AN ECOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE ON LANGUAGE LEARNING BEYOND THE CLASSROOM IN A CHALLENGING ENVIRONMENT: A STUDY OF LEARNERS' EXPERIENCES, BELIEFS AND AUTONOMY.

by

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Abstract

This research explores the complexity of experiences of learning English beyond the classroom in a challenging Algerian setting.

Language learning has two dimensions, inside the classroom and beyond the classroom. Studies on language learning beyond the classroom are relatively scarce, in part because this dimension is to some extent hidden (Benson, 2011a). Furthermore, in the Algerian setting, studies about language learning and aspects such as autonomy are mostly classroom-based and dependent on teachers' perspectives. This calls for more LBC studies, which are contextually appropriate and primarily based on the learners' personal understandings of their learning experiences. This will provide insights that can contribute to triggering change that is fit for the learners, their circumstances and their needs.

Adopting an ecological and person-in-context view, this study taps into the learning beyond the classroom (LBC) experiences of six Algerian learners in a challenging environment. It aims to explore the relationship between the learners and the environment. More specifically, it explores the influence of this environment on the nature of the learners' experience, their perceptions of learning affordances and their exercise of autonomy beyond the classroom through different activities.

The study utilises a qualitative study design that draws from narrative inquiry to elicit learner perspectives on the LBC experience. It is based on language learning histories (LLHs) written by the participants in the study, which were followed by a set of semi-structured interviews customised for each participant based on their LLHs. Data collection was concluded with a focus group which discussed the shared and contested views on LBC experiences in their environment.

The findings suggest that the experiences of learning English beyond the classroom were characterised by persistence and creativity. The environment presented several challenges (e.g., the community's negative attitude to foreign language use, and the low status of English) and few opportunities for English language learning or practice. Despite this, the participants managed to find or create learning opportunities based on their interests and goals. The findings showed that the participants carry a set of language learner beliefs (e.g., the value of having a strong connection with the language) and motivations (e.g., motivation for improvement of local English learning situation) that reflect a synergy between the environment's influence and the learner's agency. These beliefs and motivations aided the learners in the perception of learning affordances, which in turn allowed the participants to bypass the challenges of the environment and interact with LBC resources that fit

with these beliefs and goals. The findings revealed a dynamic exercise of autonomy, unique to the learners in their environment and seen in different forms throughout the narratives. The dynamic aspect is drawn from the fact that the participants willingly give up control and change from self to other-directed learning to satisfy needs.

The study has implications over three levels: theoretical, methodological and pedagogic implications. Concerning theory, the implications are for local researchers and researchers in similar settings to view challenging learning circumstances positively with consideration of how learners learn despite the difficulties. Additionally, the research calls for the use of the ecological perspective to view LBC experiences holistically and with reference to the relationship between the environment and the learner, reflecting aspects such as learner beliefs, motivations and autonomy.

The study also has implications for methodology. They include the empowerment and prioritization of learners' perspectives, the need for awareness of the pitfalls of conducting research in settings familiar to the researcher, and a demonstration of how to manage research limited by time or circumstances.

In terms of pedagogic implications, the study demonstrates different activities learners in challenging environments can use. It also shows how LLHs are a strong tool through which learners can reflect on their learning experiences.

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1. Introduction

This thesis explores experiences of learning English beyond the classroom (LBC) in a challenging Algerian environment. The overarching objective is to learn about LBC from the learners' own understandings of their experiences throughout their learning careers, in doing so, this study empowers their perspectives.

The study reveals that the six participants' experiences carry themes of persistence and creativity in being successful English language learners despite the limitations and difficulties their classroom and local environments presented. This persistence and creativity come from their ability to perceive and use learning resources, which is mediated by their language learner beliefs and their personal agendas. The insights demonstrate the participants' emotional engagement with the English language and/or its resources, and their active role in creating their LBC experience from their first contact with English until their current status as university students. Moreover, this thesis demonstrates the participants' exercise of autonomy, in contrast to much of the Algerian-based literature which deems learners as unready to be autonomous. Through the learners' perspectives of their LBC experience, usually hidden from teachers and researchers, this autonomous practice was revealed in different ways, involving different degrees of taking control over their LBC in a challenging environment.

A qualitative and holistic perspective was taken to uncover learners' experiences, focusing on what the learner has to say about their own learning. This was achieved here through the adoption of the interpretive qualitative approach, drawing insight from the narrative inquiry. Language learning histories (LLHs) were used to elicit written narratives about the participant's learning experiences. The LLHs served as the nucleus of the study as they helped the participants think about their language learning careers. Insights from the written narratives were used to construct customised semi-structured interviews to further explore the LBC experience and address the research aims and questions. What was learned from the LLHs and interviews was then used to construct a long focus group discussion that elicited a multiplicity of shared and contested views about learning English beyond the classroom in the participants' and served as a follow-up to their previous contributions.

This introduction chapter Introduces my personal perspective and its relevance. It highlights the background and the focus of the study. It also discusses the research questions' development. It then offers notes on terminology and finally outline of the thesis structure.

1.1. Personal perspective and positionality

Whilst in the final year of my master's programme at the university near my home in Algeria, our department organized a meeting day. A few local researchers were invited to present their studies. The shared theme was improving language learning. At one point, as part of a question and answer session, the topic of the importance of authentic exposure to English was brought up. I raised my hand and shared the following comment "it would be great to encourage English language learners to watch vlogs made by native speakers about their daily lives". The answer that my comment received was a simple "yes, thank you" and the session carried on with no reference to what I said. Later, a friend of mine shared how he too watches vlogs and we spoke that afternoon about our favourite channels. I went home with the idea that experiences such as mine, and my friend's are worth studying. The next year, I was part of a PhD pre-sessional in the UK. The topic of research that I proposed at that time was "language learning through YouTube vlogs" which later evolved to become this thesis. My personal experience was, therefore, a catalyst for the present study. In fact, the first language learning history added to this study's repertoire is my own and is depicted below:

The first memory that I can recall involving English is that time when I was in my fourth or fifth year of primary school. I was around 10 or 11 years old. The movie Titanic was aired on the national TV channel, but I did not see it. The next day every one of my classmates was talking about it, but what caught my attention was this one classmate who was singing the infamous Celine Dion song with made-up English words. It appealed to me, and I started to hum it with my own made-up English, and I believe that I gained an interest in the language since then.

Middle school was when English was first introduced to our curriculum. I remember the first session of the English language course there. That day, the teacher told us that we will be able to learn English in one month. I do not think I learned in a month, but my progress was fast that year, and I used to get the best marks in that course. The first year of middle school

was also the year my family first installed satellite TV. I was captivated and my life changed. I started to watch Disney shows subtitled in Arabic. This included shows like Lizzy McGuire, Even Stevens, That's So Raven, Hannah Montana and many more. I remember how excited I was to run back home at 5 to watch The Power Rangers. I used to watch the shows, try to learn their songs, and remember some expressions, I even wished that I had lives like theirs, and study in a school where everyone had their own locker.

That period was also when we first got the internet. At first, I did not use it much, then I started watching YouTube videos of anime fights with songs added to them, and that was when I discovered Likin Park, It was perhaps the first music band I developed an interest in. Thanks to it, I made a friend who heard me singing one of their songs in the courtyard of the school. We got close and later he gave me some CDs that included some Linkin Park albums, System of a Down and Three Days Grace. He also included a game. It was called Wolfenstein Enemy Territory, a shooting game where two teams play Allies or Axis and compete against each other to finish historical battles' objectives. The game used a built-in message system, where players chat with each other and there was the possibility of external voice chat. I made many friends in-game and learned various expressions, which helped me correct my English in different ways. Another activity I did was chat programs like skype and yahoo messenger, although I mostly spoke to my classmates, I did have one friend I spoke to a lot from Germany who I met in the game I mentioned before.

Middle school life was mostly spent on video games and listening to music and learning to sing along songs. By the end of it, I also started reading Mangas (translated Japanese comics).

High school was a different experience from middle school. My English was remarkably better, and I distinguished myself as someone who knows English. I was so confident that I stopped buying notebooks to write lessons on, as I believed I did not need them, and the teachers I had did not comment on that. During that time, I started playing World of Warcraft, which is a well-known and popular massively multiplayer online roleplaying game (MMORPG) where you can create your character and explore a vast world, full of immersive quests, and adventures as well as meet people, fight them and make friends. I benefited a lot from that

game, especially from immersing in its lore and learning different game character quotes. During high school I also become an avid consumer of translated Mangas (Japanese comics), I also watched lots of subtitled Japanese anime. In 2010 I created my first Facebook account where I mostly used English, and it is the same Facebook page that I use today.

At university, I interacted with other English language learners. I had the opportunity to speak in English more often, in class or while hanging out at the university with my peers. I also sang, as part of a small band with my friends. We covered classic rock songs or wrote our own. During University we had different courses in our first two years to improve our English. Even if I believe that I am more of a naturalistic, self-directed learner, I have benefited a lot from advanced grammar lessons, especially about tenses and their appropriate use.

As a language learner I have always thought of myself as a consumer, the more English Language material I exposed myself to, the better I became, although I did benefit from grammar lessons at the university level, so I cannot ignore classroom instruction. My greatest strength is that I am very familiar with western culture, and that helped me greatly in understanding movies and shows without subtitles, and I noticed that I'm better at understating comedy movies while watching them with my friends. I understand most of the jokes while they do not. This also helped a lot me in interacting with native speakers online or in-person when I moved to the UK.

My personal experience of learning English beyond the classroom plays a starting point in this study. Although it is important to point out that I had to be actively attentive to the effects of my experience and assumptions could make on the qualitative interpretations. As my approach to the study tries to empower the participants' perspectives, I had to be careful not to put mine first.

Therefore, the role of my personal experience can be summarised in the following points:

1. giving me an insider perspective to LBC in that environment due to my familiarity with the area and also the available learning resources.

2. allowing me to build a relationship with the participants as they considered me one of them.

3. allowing my study to have a unique perspective as before being a researcher I am an Algerian English language learner first.

1.2. Developing the focus of the study

In this section I show the focus of the study by providing a background to it and an account of the development of research aims and questions.

1.2.1. Background to the study

Language learning occurs in two different dimensions: the classroom, which is typically the first context that comes to mind when language learning is mentioned, and the second one is outside the classroom premises.

My thesis is concerned with the second dimension, where the focus is on a few Algerian individuals' language learning beyond the classroom in their local area. As shown in the previous section, my personal experience of learning English in the said area, where the English language holds a minor position compared to Arabic and French, is a catalyst to the study, as, through the years, I have turned to out-of-class practices such as multiplayer online video games and my interest in rock music, which to my belief, have contributed primarily on my current level of English as opposed to classroom instruction that I have always found unsatisfying. Therefore, my ongoing and evolving reflections and understanding of my experience with out-of-class activities are important parts of the study and influential to some degree. The nature of the study setting also is a motivation as well as a focal point. It is conducted in the province of Naama. It is located in the western inner region of vast Algeria, mainly characterised by a slower rate of development compared to northern areas, which is not only seen in the quality of life but also reflected greatly on the status of the English language and the limited number of private language schools and access to different exchange and study programs offered by the government in cooperation with different countries, such as the U.S, Canada and U.K as part of an ongoing reform (Belmihoub, 2018.p. 211)

Another important element for conducting this research is the current need to focus on language learning beyond the classroom, which Benson (2011a) introduced as a field ripe for research and is concerned with learning in separation from traditional instructional contexts.

According to Richards (2014, p. 2), even though language teaching is a preparation for language uses beyond the classroom, major focus spanning across the last 100 years has been put on classroom learning, syllabus design, teacher training and creating opportunities for authenticity within classrooms. In addition to that, the number of studies on language learning outside the traditional classroom contexts is fewer than classroom-based ones (Benson, 2011a; Richards, 2014; Lai, 2015). The role that classroom instruction plays cannot be denied, however, it can be faced with certain limitations. Richards (2014, p. 2) cites some of them including classroom size, time limits, teacher proficiency, test-driven curriculums and limited opportunities for authentic communication. Today, thanks to technological and broadcast advancements, the world outside the classroom can afford several possible venues for language learning such as via social media, as well as increased opportunities for face-to-face communication with native speakers. Colley, Hodkinson, and Malcolm (2003, p. 265) state that learning consists of formal and informal elements and it is important to understand their natures, the relationship between them, and also to find a balance between the two that yields positive learning outcomes. Thus, more attention should be paid to out-of-class language learning contexts and practices whose range according to Benson (2011a, p. 9) far exceeds that of classroom settings.

In recent years, there have been a growing number of studies in language learning beyond the classroom, covering different aspects such as learners' perceptions of out-of-class learning and in-class learning (Lai, 2014), out-of-class language learning with technology (Lai, Hu and Lyu, 2018) and comparing informal out-of-class learning with in-class (Cole and Vanderplank, 2016). However, what most of the studies share is that they are based in areas where English is spoken widely in the community. On the other hand, the area of this study is in the Algerian inland province of Naama which is locally known, alongside similar places of inland and southern Algeria, with low proficiency and command of foreign languages including English and French, as opposed to northern areas. Therefore, a study in such an environment that aims to draw local English learners' experiences and rich narratives, with regards to

language learning beyond the classroom will surely offer significant insights, and its interpretations will enrich the growing body of LBC literature.

1.2.2. Developing the research aims and questions

In my initial research proposal, I asked four research questions that contributed to directing my study to its current focus. These questions were:

1. What opportunities for language learning beyond the classroom are available to the learners?

2. How do the learners make use of the available opportunities for language learning beyond the classroom?

3. What are the learners' beliefs towards LBC?

4. How did these beliefs affect the learners' LBC practices?

After exploring the literature, developing my understanding of the LBC experiences and reflecting on the nature of the environment and the challenges it presents, I gained an interest in the notion of learning ecology, which is described by Baron (2004, P. 6) as "the accessed set of contexts, comprised of configurations of activities, material resources and relationships, found in co-located physical or virtual spaces that provide opportunities for learning". Kashiwa and Benson (2018, p. 728) add that "Sustained learning typically involves engagement with many such contexts over time". This brings forth a temporal element and a central concept to my research that Benson (2011b) called "language learning careers", which refers to the entire experience of learning a language from first contact to the present (2011b, p. 548). This term is employed in this thesis since my research aims to elicit information about the participants' experiences throughout all their years of learning English in their environment, therefore, this study explores language learners' careers beyond the classroom in a challenging environment.

Adopting an ecological perspective helped me take on a more holistic and context-appropriate standpoint. Considering English language learning beyond the classroom in a linguistically under-resourced environment, paired with an ecological view of context and a focus on learners' beliefs and lived experiences, my research focuses less on what opportunities are available to the learners and more on the relationships of the learners and

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their environment that define the LBC experience and on the perceptions and interactions involved in the learning process.

Furthermore, taking on the ecological stance promoted the concept of autonomy as a focus of the study. Initially, autonomy was not among the main aims of the study as it is principally at the heart of LBC practice, making it self-explanatory. However, while exploring Algerian literature about autonomy and Algerian learners' readiness to be autonomous, I noticed the need for further investigation, but more from the learners' perspectives. Studies on learner autonomy by Algerian researchers present important endeavours in improving language teaching and learning in Algeria (e.g. Benaissi, 2015; Hadi, 2017; Arib and Maouche, 2021). What the findings share is an agreement on Algerian learners' unreadiness for autonomy. This was referred to cultural reasons, more specifically the Arabo-Islamic influences, such as the teachers' authoritative and highly respected personas, borrowed from Quranic study schools that most learners attend at early ages, which makes learners dependent on the teachers. Looking at the approaches and methodologies adopted in those studies, there are some points which may explain the claims. First, there seems to be a dependence on teachers' perspectives as the main source of data and basing the studies about autonomous language learning on what occurs inside the classroom. Second, when the learners are involved, the studies seem to not consider the learner's perspectives in depth, instead, they tend to implement mass questionnaires with +100 students and conduct classroom observations. Thirdly, most of the findings are classroom-based, which leaves much to explore in terms of outside the classroom practices. The contribution of my study, therefore, lies in its empowerment of learners' perspectives, its focus on learning in the vast world beyond the classroom, and also its use of ecological definitions of autonomy, which consider different modes of learning and control, including ones that are often invisible to the teachers and scholars using conventional methods that are limited to what occurs in the classroom while neglecting LBC.

