the other. I chose to make the UAE my home in order to build a life with my husband and put my dreams of living elsewhere on hold for now, because it was a necessary sacrifice at this stage in our lives. He chose to rearrange his daily schedule to accommodate our needs as a couple and maximise the time we get to spend with one another each day, while also picking and choosing the types of people he surrounds himself with so that conflict is kept at a minimum.

Comment [u2]: Form my believe, this is the right commence to be a good family. ✓

Whether the sacrifices are small or large, they're an integral part of a relationship and they're only fair if both husband and wife are making them.

Comment [u3]: The sacrifices could from somewhere els, their family, friends etc.... it's not condition to be confined ✓

Of course, all these theories of mine are headed straight out the window with the impending arrival of our first born, now only two weeks away from her due date. Now, it's no longer a question of what I'm willing to sacrifice for Mr T, or what he's willing to sacrifice for me. Now, it's all about what we're sacrificing as parents for the good of our daughter and, let's be honest – she's not going to be making any sacrifices in return, and definitely not any time soon.

Comment [u4]: It doesn't make any sense, that any one do something wait for rewarding. ✓

Figure 7.2 A sample of student reading log: a newspaper article with student comments using Word comments and highlighting

Article Analysis

- Reason for reading:

I read this article because I wanted to know more what the media wrote about Abu Dhabi Science Festival. In addition to that, I read this article because I wanted to know more information about the science festival events all over UAE (Abu Dhabi, Al Ain and Al Gharbia) .

- Questions before reading the article:

- The differences between ADSF 2011 and ADSF 2012?
- What is the university students role ?

- New vocabulary:

- Enthusiasm: eagerness or interest.
- Patronage: support or investment.
- Queue: stand in line or row.
- Venue: site, place or location.

- Did the text meet objectives?

Yes, because:

- I founded some answers of my pre-reading questions.
- I knew more about ADSF.
- I learned some words and new vocabulary.

- Level of enjoyment:

The article was good and useful. There were some numbers that I wanted to know and I find it in this article. ^{found them} Also, I knew some information that I didn't know before. For example, I didn't know that the festival had 800 trained students as science communicators.

Figure 7.3 A sample of student reading log: a reading report on a newspaper article

Article Title: Social networkers rally to the cause for homeless - 20/11/12

| English | Translation | Notes |
|-------------|-------------|-------|
| generous | سخي | |
| assessing | تقييم | |
| assistance | مساعدة | |
| overwhelmed | طغت | |
| rallying | احتشدوا | |
| tenants | المستأجرين | |
| donations | تبرعات | |



Social networkers rally to the cause for homeless

DUBAI // Social-network users are rallying to help tenants left homeless by the blaze at Tamweel Tower.

Twitter was buzzing with requests for donations of clothes and essential items for people evacuated from the 34-floor tower in Jumeirah Lakes Towers.

Tenants have been put up in hotels since the blaze, but word got out that basic essentials were needed for those who fled their homes in the middle of the night.

Comment [AAAAS1]: Helping people who effected by the blaze in the tower.

Bhavana Nair, who is organizing an appeal on Twitter, has been circulating her mobile number with the #jlt hash tag since yesterday morning.

Ms Nair received more than 50 calls from people eager to help in the first five hours after her tweet.

"I'm amazed with all these people and I'm so overwhelmed," she said.

"It just shows the city has a lot of generous people. Some are calling up and asking where they can send a cheque.

Comment [AAAAS2]: Twitter was the way for sharing fast. Then, people interact with situation.

Figure 7.4 A sample of student reading log: a newspaper article with vocabulary translation

Book Reading Report - 1

1. Why did you select this book?

The reasons why I select ^{ed} this book ^{is} because of the cover of the book ^{grabbed} take my attention I saw horse picture on the cover and the name of the book too and because of the story generally furthermore, it's my first time read about something like animal story.

2. What did you expect to learn or gain by reading it?

I expect to learn from this book the way the animal live their lives and how they behaving with human and other animals too.

3. Would you read another book by the same author?

Yes, why not because I like such topics which talking about animals, nature and landscape.

4. What was the most interesting part of the book?

The first part where the black beauty "the main characteristic on the story" and its birth place and where it spent its childhood

5. What was the least interesting part of the book?

The parts where the author writ about the cruelty from the human to the animals

6. Write a short message to a friend telling him or her about this book.

This book generally written about horse and who it grown up and the author mentioned many situation any the black beauty deal with it, further the author speak about some of human behavior to animal as an story in specific situation and vice versa .

Figure 7.5 A sample of student reading log

Appendix C: Samples of students independent listening submissions

Listening Log Week 14

1

What is the title of the program?

Tea Drinking in the UK

2

Summarize the main ideas of the program.

Tea is a very common and traditional drink in the UK. So, around 120,000,000 cups of tea are drunk by the British every day. Tea plants come from India, Sri Lanka and China but the sugar came from the Caribbean.

3

Did you learn anything new from this program? If yes, what? If not, why not?

Yes, I learned that British people are addicted on tea. So, they drink 120,000,000 cups of tea daily. In addition, tea with sugar is the favorite drink to them. Also, teas are exported from different countries which are India, Sri Lanka and China but the sugar came from the Caribbean.

4

Make a list of new vocabulary that you learned from this program. Add a definition in English or Arabic.

Addict: person with a physical and emotional need to consume something.

Victorian: from the years when Queen Victoria ruled England (1837 – 1901).

Antiseptic: substance used to kill bacteria and prevent illness.

Sobriety: to be sensible and not drink too much alcohol.

Figure 7.6 A sample of student listening log

Listening Log Week 14

1

What is the title of the program?

The title of the program is **10 top time-saving tech tips by David Pogue.**

2

Summarize the main ideas of the program.

The main idea of the program is **how to save your time when you are using your electronic devices . Even if you will save a second it is really very important to learn the shortest way to do things.**

3

Did you learn anything new from this program? If yes, what? If not, why not?

Yes I learn many new things in using web like ctrl with + is to make the font larger. Also, when we use Google we can only write define then the word in the search box and without click enter you will see the definition. Actually, I like the video it is amazing to know these small shortcuts.

4

Make a list of new vocabulary that you learned from this program. Add a definition in English or Arabic.

- Snaps: TCP a photograph taken quickly and often not very skillfully.**
- Frustrating: making you feel annoyed, upset, or impatient because you cannot do what you want to do.**
- Newbie: someone who has just started doing something, especially using the Internet or computers.**
- Increments: a regular increase in the amount of money someone is paid.**

Figure 7.7 A sample of student listening log

Listening Log Week /

1

What is the title of the program?

The world's brightest city.

2

Summarize the main ideas of the program.

Hong Kong is considered to be the brightest city in the world. Even at mid-night, it won't be dark because there is light everywhere. All these neon signs are causing light pollution, and so many people are complaining about it. Businesses have been asked to turn off the lights at a specific hour, but that won't be easy because they sell almost the same items and offer the same services, and those signs are the only way they can be distinguished.

3

Did you learn anything new from this program? If yes, what? If not, why not?

Well, I learned that Hong Kong is the brightest city in the world, as I have never heard of this fact before. I also didn't know that there is something called "light pollution" and that light could cause that much damage and disturbance.

4

Make a list of new vocabulary that you learned from this program. Add a definition in English or Arabic.

contribute: to give or supply in common with others.

To dim: to have limited or insufficient amount of light.

Distinguish: differentiate.

Competitor: challenger.

Figure 7.8 A sample of student listening log

Appendix D: Sample of independent writing log reflection sheet
Writing Log Drafting Checklist

| Essay Title: | | | | |
|---|----------|---|---|---|
| Errors | Draft 1 | Draft 2 | Draft 3 | Other Drafts |
| Spelling (Sp) | | | | |
| Punctuation (P) | | | | |
| Verb Agreement (VA) | | | | |
| Verb Tense (VT) | | | | |
| Pronoun Referencing (PR) | | | | |
| Wrong Preposition (Prep.) | | | | |
| Articles (A) | | | | |
| Wrong Word (WW) | | | | |
| Word Ending (WE) | | | | |
| Word order (WO) | | | | |
| Sentence structure (SS) | | | | |
| Essay is in completed form | | This essay is completed. Y N _____ Initial, Date | This essay is completed. Y N _____ Initial, Date | This essay is completed. Y N _____ Initial, Date |
| Organization 1-0 | 4 | 3 | 2 | |
| Drafting shows continuous improvement | | | | |
| Brainstorming and outline | | | | |
| Variety of complex structures (grammar) | | | | |
| Vocabulary range and accuracy | | | | |
| Organization and linking | | | | |

Progress Overview (Filled by the student)

Errors I have reduced in this essay:

Areas I have identified for further work:

To eliminate these problems I will:

To prove that you have acted upon your reflections, please attach a worksheet with completed grammar or writing activities.

Appendix E: Samples of student vocabulary work for the ILL

2087

Week 4

2/3/2020

Vocabulary Record – Semester 2

| Date | Words (only #s required) | Source | Description of Treatment(s) |
|-----------|-----------------------------|---|---------------------------------|
| 21-2-2010 | 106 - 115 | reading booklet p.17 | synonyms, definition |
| 22-2-2010 | 116 - 121 | ILts foundation book p.31 | picture, definition |
| 22-2-2010 | 122 | http://indarticles.com/articles/mi-mohmu/is-2-30/ai-109735 | picture , definition |
| 22-2-2010 | 123 - 135 | ILts foundation book p.31 | Gap fill, definition |
| 22-2-2010 | 136 - 140 | gulfNews | Antonyms, picture, definition |
| | | | |
| | | | |

- Note (1): All words must have completed treatments in order to be entered here.
- Note (2): Students should complete about 35 words per week.
- Note (3): This form must be handwritten.

Vocabulary Record – Semester 2

| Date | Words (only #s required) | Source | Description of Treatment(s) |
|-----------|-----------------------------|---|-----------------------------|
| 19-2-2010 | 71 - 74 | the spy next door movie • PS3 "grand theft auto IV" | synonyms |
| 14-2-2010 | 75 - 84 | PS3 "winning Eleven 2010" | synonyms |
| 21-2-2010 | 85 - 88 | writing booklet p.15 15 16 | puzzle |
| 21-2-2010 | 89 - 96 | LD booklet p.23 | picture |
| 21-2-2010 | 97 - 105 | ILTS foundation book p.33 • reading booklet p.16 p.17 | sentence - picture |
| | | | |
| | | | |

- Note (1): All words must have completed treatments in order to be entered here.
- Note (2): Students should complete about 35 words per week.
- Note (3): This form must be handwritten.



244

Suspension: when something is officially stopped for a period of time



245

Prisoner: someone who is kept in a prison as a legal punishment for a crime or while they are waiting for their trial.