Therefore, in my study, through the ecological perspective, I explore the complexity of LBC experiences of a small number of six Algerian English language learners. The thesis focuses on the learners, their environment, and the relationship between the two. Moreover, in adopting ecology of learning I borrow the concept of learning affordances, which are "Action

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in potential" (Van Lier, 2004, p. 69), however, these affordances are not properties of the environment, but instead, they are a result of the learners' interaction with the environment and their perception of them (Van Lier, 2004; Menezes, 2011). To explore the perceptions of affordances and how they have contributed to the learning experiences, my study aims to understand the environment and the participants' beliefs about learning and the different learning resources involved.

With all of that in mind, the present thesis addresses the following research questions:

1. How has the environment influenced the participants' language learning beyond the classroom experience?

2. What language learner beliefs do the participants hold that reflect their language learning experience in their environment?

3. To what extent is autonomy exercised throughout the learners' experiences beyond the classroom?

1.3. Notes on terminology

This section defines the main concepts in the thesis.

LBC: short for language learning beyond the classroom. First It refers to the field of studying learning in contexts other than the conventional classroom. Second it is the process of learning a language in a multitude of interacting settings in virtual or physical spaces beyond the classroom.

Language learning careers: this refers to an individual's experience of learning a particular language from their first contact with it to the present.

Ecology of learning and the ecological perspective: I use the term ecology to refer to the totality of complex relationships between the learner and environment involved in learning. In Barron's (2004, p. 6) words ecology of learning is "the accessed set of contexts, comprised of configurations of activities, material resources and relationships, found in co-located physical or virtual spaces that provide opportunities for learning". The ecological perspective

studies these contexts and relationships and views language learning not as a separate aspect but within the totality of learners' lives and as a result of their interactions and participation in meaningful events.

Language learner beliefs: in this study I use a broad definition to language learner beliefs to refer to them as "the conceptions, ideas and opinions learners have about L2 learning and teaching and language itself" (Kalaja, Barcelos and Aro, 2018, p. 222).

Language learner autonomy: in this study, autonomy is not total independence. It refers to the learners' ability to chart their own paths through a complex multitude of contexts, resources, opportunities and challenges to achieve their language related goals. In other words, autonomy is "a capacity for intentional use in context of a range of interacting resources toward learning goals" (Palfreyman, 2014, p. 182).

Qualitative study that draws from narrative inquiry: The present study uses a mixture of narrative (language learning histories) and non-narrative data (Interviews and focus group), which means that referring to it as simply a narrative study is misleading. Instead, I refer it as a qualitative study that draws of narrative inquiry which I define as any qualitative endeavor that makes use of narrative and non-narrative data and employs qualitative analysis methods such as thematic analysis combined with narrative thinking to guide interpretations and maintain chronological coherence.

1.3. Thesis structure

Here I outline the structure of this thesis

Chapter 1: Introduction

It is the present chapter where I provide an overview of the thesis. It includes my personal perspective and motivation for undertaking this research. It then shows the development of the focus of the study with reference to its background and the development of research aims, significance and addressed research questions. This chapter also offers a note on the main terms used in the study. Finally, a structure of the whole thesis is provided.

Chapter 2: Review of literature

This chapter reviews the literature relevant to the study along four different areas. The purpose of this chapter is to highlight how literature aided me in understanding the targeted areas and positioning my research and making appropriate decisions concerning methodology and constructing a working theoretical framework. The chapter is structured to reflect the complexity and nonlinear nature of language learning beyond the classroom. It discusses, with relation to this study, the scope of LBC research, the ecological perspective, the contextual view of language learner beliefs and finally the concept of autonomy. An important aspect of the study is that it is based on a broad ecological approach that considers different areas to achieve a holistic understanding of LBC. This is reflected in the literature review that opted for breadth instead of focusing on a small number of areas in the presentation of theory and eventually analysis.

Chapter 3: Research methodology

This chapter is devoted to the approach adopted in this study. It explains the undertaken postmodern qualitative paradigmatic position and describes the research design and how it draws insight from the narrative inquiry. It offers an overview of the data collection tools. It highlights the quality criteria and ethical considerations. It also details the data collection procedures. Finally, it provides insight into data analysis.

Chapter 4: The environment through the eyes of the learners

This is the first findings chapters. It describes the environment of learning as perceived by the participants with references to the challenges faced at both the school (e.g. friends' unwillingness to communicate in English) and the local environment (e.g. low status of English language)

Chapter 5: Reported learner beliefs and motivations

This two-part chapter offers insight into the participants' beliefs about language learning (e.g. the importance of communication) and motivations (e.g. motivation for intervention and improvement of local English language learning situation) involved in the

shaping of the language learning experiences beyond the classroom in the participants' challenging environment.

Chapter 6: Autonomous LBC practice

This first part of this chapter presents data about the perceived affordances of the different resources for LBC in the participants' environment. The second part of the chapter attempts to show the complexity of autonomous LBC practice through the four dimensions of location, formality, pedagogy and locus of control (Benson, 2011a).

Chapter 7: Discussion

This chapter weaves together the findings from the three chapters and insight from the literature to address the research questions. It highlights the persistent and creative nature of the participants' LBC experience in a challenging environment that reflects their beliefs and motivations, perceptions of learning affordances and eventually their dynamic exercise of autonomy.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

It reviews the main findings of the study and highlights its implications for theory, methodology and for language learning and teaching. It identifies its limitations and dilemmas. It finally offers suggestions for future research.

2. Review of literature

Language learning beyond the classroom is an elusive dimension of learning. Compared to the classroom, the world outside is rich with language learning resources and opportunities. To explore this side to language learning, I draw from four main areas in this review of the literature.

This four-part chapter is designed to reflect a holistic approach to the complex nature of language learning beyond the classroom and show how the literature helped me in: understanding the different aspects, positioning my study, constructing a working theoretical framework, and choosing the appropriate method to explore LBC practice in a challenging environment.

Section 2.1, titled **Exploring LBC** defines language learning beyond the classroom as a field ripe for research, that is gaining popularity and will benefit from further inquiry endeavours in different contexts. It reflects on previous studies and approaches to the phenomenon and offers an insight on LBC in challenging contexts.

Section 2.2, **Ecology for language learning,** draws from the ecological metaphor to theorize language learning. In the study, the ecological perspective enriches the theoretical perspective thanks to its holistic approach and consideration of language learning as a complex non-linear process that includes a multitude of interrelated and interacting elements. This section therefore highlights ecology of learning, the related concept of affordances and finally the implementation of ecological perspective in LBC research context.

Section 2.3, **Language learner beliefs** explores the participants' beliefs about language and language learning derived from their understandings of their experiences beyond the classroom. Initially, this section complements the holistic ecological perspective implemented in the study, which Draws on the notions of environments' affordance and the emergence of learning; thus, Looking at learner beliefs can aid in understanding how participants perceive and act on learning affordances. On the other hand, exploring learner beliefs plays a part in empowering the participants' perspectives about their experiences of learning beyond the classroom, which are often invisible to teachers and researchers (Benson, 2011a; Richards,

2014). The section consists of three parts and follows the model of the previous ones in first defining the concept, showing insight from previous research and highlighting Learner Belief's role in learning beyond the classroom.

Section 2.4, **Autonomy**, presents this concept as a central notion to the present research, as Learning beyond the classroom denotes autonomy. Insights from this section will broadly help in noticing and identifying autonomous practice in the participants' contributions. This section defines learner autonomy, highlights it in the context of LBC, examines it from the ecological perspective and finally discusses the cultural appropriateness and universality of autonomy in addition to highlighting learner autonomy in the Algerian context.

2.1 Exploring LBC

The world beyond the classroom is an important learning dimension thanks to the opportunities available to learners. However, there are far fewer studies in this area than there are classroom related ones (Richards, 2014), making the field of 'language learning beyond the classroom' (LBC), as termed by Benson (2011a), one ripe for research that has much to offer to language learning literature. A probable reason for the lack of published studies is simply that most researchers and their audience are language teachers, who assume their workplace as the 'natural' one for learning, and that out-of-class practices are usually 'invisible' and not easily accessible to teachers (Benson, 2011a, p. 8). This calls for more in-depth efforts to understanding this hidden side of language learning.

This section firstly (2.1.1. Conceptualizing LBC) defines learning beyond the classroom as a concept as well as a research field and highlights the theoretical model used in this study to understand Learning through different LBC resources. Secondly (2.1.2. Insights from LBC research) it demonstrates previous research which helps in shaping and positioning my theoretical framework, which consists of insights drawn from different areas covered in this review of the literature (LBC, ecology of learning, language learner beliefs and autonomy). Thirdly (2.1.3. LBC in challenging environments) the notion of language learning in challenging environments and its relevance to the study are explained.

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2.1.1. Conceptualizing LBC

Learning beyond the classroom is concerned with learning processes occurring in contexts other than the conventional classroom. Because of the variety of contexts and resources in the world beyond the classroom, this conception creates multiple possibilities for what LBC could stand for, and consequently makes the field "extensive, and not easily delimited" (Benson, 2011a, p. 8). With that in mind, there is a need for a perspective that explores the nature of learning in such a vast context beyond the premise of the classroom. Therefore, LBC attempts to answer questions that:

> concern the kinds of places, other than conventional classrooms, where language learning takes place, the characteristics of these places, the kinds of learning activities that take place in them, and their role in the wider picture of individuals' language learning (Benson, 2011a, p. 9).

This shows that language learning beyond the classroom is characterised by complexity as there exists many possible places, resources, and configurations for learning, some of which were addressed in different studies. For instance, LBC can occur through digital gaming (e.g. Kongmee, *et al*, 2011; Chik, 2014; Zhang et. Al., 2017), private online tutoring (e.g. Kozar and Sweller, 2014), watching TV (e.g. Wang, 2012; Alm, 2019), joining and participating in self access centres (e.g. Castellano and Mynard, 2011; Gardner, 2022) and much more. These activities are characterised by variety in terms of types and the multiple options a learner can chose from. In turn, this calls for efforts to focus on the complexities of LBC resources in order to improve learning results.

Academics have introduced several frameworks to differentiate between the types of learning in such a context (Lai, 2017, p. 65). They all strive to eventually contribute to the definition of LBC and the creation of an appropriate theory. I have chosen Benson's (2011a)[1] framework, which is one of the earliest attempts of constructing a theory for LBC. The reason

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[1] It is important to note that Benson's strong presence in this thesis is, to my knowledge, the only effort to categorise the different modes of practice out-of-class under the umbrella of the term of LBC.

behind my choice is that this approach is both simple to understand and straightforward in addressing LBC practice. As I will show in other sections[2], part of my rationale is a reaction to studies attempting to explore LBC practices and also autonomy through perspectives (especially in the Algerian autonomy literature) that consider the classroom as the natural context of learning, while my approach aims to learn about LBC in out-of-class contexts as the focal point, which may happen to interact with the classroom.

In the following paragraphs, I highlight the main points of the framework relevant to my study.

One of the complexities of LBC is the numerous meanings it can have, as there exist several activities, places to learn and configurations beyond the classroom. This is mirrored on the myriad of terms in the literature referring to learning beyond the classroom ('out-of-class', 'out-of-school', 'after-school', 'extracurricular' and 'extramural'; 'non-formal' and 'informal'; 'self-instructed', 'non-instructed' and 'naturalistic'; 'independent', 'self-directed' and 'autonomous'). According to Benson (2011a, p. 9), language learning beyond the classroom can be viewed and analysed through a four-dimension framework, which will assist in untangling the variety of terms in the literature mentioned above. The four dimensions are **Location, formality, pedagogy,** and **Locus of control**.

The first dimension of **Location** refers to the physical or virtual environments where learning takes place (Chik, 2014, p. 90). Although saying location might be confusing as *Beyond the classroom* is a location itself, the term refers to one of four dimensions. Five terms are identified in the literature. 'out-of-class' and 'out-of-school' usually signify non-prescribed activities which are carried out independently by the learners themselves to broaden their linguistic knowledge, on the other hand; 'After school', 'extramural' and 'extracurricular' refer to in-school activities that are less formal than organized lessons (Benson, 2011a, p. 9). In the same vein, Lai (2017, p. 65) refers to the Location dimension as "the relationship of the learners (the physical, social and pedagogical relationships) with the human and material

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[2] Check section 2.4.4.2 Autonomy in the Algerian Context

resources in the learning contexts". This definition somehow directs thought towards a learner-in-a-context perspective that aligns with sociocultural views such as the ecological framework that my study draws from[3]. Therefore, by viewing LBC practices through this dimension, affordances and constraints of the environment are central in exploring the learning experience.

The second dimension is **Formality**. It answers the question of whether language learning is organized by an institution and leads to a qualification or not. Non-formal is classroom/school-based, stemming from interest and does not result in any qualification (Benson, 2011, p. 10). Informal learning is "any activity involving the pursuit of understanding, knowledge, or skill that occurs without the presence of externally imposed curricular criteria" (Livingston, 2006, p. 206). It is therefore related to activities of seeking knowledge based on interest outside any organized courses rewarding formal qualifications. Kocatepe (2017, p. 105) found Benson's use of the terms formal and informal learning problematic as they "evoke conceptions of informal resources being unstructured and ad hoc and formal resources being assigned official status". She instead argues that naturally occurring resources such as the likes of social networks (Gao, 2007), video games (Ou, 2012) and popular culture (Sandlin, Wright, and Clark, 2011) are "equally structured and rigorous in terms of creating opportunities to learn" (Kocatepe, 2017, p. 105). She introduces alternative terms *Curriculum-oriented* and *naturally-occurring* to refer to formal and informal learning, respectively (2017, p. 105).

The third dimension is **pedagogy**. According to Chik (2014, p. 88), pedagogy means the extent to which instruction (sequencing of materials, explicit explanation, and testing) is involved. In LBC it is either self-instruction or naturalistic learning. Benson (2011a, p. 11) positions self-instruction and naturalistic learning as two ends of the pedagogical continuum beyond the classroom. Self-instruction refers to the learner's intentional use of specifically designed materials (tv shows, books) that take on the role of the instructor. Kocatepe (2017, p. 106) presents a similar definition, however with no mention of specially designed materials that take one the role of the teacher, instead, she refers to self-instruction as "the deliberate,

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[3] Check section 2.2

self-initiated efforts of a learner to utilize existing resources to achieve a learning goal". What makes it self-instruction, in her opinion, is the learner's intention and consideration of the resource as one for learning. She exemplifies with a learner who writes down lyrics of a song she started listening to with the sole goal of learning the language (2017, p. 106).

As for 'naturalistic' learning, it involves neither an intention to learn nor specifically designed materials (Benson, 2011a, p. 11). Instead, it consists of a learner's "participation in real life situations to fulfil real life outcomes" (Kocatepe, 2017, p. 106) such as listening to music for pure enjoyment, where a learner's main goal is to understand the lyrics of her favourite songs, and learning happens "as the learner participates in the meaning-making process underpinning the song" (Kocatepe, 2017, p. 106). According to Benson, 'naturalistic' learning could be hypothetical, and he introduced 'self-directed naturalistic learning', which is a more common process, involving the learner setting up naturalistic learning situations with the intention to learn, however, his focus will shift into communication and enjoyment (Benson, 2011a, p. 11). Self-directed naturalistic learning then resides somewhere in the middle of the pedagogical continuum. According to Kocatepe (2017, p. 106), Self-directed naturalistic learning is an intentional yet less structured experience than self-instruction, and it involves naturally occurring resources to fulfil both purposes of real-life needs and potential pedagogic gains. An example of that is a learner who listens to a song to develop her language, however without engaging in a specific learning activity, instead, her interest is shifted towards the music, lyrics and enjoyment (Kocatepe, 2017, p. 106).

The final dimension is the **locus of control**. According to Peek (2016, p. 231), this construct can be traced back to Rotter (1954, 1966) and refers to an individual's belief about the internality or externality of control over their life events. In language learning, The terms 'independent', 'self-directed' and 'autonomous' generally refer to learning without teacher interference, however, their real meaning lies in the matter of who contributes most to making decisions about learning, the learner himself or someone (or something) else (Benson, 2011a, p. 12). Therefore, locus of control refers to the extent to which a learner perceives their learning to be controlled by themselves, others, or instructional materials (Lai, 2017, p. 65). This dimension, thus, asks questions such as whose decision was it to initiate a certain learning activity or learn in a certain way. Benson (2011a, p. 12) notes a pattern in younger

learners, where the initial decision to study a language is usually not made by themselves, particularly when it comes to languages such as English which happen to be part of compulsory education; while for school and university students it can be their own choice of which language to learn; as for adult learners, it is more of self-improvement or recreation. These patterns are examples that might be true in some contexts, however to my belief, they are not necessarily viable for all of them, and that is one way in which the contextual approach in my study is of significance. Because the world beyond the classroom is abundant with settings and their different affordances and possibilities, the patterns will surely vary, either based on the context or the individual's language learning career. Moreover, as Benson highlights, LBC and locus of control are related "in that non-classroom settings often demand that the learners make many of the decisions about their learning" (2011a, p. 12).

Understanding these dimensions is helpful to clarify two concepts central in this framework that will contribute in touching on the complexity of LBC: 'settings' and the 'modes of practice' they support. A setting is defined as:

> An arrangement for learning, involving one or more learners in a particular place, who are situated in particular kinds of physical, social or pedagogical relationships with other people (teachers, learners, others) and material or virtual resources (Benson, 2011a, p. 13).

As for 'Mode of practice', it is: "A set of routine pedagogical processes that deploy features of a particular setting and may be characteristic of it." (Benson, 2011a, p. 14). In other words, a 'setting' is a set of circumstances in a location offering affordances for and constraints on learning possibilities. While 'mode of practice' is the way formality, pedagogy and locus of control are woven together in settings (Benson, 2011a, pp. 13-14).

According to Chik (2014, p. 88), the abovementioned model of Benson (2011a) is one of the only theoretical frameworks which help in bypassing the challenge of exploring the wide array of language learning activities out-of-class by analysing the settings for language learning and the modes of practice they support. However, as Benson and Reinders (2017, p. 562) pointed out, that model is preliminary and in need of further development, and for that to happen, more studies to understand language learning beyond the classroom are required.

2.1.2. Insights from LBC research

The present section offers insights on some previous research about learning beyond the classroom and also possible paths for further inquiry. This section serves in the effort of establishing an understanding to guide the approach to language learning experiences in my targeted research environment.

What I aim for is to show some examples of what previous research on LBC has found, and also present possibilities of what it can still offer in terms of better understating LBC practices, settings and experiences. This section will aid in both informing the study and showing my awareness of the different relevant topics. A main premise of my study is the holistic approach to the learning experience that allows for the emergence of relevant themes. Therefore, through this section about research LBC research (and other sections through the literature of similar nature), I try to demonstrate an informed framework and readiness for the unexpected during data collection and analysis.

According to Lai (2017, p. 5), academic attention to learning beyond the classroom has been increasing for the last decade due to the rising popularity of communicative language learning theories highlighting "extensive language exposure and authentic language use and interaction as necessary conditions for language learning". This rise relates to the growing worldwide presence of information and communication technologies in people's lives, which as Lai (2017, p. 5) explains, makes the aforementioned conditions easy to fulfil. These advances in technology and communication create a myriad of opportunities to support language learning out of class. Such opportunities are characterized as being multimodal, social and interactive (Richards, 2014, p. 2). The rich opportunities, therefore, help in bypassing in-class limitations language learners may face, such as time limits and classroom size (Richards, 2014, p. 2).

Different previous studies in the literature show evidence on how language learning beyond the classroom can help language learners in ways in-class learning cannot (e.g., Lam, 2000, 2004, 2006; Black, 2006, Murray, 2008; Benson and Chik, 2010; Kuure, 2011; Socket, 2014). For instance, Murray (2008) mentions Japanese informal English learners who were motivated to learn English by their emotional connection to English language pop culture,

despite their low interest in English as a subject. Another example is Benson and Chik's (2010) paper about two formal Hong Kong learners who credited their high proficiency to their preferred media and related online community.

In addition to the plethora of opportunities they possess, out-of-class contexts are intertwined with language gains, and also with positive outcomes such as enjoyment, confidence and identity construction, experimentation and expression in online communities (Lai, Hu and Lyu, 2018, p. 115).

At this point, it can be said that there has been a growing interest in researching language learning beyond the classroom. Benson and Reinders' (2017) research agenda suggests major possible areas related to LBC, among which there is: the settings of language learning beyond the classroom, with topics such as affordances and constraints of specific settings and study abroad; and how learners learn beyond the classroom, targeting their experiences beyond the classroom, their strategies and their technology-enhanced learning.

One of the early studies in out-of-class language learning is Lamb's (2004) on Indonesian junior high students' autonomous learning outside the classroom. It was found out that the students were learning independently from their teachers' both in-class and out-of-class, with most of their learning happening beyond the classroom, however, in-class language learning was perceived as important, mainly as a result of their relationships with their tutors. Another study, which depicts the way learners perceive and use available resources for learning in their environment is Lai's (2015) study of Hong Kong's students' attitudes to in-class and out-of-class learning. The conclusion was that they valued both, yet perceived different affordances to each context creating a synergetic language learning experience.

Focusing on particular settings is another path of research in language learning beyond the classroom. According to Benson and Reinders (2017, p. 565), such studies will not only enrich our knowledge of language learning beyond the classroom's affordances but also benefit theoretical perspectives about learning spaces and social networks. Murray, Fujishima and Uzuka (2014), through drawing theory from human geography and mediated discourse analysis, attempt to discuss the 'semiotics of space' in language learning beyond the classroom in a Japanese university which they referred to as 'social learning space'. According to them,

the learner's perception, and imagination of space determines their practices and influences their learning autonomy. Palfreyman (2011) used 'social network theory' to explain how female Emirati students involve networks of friends and family in their in-home language learning.

Chik's (2014) in-depth study about digital games and language learning in China argues that learners practice autonomy within the community with their managed gameplay for leisure and learning in five different dimensions; four of them are Benson's (2011a) Location, formality, pedagogy and locus of control; while the fifth was introduced by Chik (2014) as the 'trajectory of learning' which expands Benson's model in gaming communities, and is a "temporal component in understanding L2 learning through gaming as a persistent and managed career" (p. 96).

According to Benson and Reinders (2017, p. 567), the way learners approach their learning beyond the classroom, the strategies they implement, their perceptions and the way they feel about their experiences are important matters as they reflect and influence language learner's motivations, attitudes and their sense of identity as language learners. Therefore, to understand language learning beyond the classroom's effect on learning, it is crucial to understand how language learning beyond the classroom relates to the learner. In a research paper aimed at understanding learners' experiences with technology beyond the classroom, Lai, Hu and Lyu (2018, p. 115) point out that the main findings of studies about the use of technology out of the classroom are: learners implement a wide variety of technological recourses weekly; Technological recourses of a receptive nature are the ones used most by K-12 and university students; and finally, communication tools (online chat, conferencing tools) are the least frequently used; however, those studies could only provide a crude idea about nature of language learning with technology beyond the classroom, and what will be more beneficial is the study of learners' lived experiences, which will yield insight about their perceptions and selective appropriation of technological resources' affordances for language learning.

Based on these insights, the present study aims to enrich our LBC knowledge by focusing on experiences as lived and understood by the learners.

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2.1.3. LBC in challenging environments

The present study attempts to explore and understand LBC experiences in a challenging environment. The concept of 'challenging' or 'difficult circumstances' is not a new one. In terms of ELT, the term *'difficult/unfavourable circumstances'* was first used more than 60 years ago by Michael West in his book *'Teaching English in difficult circumstances'* which mentions obstacles such as packed classes and unqualified educators (1960). In the context of developing countries, difficult circumstances in learning have been addressed by several authors (e.g., Bertoncino, Murphy and Wang, 2002; Copland, Garton and Burns, 2014; Verspoor, 2008). Shamim and Kuchah (2016), examined these studies and concluded that:

> Difficult circumstances include, but may not be limited to insufficient and/or outdated textbooks, crowded classrooms with limited space, and lack of adequate resources and facilities for teaching-learning, including ICT. These difficult circumstances are compounded, particularly in resource poor environments, if teachers do not have adequate English language and/or pedagogical skills (p. 528).

Kuchah (2018, p. 3) suggested that these difficulties represent the "micro-level" and do not consider other "macro and meso" difficulties that characterize ELT in developing countries. These 'macro' and 'meso' challenges[4] can be observed in the world beyond the classroom and the overall relationship between the learner and the environment[5]. According to Maley (2001, cited in Kuchah, 2018, p. 2), learning and teaching in developing countries can be hindered by difficulties outside the classroom, and he exemplified by students who do chores in the morning and then travel five miles on foot to then join a dirty cramped classroom with 60 students. These dire straits are far harsher than the situation of the present Algerian study's environment, however much can be learned from such studies of learning in difficult circumstances and how they approach these challenges.

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[4] As will be shown in Chapter 4, some of the challenges that the participants faced include the community's negative attitude towards English use in public and friends and peers' unwillingness to communicate in English.
[5] For more about this relationship check 2.2.

In the field of difficult learning circumstances, 'Teaching English in Large Classes' (TELC) is a popular topic. Smith (2011, p. 2) presented a research agenda suggesting that new studies should:

1. give up on the idea that large classes are a problem where small ones are the preferred norm, thus empowering learners' perspectives and allowing opportunity to view large classes positively;
2. move towards positive efforts on developing appropriate methodology instead of focusing discussions on how large the classes are
3. implement qualitative and exploratory case studies instead of generalizations across culturally diverse contexts
4. pay attention to issues of *doing research* in difficult environments, and also teacher experiences.

Insight from this TELC oriented agenda is beneficial to the present study in different ways. As I aim to explore LBC in a challenging environment, it helps to avoid presumptions that difficulties are bad for learning. This will eventually aid in noticing the positive aspects of such a setting, which reside in the relationship between the learners and the environment, how they manage to learn and what we can learn from them. In fact, Smith (2015) voices his concern over the use of terms in line with 'difficult circumstances' as they denote an ideal state of affair vs a non-ideal one. Smith (2015) then proposes the solution of using phrases such as 'challenging circumstances' or 'low-resourced classrooms' instead of labelling situations as difficult, which may lead to missing 'positive' or 'normal' aspects of the situation and 'pathologizing' it. Using qualitative exploratory methods is also suggested in the agenda and is actually taken into consideration in the present research, which as will be shown in the methodology chapter[6], is qualitative and implements narrative inquiry to explore in-depth the experiences of the participants. Finally, it would be beneficial to gain awareness about possible issues of doing research on LBC in a challenging Algerian environment and adapt and prepare for unexpected ones[7].

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[6] Check section 3.1 and 3.2.1
[7] Check data collection procedure 3.4

On another note, as previously shown, studies about challenging language learning environments are not new and that includes LBC. For example, Lamb (2002) explored successful and non-successful Indonesian English learners' experiences out of class and how they were shaped by the cultural and social contexts. This small scale study cautiously suggests that formal and informal learning opportunities are scarce in provincial Indonesia, which discourages most learners, however, a small number managed to be successful despite the circumstances, reflecting their great personal investment in English, autonomous behaviour, resourcefulness and independence in pursuing their goals (Lamb, 2002, p. 35). Concerning the limitations, lamb (2002, p. 9-50) expresses that the sample is too small to generalise and that it lacks corroborating data in the interview transcripts. Still, Lamb's endeavour is insightful as it encourages a focus on the learners' perspectives and takes the environment into consideration.

In terms of challenges facing Algerian learning in the setting of this study, they will be shown in the findings' chapters from the learners' perspectives[8]. However, to contextualise, generally, the area to which the participants belong is in the Province of Naama. It is located in the western inland region of Algeria and is characterised by low development compared to northern regions, an arid harsh climate, desertification and lack of entertainment and tourism venues in addition to difficulties of finding employment.

What I will present in the next section is a perspective that considers the learners' lived experiences and the different elements interrelated in the ongoing process. This perspective is the ecological framework, an important aspect of my adopted approach towards language learning, which is holistic and conscious of both the settings for LBC and how Learners learn beyond the classroom.

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[8] Check findings in chapter 4

2.2. Ecology of Language Learning

The ecological perspective is "the study of relationships among elements in an environment or ecosystem, In particular the interactions among such elements" (Van Lier, 2010, p. 4). This view is relevant to the present study because it focuses on the complexity of the relationship between the learners and their environment, "not only on the social level but also at the physical and symbolic level" (Van Lier, 2010, p. 3). Therefore, the ecological lens allows this study of LBC to gain insight into this often invisible or difficult to access dimension of language learning (Benson, 2011a; Richards, 2014), and to provide a more holistic insight on language learning, the learners themselves, and the environment where learning occurs. The following sections first define the ecology of learning (2.2.1), then present the concept of affordance borrowed from the ecology metaphor (2.2.2) and finally highlight the ecological perspective in the context of learning beyond the classroom with reference to its relevance to my present study (2.2.3).

2.2.1. Defining ecology of learning

In the next paragraphs, I define the ecology of learning as both a concept and a perspective for researching language learning that pays great attention to the notion of context.

Palfreyman (2014, p. 175) pointed out that a metaphor is not only a tool that people can use in order to understand or explain some new subject, it is also a means which novices and experts alike can implement in thinking about and conversing knowledge; thus focusing on a certain direction and preventing the thought stream from diverting towards another. Language learning benefits from the metaphor of Ecology.

The term ecology was firstly introduced by Herckel (1866) and is "the totality of relationships of an organism with all other organisms with which it comes into contact" (van Lier, 2004, p. 194). Human activity can be seen through this metaphor. We can observe A natural ecology in places such as a swamp or a pond harbouring a system of interacting living organisms by means of feeding-off of each other, competing, or living in symbiosis. A learning situation then, can be seen in the same scope; as it is a *system* based on various learners, teachers, materials, and other elements interacting with each other (Palfreyman, 2014, p. 176). Ecology, therefore, provides a means to holistically observe and describe language

learning with consideration to different relationships, situations and sociocultural elements that may hinder or facilitate the process. Therefore, ecological inquiry can simply be defined as "the study of organisms in their relations with the environment" (Van Lier, 2004, p. 3).