246

Detention: the state of being kept in prison.

Bribe

6 words

212

Part of speech: **verb**

Examples: The only way we could get into the country was by bribing the border officials.

Synonyms: inducement, sweetener, corrupt.

Dioxide

213

Part of speech: **noun**



Reliance

214

Part of speech: **noun**

Examples: the country's reliance on imported oil.

Synonyms: dependence, confidence, trust.

week 10

collocations

Earn

Noun

Earn money - earn a wage - earn a salary- earn a living- earn a fortune- earn a crust

Immediate

Noun

Immediate response- immediate action- immediate problem- immediate danger- immediate future- immediate area

Condition

Verb

Impose conditions- set conditions- meet condition- satisfy condition

Criticism

Adjective

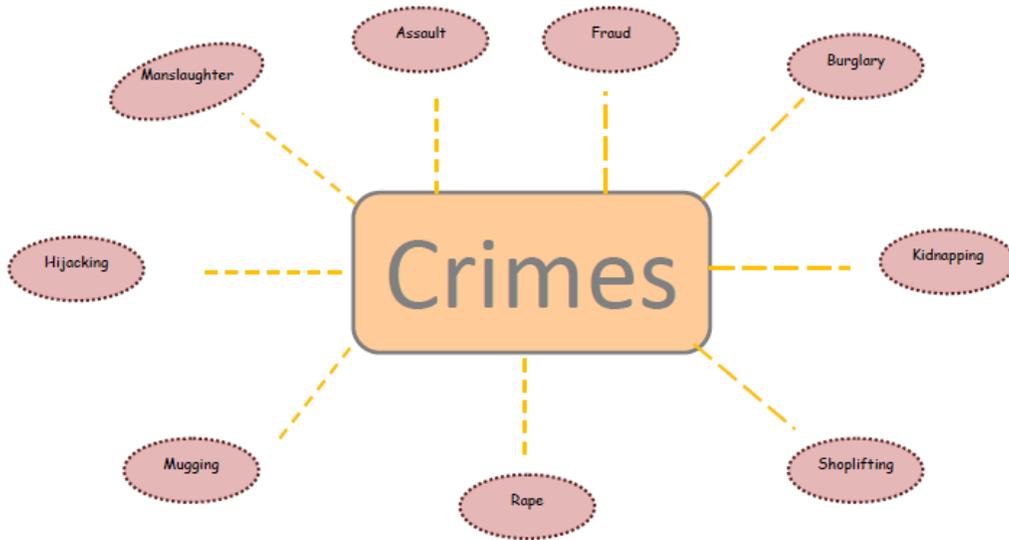
Strong criticism -severe criticism- harsh criticism- widespread criticism- public criticism- constructive criticism

Victim

Noun

Famine victim- earthquake victim -flood victim- accident victim- crash victim

week 10



Appendix F: Preparatory Programme Surveys

Please put a tick [✓] if you agree with the following statements:

الرجاء وضع إشارة (✓) إذا كنت توافق على ما يلي:

I agree to participate in this survey. _____
أوافق على المشاركة في هذا الاستبيان _____

I have no objections if the data collected in this survey is used for research purposes.

ليس لدي مانع إذا ما تم استخدام المعلومات في هذا الاستبيان لأغراض بحثية _____

Date: _____

Signature: _____

Foundation Year Survey of Current Students Fall 2009

Please tick/check your answers and write comments as necessary. Section: _____

1. The Foundation Year English Language Program is based on the IELTS test. Do you think the IELTS-based course content of the Foundation Year English Language Program is preparing you for university study?

- | | | | | |
|-------------------------------|--|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------|---|
| a. Integrated Skills | <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Disagree | <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree | <input type="checkbox"/> Agree | <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Agree |
| b. Reading | <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Disagree | <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree | <input type="checkbox"/> Agree | <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Agree |
| c. Writing | <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Disagree | <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree | <input type="checkbox"/> Agree | <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Agree |
| d. Listening | <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Disagree | <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree | <input type="checkbox"/> Agree | <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Agree |
| e. Speaking (002) | <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Disagree | <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree | <input type="checkbox"/> Agree | <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Agree |
| f. Language Development (002) | <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Disagree | <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree | <input type="checkbox"/> Agree | <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Agree |

Comment: _____

2. Do you think 16 class hours of English per week is adequate to prepare you to learn (and study) in English?

- Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

Comment: _____

3. Do you think the Independent Learning Portfolio (ILP) is helping you learn more English?

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

Comment: _____

4. Using the numbers 1 to 5, rank each section of the Independent Learning Portfolio from most useful (1) to least useful (5). Use each number (1, 2, 3, 4, and 5) once.

For 001 use the numbers 1 to 4.

a. Reading _____

b. Writing _____

c. Vocabulary _____

d. Study Skills _____

e. Language Development (002 only) _____

Comment: _____

5. Do you think the Study Skills component taught in the Integrated Skills class is helping you to study better?

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

Comment: _____

6. Do you think you would benefit from a grammar course as part of the Foundation Year Program?

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

Comment: _____

7. Do you think you would benefit from a video component in the listening class to help you learn note taking skills?

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

Comment: _____

8. What do you think can be done in the Foundation Year Program to better prepare you for your freshman program?

a. _____

b. _____

c. _____

d. _____

e. _____

Appendix G: Interview schedule and the questions

| | |
|---|--|
| <p>Interview schedule</p> <p>Date:</p> <p>Began:</p> <p>Ended:</p> <p>Teacher:</p> <p>Courses:</p> | <p>Q1: What does learner autonomy mean to you?</p> <p>Q2: What strategies do you use to foster autonomy in your class?</p> <p>Q3: Do you think the ILL is an effective tool in fostering language learning autonomy?</p> <p>Q4: What do your students' think about the ILL? What's their reaction to it?</p> <p>Q5: What are some obstacles that you have come across when implement the ILL?</p> <p>Q6: Do you like the ILL?</p> <p>Q7: How autonomous are your students?</p> |
|---|--|

Appendix H: Certificate of Ethical Research Approval from Exeter University

MSc, PhD, EdD & DEdPsych theses



Graduate School of Education

Certificate of ethical research approval

MSc, PhD, EdD & DEdPsych theses

To activate this certificate you need to first sign it yourself, and then have it signed by your supervisor and finally by the Chair of the School's Ethics Committee.

For further information on ethical educational research access the guidelines on the BERA web site: <http://www.bera.ac.uk/publications> and view the School's Policy online.

READ THIS FORM CAREFULLY AND THEN COMPLETE IT ON YOUR COMPUTER (the form will expand to contain the text you enter). **DO NOT COMPLETE BY HAND**

Your name: Sabina Ostrowska
Your student no: 580039084/1
Return address for this certificate:
Sabina Ostrowska
Khalifa University
P. O. Box 127788
Abu Dhabi
United Arab Emirates
Degree/Programme of Study:
Educational Doctorate in TESOL

Project Supervisor(s):
Dr. David Palfreyman

Your email address:
Sao208@exeter.ac.uk
Sabina.ostrowska@kustar.ac.ae

Tel: +971 50 6640816

I hereby certify that I will abide by the details given overleaf and that I undertake in my thesis to respect the dignity and privacy of those participating in this research.

I confirm that if my research should change radically, I will complete a further form.

Signed: Sabina Ostrowska date: 1/9/2013

Chair of the School's Ethics Committee

Certificate of ethical research approval

TITLE OF YOUR PROJECT:

Student and teacher perspectives on fostering language learner autonomy at a tertiary level English preparatory program in the UAE (working title)

1. Brief description of your research project:

This research project is designed to explore whether a system of Independent Learning Logs is an effective tool in fostering students' autonomy in learning English. This exploratory-qualitative study aims to understand how students and teachers use the Logs. The researcher's goal is to explore students' and teachers' opinions and attitudes towards the independent learning system. The results of this study may inform changes within a specific preparatory program in the UAE and help teachers understand the role of learners' autonomy within a language learning programme. Finally, the study will contribute to learner autonomy theory by exploring ways in which students organize their own learning and set up their own goals in learning English as a foreign language.

2. Give details of the participants in this research (giving ages of any children and/or young people involved):

1. English language teachers from a Preparatory Programme at a university in the UAE
2. The Preparatory Programme students (academic year 2012-13); ages between 18-20; male and female students; Arabic L1 speakers

Give details (with special reference to any children or those with special needs) regarding the ethical issues of:

3. **Informed consent:** Where children in schools are involved this includes both headteachers and parents). Copy(ies) of your consent form(s) you will be using must accompany this document. a blank consent form can be downloaded from the GSE student access on-line documents. Each consent form **MUST** be personalised with your contact details.

Interviews:

All the interviewees will be invited to participate in the interviews via e-mails which will explain the aims of the interview and the study (see Appendices B and C). The interviewees who accept the invitation will be contacted to schedule a specific time and date. The researcher will explain the aims of the study before each interview and will make sure that the interviewees understand the Consent Form (see Appendix A) before they sign it. Each interviewee will sign a personalised Consent Form before the interview begins.

Online survey:

Participants in the survey will receive a link to the survey via their university e-mail. The first page of the survey will include the information about the aims of the survey and the Consent Form (see Appendix D). The respondents who give their consent will tick 'Yes' in the survey.

Content analysis:

The researcher will gain the students' permission before using any documents or student coursework and will ensure that they sign the Copyright Release Form (see Appendix E).

4. anonymity and confidentiality

The researcher will keep the names of the interviewees confidential by using pseudonyms in the interview transcript, in the thesis, and in any related papers or conference presentations. The researcher will ensure non-traceability of the participants in all parts of the study, including the data analysis and discussion. Thus, any information mentioned in the interview and any contextual data which may reveal the identity of the participant will be removed.

The online survey will be completely anonymous. The survey will ask the respondents for their gender and their IELTS score. These two pieces of personal information will not compromise the anonymity of the survey.

Any reference to individual students' work or studies will be done using pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality. Any information that may compromise the confidentiality of the participants will be removed from the study.

5. Give details of the methods to be used for data collection and analysis and how you would ensure they do not cause any harm, detriment or unreasonable stress:

This research project will use three methods of data collection:

- a. Semi-structured interviews
- b. Online surveys
- c. Content analysis

The interviews will be conducted on the campus in a meeting room. The participants will be invited for the interviews and will participate on a voluntary basis. The meeting room where the interviews will take place ensures privacy but is not intimidating in its layout. All the participants will be e-mailed the interview schedule beforehand to allow time to reflect on the questions. The interviews will be scheduled in a time convenient to the participants and will not exceed 50 minutes. Afterwards, the participants will be sent the interview transcripts to allow them to add or delete statements that they are not comfortable with.

The online survey will be voluntary. The students will be e-mailed the link to the survey after they complete their English courses so they will feel that it is a compulsory part of their coursework.

The student work collected for content analysis will be used with students' consent.

6. Give details of any other ethical issues which may arise from this project - e.g. secure storage of videos/recorded interviews/photos/completed questionnaires

The hard copy transcripts, samples of students' work and signed consent forms will be stored in a locked filing cabinet. The audio data will be downloaded from recording devices at the earliest possible opportunity, and then deleted immediately from those devices. All electronic data will be stored on the University of Exeter U-drive, and removed from portable devices (e.g. laptops) at the earliest opportunity.

7. special arrangements made for participants with special needs etc.

There were no special needs participants involved in this project.

8. Give details of any exceptional factors, which may raise ethical issues (e.g. potential political or ideological conflicts which may pose danger or harm to participants):

There are no political or ideological issues that are related to this study.

This form should now be printed out, signed by you on the first page and sent to your supervisor to sign. Your supervisor will forward this document to the School's Research Support Office for the Chair of the School's Ethics Committee to countersign. A unique approval reference will be added and this certificate will be returned to you to be included at the back of your dissertation/thesis.

N.B. You should not start the fieldwork part of the project until you have the signature of your supervisor

This project has been approved for the period: 1/1/13 until: 31/12/14

By (above mentioned supervisor's signature): D.M. Pally date: 11/9/13

N.B. To Supervisor: Please ensure that ethical issues are addressed annually in your report and if any changes in the research occur a further form is completed.

GSE unique approval reference: D/12/13/47

Signed: N. Brennan date: 16/9/13
Chair of the School's Ethics Committee



Appendix A

GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

CONSENT FORM

I have been fully informed about the aims and purposes of the project.

I understand that:

there is no compulsion for me to participate in this research project and, if I do choose to participate, I may at any stage withdraw my participation

I have the right to refuse permission for the publication of any information about me

any information which I give will be used solely for the purposes of this research project, which may include publications

If applicable, the information, which I give, may be shared between any of the other researcher(s) participating in this project in an anonymised form

all information I give will be treated as confidential

the researcher(s) will make every effort to preserve my anonymity

(Signature of participant)

(Date)

(Printed name of participant)

One copy of this form will be kept by the participant; a second copy will be kept by the researcher(s)

Contact phone number of researcher(s): +971-2-4018106

If you have any concerns about the project that you would like to discuss, please contact:

sao208@exeter.ac.uk

OR

sabina.ostrowska@kustar.ac.ae

Data Protection Act: The University of Exeter is a data collector and is registered with the Office of the Data Protection Commissioner as required to do under the Data Protection Act 1998. The information you provide will be used for research purposes and will be processed in accordance with the University's registration and current data protection legislation. Data will be confidential to the researcher(s) and will not be disclosed to any unauthorised third parties without further agreement by the participant. Reports based on the data will be in anonymised form.

Appendix B Interview Information for the Participants (Students)

Dear XXX,

I am conducting doctoral research about students' opinion of the Independent Learning Logs. I would like to hear from different students to have a better understanding of what you liked and disliked about the ILLs. Also, I would like to know what you think it means to be an independent learner.

I would like to have a short discussion with you this week or next week. It will take approximately 20 minutes. Anything you say be strictly confidential, which means that if I use your opinion in my report, I will change your name and your section number.

Please let me know if you will be able to help with this research. If so, e-mail me the exact time and date when you can talk to me. The interviews will be conducted in the meeting room on the 1st floor. I am available to talk to you anytime.

Regards,
Ms. Sabina

Appendix C Interview Information for the Participants (Faculty)

Hi,

As you may know, I am writing my dissertation on learner autonomy in EFL context. I have to collect some data now, and I would like to start by interviewing some of our Prep Program teachers.

Please let me know if you would be willing to participate in a 30 minute interview. I can ensure you that anything you say during the interview will be confidential. Your name or personal details will not be revealed at any stage of my research.

If you have no objections to participate in this study, please have a look at some of the questions in the attachment. The questions are tentative and I hope to explore this topic in more depth with your help. Please let me know what time on Monday would be the most suitable for you.

I would also like to ask you to nominate 9 students that I could interview - I need 3 students who are not doing any work on their ILL, 3 average students, and 3 students who are doing outstanding work on the ILL.

Regards,
Sabina

Appendix D Online Survey Information and Consent Form

Home > You > English Tools Help > Log Out

Search > Show > More >>

5/21/11

Independent Learning Logs Survey Fall and Spring 2011

Dear students

As part of my doctoral research, I'm conducting a short survey about your opinion of the Independent Learning Logs. We will use the results of this survey to improve the Independent Learning Log system. I want to find out what you think about the Logs and how you use them in your English studies.

I would appreciate if you explain your answers and give specific examples to support your opinion. The results of this survey will be used in my doctoral thesis and may maybe used in academic publications. Your name and personal information will remain confidential.

If you wish to participate in this survey, please click YES in Question 1.

If you don't want to participate, please click No in questions 1.

Thank you again for your help. Your honest opinion is what matters the most.

Sabrina Ostrowska

Sabrina.Ostrowska@kustar.edu.pl

* I, by choosing YES, I certify that I have been fully informed about the aims and purposes of the project.

I understand that...

I don't have to participate in this survey.

If I do choose to participate, I may at any stage withdraw my participation.

Any information collected in this survey may be used anonymously.

Any information which I give may be used for educational research and published.

All information I give will be treated as confidential.

The researcher(s) will make every effort to preserve my anonymity.

Yes

No

Next

Appendix E Copyright Release For for Student Coursework

I, _____ freely grant the researcher the non-exclusive right to use, copy, modify, publish, or create derivative works from the works of authorship I created during the English courses at the Preparatory Program. These works include but are not limited to: written work(s), image(s), art object(s), sound recordings, photographs, and/or audio/video materials. The researcher may use these works in whole or in part, or in modified form for educational and research purposes either in print or digital format.

Course Name _____
Course Section _____
Term/Date _____

I certify that the materials submitted are solely of my creation and that no other individual or parties hold copyright interest in any portion of the work(s) described above and that I hold all rights to these works.

I hereby certify and that I am of legal age (18 years old or older).

It is understood that no compensation has been paid and that no fee or compensation shall be due to me from

It is also understood my name may not be used in conjunction with the use of such materials.

Printed Name _____
Signature _____
Date _____

Researcher's name: Sabina Ostrowska

Phone: +971 506640816

E-mail: sabina.ostrowska@kustar.ac.ae; sao208@exeter.ac.uk

Appendix I: Samples of interview transcripts

Group Interview

S: Okay, so let's start with the first question, general question, okay? We don't have to follow these questions. What does it mean to be independent as a learner?

X: Uh, organize more, or--

S: --organize in what way?

X: Uh, everything—in your time, in your studying...

S: Umhm

R: Depend on yourself.

S: How do you depend on yourself?

R: (unintelligible)

S: Umhm

R: Nobody gonna tell me do this or do this thing, give us some information we have the due times, the deadline and we should do it. By ourself and no one will do it for me.

S: Umhm....do you agree?

R: (unintelligible)

S: You don't need to agree with this, yeah? Umm, what do you mean depend on yourself...so this is one example.

R: (unintelligible)

X: (unintelligible)

S: Do you think it is more than high school? In what sense?

X: Because in high school if you lose marks you can go to your teacher and talk.

S: And here?

X: ---and you can deal with him, but here, no. If you lose, you lose.

S: Can you give me example?

X: Like in, uh, the quizzes—

S: --umhm

X: We want for to repeat a quiz or or anything and you can't.

S: You can't.

X: We tried once but we learn that here you cannot do this.

S: Okay, what about managing you own time, how do you find that?

X: Uh...the planner, the planner.

S: What—yes, Raya?

R: We don't have (unintelligible).

S: Don't have?

R: Free time.

S: Free time. So how do you organize your time to do all these activities you have a lot of activities to do outside the class. How do you manage your time?

X: The planner they give us...

S: Uhuh

A: So that's sort of organizing--

R: --I should, I shouldn't leave everything to the last moment, I should do my works—

S: Do you follow that advice?

X: yeah

R: (unintelligible)

S: (laughing) I mean we all know we should not leave things to the last moment but do we follow this advice?

X: (unintelligible)

R: Yes, me I leave everything to the last moment.

S: (laughing) Who else does everything in the last moment?

X: I do.

S: I do...Okay so how does this organizer help you—you write, you say okay this day I am going to do the reading this day I will do the writing—how do you organize your work?

X: You put your schedule—

S: Umhm

X: --as you have the schedule of classes you can put your own schedule for studying
S: So you make your own schedule?
X: Yeah, but you can't follow it exactly.
R: Yeah, you can't follow it.
Y: (unintelligible)
S: Why is it difficult to follow it?
R: Because the time flying
S: (laughing)
R: and sometime something (unintelligible)
S: Hmum, so when you have you schedule you—how many days a week do you manage to follow your schedule?
X: Now, zero.
S: Now zero. Why?
X: I don't know—in the first of the year I was following my schedule, but now even sometimes three days or four days I don't study.
R: Sometimes we don't want to study.
S: (laughing) Why don't you want to study?
R: (unintelligible) we feel pressure and this make us feel boring—
X: Yeah
S: Why do you feel pressure?
R: Because like in three week we have mid-terms and we have assignments and—
X: --and you do the mid-terms and we have articles and homeworks—how we can study for the quizzes with doing homeworks?
Y: (unintelligible)
R: Sometimes the results were very disappointing
S: Hmm—do you all feel the same?
R: Yes
S: Yes, and the guys, do you all feel the same? Do you feel like this? There's too much pressure?
Y: Yeah
S: How—what kind of pressure do you feel?
R: (unintelligible)
Z: (unintelligible)
Y: A lot of homeworks.
S: A lot of homeworks.
X: Yeah
S: By homeworks you mean the independent learning logs or something else also?
R: yeah, articles...
S: Articles, that's the reading log...vocabulary
R: (unintelligible)
Y: Article.
S: And huh?
R: (unintelligible)
S: That takes lots of your time—
R: Yeah, maybe three hours—
X: Two hours
S: Hmm? Every week?
Y: Every week.
R: Mr Aron want vocab, (unintelligible) all thing...
X: (unintelligible)
R: He give us a very bad mark.
X: Yeah
S: For your vocabulary?
R: (unintelligible)
S: Oh, okay
A: (unintelligible)
S: And...yes, Amnah?