A significant aspect of the ecological perspective that guides the present study is 'context'. As Palfreyman (2014, p. 191) points out, a learner is always in a context and it is important to "be aware of how the learner is influenced by the context (and by her perception of that context), as well as how the context as a whole changes as individuals and activities develop". This appears to reflect a dynamic interdependent relationship. In other words, the ecological perspective does not view learning on an individual basis of either the learner or the environment, instead, it focuses on a relationship between the two, that is unique and meaningful (Van Lier, 2004; Withagen, De Poel, Araújo, and Pepping, 2012; Ruohotie-Lyhty, 2015). Studying this relationship is relevant to the present research because it allows for the emergence of new ways to view language learning experience, especially aspects of it that are usually difficult to observe such as autonomous learning beyond the classroom (Benson, 2011a; Bensons, 2011b; Richards, 2015).

Barron (2004, p. 6) describes the ecology of learning as "the accessed set of contexts, comprised of configurations of activities, material resources and relationships, found in co-located physical or virtual spaces that provide opportunities for learning". Furthermore, each of these contexts "is comprised of a unique configuration of activities, material resources, relationships, and the interactions that emerge from them" (Barron, 2006, p. 195). This shows that the ecological perspective is mindful of physical and virtual contexts and the different opportunities available for learning. Kashiwa and Benson (2018, p. 728) add on Barron's (2006) view by saying that: "Sustained learning typically involves engagement with many such contexts over time". Kashiwa and Benson (2018, p. 728) use different terminologies on what Barron called *context* and *ecology* and referred to them instead as *setting* and *environment.* While the *setting* is an arrangement at a particular location consisting of human and material resources that could facilitate learning, the L2 *environment* is a configuration of *settings* where a learner peruses her L2 learning at a particular phase (such as learning at home or abroad) (Kashiwa and Benson, 2018, p. 728).

Van Lier (2004, p. 11) points out that ecology is concerned with the study of context, because "The ecological approach looks at the entire situation and asks, what is it in this environment that makes things happen the way they do? How does learning come about?". Van Lier further indicates that ecology involves the study of "movement, process, and action" (2004, P. 11). Van Lier (2004, p. 20) also compares the ecological framework to sociocultural theory and points out their similarities and differences and considers ecology as an alternative to traditional educational theory, research and practice. This view falls with sociocultural theory and entails that "the learner is seen as situated in a specific culture and where learning takes place through interaction with the environment, including artefacts and other human beings"(Berglund, 2009, p. 187).

Tudor (2003, P. 10) considers the ecological perspective as one "that involves exploring the deep script of human interaction with the learning process, not in isolation, but within the broader context of students' concerns, attitudes and perceptions". On that note, such a perspective leans towards studies conducted in natural environments, therefore focusing on language as a 'semiotic social practice' rather than acquisition of linguistic structures, and on 'social contexts beyond school' rather than the classroom itself (Menezes, 2011, p. 59). Following this logic, ecology of learning could benefit from historical perspectives employing longitudinal and/or narrative approaches to capture where learners come from and where they could be heading.

In a conclusion, the ecological perspective of learning is a holistic perspective that views language learning, not in isolation but instead, in relation to the environment and the different elements involved. Ecology of learning is potentially a powerful tool that can help in raising awareness and researching learning as "an on-going system rather than as a unilateral or linear process" (Palfreyman, 2014, p. 190). Therefore, the ecological framework will play a role in how my study approaches experiences of learning beyond the classroom, as the world out-of-class is rich with resources, which according to Palfreyman (2014, p. 190) are material, social or discursive features of the environment, all of which offer potential contributions which mainly depend on the learner realising that and acting upon it. This brings up the concept of **Affordance** that I discuss in the next section.

2.2.2. The notion of affordance

As indicated before, the environment is a central aspect of the ecological perspective. In my attempts to explore holistically the deep script of experiences of learning beyond the classroom in a challenging environment, I borrow the concept of affordance to highlight language learning opportunities and how learners perceive and make use of them. In this section, I explore the meaning of this concept, its nature and its relevance to language learning and the present study.

The term affordance was first introduced by the American psychologist Gibson (1986) in his book about visual perception. Accordingly, "affordances of the environment are what it *offers* the animal, what it *provides* or *furnishes*, either for good or ill" (Gibson, 1986, p. 127). Gibson exemplified with affordances of some terrestrial surfaces, such as a forest path affording walking, and a knee-high surface that affords sitting (1986, p. 127).

Drawing from a number of definitions of affordance (Neisser, 1987, p. 21; Forrester 1999, p. 88; Varela, Thompson and Rosch, 1991, p. 203; Shotter and Newson, 1982, P. 34), Van Lier(2004, p. 91) highlights the notions of relations, possibility, opportunity, immediacy and interaction and explains that "Affordance refers to what is available to the person to do something with" (2004, P. 91). He further adds that the notion of affordance is "action in potential" (P. 92), as it emerges from interaction with the physical and social world. This means that affordances are not properties of the environment, in fact, they are emergent from the individual's interaction with the world. Menezes (2011), who considers affordances as linked with the concepts of perception and action (perception as an ecological phenomenon resulting from interaction with environment rather than being a mental process) verified that different individuals perceive the world differently, and that "complementarity and interaction between individuals and the environment emerge from different social practices" (Menezes, 2011, p. 61).

Therefore, language learning is emergent from learners' engagement with resources in the environment. For these resources to turn into affordances, their potential contribution must be perceived and acted on by the learner (Kashiwa and Benson, 2018, p. 4). This shows that not only does learning depend on what the environment offers, but also on the learners'

awareness of a resource's potential contributions and how to act based on this knowledge. Moreover, the emergence of language learning is a result of one's response to "interaction, to demands and constraints, or to offerings and obstacles, reorganizing and adapting themselves to the changing conditions in a niche" (2011, p. 62). This implies that through the concept of affordance, perception and action are tied together. On that note, Van Lier (2008, p. 598) expresses that:

> While being active in the learning environment, the learner detects properties in the environment that provide opportunities for further action and hence for learning. Affordances are discovered through perceptual learning, and the effective use of affordances must also be learned. Perceiving and using affordances are the first steps on the road toward meaning making.

This indicates the existence of learning affordances all around the learner and reinforces her 'active' involvement in affordances' contribution to learning as that depends on her perception and action.

Another aspect of the concept of affordance to mention is that not all learners will perceive the affordances or take advantage of them in the same way, and the availability of resources in an environment does not necessarily mean they will be benefited from by the learners. In that regard, Palfreyman highlights three loosely divided yet interrelated factors which affect the contribution of affordances of resources: "(a) features of the task context, (b) learning skills, which might be taught and (c) what might be considered attitudinal/ affective variables"(2014, p. 178). This demonstrates the complexity of affordances, their perception by learners and their contribution to learning.

In terms of research, the concept of affordance has been applied by different scholars. For instance, through the analysis of a host of language learning histories, Menezes (2011) explores the affordances of English learning beyond the classroom from the experiences of a number of Brazilian, Fin and Japanese learners. The findings reveal a myriad of language affordances manifested in different settings (interactions with others, cultural products and travel abroad), and that learning does not simply occur because these affordances exist, but instead, it emerges from the learners' perceptions, their interaction with the environment,

and their active nature, autonomy and agency. As a conclusion, Menezes (2011, p. 71) states that:

> learners must be empowered to perceive affordances in their niches. We must acknowledge that schools alone cannot gather all the necessary affordances for language development and we must open our students' eyes to the world around them.

All in all, affordances are actions in potential surrounding the learners in their environment. For these affordances to be considered, they ought to be perceived by the learner and acted upon. Therefore, as Van Lier puts it: "Perhaps, after all, we 'learn' language in the same way that an animal 'learns' the forest, or a plant 'learns' the soil" (2000, p. 259). The relevance of affordance to the present study lies in the challenging nature of the environment which denotes a lack of learning opportunities and difficulty to access them. Therefore, using the concept of affordance, and its notions of perception and emergence guides my thinking towards how learning beyond the classroom occurs despite the obstacles, therefore reflecting learners' active role, their persistence and creativity and eventually empowering their accounts of the learning experience.

2.2.3. Ecological research on language Learning beyond the classroom

This last section highlights the ecological perspective's tenets within the scope of language learning beyond the classroom.

The ecological metaphor is an approach to view and think about language learning holistically. As an important dimension, language learning beyond the classroom can also benefit from such a perspective. As previously shown, the ecology of learning puts a great focus on the environment of language learning. A learner's environment consists of all sources and opportunities existing around her. Benson's (2011a, p. 8) broad definition of language learning beyond the classroom describes it as "concerned with everything that classroom language learning is not concerned with". The world beyond the classroom expands the opportunities of language learning and therefore offers more affordances than what classrooms have got. Consequently, it aids learners in overcoming classroom limitations. In other words, out-of-class plays a great role in constructing a wider learning ecology that can

consist of various settings, both physical and virtual offering several learning resources. Thus, attention should be paid to out-of-class contexts in order to achieve a better understanding of the learning process as a whole, the role of out-of-class learning, how learners relate to it, and how they carry on their learning in a multitude of settings. In that regard, Sefton-Green (2006) urges for a broader understanding of learning that considers "a wider learning ecology" (p. 4). Furthermore, he stressed that "learning in out-of-school settings needs to be accorded status and understanding as we seek to enhance the education system more generally'' (p. 6).

The ecological perspective has the potential of a framework to guide inquiries on language learning beyond the classroom. The world beyond the classroom offers many resources and opportunities for language learning, as learning can occur in a variety of contexts thanks to the technological developments in the internet, media, and social networks (Richards, 2015, p. 2). Therefore, there has been a growing interest in studies about language learning beyond the classroom, some of which adopt the ecology of learning approach. Lai and Gu (2011) use the ecological framework to investigate a number of Hong Kong students' self-regulation of out-of-class language learning with technology. The study revealed diverse strategic engagement with technology in self-regulated learning experiences, which seemed to be affected by several factors including contextual ones like duration of the study, and personal ones such as digital literacy and readiness for communication with native speakers and various language learner beliefs (2011, p. 329). Lai and Gu (2011, p. 331), conclude by calling for the need for learner training in terms of language learner beliefs and metacognitive knowledge concerning technology-enhanced language learning.

Another inquiry is Lai's (2014) study of students' perceptions of their experiences re-garding both in-class and out-of-class language learning and how they bridged the two to construct their learning ecology. The study reveals that the learners perceived both in and out-of-class as encompassing learning opportunities. The learners created synergetic learning experiences across both contexts based on their different affordances. In terms of in-class affordances, they included: grasping the basics; learning basics of the language (grammar and vocabulary); Fine-tuning the language skills (listening, speaking, writing, reading); getting introduced to Chinese culture; and keeping focused and committed (Lai, 2014, p. 271). As for out-of-class affordances, the perceived ones were: maintenance of motivation and interest; a

sense of the real language; an indication of linguistic ability; a sense of connectivity (Lai, 2014, p. 271). Furthermore, the perceptions and implementation of the affordances were affected by "features of the resources", "learners' dispositions and abilities" (such as needs and beliefs, etc), and "previous learning experiences" (Lai, 2014, p. 271). Lai finally calls for the importance of designing mechanisms to support learners in perceiving and acting on out-of-class learning affordances and connect their in-class and out-of-class experiences.

Kashiwa and Benson (2018) adopt an ecological perspective of context to investigate how some Chinese students reconstructed and reconceptualised their language learning environments after spending three months studying in Australia. This small-scale study first identifies a change of conception: Whereas at home, in-class and out-of-class experiences were seen as separate; the two contexts were later viewed as integrated while being abroad (2018, p .743). Second, the authors identify a relationship between the learners' understanding and awareness of environmental learning affordances while studying abroad and agency in out-of-class activities participation (2018, p. 725).

These studies, which focus on different aspects of experiences of learning beyond the classroom all follow, to varying degrees, the steps of ecological perspective.

In terms of a framework, Van Lier (2004, p. 193) broadly suggested four different criteria to be observed for a study to be considered as an ecological one:

- It is contextualized or situative, focusing on relationships in the setting;

- It has spatial and temporal dimensions;

- It is (at least potentially) interventionist, i.e. change-oriented and critical;

- It is ecologically and phenomenologically valid, particularly in terms of a correspondence between researchers' and participants' situation definition.

My study follows the ecological framework. it adopts the ecological perspective of context to investigate a small number of English language learners' experiences beyond the classroom in their challenging multilingual environment, where English has a generally low status, which can be considered as different from previous studies where the target language

is spoken widely in the community. In van Lier's words, this makes my study contextualized and possessing of a spatial dimension. As for the temporal dimension, as I show in the methodology chapter[9], my study draws insight from narrative inquiry to explore LBC through participants' long learning careers[10] and generate retrospective accounts from their first contact with the English language until the present in their university. In terms of potential intervention, I strive to show how LBC is managed despite environmental challenges which draws attention to the difficulties faced by the learners and potential ways to overcome them, and also to the need to empower learners' perspectives about their learning. The ecological and phenomenological validity is similar to the emic perspective from ethnography (Van Lier, 2004, p. 195), which I aim for through direct interaction with the participants in the research context as well as the use of their own terms and understandings in data analysis and representation of findings.

2.3. Language learner beliefs

In the previous section, I presented the ecology of learning as a holistic approach and a central part of my framework for understanding experiences of language learning beyond the classroom in a challenging environment, as it highlights the relationship between the individual and the environment, and between perception and action. In this section, I discuss the notion of language learner beliefs which are involved in the perception of the affordances of the environment, and how they form part of my overall approach to look at LBC experience from the learner's perspective.

In the following paragraphs, I define language learner beliefs (2.3.1) and explore the different perspectives through which they have been approached throughout the years (2.3.2). Finally, I attempt to highlight the concept of learner beliefs in the context of language learning beyond the classroom and connect to the present study, which employs a contextual and holistic ecological perspective to the learning experience and learner beliefs (2.3.3).

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[9] Check section 3.2
[10] "the aspect of a person's course through life that is concerned with language learning" (Benson, 2011b, p. 546)

2.3.1. Defining language learner beliefs

Defining language learner beliefs can be problematic and the difficulty lies in the multitude of meanings assigned to the concept as well as the approaches taken to view it. According to Pajares (1992, p. 309):

> defining beliefs is at best a game of player's choice. They travel in disguise and often under alias—attitudes, values, judgments, axioms, opinions, ideology, perceptions, conceptions, conceptual systems, preconceptions, dispositions, implicit theories, explicit theories, personal theories, internal mental processes, action strategies, rules of practice, practical principles, perspectives, repertories of understanding, and social strategy, to name but a few that can be found in the literature.

This lengthy list, highlighting some but not all terms related to beliefs, demonstrates the complexity of the construct. In that regard, there have been several attempts to clarify what beliefs are and are not (such as beliefs vs knowledge distinction, e.g., Woods, 1996; Wenden 1999). Regarding language learning, beliefs are referred to in the literature by several terms and definitions, which is proof of the importance they have been assigned by scholars (Barcelos, 2003, p. 1). Broadly speaking language learner beliefs can be defined as "the conceptions, ideas and opinions learners have about L2 learning and teaching and language itself" (Kalaja, Barcelos and Aro, 2018, p. 222).

White (2008, p. 121) pictures learner beliefs as an implicitly discussed element in the good language learner spectrum famously depicted by Juan Rubin (1975). In White's words "beliefs are important because learners hold their beliefs to be true and these beliefs then guide how they interpret their experiences and how they behave". Similarly, according to Aro (2009, p. 15), beliefs are important because they seemingly influence human action as they represent worldviews, thus "function as a filter, influencing one's perceptions of oneself, others and the world in general" and they also "may be good indicators of the decisions individuals make".