A: We don't—
 S: --What did you get if you don't mind me asking
 A: Uh...87
 S: 87
 A: I follow all of the instruction...I did everything...
 X: I get 80
 S: 80? And you satisfied?
 X: Yeah
 S: (laughing)
 R: But when we work hard, we want something to satisfy us.
 S: So what mark would be satisfying for you? 90? 90 would be okay?
 R: Yeah
 S: Okay...who else is not happy with—
 R: (unintelligible)
 S: Special person?
 R: And when we asked him he said we can't give all the student a good mark.
 S: How do you feel, Zamzam, about the notebook?
 Z: (unintelligible)
 S: But what do you feel...do you feel this notebook helps you improve your vocabulary skills?
 X: No!!
 S: Why, why not? I need—
 Y: (unintelligible)
 X: --to write. You can't--
 H: (unintelligible)
 S: Yes, Hamad?
 H: --copy without thinking
 S: Copy without thinking? So where do you copy from?
 H: Dictionary
 S: And you just copy without thinking?
 R: Yeah and sometime the word have two meaning and we don't know which meaning you want.
 X: Yeah
 R: --and we are surprising about that...he didn't discuss any words with us.
 S: In the class?
 R: He just give us the list and (unintelligible)
 S: Hmm...maybe he wants you to be independent
 R: Not like...not in the way.
 S: How how...what would be the solution to the—to be learning vocabulary in an independent way?
 X: Games.
 S: Games—in the class?
 X: yeah.
 S: Okay
 X: Guidelines
 S: Guidelines? What guidelines?
 X: Like he told us, like if you have (unintelligible) for word, what you do?
 S: Uhuh
 X: You can't get all the meaning for one word
 S: No...Abdulrahman, what were you saying?
 A: (unintelligible)
 S: No? ...So you said games, guideline, how else...if you were the teacher of the vocabulary, how would you organize this?
 A: (unintelligible)
 S: Discuss the words in the class? Hmhm, would you still have students keep a vocabulary notebook?
 X: Yeah, but in a (unintelligible) way...like using hooks....not just give them—
 S: --using—
 X: Hooks. Using special methods to—
 S: What would be an attractive way?

S: Okay...is it true? Who else will continue reading after the reading course? Never?

A: I don't read in any, in Arabic and English.

S: You don't like reading in Arabic? Who doesn't like—

R: --(unintelligible)

S: Maybe there's a relation—if you hate reading in Arabic you'll hate reading in any language, yes?

(Several voices in Arabic)

S: Any more advice? No? No? Okay, thank you very much, I'll see you after your holiday.

Ahmed

First of all I wanted to ask you what do you think it means to be independent as a learner?

To be independent is not only to study by yourself...it is a misconception when it is I take a book and I read the book by myself.

Independent is not only study by yourself...taking all the information from the teachers, instructors and your friends and processing it into your studies in the way that suits you, and recognizing your strengths and weaknesses and.... improving yourself like that and...also one of the main things of being independent is... prioritizing yourself that's extremely important ahhh...you see when you cram before the exams, they don't pay attention in class, ehh...they think that 7 hours per day of studying is what's gonna help them, that's not being independent learner; that's being just following your instinct about being efficient.

You are obviously an excellent language user, you got IELTS 8 I believe?

Yes.

OK, so I would like to hear more about how did you learn English, how did you achieve...it is a very high standard. How did you get there?

You see, a lot of people ehhh... when I came to the university, I'm used to using English as the main language even though it is a second language for me, I consider it myself like a first language, cause I don't use Arabic that much, [...] it is my mother tongue, but I use English quite predominantly, ahhh...

Are both your parents Arabic speakers?

Yeh yeh, everyone is an Arabic speaker, even my sister is taking English literature as her major [...]

Aha.

But maybe I learned it through use, through socializing, using English, through studying using English...the main language through all of my studies from kindergarten to grade 12 was English, I was in a British school for most... all of my school life, and we mainly for all subjects used English, except for English and Arabic, but these were very small subjects they were not very emphasized in that school, it was just the government says we need to have these subjects

But you know, there are many schools that have English from kindergarten to grade 12 and even though the kids start very early not everyone achieves very high level in English?

Actually, if you see...I have... there are videos of me speaking English in grade 5 or 6, before the time when we socialize using the language and my accent was very thick, heavy, like... it wasn't like ehh..., it didn't sound very...ehh...

Natural?

Yeah, it didn't sound very natural; but after a while when after I started socializing with people using English, started meeting people, started meeting English people, people from different culture who use English and...ehhh...just basically interacting with the language naturally throughout my life that's what made me improve language not just studying from a textbook, that really helped me there are rules in English that I use regularly, I don't even know the name of it; I don't know what it is called...past participle...I just use it cause it is instinct

You said that you like to learn English through socializing, where would you socialize? What do you mean by it?

With friends sometimes... very predominantly this is a big factor was the internet.

Aha.

The internet has large use of English as the main language ehhh... that's what really drove me, cause when you have a keyboard – what do you first see on the keyboard? You don't see Arabic keyboard very commonly, you see it but the main thing is the English keyboard it is English, so that was a big driving factor with me and lots of different students, if there was no internet and culture of that you wouldn't see them engaging with the language.

So what kind of website would you normally participate in?

I would participate in YouTube, that's large...

Do you have a YouTube account?

Yeah, I mostly just subscribe to other people's videos, I've been an avid YouTube viewer since 2007, so that's really helped and also a lot of forums on the internet where people post for each other, forums for gaming, different hobbies and all that.

What kind of videos would you usually watch on YouTube?

Depending, I watch news. I have a very liberal political views I would watch liberal news channels I watch different news channels, so and also I would watch stuff related to video games, I love video games, eh... actually, I have a website where few people related to video games, that's how I engage in that and... also skiing.

Skiing website?

No skiing videos.

Skiing videos.

I love...skiing.

I've heard from many students who are excellent that they learn English from video games.

Yea,, yea.

How? Can you tell me more about it, because I don't know about it.

Exactly, a lot of people would think how can you learn life lessons from a video game, isn't it just point and shoot, that videogames is what's most shown to public, The Call of Duty and all those shooting games but what is not showing is independent video games, games with the story, games with real...excellent narrative. Those are not shown in the spotlight and that's where a lot of my English has developed which I'm even surprised, I didn't expect... games with in-depth story, ...with a developed narrative, ...with proper heart, not simple entrainment that's made to entertain the masses. It is something that's specialized and...something that can develop me as a person.

And when you see a new word in a game, because they give you scenarios, a little description?

Yes.

You can see text right? You can read it?

Yea.

And sometimes you hear it and sometimes you read it and sometimes both, as I understand?

Yes.

So if you see a new word and you don't understand it what you do about it?

Usually in these games the words are used in the contexts where it is easily understandable, where they would say a word in a sentence you would say oh! I sort of get that so... usually I would get it straight away, if I don't know the word I would be like it is used in this context so it must mean this, if I don't... I do check a dictionary, but that's on the off-chance, usually, throughout I never read a definition of a word from a dictionary.

Mmm...

The biggest mistake I can see an English teachers telling a student 'why don't you read a whole dictionary'. That's nonsense; no one can read the whole dictionary and absorb it. I learned all of my vocabulary through use, through engaging with language, hearing a word and going 'Oh! that must mean this'.

Mmm...so let's talk a little bit about the language programme here. You came to the Prep Programme in September and you have taken Reading, Writing, Listening and Speaking, all these courses and they have an independent learning component.

Mhm

What did you think about the ILL, the Independent Learning Logs in general?

The Independent Learning Logs - I see that they are useful in the fact that our instructor in general has given us eeh... a lot of leeway to do whatever we want, to submit them in audio-form, to submit them in text-form, to use many different types of articles. There are few obvious guidelines to follow but mainly it was very free and I see it as a very strong plus. It gives a person freedom to read however they like amm.. but there are few limitations. The workload is very irregular and the workload, in general, is very high...ahm... I think it was 3 or 5 audio... 3 ILLs per week...it is a very large...ehhh...

Which ones do you mean? Because you know every teacher has different requirements, so which ones?

Reading, she told us to read 3 articles above 500 words.

Every week?

Yea... every week and to write the whole thing about them, but I didn't do that I found a loophole in the system, to tell the truth and used audio...so I read an article, I record for 2 or 3 minutes, that's it done! While someone would take an hour and a half to do their audio ILL, I was done in 5 minutes so...that's an obvious loophole that I feel shouldn't be present emmm..., and the workload is irregular...it is too high..that's one drawback, but other than that I feel that it was very useful in developing people's language – when I was in dorms as they were reading the articles they would after reading the article find out new vocabulary, new words, engage themselves in the language and that's what this programme is obviously striving for and it succeeds in that regard.

And what about reading books? What did you think about books we suggest for you, the number of books we suggest, did you enjoy it or...what did you think of that?

No actually, again there was a lot of leeway to choose whichever book you like, of course it can't be any book...it should be something that will improve your language. Actually that has lots of benefit...ehhh... gives people freedom to engage in language in the way they are most comfortable with...

Mmm...

So...they can read a book related to a topic that they like...and...I see that as nothing but a benefit.

Which part of the learning logs was the most useful for you?

Which ones?

Yeah.

We have vocabulary, right? Listening, speaking and reading, and writing?

Many of them they were a bit...honestly, they weren't very beneficial to me. I was extremely, extremely bored.

Tell which ones were not useful?

...gave me a few uses, actually listening class...those actually surprised me, that they actually benefited me and I was engaged in the class, I wasn't bored. I didn't feel like I was being..ehhh...like...taken from my full potential. So that one gave me a few skills that I need.

Mmm... and what about the Listening Logs? What did you have to do for independent listening?

The listening, the ILLs? Ehhh...What do we have to do?

Yea or listening?

It was Ms. Hilary. So she gave you some assignments, and you must go and listen and write ehhh...

She...find three articles on the web and...ehhh....type an ILL like a report.... or do an audio...you speak about the topic...

So this counts as your speaking log?

...which is also so you do 3 speaking logs

What about the listening? Independent listening?

Yeah, we did. We did a few ehhh...sir, he sent us a few videos from TED and said listen to these and fill out the document on what did you see here, what are the main topics – it was mostly engaging, but a few videos were mind numbing to sit through, there is this video specifically about a math magician and he would quickly do calculations, sort of...but that one was bit of a chore to go through.

So you didn't have choice to choose which videos from TED Talks to watch?

No.

And the vocabulary, did you do any vocabulary logs this semester?

No.

Like vocabulary lists, did you do any of that?

We did, they would give us the list and say we have a quiz, and say you can print it out and use it during the exam but I never did that because they are very...extremely simple vocabulary words.

Mmm...OK. That's very interesting. So overall, do you think you are an independent learner?

Definitely ahhh... with a lot of subjects... I see a lot of people calling each other before the exam, 'what is this?', 'what is that?', running to the teacher, I never do that....I never consult the teacher unless it is a proper mistake in the exam, but ehhh.... I stick to my own, I come here and I leave everyone in the room, running around with their books, I just go to the exam and...I did prioritize myself very well, in the beginning I admit, I was a bit nervous sometimes but now I feel I have my things organized and I'm on the right track and I'm confident with myself.

And the last question, if you could make any changes in the ILL system what would you suggest we do?

First of all I would, actually I have two main changes. First of all the ILLs the workload should be regulated more, where audio...is much easier than the normal ILLs. As I said before mainly I would see the...the... standard of English with anyone who comes to the course do they need this study. Cause I

have to admit that I didn't really need these....these... classes and that I was only in them because my IELTS grades were late. So I think a bit of leeway should be given to people whose grade might be late...they might have done the exam bit later. I think there should be more effort put into assessment in the beginning to see if we need the admission. Do they need this? If I got my IELTS a bit earlier, like a week earlier, I could have been transferred to freshman.

Mmm...That's right. You wrote to me that you have some suggestions, some comments.

Ahhh...that was my main comment – I don't really have any other comments other than the teachers are very friendly, every time I go to their office they are more than happy to help out...ehhh...sometimes I feel... I sympathize with other students who take normal classes from 8 to 3, I feel it is a...a lot of time to study from 8-3 with only one hour break...I feel that's the main drawback other than that it was a pleasure going through this course

Thank you very much for coming here and for your feedback.

Sara

What do you think it means to be an independent learner?

To think alone to have all the information, research, you have done for something, and you like to be, I think, lonely person, yeah, so you have to do all the work by yourself, you can't count on other people to do your job, I think that's the ...

Do you think that you are an independent learner?

Ah, No ... laughs

Why not? Tell me about it.

My personality is like sociable, so I like to social ... people, so when I am study I have to have more than one skill, like I can't just read and write; I like to talk to my friend maybe she knows something I don't know. She might help me with that, so I think that group work is much better than independent learning. Uh, huh, so if you are working independently, you must work alone, but you're not an independent learner.

No.

So tell me a little bit more about when you do your reading reports, for example for Mr Ben, how do you work on these?

Ah, first of all, I have to know what I'm interesting ... before I start reading anything, maybe I like to read novels more than newspaper and magazines, so I have to choose the right novel, maybe I like novels, maybe drama or horror movies, so I will be enjoying reading and I will keep writing and it will be fun for me and I have to do the work much faster, for if I read something, if I read a book, I will not understand any words, so I think choosing what is the best for me, I must know that.

So did you use that advice yourself (Yeah ...) so what books did you choose this last semester?

Ahhhh, first of all I read Diary of a Wimpy Kid, then Holes, um, Holes it was long book, but I enjoyed reading it because I heard about the movie, I watched the movie, then so I compared the movie with the book and I saw the similarities and the difference, so I choose that, so ...

Did you take this book from the library or you bought it?

No, no ... I read myself, I enjoy reading books, so I love to buy some books ...

So before you came to the English Programme you were already reading in English? (Yeah, Yeah, OK)

And did you do weekly articles with Mr Ben? Did you read articles, or you didn't have to?

No, articles I did for Miss Christine. I had to read five articles about the workshop, so I had to choose five topics talk me about my workshop at the Science Festival, so...uh...I had the five basic main things that in the blood, I used this information about the articles, so I talked the heart, the blood, the cells, the clots and the skins, so it was easy for me to find the articles, but the hard part is to understand every word and keep reading about these stuffs. But at the end I enjoy reading this because I know much information I develop my ideas more than back at the Science Festival.

And did you work with friends on these articles?

No, no, no my friends worked on the same workshop with me, but she had another five articles. So in the end she told me what did she choose and I told her what did I choose. (Uh, hum) It was good.

And what do think about the Listening logs? I would send you the link to listen; did you think that it was useful?

Yeah, It was useful, (How was it useful?) because, I don't know, for me if I was in the class and I did this I would get nervous if someone finished before me, or after me, I would say I would listen very fast, I would be nervous, but at home or somewhere else alone I can listen to it and I can take my time, and read it and ... ah, I improve with my listening actually this semester, the scores, and I think it was very useful.

Was it a good idea that you could choose your own topic?

Yeah, no one likes the same reading the same time, because they think it is boring ... it is hilarious, so choosing our own topic was a good idea.

So, on your own do you listen to radio, do you listen to podcasts in English?

Ah, radio ... I do listen to the radio with my brother, it is mostly in Arabic, but during the day, if I went out, we do listen to English radio here in Abu Dhabi, and it is plays some songs,

OK, but to improve your listening skills do you do anything outside the classroom?

Watching movie actually, watching movies without subtitles, (Uh, hum) by this I can learn more words, new words, I improve my listening, I can understand the meaning from the action movie, from what they

say, from the whole sentence. If I missed one meaning, when I hear the rest of the sentence, I might guess what's the meaning is ...

But it is not easy. When do you should watch a movie without subtitles? When was the first time that you watched a movie without subtitles and you felt happy that you understood it?

When I download some movies from the Internet (Uh, hum, OK) I enjoy downloading movies, and buying CDs and some of the CDs have subtitles but in another language. First time, back in China we bought lots of movies and also that's had the subtitles in Chinese, so we didn't have English subtitles, but from what they say and from what we see, we understand what was said, so it become English more easy for me now to understand if I watch a movie or something. I enjoy watching English movies.

So when was it when that you started to watch movies without subtitles? Two years ago, three years ago? (No, no, four years ago) Four years ago, when you were like fifteen, younger maybe, fourteen. (Yeah, yeah) It is very good. What school did you go to?

Oh, for, um, actually I started in my hometown in Dibba (Uh, huh.) till grade 9, uh 8, then I moved to China for grade 9.

Wait, wait, wait, so you were in Dibba in a government school? (Yeah) OK, so it was just Arabic.

Arabic, but we had English class, but we didn't focus very much in the English, (OK) so ... back then, um, I liked to listen to English songs, and read and do all this, and the teacher said, "You're good in English. You have to develop your language." (Um, hum) So when my father moved to China he said, "You can come and can improve your English." (Ah) so, I said, "OK," so my whole family went with us. And I did, it was really ...

So you learned a lot of English in China?

Yeah, I had to speak in English. There is no Arabic. Laughs. I had to choose another language to learn and I choose Chinese. (Um?) And eh, I had eh so many friends, Arabic friends from Oman, from Bahrain, from Saudi Arabia, but we all spoke English, we didn't speak in Arabic ... laughs.

Why didn't you speak in Arabic? So there were kids of other ambassadors, right?

Yeah, (Um, huh) I think, from my opinion, it is rude to talk in Arabic when you have someone who speak English and he doesn't understand Arabic, (That's right, great) I think that they might say something for us (Yeah, that you talk about them, I agree with you) yeah, so we speak in English (So your speaking was excellent from the beginning) Yeah, because I didn't feel right because all of them the English is a second language for them, (Uh, huh) so we all had the same... (That's right.) so it was OK... (That's good)

And now in the class at the university do you speak English with your friends, sometimes or never?

Eh ... at the class we have to speak in English, but after class we speak in Arabic, and sometimes for, if we discuss something we might say it in English, but there are some Arabic words, I can't say we speak total English. (OK, so in your private life you prefer to speak Arabic.) Yeah! (when you speak with your friends.) Even if I talk to my family through e-mail and Blackberry phone, I speak to them in English.

Really!? To your family?

Yeah, my family, all my cousins speak in English, Ahhhh, I don't know we, we, we used to that. (This is in your family, it is common?) Yeah, (To send message on the Blackberry in English.) Yeah, only for my cousin, and my mothers, I speak to them in Arabic. (And with your father?) Ah, my father? If he talks to me in English I will reply in English, in Arabic, I will reply in Arabic.

That's very good. It is amazing. And so your speaking was very good in the beginning and how did you learn how to read in English?

Read in English? I first, ah ... when I told you I started to read at two ... four years ago, I only watched movies back then. Then I started to notice that there were movies and also novels, (Uh, hum?) so I wanted to know if it is the same or not. So I started with eh, ... what was the book called ah ... About a Boy. (Um, hum. I've seen this movie.) Yeah, I saw this movie in the class ... when ... in the school in China. Then she said, "There is a book if want to read it or not." I thought it would be...a beginning to start to reading, a novel, the whole novel, so I said, "OK," and I read it ... I enjoyed it, and I have catched some ... eh, catched some joy in it, I might be like this, like this, and I feel good, and I I can say I felt good, but I

So, after your first book you felt, "I can do it –

Yeah, I can do it, I can read more books if I enjoy the topic (But that's amazing, How did understand ... all the words and ...)

In the beginning I didn't understand the words, I have to have my dictionary, the [...] dictionary, then the words come back again and again (Uh, hum.) OK, so I notice the words now, and even now if I don't

know one word from the sentence you can guess (Uh, hum.) And when you check, you can ... also, OK

...

That's very good. So, how many books in English do you think have you read in your life?

Ah ... There is four different novels and diary, Diary from Wimpy Kid, (Uh, hum.) in this series, so I've five of them or four. I still have two more to read and even. (It is Diary of the Wimpy Kid, right? There's a movie also.) Two. One part, one part (Uh, hum.) ... so I think in total it is like ten or eleven.

That's very good. So how do you feel about your language skills since you came to the Preparatory Program?

Uh ...mmm... I ... I can say I improved, and but I felt, like sad totally when I saw my IELTS score again, it is 5.5. I thought I would get a 6, and I said I will get a 6, but, but I feel suffer with 5.5 ... I say, "Why?" The hard part is the reading for me. (Uh, hum.) Even, even if I know how to read, but the IELTS exam you have 60 minutes for three articles and ... two or three basic ... and when reading, you can read the whole thing, but in the exam you have can't have it ... (uh, hum) you always have to scan and I hate to scan ... and you have to find information and you have to read and I feel so (disappointed?) yeah.

Yeah, but you know you will eventually get 6 'cause you are a strong student, ah ... so don't be disappointed, so in what area do you think you've improved in English?

Ah, speaking and listening. (Really, how?) Because listening ah... I didn't think for my whole life that I heard a lecture and take notes and then take a quiz, but I did it this year and I think do it, then I read note, then I have a quiz and most of the answers were right, so, so it is good to do that and I felt even good and even for the um, ah, listening and uh ... reading? I can't say ... ahhh... because I already read, (uh, hum.) so I didn't hear much difference (Uh, hum) I feel reading's the same, better then ...

But you didn't start reading newspapers, did you? (No.) No, you didn't like that.

I didn't like reading newspapers, I only read like magazine or reading, even the National. They have good articles. They talk about different things, new things.

Do you read the National sometimes?