As for what domains of beliefs are relevant, White (2008, p. 121) cites beliefs held by learners about themselves, about language learning and about the contexts where they are

learners and users as well. Beliefs learners hold about themselves can often be related to the notion of self-efficacy or "the judgments they hold about their capability to organize and execute the courses of action required to master academic tasks"(Mills, Pajares, and Herron, 2007, p. 418). According to Wesley (2012, p. 100), self-efficacy rejects Bandura's (1997) idea that everything is controlled externally. Self-efficacy is also related to self-concept which "describes how individuals generally feel about themselves" (Mills, Pajares, and Herron, 2007, p. 423). In addition to them possibly being about themselves, learner beliefs can also be externally focused such as about learning tasks and the target community and culture (Wesely, 2012, p. s100).

Concerning the nature of beliefs, Sigel (1985, p. 351) defined them as "mental constructions of experience", which makes them both cognitive, and social constructs resulting from experiences (white, 2008, p. 121). In addition to that, Benson and Lor (1999, p. 462) comment that beliefs are contextualized based on learning situations or tasks, and that instead of being held under all circumstances, "they can be understood as cognitive resources on which students draw to make sense of and cope with specific content and contexts of learning".

To sum up, the elusive nature of learner beliefs makes them a hard concept to define. For the sake of the present study, It is best to adopt the contextual, cognitive and social natures of beliefs as I try to explore the experience of learning beyond the classroom with reference to the environment's challenges and learners' management though that. To that end, I use Dewey's (1993, p. 6) definition which considers learner beliefs as a form of thought that "covers all the matters of which we have no sure knowledge and yet which we are sufficiently confident of to act upon and also the matters that we now accept as certainly true, as knowledge, but which nevertheless may be questioned in the future..". This definition, according to Barcelos (2003. P. 10), highlights the contextual nature of beliefs and proposes that they are a cognitive concept that also reflects a social nature stemming from experiences and problems. In the following section, I review the literature to show changes in learner beliefs studies throughout the last 4 decades and what approach I shall be implementing in my own exploration of experiences of learning beyond the classroom.

2.3.2. Towards a contextual approach to language learner beliefs

Learner beliefs have been approached in different ways. In the late 70s and early 80s, learner beliefs gained popularity in applied linguistic research, mainly due to discussions about 'the good language learner' (white, 2008; Kalaja and Barcelos, 2013). At that time, the question of why some learners are better than others suggested several possible involved elements and beliefs held by the learners were among them. Through the last decades, views on beliefs varied and so did the research approaches. Kalaja and Barcelos (2008; 2013) and Kalaja *et al* (2015) identify four perspectives to language learner beliefs in applied linguistics and referred to them as classics, normative approaches, contextual approaches, and offshoot methods. In the following paragraphs, I discuss these inquiry paths and then show under which the present studies reside.

During the early days of studies on learner beliefs where works of figures such as Horwitz and Wenden were prominent, learner beliefs were thought of as cognitive in nature, and according to Kalaja *et al*. (2015, p. 9), they were also "statable (that is, learners can talk about them), stable, and fallible, or true or false". They further add that the studies were only done through indirect methods such as interviews and questionnaires. A famous example is Horwitz's (1987, cited in Kalaja *et al.* 2015, p. 9) Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory (BALLI), which is a 30 close-ended question survey.

Later, two lines of inquiry appeared. The first is the traditional or normative approaches (Barcelos, 2003). It followed the path marked by previous researchers and witnessed a great use of BALLI by means of adaptation, replication, or inclusion into larger quantitative research schemes (Kalaja *et al*., 2015, P. 10). This approach followed the etic perspective (outsider) of pioneering studies as well as their characteristic of cognitive psychology in addition to an objective view of nature; however, it demonstrated a higher degree of statistical sophistication of quantitative analysis in relating learner beliefs with other variables, such as anxiety, motivation and learning strategies (Kalaja and Barcelos, 2013, p. 3).

The second trend is referred to as contextual approaches (Barcelos, 2003). Following an emic perspective (insider), studies considered the subjective nature of language learning, and as Kalaja and Barcelos (2013, p. 3) point out "the languages to be learned, being a learner, the

learning process, and the learning contexts are all charged with positive or negative experiences and loaded with personal meanings". Furthermore, as opposed to the previous line, beliefs started to be viewed as dynamic and context-dependent (Kalaja and Barcelos, 2013, p. 3). Such a line of research is qualitative and interpretive in nature and benefits from several data collection methods such as questionnaires with more open ended-questions, semi-structured interviews and narratives.

Recently, research on learner beliefs draws from the previous line and is according to Kalaja and Barcelos (2015, p. 11) influenced by "sociocultural theory and/or by Bakhtinian dialogism". This ecological/sociocultural line of research "Illuminates a new but complementary path to exploring beliefs as contextually situated social meanings emerging in specific sense-making activities" (Negueruela-Azarola, 2011, p. 368). White (2008, p. 124), drawing from Norton and Toohey (2001), observes that through a sociocultural view of language learning, there Is a need for a focus change from the individual learner to what his/her community offers as learning activities, settings and practices. Moreover, learner beliefs are considered to originate from society, thus they are emergent from interactions with others, internalized and then possibly transform when faced with contextual experiences (Kalaja and Barcelos, 2013, p. 4). This goes in line with Bakhtin's notion of heteroglossia and polyphony, in which individual beliefs might not be purely individual at all, but instead grow from the voices and thoughts of the many (Pan and Block, 2011, p. 393). According to Dufva (2003, p. 138), These voices may originate from different resources:

> Thus, some elements may seem to be directly related to the individual's own lifespan and… personal experiences. Others would reflect the linguistic attitudes of the community at large and still others would be related to the discourses within language education, language policies, curricula, syllabi and teachers' practices.

Following this framework of research, Peng (2011, p. 315) uses the ecological notion of *affordance* to explore a student's beliefs mediation. The study reveals the emergent and context-responsive nature of learner beliefs. It was found out that Local classroom affordances "give rise to the emergence of learner beliefs" (Peng, 2011, p. 321). These

affordances include meaning-focused activities, familiar topics, support from teachers and peers, teaching methods and lesson goals (Peng, 2011, p. 321).

Yang and Kim's (2011) study also draws from the sociocultural framework. The findings suggest the constant evolution of beliefs in accordance with the learner's goals within the context of social interaction. Furthermore, this belief change affords insight into a "remediation process between the learner and the L2 learning environment, showing the learner's agentive efforts to maintain (or abandon) L2 goals" (Yang and Kim, 2011, p. 332).

As far as future studies are concerned, Kalaja and Barcelos (2013, p. 5) recommend several areas relating beliefs with motivation, identity, emotions, change, and learning in general. They urge for a need of a holistic rather than an isolating approach, thus viewing the abovementioned elements as interactive and forming an ecological system. Additionally, White (2008, p. 127) suggests more research on exploring how beliefs assist or constraint exercise of agency in particular contexts of learning or use. And thus, she stated that:

> We need more longitudinal studies to see how beliefs develop in relation to learner perspectives on the affordances and constraints of a learning context and to investigate the interplay among those beliefs, learners' actions and their interpretation of experiences (White, 2008, p. 127).

In fact, in the present study that looks at learning experiences from the holistic lens of ecology of learning, goals and motivations[11] are an aspect of the learners in addition to their beliefs and they are viewed as socially and contextually constructed and involved in the perception of affordances and overall language learning careers. Since this study draws from on ecological perspective that views language learning as a non-linear process that occurs in social, contextual, and spatial relationships (Van Lier, 2010, p. 3) I consider learner motivation from Ushioda's (2009) person-in-context relational perspective that she explains as:

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[11] It must be noted that motivations were emergent from analysis and were not an initial aim of the study, hence their position in the literature review as sub-elements related to learner beliefs.

a focus on real persons, rather than on learners as theoretical abstractions; a focus on the agency of the individual person as a thinking, feeling human being, with an identity, a personality, a unique history and background, a person with goals, motives and intentions; a focus on the interaction between this self-reflective intentional agent, and the fluid and complex system of social relations, activities, experiences and multiple micro- and macro-contexts in which the person is embedded, moves, and is inherently part of. My argument is that we need to take a relational (rather than linear) view of these multiple contextual elements, and view motivation as an organic process that emerges through this complex system of interrelations. (Ushioda, 2009, p. 220)

This view of motivation not only considers it as part of the complex non-linear system of relations that define language learning, but, as Dörnyei and Ushioda (2013, p. 92) notice, as explicitly stressing the learners' complex individuality as a real person whose learner identity is but one aspect of their overall sense of self. This goes in line with the present study's efforts to empower the learners' perspective and offer a voice to their experiences.[12]

In conclusion, much will be gained from adopting an emic approach that considers the social and contextual natures of beliefs as well as their role in shaping and interpreting opportunities and experiences. Additionally, research will benefit from the holistic approach which considers beliefs as part of a learning ecology inclusive of and interactive with other constructs such as agency, identity, and motivation. The present study adopts this approach to learner beliefs to explore the deep script of experiences of learning English beyond the classroom, in which learner beliefs are involved in the perception of learning affordances in the participants' challenging environment. The next section sheds light on that.

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[12] Motivations' role in LBC experience is further shown as an important element of learner autonomy through the ecological perspective. Check section 2.4.3

2.3.3. The role of beliefs in language learning beyond the classroom

Beliefs held by language learners influence their learning outside the classroom in several ways. What Kalaja and Barcelos (2003; 2013; 2015) termed a contextual approach, which views learner beliefs as dynamic rather than stable and also contextual and social rather than only cognitive, clearly considers all contexts of language learning including the ones out-of-class.

The world beyond the classroom offers a large range of learning opportunities (Richard, 2014; Benson and Reinders. 2017), and language learner beliefs affect their contribution in learning or as Kalaja, *et al.* (2011,p. 49) point out, "The beliefs that students hold about learning or about different languages may help them to notice affordances and seize learning opportunities, but they may also prevent them from doing so". On a similar note, there is a complex relationship meditated by the language learning context's affordances and affective elements such as agency, emotions, and identities (Mercer, 2011a; Kalaja *et al.*, 2015; Lai, 2019). Furthermore, Learner beliefs are involved in learners' creation and selection of language learning strategies (Abedini, Rahimi and Zare-ee, 2011; Zhong, 2014; Tang and Tian, 2015).

In discussing language learning ecology, Palfreyman (2014, p. 178) shows that the ability to benefit from affordances is affected by three factors: "(a) features of the task context, (b) learning skills, which might be taught, and (c) what might be considered attitudinal/ affective variables". He further explains that these factors, even though are based on individual feelings, are also influenced to a great extent by what he terms *discursive resources*, which are the ideas and beliefs circulated through a society by means of formal or informal discourses. Therefore, this demonstrates the social nature of learner beliefs.

Based on reports of previous studies (White, 1999; 2003) on self-instructed language learning, White (2008, pp. 124-125) notes the dynamic nature of beliefs and how expectations and beliefs influence the learners actions as well as their interpretations of experiences in new learning environments. She concludes that good learners are not necessarily ones who own particular sets of beliefs, however, they are those who possess a sense for affordances of a learning context as well as the ability of "developing a productive interface between their

beliefs and attributes and different possibilities and experiences within that context" (white, 2008, p. 125).

Concerning my study on language learning beyond the classroom. I consider the dynamic, contextual, and social natures of learner beliefs to explore how they are involved in the overall construction of the learning experience in a challenging environment. I also draw from the ecological framework which can be defined as the study of "organisms in their relations with the environment" (Van Lier, 2004, p. 3). It emphasizes on the interactive relationship between the learner and her environment, and also on the nonlinear nature of language learning in which change in any element in the system can be reflected onto the others. With that in mind, I hope to holistically explore the learners' expressed beliefs, how they influence their learning, their management through environmental challenges, and the way they are involved in perceiving and benefiting from the ecology's affordances. Furthermore, my approach offers the opportunity for the emergence of other elements that can be considered as related to learner beliefs, such as perceptions and motivations.

2.4. Autonomy

At the heart of language learning beyond the classroom lies autonomy. Taking charge of their learning, making decisions, and managing through difficulties in a challenging environment entails that the learners are autonomous to some degree. This makes the concept of learner autonomy central in the present study of exploring experiences of learning beyond the classroom in an Algerian context. In particular, I argue that Algerian English students can be more autonomous than their teachers and scholars believe, as learning out-of-class is usually hidden from their view (Benson, 2014; Richards, 2015). In making this argument, I propose viewing the process through the holistic and contextual lens of the ecology of learning, which is an approach sensitive to the learners, their environment and the relationships between them.

In this section, I first define the concept of language learner autonomy (2.4.1), then discuss it within the scope of learning beyond the classroom (2.4.2). I then highlight the ecological perspective of learner autonomy (2.4.3). Finally, an account is given of how learner

autonomy is viewed in Algeria, with reference to discussions around the cultural appropriation and universality of autonomy (2.4.4).

2.4.1. Defining autonomy

This section defines learner autonomy and refers to its three dimensions of control (methodological, psychological and content of learning).

Much of the research on language learner autonomy has been preoccupied with finding a definition (Cotterall, 2008, p. 110). Additionally, describing an autonomous learner is another area in relevant literature where researchers attempt to draw lists usually referred to as profiles. A well-known one is Candy's (1991) 100 competencies that fall under the following main characteristics:

- methodical and disciplined;

- logical and analytical;

- reflective and self-aware;

- curious, open and motivated;

- flexible;

- interdependent and interpersonally competent;

- persistent and responsible;

- venturesome and creative;

- confident and have a positive self-concept;

- independent and self-sufficient;

- skilled in seeking and retrieving information;

- knowledgeable about and skilled in learning;

- able to develop and use evaluation criteria.

A more recent autonomous learner profile is provided by Cirocki (2016, pp. 29-30), where he argues that autonomous learners are individuals who:

- have an intrinsically-motivated approach to learning the target language, which they regard as a means of communication;

- make cogent decisions and assume responsibility for their own learning;

- set realistic individual targets for themselves as well as regulate their behaviour with regard to previously formulated goals;

- negotiate the syllabus, making decisions on course content, materials and assessment;

- estimate personal strengths and weaknesses and choose their own learning tasks with reference to previously set objectives;

- identify what has already been discussed in the classroom as well as know when, how and why they learn new information and what available resources will aid foreign language learning;

- are able and willing to adapt to new learning contexts;

- select and implement appropriate strategies to make full use of their environment, negotiating between their own wants and the needs of other classroom members;

- manage their foreign language learning experience, systematically monitor their progress and critically evaluate outcomes;

- become fully involved in collaborative practices, seeking guidance from peers and language teachers alike, if need be; and

- reflect on their learning experiences so they can decide what to do next.

Regarding the profiles, I ask the questions of whether an autonomous learner must be all of the above and if we observe a learner who does not exhibit some of those attributes, does it translate to them lacking autonomy? In other words, in this study, to some degree, I

question the viability of such profiles in the context of learning beyond the classroom which consists of varying interacting resources and spatial and sociocultural elements, making it difficult to accurately describe an autonomous learner. Although such profiles are important in improving learning and autonomous practice in the context of the classroom, their use beyond the classroom can be limited due to the complexity and the variety of resources, learning settings and modes of practice. Alternatively, I advocate for a more broad and holistic approach to autonomy that does not limit our view to pre-defined sets of characteristics. Therefore, my approach is based on two levels, the first is depicted in this section that offers a general definition to autonomy and its different dimension of control, the second is the ecological approach to autonomy and is covered in section 2.4.3.

Concerning the first level, Benson (2011b, p. 86), proposes that autonomy is "the capacity to take control of one's learning" and argues on the complexity of describing it as it can be observed in different forms yet we must possess the ability to identify which form to recognize in the context of research and practice. This concept has three different dimensions of control (or forms): one relating to the management of learning, the second is about the cognitive process and the third is about the content of learning; all of which will be explained below.