If I would come to the mall and I saw the title was interesting, attractive, I have to right then read it, so it depends about what's the details from the front page.

So you don't think your reading has improves so much, but it is maybe because you're already strong? (Not strong, but good.) Good (laughs) You're good, and what about your writing? Do you think ... who's your writing, Mr. George was your Writing ... and you had to write lots of drafts, right? And what else did you have to do in the Writing class?

First, I ... I learned how to plan, but I before I wrote. (You didn't do that before?) Before, I was OK, not good, but OK, but I can't understand the topic, I can read I, I can [...] mistakes I have to put paragraphs, how to put an introduction and conclusion, three bodies. I knew what to do, but NOW by planning, he ... Mr. George teach us how to plan, Ah ... I can develop my ideas, I can ... back then I just write everything. Everything I know, I just writ it. Now I write [...] two or three main ideas. Yeeah, now I have to choose the details [...] all these things, and the last writing I always had some stupid mistakes, few mistake, but the last writing I didn't have any [...] made, he didn't write anything. And I say, "Did you correct it?" He said, Yes." So he said that it was perfect.

Oh, really? (...) So after you write, you would take time to correct it yourself?

Ah, sometimes I have time. Sometimes I take more time at the planning. (Uh um.) But ...ah... he help us, because my class we have to write the plan, the next class you have to start writing. Then he has to print our papers the whole class to read it ... laughs ... that was OK (Was it OK to share with your class?)

Because they read theirs, I read mine. (Do you think learning anything from sharing?) Yes, we have similar ideas ... laughs (laughs) ... we have somewhat similar ideas and ... ah ... I learned from their mistakes. (Uh, um) so sometimes he didn't print all the papers, so he print just maybe few, three boys and one girl. When we read, we can take all vocabs and mistakes. I have to correct my writing, so it was a great idea.

That's good and did you like writing the final drafts, writing first drafts, second drafts?

Yeah, yeah because ah ... you evolve very well ... when I see the first draft and the last draft ... you can see the ... and all the wrong things the ... and the ...

Thank you. So if you could give us advice, you know we have this independent learning is very important. You must learn how to improve your writing, how to read, how to learn ... you know, listen on your own at home. Do you think this system is working or could we improve it or some parts of it are useless?

Ah, we can't say useless because People are not the same, (Uh, um) they have different personalities difference ... before different learning styles and technique – so some of them might think it is very good

for them and some of them say it is maybe, "It is not bad," but for the reading, I think it will be independent, we can read, we can read a lot choosing our own topics not someone giving us their own topic. And for the listening I think it is always independent, but for the speaking you can ... share ... it is other things ...

OK, so do you think that we should leave this English Programme as it is or do you have any suggestions for any changes? (Ah ...) If you were the boss of this university. You are Mr. Jim and you can change things, what would you change? For the next generation, you know? Uh/ For the future students. (If I want to change) To improve the experience.

Theeee ... I think the reading ... Maybe if, I don't know, but we have to change it (How would you change it? Give me some suggest ... some ideas) OK, soooo ... each week we have to have our own book and we all have to read only the first chapter and then we have to tell the other students what we are reading about, and eh if we think it is interesting they might read it, too; because I don't know what the other students 'til now are reading, and I think if I ... my two ... and I start to read my chapters and I say I might like you, but I don't know he's reading a book.

That's a very good idea.

So we have to share with the other. So in the end, so we're all OK, we're all going to read one book if we like the idea. (Uh, um) Because we like to know things in our class, so if I could I would do that.

All right, I think this was very interesting. OK and when I finish writing in the Word, I will send it to you and you can quickly read the document and see if you want to delete anything and so on, OK? (OK) Thank you very much for this. (You're welcome)

George

- Okay so you know I'm doing this research on autonomy - learner autonomy. All right, should we start by what do you think learner autonomy is?
- Uh, for me it is having as much choice as possible into what materials a learner uses, when they're...
- Mm
- Uh, and with that they should have some choice as to what, what style of learning, what uh, what they do with learning. It requires the learner to be trained up in what's available, what different ways to do things, and...learners have to have a lot of...
- Mm. So how do you think this, uh... it is a good definition I think, how does it work with our students, what has been your experience?
- Our students have very little or no experience with being able to choose... anything.
- Mm.
- Um, so, to start with, as an example, what I've done with reading recently, I have to – I feel I have to – build them up to being autonomous, being able to make their own choices, so to begin a semester of bringing in a selection of books, just for them to look at, and to identify which ones they think might be interesting, and how do you choose a book, do you look at... the cover? Do you look at... what's written on the back of the cover? Just what... I mean, actually telling them what many people know from where- from our background, they, they've done that for years; our students never have.
- Mm.
- We're teaching them how to use a book, what, what criteria do you use to choose a book? As opposed to just what's the thinnest one on the shelf, which is quite often what our students will go to, but it doesn't mean it is the one that's going to be the easiest one to read. Um... forcing deadlines. So, the autonomy aspect, once they've gotten the ability to choose their own material, and, and I'll help them in the beginning, give them, you know, get information from them, what do you like to read, they choose a variety of titles and... just, introduce each one to them, um... once they've got that ability, then it is just basically requiring them to do the work.
- Mm
- So, is that truly autonomous? Or not... it is in that they choose what material to use, uh, when you'd like to do it, they get to choose how they interact with it more or less; what I want from them as proof that they're doing this is a reaction,
- Mm

- and that's pretty wide open as to how you react to what you've read, no prescriptive summary that it must be this many words, must be this many... none of that, so they have to choose as to how they're going to react, um, from what they've seen the first time, I might then ask questions, or encourage them to think about other ways of reacting.
- Mm
- Um, but again, I don't lead them too much, I let them do it without a lot of direction the first time, and then give them suggestions afterwards, for improvement.
- Mm
- Or, I like them to say, here, think you could give me more information about that next time.
- Mmm
- So, take what they've given me and help, have them build on that as opposed to... only giving me what I've asked them to give. I find if I am too prescriptive, that's all they will give me.
- Mm, that's right, yeah.
- If I leave it more... open-ended, how many words, I don't know how-- many do you need, um should I write a summary, I don't know, do you want to? What should I include in my reaction, should I include what I was thinking about—that might be nice, nothing definite with the students...
- Mmm
- ...so the the less defined you are I find the more that I get from the students
- Mmm
- But if I tell them this is exactly what I want they will give me that and no more
- Umm that's right
- And quite often less than even the quantity
- Mmm...can you think of like some success stories you had in the last three years here with this uh approach? You know, giving students freedom, to choose what they do and how they do it?
- One of ...one of the students last spring who really took on a lot of reading...
- Mmm
- ...and was being more and more creative in the reviews that she would send in with the reactions she would send to me, um she was saying at one point that her family was up in Ras Al Khaimah and she would call home daily and her younger brother always wanted to know what was happening in her story so pretty much she was translating, over the phone, the story,
- Um
- ...of what she had read so she was then including that in her written reaction and then in one of her following ones she included pictures of her little brother holding the book—so she had taken this book back home one weekend and included amongst all of the things she wrote and what she thought of the characters and how it reminded her of herself as a little girl and she included pictures of her brother holding this book and
- The photograph? (6:00)
- Yeah
- Ooh that's brilliant
- Yeah, so for me that was the greatest success because not only do I feel that this student has now found reading to be enjoyable, she is quite likely going to transfer that to her younger brother
- Umm
- and for me and for me that is more than I could ever hope for, I am quite happy with
- Yeah, now obviously not all.. all students are going to respond so well...what are some of the complete failures? What's their opinion?
- Well, for some of them I cannot get past 'reading is boring'
- Umm
- And I... that has been the biggest stumbling block even when I'm getting time in class to read and taking the whole class over to the learning center and saying okay today all we're doing is sitting in here and reading so they've got a different atmosphere, different place um and I sit and read with them and still no reading report after having helped find what
- Um
- ...what their interests are in all of this there is still just this complete shutdown by some students

- Umm so you've been here three years now almost, right—you've been doing this learning log...what is your opinion about the learning log in general?
- If I were a student
- Hmmhm
- I would hate it
- Okay, why?
- Umm,,. but the problem is if I were a language student I would be doing it...um, one of the reasons that I am so pro-autonomy is that's how I always felt as a learner,
- Um
- I got irritated with teachers telling me what to read because I was reading something else so their requirement of read this book is getting in the way of my reading, right? If I were a language learner in a programme like this I would be doing all kinds of things myself so all of this requirement of record keeping is getting in the way of me reading or getting in the way of whatever else whether it is flash cards, vocabulary the writing I don't have a problem with because that is what has to be done with the writing...umm...the vocabulary not so much because we do give a lot of autonomy with the students there--you can do flash cards, you can do it online you can do this or that so I wouldn't have a problem with that...I would probably gripe most about reading,
- Um
- especially having to type something or write something up
- Um
- I know you've done I think oral book reports especially I've tried to encourage students to do that but haven't...they they prefer for some reason just to type it
- I've got a lot of written reports now, the final, and half of them are plagiarized
- Yeah, I think I would prefer as a student
- Umm
- ... I'll just tell you about it okay?
- Yah
- That's how I would feel
- Umm
- Uh, I think we're getting better with our independent learning log we're making a lot of improvements, we're moving more towards um a variety of acceptable formats which I think is good letting the students then choose or the teachers choose what will they accept from the students... um but if our submission requirements gets in the way of what they should be doing get busy with the paperwork or reporting or recording information as opposed to actually interacting with it or doing something..
- That's right
- ...then I think it is a problem
- Umm
- I think we're moving in the right direction.
- I think I'm with you that we should open it and allow teachers discretion actually even more you know, what interactions we accept I find it however it is sometimes problematic explaining the criteria to students because like you said they want discrete requirements very distinct requirements and they get frustrated and some teachers I feel when we have new teachers sometimes they get frustrated with it
- Yeah, they want to know what what am I supposed to be doing with the students
- Yeah, and how it is going to be assessed
- Yeah and how can they defend themselves if a student questions a mark
- Exactly whereas sometimes you get reports you know that are...the assessments can be quite fluid
- Umhmm
- ... if you know what I mean...it is just (laughing) you seem...experienced...to judge it...
- I think that if a teacher is going to be able to encourage autonomy with their students, that teacher has got to have certain amount of autonomy themselves
- Umm