A famous definition is set by Holec (1981). It describes autonomy as "the ability to take charge of one's own learning" (1981, p. 4). He considers taking charge of one's own learning as being: responsible for determining one's learning objectives; defining learning's contents and progressions; selecting methods and techniques to be used; monitoring procedures of acquisition; and evaluating what has been acquired. He also posits that "The autonomous learner is himself capable of making all these decisions concerning the learning with which he is or wishes to be involved" (1981, p. 3).

Cotterall (2008, p. 110) points out that Holec's definition addressed two matters: first, it is evident that autonomy is seen as a potential capacity that needs to be developed; second, this definition focuses on the technical aspects of learning seen in the five types of decisions, or what Cotterall refer to as "methodological skills" needed to manage one's own learning.

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Therefore, to take charge of one's own learning is to be capable of making decisions at consecutive stages of the learning process.

Holec's definition remains to this day a very useful one, but according to Benson (2011b, p. 88), even though it focuses on the main areas where an autonomous learner is expected to demonstrate control, it is problematic in its technical descriptions while neglecting the cognitive capacities involved. This brings us to another point of view, that is of Little (1991, p. 3). In contrast to Holec (1981, p. 3), Little proposes that:

> Essentially, autonomy is a capacity – for detachment, critical reflection, decision-making, and independent action. It presupposes, but also entails, that the learner will develop a particular kind of psychological relation to the process and content of his learning (1991, p. 4)

Little (1991, p. 4) further adds that this capacity is seen in how a learner learns and the way learning is transferred to other contexts. Benson (2011b, p. 88) points out that the capacity to take responsibility for one's learning from Little's point of view sheds light on "control over the cognitive process underlying effective self-management of learning", and he adds that little's definition complemented Holec's with an important psychological dimension.

By now, I have mentioned two dimensions of autonomy: methodological and psychological. Benson (2011b, p. 60) introduces a third dimension underplayed by the previous two definitions and is concerned with control over the content of learning. Therefore, not only can an autonomous learner control how and when to learn, and how to think about that, but also what and where, thus introducing a political and social element (Cotterall, 2008, p. 111).

Benson (2011b, p. 60) talks about two aspects of this dimension. First is a 'situational one': "Autonomous learners should, in principle, have the freedom to determine and follow their own learning goals and purposes, if learning is to be genuinely self-directed". However, since learning is usually enhanced through interaction with others and not in isolation, total self-direction is neither feasible nor a very desirable option, which leads to the social aspect of control that concerns the ability to negotiate objectives, purposes and contents and resources with others (Benson, 2013, p. 60).

The three dimensions of autonomy mentioned above, referred to by Cotterall (2008) as methodological, psychological and content; and by Benson (2011b) as learning management, cognitive process and learning content, are interdependent because:

> effective learning management depends upon control of the cognitive processes involved in learning, while control of cognitive processes necessarily has consequences for the self-management of learning. Autonomy also implies that self-management and control over cognitive processes should involve decisions concerning the content of learning (Benson, 2013, p. 61).

He further adds that in autonomy research, it is often that researchers focus more on one dimension than the others, which encourages looking at each dimension separately (2011b, p. 61).

As seen above, autonomy is "the capacity to take control over one's learning" (Benson, 2013, p. 68). Using this definition views autonomy as consisting of three dimensions of control, which are methodological, psychological and content. In this study, this definition and the three interdependent dimensions are taken into consideration at a first level that serves as a departure point to view the extent to which the learners are autonomous in their learning beyond the classroom experiences. The second level consists of the ecological view of autonomy which I talk about in section 2.4.3. In the next section, I discuss learner autonomy in the context of learning beyond the classroom in more detail and draw insight from previous studies.

2.4.2. Autonomy beyond the classroom

Little (1991, p. 4) argues that "the capacity for autonomy will be displayed both in the way the learner learns and in the way he or she transfers what has been learned to wider contexts". This suggests that autonomy is not exclusive to classrooms, instead it extends to contexts beyond that. As I have shown before, the world beyond the classroom is often invisible to teachers and researchers (Benson, 2011a; Richards, 2014), and it is important for them, as Kocatepe (2017, p. 104) argues, "to find out exactly what learners do [beyond the classroom] and how they improve [their learning] through doing this". In this section, I highlight the

importance of research on autonomous learning beyond the classroom and demonstrate that through insights from findings of previous studies.

Benson (2011b, p. 203) shows that most research on autonomy is based on the following hypotheses:

1. The concept of autonomy is grounded in a natural tendency for learners to take control over their learning.
2. Learners who lack autonomy are capable of developing it given appropriate conditions and preparation.
3. Autonomous learning is more effective than non-autonomous learning.

Accordingly, the first deals with describing autonomy and its dimensions, while the other two are about the efforts to foster autonomy and better language learning.

Benson (2011b, p. 203) highlights several areas where there is a need for further research in describing autonomy, among which he says: "because so much research is concerned with the effectiveness of language teaching, we still know relatively little about control over learning outside the classroom". In the area of learning beyond the classroom, much can be learned through "introspective or retrospective accounts of learning gathered through diaries, written language learning histories or interviews" (Benson, 2013, p. 206). This shows the need to pay attention to language learners' personal experiences and their own interpretations of them, as much can be learned from the learners themselves.

Chirkov *et al.* (2003, p. 98) note that for autonomous out-of-class learning to occur, learners ought to willingly enact and endorse the actions they are engaged in. In that regard, Kocatepe (2017, p. 105) states that a learner who may carry out tasks while feeling compelled to do that or perceives that his/her actions are controlled by somebody else could perform out-of-class, however doing so lacking autonomy. Therefore, it can be understood that for a learner to be autonomous beyond the classroom they have to, as Benson (2011b, p. 58) defines autonomy, "take control of one's learning" and in doing so, demonstrate the dimensions of control, over learning management, over cognitive processing and over learning content. However, "the forms that learner autonomy takes will differ according to the person and the context" (Benson, 2013, p. 92). Down below I shall site a number of studies reporting

how learners exercised and demonstrated autonomy in language learning practices out-of-class.

Pickard (1996) conducted a study on a number of German students' language learning strategies outside the classroom. This early study found that the students mainly read novels, listened to the radio and browsed newspapers, and in their activities, they showed volition and control over what to read and listen to, as a majority read more for leisure rather than focusing on linguistic forms. It was also visible that the learners possessed an awareness of the opportunities available in their environment and what it lacked.

Hyland's (2004) paper reports a study examining out-of-class English learning activities of student teachers in Hong Kong. The results suggest that the learners put effort and devoted considerable time on practising English outside the classroom with a focus on receptive activities, such as those of watching movies, listening to songs and reading academic texts, while they mostly avoided participating in productive skills like speaking English publicly. Another similar study is that of Chan (2011) that is based on the fact that even if the opportunities of learning English are reported to be scarce in that Cantonese-dominant environment, they do in fact exist; and the survey that was administered to 78 Chinese learners showed that the learners make use of opportunities such as watching TV and reading. According to Kocatepe (2017, p. 106), the learners in those studies show an example of "control of self-determined learning agendas beyond the classroom", since they are the ones who picked which activity to engage in and that facilitated their learning and aided their creation of favourable social identities.

Kalaja *et al.* (2011), through implementing Vygotskyan theory and qualitative analysis of an open-ended questionnaire, sought to understand Fins' learning of English and Swedish out-of-school. The results show similarities in classroom experiences however, they were different outside. On one hand, English language learners showed more agency in seeking learning opportunities, such as in engaging in face-to-face interactions with speakers of English; while, on the other hand, Swedish language learners failed to expand beyond what was placed in front of them such as milk cartons and labels. This clearly demonstrates differences in modes

of practice in similar settings and also differences in exercising autonomy from one learner to another.

Kocatepe (2017, p. 107) draws our attention to a norm in studies on autonomous out-of-class learning in which a narrow conception of autonomous learning is adopted resulting in limited findings. She exemplifies with Lai, Zhu and Gong's (2014) study that considered Chinese EFL students as ones lacking control over out-of-class learning due to their reliance on school materials and guidance of teachers and parents. Inozu, Shinkarakas, and Yumru (2010), similar to the study mentioned before, saw Turkish EFL students as irresponsible about their out-of-class learning experiences, since they consider receiving direction from peers and teachers. These studies' limited vision is due to associating autonomous out-of-class learning with characteristics of individualization and independence, while at the same time, neglecting guidance and support resulting from dependence on others (Kocatepe, 2017, p. 107).

Kocatepe (2017, p. 107) brings forth another crucial remark regarding the ethnocentric view some studies take on in discussing autonomous out-of-class learning. In these studies, the learners' cultural background is blamed for the lack of control of out-of-class learning. Al Asmari (2013) shows that in the Saudi context, teachers were less enthusiastic to offer guidance for autonomous out-of-class learning for fears of such behaviours going against social and political norms. On other occasions (e.g., Ming and Alias, 2007; Al-Khasaweh, 2010; Ashar, Rahimi and Rahimi, 2014) learners are seen to lack autonomy in out-of-class learning because their cultural backgrounds are incompatible with autonomous learning practices. Kocatepe (2017, p. 107) shows that these studies consider "culture itself, as if it is a monolithic, singular entity, is a constraining force" and highlighted the importance of casting away such mass generalizations about cultural groups and to instead focus on the relations between learners and broader societal structures. As will be shown in section 2.4.4, the Algerian literature on autonomy (e.g., Missoum, 2015; Hadi, 2017; Arib and Maouche, 2021) also shows claims about Algerian learner's unreadiness for autonomous practice.

This calls for holistic views that consider the different elements and contexts and interplays involved in language learning beyond the classroom and also views autonomy as related to and reflecting interdependence. One such view is that of the ecology of learning.

2.4.3. Ecology of autonomy

The ecological view of autonomy looks at the different ways a learner can interact with their environment and exploit the available resources of different natures to achieve his/her learning goals. In the following, I discuss ecological linguistics (Van Lier, 2004; Palfreyman, 2014) and draw attention to how such a perspective considers autonomy and the autonomous learner as a capacity to be in charge of one's learning taking into account their environment its characteristics, its perceived affordances, and the learners themselves and their personal goals.

Before delving into autonomy from an ecological perspective, I shall first highlight the notion of an ecological approach to language and learning. Van Lier's (2000, p. 251) "ecological linguistics" is a study of language as relations of thought, action and power rather than as objects such as words, sentences and rules. This view considers language as emergent from individual interactions with others and also with the environment including physical, social and historical contexts. Furthermore, the environment contains affordances emergent from the interaction between the learner and environment which allows for learning to occur.

Van Lier (2004, p. 7) shows that ecological linguistics views language and learning as 'areas of activity', where learners engage in learning through participation in communities of practice. According to Sade (2014, p. 157), Van Lier considers the importance of sociohistorical contexts in which learners and also teachers are situated. This can be understood from the following definition:

> Autonomy in an ecological approach does not mean independence or individualism, however. It means having the authorship of one's actions, having the voice that speaks one's words, and being emotionally connected to one's actions and speech (Damasio, 2003), within one's community of practice (Wenger, 1998). This type of autonomy is dialogical in Bakhtin's sense (1981): socially produced, but appropriated and made one's own (Van Lier, 2004, p. 8).

In line with Sade (2014, p. 157), the above definition highlights what autonomy is not. Autonomy is not individualism and being autonomous does not necessarily mean

independent. This point can be observed in a critique by Little (1995, p. 178) where "learning is not solitary or solipsistic" and "total independence is not autonomy but autism".

Similarly, Yashima (2014, pp. 60-61) says that as a result of the recent development in applied linguistics and also the concurrent expansion of theoretical frameworks such as sociocultural theory, the concept of autonomy became more complex. She further explains that autonomy is paired with a sense of interdependence as seen in collaborating with teachers and peers, even though, it has always been synchronous with independence and individualized learning.

According to Palfreyman (2014, p. 182), from an ecological perspective, rather than seeing autonomous learners as 'independent' or 'freed by' their context, it is better to consider the ways learners can possibly interact with their environment to exercise autonomy. Palfreyman (2006, p. 354) states that:

> the individual can be seen as actively taking up a particular stance with respect to
> material and social resources, and learner autonomy as a developing awareness
> of these resources and of one's own use of them.

From that, Palfreyman (2014, p. 182), considers autonomy from an ecological perspective as "a capacity for intentional use in context of a range of interacting resources toward learning goals", and he further goes on to discuss each element of this definition that can be summarized as follows:

Intentional use: learning is informed, strategic, volitional and non-determined. The learner is aware of the available resources; therefore, he/she can purposefully interact with the environment through cognitive, social and affective strategies. Moreover, the learner will possess an internal agenda and his/her actions will be non-determined as in "not oblivious to the context, but tending toward proactive rather than reactive" (2014, p. 182); therefore, the learner will navigate his/her learning according to his/her own purposes.

Range of interacting resources: this can broadly include material, social or discursive resources which are effective means to access resources of different natures with direct impact

on learning (linguistic/communicative input, clarification of forms, practice, motivation, encouragement, etc.). Therefore,

> the autonomous learner will identify in her environment resources relevant to her purposes, make effective use of these, be open to new affordances in her environment and be able to adapt to changing circumstances by seeking out new resources or adopting new ways of using them for learning (Palfreyman, 2014, p. 183).

Learning goal: being an autonomous learner means somehow having a learning goal. Thus, offering direction and a narrative nature to the learning experience. In language learning autonomy, goals can be linguistic (as in understanding song lyrics or approaching native speaker level) or they may be more of general life goals carrying a linguistic aspect (e.g., being an international businessperson or the spouse of a glamorous exotic figure). These goals are usually formed by discourses in society, however, being autonomous means working toward an identity that the learner has made his/her own.

In addition to individual perspectives on autonomy, an ecological approach, as Palfreyman (2014, p. 184) shows, can aid in directing our thinking towards the way a community "can evidence interdependent autonomy and become a learning system." Accordingly, Dishion, Poulin, and Skaggs (2000, cited in Palfreyman, 2014, pp. 184-185) talk about personal autonomy development during adolescence and its two components of disengagement from parental ties and unsupervised interactions in the peer group; consequently, such a group is a source of both support and pressure for adolescents, and instead of hindering autonomy it may stimulate it. This shows that groups can function as learning communities. An example is in Palfreyman (2011) where each member of a certain family has a role in promoting learning among other members.

Through viewing autonomy from the holistic ecological lens, its meaning is intertwined with the concept of agency[13] , which is the "the socioculturally mediated capacity to act" (Ahearn, 2001, p. 112). Learners are seen as social agents who collaborate with others and use the resources available in their environment (Kalaja *et al*., 2011, p. 47). Lantolf (2013, p. 19) clarifies that being a social agent is "the human ability to act through mediation, with awareness of one's actions, and to understand their significance and relevance". Therefore, from an ecological sense, an agentive learner demonstrates an active role in awareness and perception of the context and its affordances and their relevance to her, which is in line with this study's ecologically guided framework making an agentive learner by default an autonomous one.

Autonomy from an ecological perspective is a complex construct. In fact, a well-known ecological approach to development of autonomy is complexity theory or complex dynamic systems (e.g. Paiva, 2011; Sade, 2014; Reinders and white, 2016; Zhang, 2016; Murray and Lamb, 2018). This approach, according to Godwin-Jones (2019, p. 9) considers autonomy as a construct influenced by a myriad of factors, such as language learner beliefs, motivations, external guidance and the sense of self/future self. An ecological approach has been implemented in viewing several learner autonomy related areas such as motivation (Sade, 2011), agency (Mercer, 2011b) learning from a distance (Braga, 2013), learning strategies (Griffiths and İnceçay, 2016), metacognitive knowledge (Zhang, 2016), intentionality of learning (Kostoulas and Stelma, 2016), online gaming (Scholz and Schulze, 2017), learning centers (Murray , Fujishima and Uzuka, 2018), informal language learning (Godwin-Jones, 2018) and teacher beliefs (Kramsch and Zhang, 2018). Following an ecological perspective, not only is autonomy interrelated with different factors, but it is also dynamic. Godwin-Jones (2019, p. 9) makes a note about this quality:

it points to the importance of looking at the development of learner autonomy longitudinally, as both internal and external factors over time affect language

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[13] due to the holistic approach, no difference between autonomy and agency will be spoken about directly here as the study will focus on learner autonomy hereafter.

learning development. That is particularly the case for informal language learning, for which learners typically use a variety of resources whose type, availability, and usefulness are likely to evolve.

With that said and through the ecology metaphor, attention is directed towards the complex relationship between the learner and the environment and further towards the different resources for learning an environment offers that Palfreyman (2011; 2014) refers to as material, social and discursive. These resources afford potential contribution to learning, however, that depends on the learner "realizing (in both senses of this word) the potential of his/her learning environment" (Palfreyman, 2014, p. 190). As for autonomy, it depends on the learner being aware of and making "beneficial use" of the different resources able to contribute to learning essentials "such as comprehensible input, clarification of form/meaning, practice, motivation, or feedback on progress" (Palfreyman, 2014, p. 190).

2.4.4. Learner autonomy across cultures

In this section, I discuss the appropriateness of learner autonomy across contexts with reference to the notions of culture and universality of autonomy. The first part is an attempt to offer insight into how the western born concept of autonomy is viewed in non-western contexts. Autonomy then is shown to be universal yet unique from a contextual point of view that considers the relationship between the environment and the learner (I.e. everyone can be autonomous, but the shape of autonomy is contextually and personally dependant). The second part is specific to the Algerian context and how Algerian learners are usually depicted as unready to be autonomous. This section adds to my theoretical framework based around the ecological approach to LBC and contextual view to learner beliefs and conceptions. The addition consists of the universality of autonomy and the need to view learner's characteristics and environment's traits as elements involved in the unique experience of language learning rather than obstacles to autonomy.

2.4.4.1. Cultural appropriateness and universality of learner autonomy

Initially, autonomy as a concept originated in 'The West' and its validity across cultures, especially non-western ones, has been problematic and often labelled "the Achilles' heel of autonomy" (Benson, 2013, p. 70). This raises the question of whether it is right to make

assumptions about the learning autonomy of people from different contexts or implement western understandings to approach their autonomous practice.

The debate about the cultural appropriation of autonomy in non-western contexts has been ongoing since the 1980s, particularly since Riley's (1988) "ethnography of autonomy" paper which raised concerns over non-European students' situations in European contexts that aimed to promote autonomy. Riley's concerns sparked subsequent discussions globally, about the cultural appropriateness of applying a western individualistic understanding of autonomy to non-western contexts, with the bulk of attention placed on Asian learners, whose learning styles were characterized as collectivist and respecting authority, this encouraged approaches that considered "autonomous interdependence" (Benson, Chik and Lim, 2003, p. 23). In fact, the individualisation and independence aspects as central to autonomy have recently lost popularity. Instead, researchers propose that the capacity for self-governance of learning grows from an interdependent relationship between the learner and what social and material resources their environment affords (Kocatepe, 2017, p. 146).

There have been several contributions to the critique of cultural appropriation of autonomy. Pennycook (1997, cited in Benson, 2013, p. 70) addresses autonomy as part of the European Enlightenment understanding of the individual. Drawing from feminist and postcolonial frameworks and focusing on the shortcomings of the individual psychology aspects of autonomy, Pennycook suggests that autonomy In ELT should be a matter of supporting students in their endeavour to "find a voice in English" and "confront a range of cultural constructions as they learn English" (1997, quoted in Benson, 2013, p. 70).

Holliday (2003) raises the issue of western ELT Scholar's opposition of Active western learners to passive non-westerners, dubbed as "other". He instead proposes the idea of "social autonomy" which assumes that everyone can be autonomous in their way, and that "Autonomy resides in the social worlds of the students, which from they bring with them their lives outside the classroom. Often hidden by learning activities" (Holliday, 2003, p. 116).

Schmenk (2005, p. 112) proposes that in order for autonomy to be considered a universal good, there needs to be a "glossing over questions pertaining to what autonomy may entail in specific social, cultural, or institutional learning contexts", however this "leaves

the concept devoid of specific characteristics and thus facilitates its homogenization". In other words, learner autonomy according to her is not "a universal and neutral concept" (p. 115) and it requires contextual awareness.

These scholars (Pennycook, 1997; Holliday, 2003; Schmenk, 2005) critique the idea of the universality of autonomy, however, they do not reject autonomy completely. Instead, they advocate for more contextually, culturally, and socially sensitive approaches. A strong defence of the universality of learner autonomy is given by Little (1999), who suggests that the ways in which teachers go about fostering autonomy should be contextually appropriate; the same thing could be said about researching autonomy where the form and content of inquiry should be appropriate to the context and characteristics of learning and the learners themselves.

It can, therefore, be said that autonomy is universal. On that note, Koketepe (2017, p. 146) argues that the sociocultural mediation and contextual situatedness of autonomy entail universality, however, "*not* in terms of the various components that constitute autonomy, as these can vary from one person to another as well as within the same person at different times. Rather, the capacity to exercise autonomy is universal". That is, everyone can be autonomous in their own way, on the condition we view their learning in ways considerate of them, their contexts and situations and their relationship with their environment. Therefore, autonomy can be considered universal, however, the forms it can take will vary.

2.4.4.2. Autonomy in the Algerian context

Having given an idea of the notions of cultural appropriateness and universality of autonomy, the question now is how that relates to the Algerian context in general and to the context of this study specifically.

Responsible authorities have made great efforts and expenditures to reform the Algerian educational system, from teacher to learner-centred. These reforms have touched all stages of the educational system, from primary to tertiary education.

With these reforms in mind and the move towards learner-centredness, the need to promote autonomy as a desirable goal to better learning and academic achievements has

emerged. Despite the efforts made, there seems to be an agreement among Algerian scholars on a number of cultural and personal traits that inhibit learner autonomy.

Hadi (2017) explores EFL students' and teachers' perception of learner autonomy to promote it at University levels. Through the employment of questionnaires, observations, and semi-structured interviews. She concludes that the Algerian students were not ready to take charge of their own learning and that even the teachers were reluctant to give control to their supposedly dependent students. Her study also reveals a limited understanding of the concept of autonomy from the points of view of teachers and students, claiming:

> EFL teachers and students in Algerian university are not aware of the concept of learner autonomy. They are not able to either define it correctly nor provide an equivalence to it in the mother tongue." (Hadi, 2017, p. 4).

This statement entails the existence of a correct definition of autonomy which could be an issue on its own. As the concept can be defined differently depending on how we view it and which dimension we focus on (check section 2.4.1).

Hadi (2017, p. 95) also proposes that the learner's unreadiness for autonomy can be traced back to their cultural background. In Algeria, the teacher figure is greatly respected and their authority is often unquestionable. This can be traced to the influence of Quran studies, which according to Hadi (2017, p. 95), are most Algerian students' first step in education before attending schools. These sessions, usually taught at mosques involve rote learning, repetition and great dependence on the teachers' guidance and commands. This supposedly then inhibits learners' ability to be autonomous.

Another study about learner autonomy in Algeria is Benaissi's (2015). According to her, Algerian students develop in an "Arabo-Islamic" upbringing and carry some specific characteristics which she summarized as follows:

As an individual, he/she:

• progresses in a culture of the group, the family, the community;

• takes decisions with the parents (family);

• shares experience with others.

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As a learner, he/she:

• considers the teacher as someone necessary for learning;

• relies heavily on classroom input (provided by the teacher);

• consults the teacher before making decisions;

• learns (inside and outside the classroom) with his/her classmates;

• takes decisions concerning studies and career with family (Benaissi, 2015, p. 412).

Based on these points, Benaissi (2015, p. 411) stated that from a sociocultural perspective all learners can develop autonomy, provided they are guided towards it and that the characteristics shown above are to be considered.

A more recent study is Arib and Maouche's (2021), which investigates Algerian culture's effect on learners' readiness for autonomy. Through a set of questionnaires to elicit teachers' beliefs on students' readiness of autonomy it was claimed that learners' autonomy is restricted by both the national and educational cultures (2021, p. 44). Accordingly, this study finds that teachers believe most learners are passive and lacking motivation to take responsibility for their learning, and this could be due to shared ideas of teacher authority, heavy parental control and a linear educational system. The study also shows that teachers believe that autonomous learning occurs out-of-class, however restricting this mostly to high achieving students (2021, p. 52).

These studies, although few in number, have been contributing to enriching the Algerian, North African and Arabo-Islamic contexts' theoretical understandings about language learning and teaching. However, some of their methods and generalisations might be unfair towards the learners in several ways. One issue is that the methods used may not consider learners' inner understandings and constructions of experience, instead, they use standard approaches involving observations, mass questionnaires and a small number of interviews with teachers to round up the studies. Another issue is that the focus is on autonomous behaviours inside the classroom while neglecting what happens outside the school premise in the vast world beyond the classroom.

What I bring forth is a different approach than these studies in Algerian contexts. First, my study is backed by my understanding of the ecological approach to learning autonomy summarised in Van Lier's definition:

Autonomy in an ecological approach does not mean independence or individualism, however. It means having the authorship of one's actions, having the voice that speaks one's words, and being emotionally connected to one's actions and speech (Damasio, 2003), within one's community of practice (Wenger, 1998). This type of autonomy is dialogical in Bakhtin's sense (1981): socially produced, but appropriated and made one's own (2004, p. 8).

Following this perspective, I do not view the culture as *monolithic,* but instead as one characteristic of the learners and the environment in which they have been living. In other words, by adopting an ecological approach I consider the universality of uniqueness of autonomy (I.e. everyone can be autonomous, however, autonomy has different meanings in different contexts).

In a more technical sense, in my data collection[14], there has not been one direct utterance of the term autonomy on my part, instead, my questions were designed to explore the raw experience of language learning beyond the classroom (often hidden from teachers and researchers), which at its heart as Benson (2011b, p. 140) notes, requires autonomy. So, by analysing the learners' narratives of LBC practice extracted from their understanding of their experiences, I aim to assert the extent of their autonomy to some degree, with consideration to their environment, circumstances, and perceptions.

I adopt a qualitative, interpretive and indirect approach, in which I view autonomy in the learners' experience, expectations, beliefs, motivations, resilience and persistence, and in their resourcefulness in finding or creating language learning or using opportunities that fit their personal agendas.

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[14] Check Appendix 1, 2 and 3

With that in mind, my study calls for similar approaches that prioritize the learner's raw contributions through retrospective construction and understanding of learning experiences. This is suggested Instead of claiming learners' inability to be autonomous, based on rigid conceptions of autonomy and focus on what occurs within the classroom exclusively.

2.5. Summary

This chapter has provided a review of the literature covering the interrelated areas to inform and position the study and explain the findings.

First, language learning beyond the classroom was presented as a field of study with much to offer and which has been gaining attention recently. Due to LBC practices' elusive nature and occurrence out of teachers' and researchers' direct observation, studies about this dimension of language learning are far fewer than their classroom counterpart. To understand the complexity of LBC in the challenging circumstances of the participants, this review of literature presents Benson's (2011) initial framework. This framework aids in exploring the settings and modes of practice of the participants' LBC through a multitude of resources beyond the classroom. This is done through a holistic and environment-based application of the dimensions of location, formality, pedagogy and locus of control.

Second, this review has shown the ecological perspective's role as a guiding framework that helps to view the non-linear LBC experience in the participants' challenging environment and the different elements involved. The ecological perspective focuses on the relationship between the learner and their environment and how it is reflected in learning. This approach aids in understanding how learners perceive the different out-of-class learning affordances in limited contexts and how this perception leads to the emergence of learning.

The third area explored within this review is language learner beliefs. In this chapter, learner beliefs are shown to be dynamic, contextual and social elements involved in the process of perception and action, based on the adopted ecological understanding of learning. Language learning beliefs, therefore, influence the learners' ability to perceive affordances of learning and their management of learning despite the challenges and form learning takes.

This makes language learner beliefs important in this study's overall aim to holistically understand the complexity of LBC.

Finally, this review presents autonomy as the "capacity for intentional use in context of a range of interacting resources toward learning goals" (Palfreyman, 2014, p. 182). It highlights the importance of contextual considerations and argues that autonomy is a universal good, that can take different forms depending on the learner, the environment and the different aspects of the ecological relationship between the two.

Insight from the four covered areas guide the research towards a holistic understanding of experiences and also towards a learner's perspective empowering approach.

3. Research methodology

In this chapter, I discuss the methodological approach of the study.

First, I clarify my paradigmatic position (3.1) which is postmodern qualitative drawing insight from the narrative inquiry. The following section (3.2) is concerned with the research design where I present an account of narrative inquiry, its underpinnings and relevance to the study, in addition to an overview and a justification of the chosen research tools. Then explain the quality criteria of the study and the undertaken ethical considerations (3.3). Following that, I offer a detailed depiction of the process of data collection (3.4). Finally, the chapter ends with a thorough explanation of the data analysis (3.5).

3.1. Paradigmatic position

In this study, I attempt to understand language learning experiences beyond the classroom in a challenging environment from the perspective of the participants. In doing so, this study explores their perceptions of the environment and learning affordances, their language learner beliefs, and their exercise of autonomy. Therefore, the spirit behind this study can be located under the qualitative postmodern paradigm, which draws insights from narrative inquiry and thematic analysis.

As Guba and Lincoln (1994, p. 107) explain, a paradigm can be considered as a set of beliefs that define for their holder "the nature of the 'world'", and their "place in it, and the range of possible relationships to that world and its parts". Due to the subjective nature of these beliefs and human's tendency to regard their position as the truth while others' as misguided, it is important for a researcher to invest effort in understanding their belief system to eventually yield research that demonstrates its value (Richards, 2003, p. 33). I present this in the following paragraphs.

Holliday (2016, p. 16) positions the main beliefs of the postmodern qualitative paradigm as follows:

- "reality and science are socially constructed";
- "researchers are part of the research setting";

- "investigation must be in reflexive, self-critical, creative dialogue";

- "what is important to look for should emerge";

- "research procedures can be developed to fit the social setting as it is revealed";

- "reality contains mysteries to which the researcher must submit, and can do no more than interpret".

Through the postmodernist paradigm, this study threads across a 'reality' co-constructed by both the participants' understandings of their learning experiences at the time of data collection, and my own understanding and interpretation of their contributions. Keeping in mind that I, myself, was once a language learner that passed through a similar experience of theirs in the same environment, which influences my position in the study. In that regard, I am aware of myself being part of the research setting, as I can affect the data collection, analysis and the data itself.

Furthermore, reflexivity has been part of the study starting from its early days and spanning across all phases and along all considered possibilities and decisions made. The study is influenced by narrative inquiry, thus the narrative aspect to it is more prevalent than the reflexive, although this distinction I am making is limited to writing since barriers between postmodern approaches are loose. This does not mean a lack of reflexivity, instead it was necessary to find a balance between the two. In terms of the narrative, the study focuses on the empowerment of the participants by encouraging them to tell their stories, as Barkhuizen, Benson and Chik (2014, p. 2) put it:

> the main strength of narrative inquiry lies in its focus on how people use stories to make sense of their experiences in areas of inquiry where it is important to understand phenomena from the perspectives of those who experience them.