- If if they're required to tick certain boxes and fill certain reports then they are going to have to make sure that they are getting that information from students so that they can meet their stringent requirements
- Umm
- If the teacher has got the autonomy, right
- Umm
- then the teacher has got to get the student from A to B—how to get the student there? You're a professional, you decide
- Umm
- Then the teacher is going to be able to say right I know where the students are I know where the students need to be and then they can work with the students from that point but if they have to get all kinds of steps in the process the teacher then may not feel the freedom to to let the students explore more possibilities of learning themselves
- Umm, there definitely seem to be two camps about it from what I've heard so far...umm...do I mean to rephrase a little bit this question, maybe more specific...do you think the ILL is effective in fostering autonomy... or how effective?
- On its own I would say the ILL is not but individually the activities are
- Umm...
- so can you have one without the other, I don't know...I see a lot of students though not taking the advantages of what they should be doing... they are looking at the ILL as umm a number or a requirement to be met... I've given you ten pieces of paper
- Umm
- they don't think about what what it was that that led to those pieces of paper all, all they're doing is...they are wanting to tick a box to meet a requirement and it is not ten pieces of paper I wanted I wanted you to learn something from having done these ten pieces of paper and that little click isn't quite happening
- Umm
- And the the ILL should be I would hope pushing them towards that and it is not. They're not looking at what can I do to improve myself they're looking at what can I do to meet this teacher's requirement
- Umm
- But I don't know if that's a follow on from their educational history
- Umm
- ...because I know that's quite similar to what they have been through for the last twelve years
- Um
- ...just do whatever the teacher tells you and if they say I want ten pieces of paper you give them ten pieces of paper and then you're done
- Um
- ...um, so we've got to break some bad habits or different ways of thinking about education and who's responsible
- Um
- ...for education it does take I think on our part a lot of training and discussion with the students as to what is going on now you are not in school you are in university you have to be the one who wants this
- Um
- ...and they have never been put in that place...I don't think any of them have considered that.
- Yeah, but I think we still have a big spectrum of students some who are...few who are very responsible...few who are (laughing)...completely irresponsible and then a big range...
- But then in the middle who haven't considered that they should be responsible for their own education
- Yes
- Right and those are the ones who I think I think it is our responsibility to have a discussion with so that they do understand that...
- Um
- I think that they are very willing and capable of understanding

- Umm
- They just haven't considered it before
- Um...the thing is like at this moment we check them almost weekly on whether they are doing the independent work you know...
- Uhuh
- ... the the background for this is the first two years they were checked once a semester and that led to a hysterical portfolio frenzy
- Yah
- ...two weeks before the final exam which was obviously again counter-productive so I don't know what the solution would be
- Hmm
- you know because when we gave them full freedom then the students complained that now we want to be tested weekly...it is obviously not very independent really...
- Well it is if after a certain time into the semester you stop badgering them about it
- Umm
- So I would give give them helpful reminders I would help them choose their material I would help them find articles to use for other work um but after a few weeks I wouldn't say anything about remember to do this or remember to do that or have you found an article
- Yeah, that's true too
- So the level of autonomy is there I've been looking through the submissions some students gave me twenty different reports over the semester and some gave me four
- Yah
- so the the choice remains there...umm...is that the the student who only did four is that my fault for not chasing him down every week...umm...at what point does the discussion of responsibility...
- Um
- Do you just give up on that, right?
- Um
- Do you remind them about being responsible and do you explain the concept of being responsible for your own education and being responsible for meeting deadlines and if you have that discussion every week are you encouraging autonomy or are you fostering dependence?
- Umm
- so I stopped having that discussion with students and I moved on to other things and if they don't want to join in that's the choice they have made.
- You know some people say like our students are not uh independent because of their culture, Arabic culture doesn't foster autonomy...it is a thought...what do you think about that
- I, I would agree in some aspects that the culture is a very collective culture and wants to make sure that everyone within your circle is okay
- Umm
- Right, so that comes to the cooperativeness,
- Um
- the concept of what is plagiarism and what is helping you friend
- Umm
- ...within your circle you take care of everyone within your circle um and there could be the perception that if the teacher is part of the circle then the teacher is supposed to be taking care of the students
- Umm
- But I think our students also want to be equal within the circle
- Um
- so by by sort of promoting that and saying I'm not going to do this for you, I can't do this for you, you've got to come up and take care of it I think they do rise to that...umm..I think our students' haven't been asked is the main thing...
- Haven't been asked?
- Haven't been asked to be responsible
- Um

- Right, it is not that they're not capable of autonomy, it is not that their culture prevents autonomy it is just that they haven't considered it it is not that our students don't like to read they just never thought about it
- Um
- Many students once you help them find a book that they enjoy
- Um
- ...find them a couple of books they enjoy, they find books on their own...they just haven't thought about it before...so I think there are many things that there are cultural differences in their society culture their educational culture that they've come from and the educational culture that we're expecting them to fit into now
- Um
- And I think one of our biggest responsibilities and challenges is to make sure that students are aware of what this transition is and to help them make that transition
- Umm
- It is not that they can't be autonomous but they need to be supported towards autonomy and they have to be given the opportunity to be autonomous
- Umm
- And it is quite easy in the first two weeks to say right, you have to do all this and then you don't say anything again and then the second week you throw up your hands and well the students don't know how to be autonomous
- Do you think the age, they're quite young, it is seventeen, eighteen when they come to the prep program, would be also a factor, you know, I mean are young people in other countries, seventeen years old responsible autonomous
- Some yes some no, I think a higher number are in different places
- Umm
- And it could be that in certain places fewer students percentage wise would be autonomous than they are here
- Um
- I think some of the Asian countries might be even more dependent on a teacher and wanting to have everything perfect according to what the teacher says
- Um
- Um I think that young people at university are especially the first chance away from home make bad decisions
- Yah I think so
- So if...again, it goes back to talking with the students and and counseling them through what they really should be doing...
- Um
- And yeah, it is more fun to stay up all night playing Play Station with your friends than actually studying...
- Yah
- Um...but is that the best decision you should have made last night you know you had a quiz—
- Well, they kind of... well I remember when I was first year they had some students they come from small towns, their first time away from home, there's no one controlling what they do they get drunk with freedom
- Yah, and so yah you are staying up all night not studying just chatting with your friends or playing Play Station or jerking around all day...
- Just making bad decisions (laughing)
- It is just making bad decisions...and I do have that conversation with students too...you know, as a Freshman, in college I made some bad decisions, here's what happened...now some of you need to think about the decisions you're making, is that the best decision for you in this point in time, are you going to be able to live with the consequences of that decision, you know...so...
- Um
- I think a lot of times we do forget that they are young
- Um
- And we do forget that some of these conversations they haven't had

- Um
- in terms of who's responsible for learning
- Well I think many students uh now it is changing but many parents haven't been to university so they really can't--
- --they have no one to
- No background--
- --and a lot of them they're probably the oldest in their family so they don't have an older brother or sister to tell them this is what university is like, so yah it is new in many ways to a lot of them
- Yah
- And that is why part of becoming independent becoming an autonomous learner requires a lot of discussion with people who know how to do that
- Um
- We can't expect our students to become autonomous on their own
- Um
- They've got to be... led towards autonomy
- Um... So what do your students think about the ILL, have you heard any comments, recurring comments and feedback on the reading--
- Not so much—
- -- and listening ILL?
- --not so much in this semester
- Hmhm
- I have two sections of reading so if they are complaining about the reading ILL they're not complaining to me
- Hm
- And I haven't heard complaints about other...other...
- Hmm
- ...learning, independent learning requirements.
- No, 'cos you don't have vocabulary this semester, do you?
- No
- And listening and speaking? So you're only doing reading and writing.
- Reading and writing...and the writing, there's no way around the writing
- Hmm
- We've got to do the plan, we've got to do the draft, you gotta do the second draft...
- Yes
- I force that so there isn't autonomy--
- Well I think that—
- --in the writing class, what I give them autonomy is the topic, we go over the rhetorical style, whether it is cause and effect or argument or whatever and they can brainstorm possible topics and they can choose one of the ones that they've listed on the board or they can come up with one on their own
- Hm
- So the autonomy in writing is by selecting their own topic
- And choosing to submit the essay I suppose
- And choosing to do the multiple drafts until it is better and choosing to learn from what they've done instead of just doing the same thing again...
- Hm
- and the autonomy there is more forced, but--
- But because of the nature of the skill, you know, there has to be more guidance and it is hardly ever been controversial, no one's ever, I don't remember students ever complaining, they are actually quite grateful from my experience that you're marking the essays I think for the...
- Yah, the complaints come mostly from reading because reading is boring and there's no point in studying vocabulary
- Yah, I've heard—

- --now, for me as a language learner, I don't know how you can learn a language without words... and mostly because of my background I view reading as being an important part of a language, uh I've been what I consider and still am to a certain extent a functional illiterate in Thai.
- Umm
- You know, I can't read—I have put forth the effort, I do understand what our students are going through—it is work
- Hm
- I love reading, but reading in Thai to me is work, it is not fun—
- Strenuous
- Yah, so I...I haven't made that step up to reading you know
- Hm
- A full language learner--user in that language
- Hm
- So, um, I still try to though, I don't give up and say reading is boring I just say well, this is hard work
- Yah..
- and I've got other things that are going to take my time right now, so I find another excuse.
- Yah, why do you think students don't like vocabulary lists or even the vocabulary we tried this semester, vocabulary notebooks and this is their least favourite activity that I know from the feedback and they hate doing it, they don't feel that it is useful...
- I have no understanding of that whatsoever because as a language learner I have made myself flashcards, I have gone out into the marketplace and questioned people selling things, what is this
- Yah
- And you know I get stares, what do you mean what is this it is what you find, can't you see it, but then they realize I am asking what's the word for this and I've got to go out and learn vocabulary as opposed to just wait so I really don't understand that with our students and I've tried to ask them about it and I can't even get them to respond in a way that makes sense to me
- Yah, it doesn't because the common response is that they say oh just copy and paste even if they do it by hand you know it is just copy and paste so uh yah that will be something I will ask students more in depth about you know 'cos I've never and we've changed it so many times the vocabulary, it was electronic, it was Spelling City, now it is a notebook, we have flash cards you know we are going out of our way with the vocabulary and they don't like it..
- Umum...they're not putting it to use at all
- Well we have a few students...even in the last exam XXXX came and took her notebook from me before I marked it for the final because she said she wanted to use it, and her notebook has always been very good
- Yah
- And in the past we had a few students--
- --yah I had a few in my class, in my writing class last spring who I know were putting words in that they had learned in their IELTS or their reading class...
- Yah
- ...so some students do
- But very few
- Very few
- Very few...okay so overall, overall, so what would be, what are some obstacles you've face when you've tried to implement the ILL in your teaching?
- Biggest obstacle is student buy-in
- Um
- Uh, if students were more willing to accept the benefit of this they would then be able to have more autonomy so in some ways it is the student perception of everything that is the biggest obstacle and I'm not sure how to overcome that I have discussions with students and even this semester trying to successfully sell the idea of reading to students, a number of them have and yet a number of them who did quite a lot of reading this semester still hold on to the belief that reading is boring

- Hmm
- so was I successful or not, I have no idea, will they continue reading, not with that kind of an attitude...
- No
- ...um, they were able to be somewhat autonomous for a semester
- Hm
- Will they continue doing it next semester, will they continue during the break...that, that, that's the biggest problem I think as a teacher pushing students to be autonomous is quite often you never know if you were successful or not
- So it should be a long-term change shouldn't it, yah that's, that's interesting maybe I should interview students who finished prep three years ago and see--
- ...what they are doing with vocabulary now now that it is maybe more of a requirement, you know what are you doing with vocabulary in your fluid dynamics class, you doing anything with vocabulary, I don't know...
- Hm
- How can you, I..I...don't understand for myself from my perspective if I were taking university courses in a second language how, how do you do that without really knowing and wanting to develop your language skills?
- Hm
- So...
- Um...
- I'm stunned
- So my final question...do you, do you like the ILL, do you like it?
- I like the activities I like that it gives some freedom to the teacher and to the students um I think at the is point it is the best way you can get the students to do what they need to do...it also provides a framework for all instructors...you know if we didn't have that and we had have I don't know what the student perception would be of that here's the commonality even if the teacher requirement but not too restrictively so overall without something better to replace it, yah I guess I like it.

Appendix J: NVivo Summary of Themes and Nodes

| Themes | Nodes: sources/references |
|--|--|
| Agency | choice versus no choice 9/37 freedom to choose what to read or listen 6/21 responsibility 6/11 changing behaviour becoming more indep 6/10 motivation 2/8 taking charge control 6/7 reflection 4/6 initiative 2/4 challenging oneself 3/4 involvement 2/3 goals 2/3 life-long learning 1/1 critical thinking 1/1 learning goals 1/1 problem solving 1/1 trust versus no trust 1/1 confidence 1/1 |
| Learning as a social activity / Sociocultural theory | working alone 7/22 collaboration 7/21 learning English through socializing 5/19 fun 4/7 fun versus learning English 2/6 family 2/5 learning from more able peers 2/4 friends 2/3 prevalence of English culture in the Gulf 2/2 science in action projects 1/2 |

| | |
|---|--|
| <p>In-class versus out-of-class / Technology</p> | <p>out-of-class learning 9/28 movies 6/15 songs 6/11 skills not transferable to IELTS 4/8 guessing meaning of new words from context 4/7 in class activities 4/6 gaming and learning English 2/5 speaking English outside the class 3/3 speaking like a native speaker 3/3 watching videos 2/3 learning English in dormitories 2/3 YouTube 3/3 independent learning and technology 2/2 Twitter 2/2 being embarrassed in class 2/2 talking to native speakers 1/2 translating new vocab 1/1 listening to native speakers 1/1 English as a skill 1/1 code switching 1/1 songs and vocabulary 1/1 internet 1/1</p> |
| <p>Teacher's role / Learner Autonomy versus Teacher Autonomy</p> | <p>teacher's role 9/37 teacher as an advisor 3/6 teacher as a coach 2/6 teacher as a parent 2/4 teacher as a whip 2/3 no teacher 1/2 spoon-feeding 2/2 caring teacher 1/1 reductionist view of learning 1/1 need teacher 5/9 teacher autonomy 3/6 teacher as a source of wisdom 1/1</p> |
| <p>Students as individuals versus students as a homogeneous group</p> | <p>independent learner works hard 3/11 student interests 6/16 students as homogeneous entity 1/7 focus on individual student needs 4/4 learning styles 2/4 learning strategies 3/3 personalising content 2/3 students as individuals 1/2 gender differences 1/1 good students behave in class 1/1 stereotyping 1/1</p> |

| | |
|------------------------|---|
| Failure versus Success | feeling failure / discouragement 1/3 feeling of achievement 1/2 |
| Ethnocentrism | students cultural background 4/13 teacher ethnocentrism 2/8 past learning experience 4/6 our students as different from other students |
| Us versus Them | native-speakerism 3/18 students deficient lacking 2/13 high school versus university 3/5 us versus them 2/3 high school teachers as lacking 1/1 me versus other students 3/5 |
| Individual skills | ILL and reading skills 9/40 ILL and vocabulary 9/26 ILL and listening skills 7/19 ILL and writing skills 6/15 ILL and speaking skills 5/14 ILL and grammar 2/3 |

| | |
|-----|---|
| ILL | <p>ILL workload 8/19 ILL beneficial 6/17 plagiarism 6/13 ILL as a burden 5/10 assessment 3/10 ILL and technology 5/9 ILL homework or duty 5/8 ILL time consuming 4/7 ILL searching for info on your own 2/6 ILL boring 4/6 time-management 2/5 course requirement 4/5 need to standardize 3/5 ILL successful 3/5 needs more structure 2/4 no prescriptive guidelines 1/4 need support for teacher guidelines 3/3 too weak language skills to do logs 1/3</p> |
|-----|---|

Appendix K: Surveys: Quantitative Data Summary

Student Survey Spring 2012

| Questions | Strongly Disagree % | Disagree % | Agree % | Strongly Agree % | n/a % |
|--|---------------------|------------|---------|------------------|-------|
| I feel that I have become more independent as a learner. | 3.6 | 10.7 | 57.1 | 28.6 | |
| I sometimes borrowed old logs from friends who had already completed the ILL so that I could get credit. | 42.9 | 35.7 | 10.7 | 10.7 | |
| I will continue reading newspapers after the course. | 10.7 | 21.4 | 32.1 | 25 | 10.7 |
| I will continue reading books after the course. | 0 | 23 | 53.8 | 15.4 | 7.7 |
| I received enough help from my teachers while working on the ILL. | 0 | 14.3 | 57.1 | 25 | 3.6 |
| I prefer to submit my logs in Moodle than on paper. | 3.6 | 17.9 | 39.3 | 39.3 | |
| The Reading Log helped me become an independent reader. | 3.7 | 11.1 | 55.6 | 22.2 | 7.4 |
| The amount of assigned reading for the ILL was too much. | 0 | 14.8 | 48.1 | 33.3 | 3.7 |
| The reading log helped me to enjoy the reading. | 0 | 59.3 | 22.2 | 14.8 | 3.7 |
| Writing the reading reports is a good idea. | 7.7 | 34.6 | 50 | 3.8 | 3.8 |
| I prefer to tell my teacher about the stories. | 0 | 22.2 | 37 | 37 | 3.7 |
| The amount of assigned listening was too much. | 3.7 | 29.6 | 40.7 | 22.2 | 3.7 |
| The extensive listening passages were too long. | 3.8 | 11.5 | 42.3 | 423 | |
| The extensive listening topics were interesting. | 40.7 | 29.6 | 25.9 | 3.7 | |
| I sometimes completed the questionnaires without listening to the whole passage. | 11.5 | 11.5 | 50 | 23 | 3.8 |
| I think it is a good idea to write many drafts for each essay. | 4 | 0 | 32 | 60 | 4 |
| The writing checklist helped me learn from my mistakes. | 4 | 0 | 44 | 52 | |
| The Vocabulary Log helped me work on my vocabulary more. | 20 | 12 | 40 | 28 | |

| | | | | | |
|------------------------------------|----|----|----|----|---|
| I enjoyed doing my Vocabulary Log. | 24 | 20 | 36 | 16 | 4 |
|------------------------------------|----|----|----|----|---|

Student Survey Spring 2013

| Question | Strongly Disagree % | Disagree % | Agree % | Strongly Agree % | n/a % |
|---|---------------------|------------|---------|------------------|-------|
| I feel that I have become more independent as a learner. | 29.4 | 5.9 | 41.2 | 23.5 | |
| Reading Log helped me improve my skills in English. | 5.9 | 5.9 | 29.4 | 52.9 | 5.9 |
| I shared interesting articles with friends/ | 5.9 | 35.3 | 35.3 | 11.8 | 11.7 |
| I prefer to read short and easy article. | 5.9 | 11.8 | 29.4 | 41.2 | 11.7 |
| I had a lot of freedom in selecting the reading materials for my Reading Log. | 11.8 | 11.8 | 23.5 | 47 | 5.9 |
| I think that the Independent Reading Log is a waste of time. | 52.9 | 35.3 | 11.8 | 0 | |
| The Listening Log helped me improve my listening skills in English. | 11.7 | 11.8 | 35.3 | 41.2 | |
| I enjoyed listening to programmes outside the class. | 11.8 | 23.5 | 29.4 | 29.4 | 5.9 |
| I had a lot of freedom in selecting the listening programmes for my Logs. | 17.7 | 11.8 | 35.3 | 29.4 | 5.8 |
| I chose the first programme that I saw on the internet. | 23.5 | 23.5 | 0 | 29.4 | 23.6 |
| We often worked on the Listening Logs in small groups. | 17.7 | 35.3 | 23.5 | 11.8 | 11.7 |
| I sometimes borrowed old logs from friends who had already completed the course so that I could get credit. | 52.9 | 11.8 | 0 | 17.7 | 17.6 |
| I think that listening to programmes outside the class is a waste of my time. | 41.2 | 41.2 | 5.9 | 5.9 | 5.8 |
| I just want to practise reading and listening for the IELTS exam. | 35.3 | 11.8 | 23.5 | 17.6 | 11.8 |

Student Survey Fall 2013

| Question | Strongly Disagree % | Disagree % | Agree % | Strongly Agree % | Don't Know % |
|--|---------------------|------------|---------|------------------|--------------|
| I enjoyed doing the Listening Logs every week. | 4 | 18 | 58 | 8 | 12 |
| Listening Logs helped me find English programmes easily. | 2 | 10 | 76 | 4 | 8 |
| There was a lot of freedom to choose which programmes to listen. | 2 | 8 | 54 | 36 | 0 |
| I think the teacher should choose all the programmes for us. | 30 | 36 | 12 | 8 | 14 |
| The programmes were too difficult. | 24 | 64 | 8 | | 4 |
| I think we need to have more freedom when we choose programmes to watch. | | 30 | 36 | 20 | 14 |
| Some students worked together on their Listening Logs. | 12 | 20 | 28 | | 40 |
| I sometimes recommended programmes to my friends. | 8 | 24 | 56 | | 12 |
| It was the first time I watched and listened to English programmes online. | 16 | 42 | 26 | 6 | 10 |
| Doing the Listening Logs was too much work. | 14 | 62 | 16 | 4 | 4 |
| I will continue listening to English programmes after this course. | 2 | 6 | 50 | 20 | 22 |
| I would recommend doing the Listening Logs next semester. | 4 | 14 | 54 | 16 | 12 |

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