Here, the focus is on the participants' contributions, their perspectives, and their stories, not my own. One way I was reflexive is by actively prioritizing their contributions and being attentive to my presence and influence in understanding, interpreting and representing them. As will be shown in the data collection procedure section (2.4), the study is narratively driven. The first data collected is the participants' personal language learning histories on which the rest of the methods were based and designed. Yet, before asking them to write theirs, I initially

wrote my own language learning history. Therefore, throughout the study, I underwent an ongoing reflection considerate of the possible effects my experience could have on understanding and interpreting theirs. The reflection also considered the extent of references to my experience throughout the data and discussion chapters. Eventually, I decided to prioritize the experiences of the participants and limited references to mine. This was in hope of maintaining this research's stance of empowering learners' perspectives, which appear to be marginalized in the Algerian literature about autonomous learning (e.g., Missoum, 2015; Hadi, 2017; Arib and Maouche, 2021).

Holliday (2016, p. 16) also speaks about the emergence of what is important throughout the research. I strived to allow the opportunity for emergence instead of starting with rigid ideas and frameworks. My understanding of the topic, the participants and the settings developed as the study progressed. I applied flexible tools to collect data, such as open-ended interview questions, and the thematic analysis started with open coding which surely helped in the emergence of relevant themes. The emergence was not an automatic process, as themes do not generate on their own, instead, this emergence was a result of my efforts, knowledge and creativity, joined with the participants' understanding and contributions, and also the circumstances of the setting and the times the study processes occurred in.

The research procedure was also characterised as flexible and went through different developments to fit with the setting and circumstances. At first, the study was designed to start with a focus group session that would mostly serve as a chance to build rapport with the participants and procure initial data, which was to be followed by long narrative interviews. However, as my understanding of the topics evolved, LLHs were introduced and the design changed to its final form. The focus of the study also changed, from simple exploratory research questions to more developed and context-sensitive ones that try to produce rich and in-depth understandings of the six participants' experiences.

Lastly, the idea of reality being mysterious and can only be superficially touched is also important. Through the postmodern paradigm, I am limited to interpretation. As I strive to explore the complexity of the LBC experience, which is usually hidden from teachers and

scholars, I use narrative inquiry to touch on the participants' inner worlds and their own retrospective understandings of experience and eventually interpret them.[1]

To conclude, the beliefs shown above situate this study within the postmodern qualitative paradigm. Through postmodernism, I adopt the idea that "each person brings their own 'baggage', or past life experiences" and that truth and knowledge are "a constructed reality (worldview) and there is no objective truth"(Webster and Metrova,2007,p. 29). I try to touch on glimpses and interpret the complexity of learning beyond the classroom experience of the participants. To that end, I draw insight from narrative inquiry and use instruments like language learning histories, interviews and focus group.

3.2. Research design

The study's overall aim is to explore the complexity of language learning beyond the classroom as experienced and understood by the learners. As data collection is informed by research questions which themselves reflect the purpose of the research (Richards and Morse, 2007; Creswell, 2007), it is important to recall the research questions to justify the design of the study:

1. How has the environment influenced the participants' language learning beyond the classroom experience?
2. What Beliefs do the participants hold that reflect their language learning experience in their environment?
3. To what extent is autonomy exercised throughout the learners' experiences beyond the classroom?

In order for me to address these research questions holistically and capture the participants' understandings of their language learning experiences beyond the classroom, it was necessary to adopt a research design fit for the research setting, its theoretical principles, and qualitative postmodern paradigm and narrative orientation. For that, the final form of data collection consisted of the use of language learning histories, semi-structured interviews, and a long focus group discussion. As the study falls under the postmodern qualitative

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[1] More on narrative inquiry in section 3.2.1

paradigm, the chronology of data collection and the final decisions made on which tools to use were determined during the process itself (Holliday, 2016, p. 16)[2]. Circumstances, access and my ever-growing understanding of the topic and the participants were involved in my explorative attempt in addressing the research questions about LBC experience in a challenging Algerian environment.

In the following sections, I explain in more detail the role of narrative inquiry and present an overview of the used research tools (language learning history, interview and focus group) and their relevance to the study.

3.2.1. Insight from narrative inquiry

To better understand the participants' personal perspectives and understandings of their long experiences of LBC, the research follows a qualitative approach that draws insight from narrative inquiry.

Telling stories is an activity that everyone practices and knows about. We encounter stories all the time in our lives. Meeting a co-worker usually involves them talking about their weekend which is a story, movies tell stories, songs we hear on the way to school do that too. Stories are everywhere and they are important to us. Murray (2009) says that not only are stories important, but our lives are stories, "stories about ourselves that we tell ourselves and other people" (p. 46). Piecing stories together and using them in research is called narrative inquiry.

This chapter presents narrative inquiry and its different dimensions and shows how it is relevant to the present study.

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[2] Check data collection procedure section 3.4

3.2.1.1 Defining narrative inquiry

This genre of research, that is usually referred to as Narrative inquiry and Narrative study interchangeably, is human-centred in nature as it aims at the capture and analysis of human life stories, in so, it documents critical events in detail as well as provide holistic perspectives (Webster and Mertova, 2007,p. 13). Therefore, in capturing stories we capture growth and development.

Narrative inquiry is also based around understanding and making sense of our lives and others' through narration. According to Murray (2009, p. 46), theorists and psychologists believe that not only do we "make our existence into a whole by understanding it as an expression of a single unfolding and developing story" but "we achieve our personal identities and self-concept through the use of narrative configuration" (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 150). As new events occur, our life story changes constantly and so does our sense of self which relies on what Polkinghorne refers to as 'configuring of personal events into a historical unity which includes not only what one has been but also anticipations of what one will be' (1988, p. 150). Therefore, narrative study documents change in individual's lives, covering all aspects, inclusive of those of language learning (Murray, 2009, p. 47).

3.2.1.2. Types of narrative inquiry

There exist different approaches to differentiate narrative inquiry in the field of language learning. And often the boundaries between them are thin. Here, I cite these different approaches and show how my study focuses on the content of narratives of the participants' contributions.

One approach is based on the analysis strategies used in the study and is drawn by Polkinghorne (1995), who differentiates between the first type "analysis of narratives", where stories are used as data, or as according to Creswell (2007, p. 54) is the use of "paradigm thinking to create descriptions of themes that hold across stories or taxonomies of types of stories"; and the second type "narrative analysis" where storytelling is implemented to analyse and present data, or as Creswell defines it as the collection of "descriptions of events or happenings and then configure them into a story using a plotline" (2007, p. 54). In addition

to using already published narratives in "analysis of narratives", researchers can also elicit spoken, written or multimodal narratives from learners or teachers for further analysis; Gao's (2010) study of already published memoirs of disabled Chinese language learners is a good example of that. On the other hand, in an attempt to convey their understanding, practitioners of "narrative analysis" use narrative writing as a means to methodologically altering non-narrative data into stories; a good example is that of O'Mochain's (2006) work on queer issues in EFL courses in a Japanese women's college, which benefits from different data sources but is reported as a narrative (Barkhuizen, Benson, Chik, 2014, p. 4).

Following this first distinction, my study leans towards "analysis of narratives". First, because the analysis starts from the onset of data collection; second, the study uses different types of interrelated data, some of which are narratives in their raw format (LLH), while others (semi-structured interviews and Focus group) are directly not, but are constructed and based on the narrative data, and they, themselves. can be configured narratively. In other words, defining my approach as totally narrative can be misleading, for that I chose to call it *a qualitative study that draws from narrative inquiry*. The process of data collection here starts with language learning histories (LLHs) which are narratives, hence the study can be called an analysis of narratives. Insights from the LLHs and their analysis are used to construct interviews and a focus group discussion. Later, data from the three tools are analysed thematically as one unit with narrative thinking guiding the process.

Another approach, according to Barkhuizen, Benson and Chik (2014, p. 4) is concerned with the researcher/participant relationship, in which they distinguish between the terms "biographical" and "autobiographical". In the first type, the researcher analyses or tells his participant's stories; while in the second, he/she analyses or tells their own. Other approaches similar to biographical narrative studies include life history, life story and oral history research; while the following fall under the same scope of autobiographical studies: autoethnography, personal experience and self-study.

Benson (2004) points out the ambiguity in distinguishing between the two basic types of biographical and autobiographical studies and proposes what he calls "(auto)biographical" which involves first-person and third-person either together or alone. A source of confusion

according to Barkhuizen, Benson and Chik (2014, p. 4) is that data in biographical studies are autobiographical from participants' perspectives. This study, I refer to it as carrying aspects of biographical research from the learners' perspective. However, it hints at autobiographical insights of my own experience which I had to be cautious about as they are part of my subjective involvement in data collection, analysis, and interpretation.

A final distinction lies in the focus of the study, whether it is on the content of the narrative or the narrative itself. According to Barkhuizen, Benson and Chik (2014, p. 5), The literature contains many narrative studies which are less concerned with what the narrators say and more with the way they say it while focusing on aspects of discourse language and sociolinguistics; in addition to that, narrative research which deals with the content aspect of narratives is also popular, and it includes the majority of sociological and psychological narrative studies.

As my study is curious about language learners' experiences beyond their classrooms, it will not focus on the first type, but instead on the content of narratives and on what the learners tell about themselves, others and events and situations they encountered. However, as Barkhuizen, Benson and Chik (2014, p. 5) show, reliance on narratives' content and ignoring their discourse was referred to as 'big stories', and has been criticised and instead, a 'small stories' approach was advocated, which focuses on the stories people tell in everyday conversations, or "how selves and identities are 'done' in interactions . . . interactions in which narratives are made use of" (Bamberg, 2006, p. 146). On that note, Barkhuizen, Benson and Chik (2013, p. 5) propose that there is much to learn from narratives of language learning and teaching provided that we are aware of the "interpretive nature of narration" (Pavlenko, 2007, p. 169), and not treat narratives as factual accounts of their subject matter. With that in mind, narratives help us understand language learners (and teachers) and represent their experiences, therefore allowing us to access learning and teaching from learners' and teachers' perspective; thus, on that note, focusing on narrative content have much to offer in terms of a "richer and more rounded" understanding of lived experiences (Barkhuizen, Benson and Chik (2014, p. 5).

3.2.1.3. Why narrative inquiry?

Narrative inquiry is important to the study due to its temporal and coherence affording outlook to experiences, and also thanks to its ability to address different elements involved in language learning. This section highlights these benefits and their impact in my attempt to understand the participants' experiences of language learning beyond the classroom.

Narrative inquiry is useful in addressing and highlighting many aspects of human experience including language learning. Throughout history, stories have always served in depicting the experiences and endeavours of people. This is possible thanks to the construction and reconstruction of personal stories as well the retelling of events deemed important to us (Webster and Mertova, 2007, p. 1). Moreover, narratives are a means through which, people make sense of their lives and the world around them, and the stories they depict are constantly being shaped by new events; thus, narrative inquiry allows researchers the opportunity to present experience holistically taking into consideration richness and complexity (Webster and Mertova, 2007, p. 1). Additionally, Narrative inquiry brings forth the temporal element of experience, as Barkhuizen, Benson and Chik (2014, p. 12) show, a distinctive aspect of narrative research is that it offers insight into long term lived experiences through different contexts and settings by means of retrospection and imagination.

The temporal benefit of narratives is the glimpses they offer about distant experiences in the past and also in the imagined future. According to Kramp (2004, p. 107):

[Stories] assist humans to make experiences meaningful. Stories preserve our memories, prompt our reflections, connect us with our past and present, and assist us to envision our future.

Therefore, in reshaping our experiences, stories offer coherence and aid us in understanding them.

Murray (2009, p. 47) states that narrative research has several benefits. One is the variety of insight narratives offer as this type of inquiry has been used in addressing different topics in applied linguistics including: motivation (Norton Pierce, 1995; Schumann, 1997; Shoaib and Dörnyei, 2004); identity (Norton, 2000; Benson, Chik, and Lim, 2003; Kanno, 2003;

Murphey, Jin, and Li-Chi, 2005); multilingualism (Pavlenko and Blackledge, 2004; Block, 2006); learning strategies (Oxford and Green, 1996); language loss (Kouritzin, 1999), communities of practice (Murray, 2008); and autonomy and self-directed learning (Murray, 2003; Benson, 2004; Murray and Kojima, 2007).

The second benefit mentioned by Murray (2009, p. 47) is the ability to understand learners' assumptions and beliefs and also to access their identities, which are in turn an engine to comprehend learning issues such as motivation, style, affect and language learning strategies. Finally, narrative research makes individual voices heard (Benson, 2004; cited in Murray, 2009, p. 47), thus marginalized or rarely researched populations can be brought forward and in so bringing new perspectives. These voices have the potential to affect and change theory by encouraging a critical view towards standard (Kouritzin, 2000, cited in Murray, 2009, p. 48).

With all of that in mind, narrative inquiry fits this study as it allows me to explore in-depth the participants' experiences both holistically and with a focus on critical events. It will aid in accessing their beliefs which influence their language learning in general and the way and the extent to which they can identify and make use of the available opportunities in their environment. Moreover, as Pavlenko (2002, p. 214) cites, through narrative inquiry, "researchers can gain rare insights into learners' motivations, investments, struggles, losses, and gains as well as into language ideologies that guide their learning trajectories". That is another reason why narrative research fit with my study as it seeks to gain an inner understanding of the participants' experiences.

3.2.2. Overview of data collection tools

In this section, I provide an overview of the used data collections tools, their relevance to the study and their challenges and limitations[3].

3.2.2.1 Language learning histories

In narrative inquiry, written accounts produced by learners (or teachers) can be used as a source of data. Such a type of data can take many forms like reflective journals, diaries, narrative frames and language learning histories. The last one plays a part as the first stage of my study where the six participants write their language learning histories depicting their experience from the first contact with English until the present as English students at university. This section will provide an overview of this tool.

Language learning histories (LLHs), according to Barkhuizen, Benson and Chik (2013, p. 37), are retrospective accounts to past learning as opposed to diaries that happen to be introspective. LLHs are the embodiment of learning experiences in a written form by the learners. In my attempt to elicit LBC experience accounts that empower the participants' perspectives, LLHs play a major role, because allowing participants to write about their learning encourages them to use their own voice, and often speak about their experiences of learning in contexts beyond the conventional classroom. According to Menezes (2011, p. 70):

> To tell a language learning history is necessarily an act of talking about affordances. Many of these affordances belong to the world beyond school, to which researchers usually do not have access. Narrative research has proved to be an effective methodology to examine those experiences and thus contribute to our understanding of SLA because when we listen to the learners' voices we free ourselves from the limits of the classroom and realize that learning experiences happen in different contexts rather than just in traditional classrooms.

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[3] A more detailed and practical depiction of data collection of the study in section 3.4. Data Collection Procedure.

This not only makes using LLHs an emic approach to learner experience (Menezes, 2008, p. 200) but also a tool by which we can explore a language learning ecology and its various interrelated elements, which falls under my attempt for a holistic understanding of the complexity of LBC experience. Furthermore, this complexity in LLHs, according to Benson and Nunan (2005, p. 156), resides in their content that reflects interrelation of psychological, social variables, and also "the learners' larger life circumstances and goals". This fits within my approach of accessing and empowering the participants' perspectives about their life and learning beyond the classroom.

According to Oxford (1995, p. 582), In LLHs as part of research, students thoughtfully look back at their past learning experiences. Additionally, she says that the act of writing a LLH can serve as a way through which the learner develops his/her awareness of the language learning process in specific contexts and situations (1995, p. 592).

The way written data telling learners' histories is collected can be seen in the example of Murphey, Chen and Chen's (2005) study of university students' social constructions of their identities as English learners. The goal was to find out if and how the students invested in their learning and their imagined communities. The students were asked, as an assignment, to write a paper of 750 words about their LLHs of learning English from the time they started learning to the present time and also what they thought about the future. The LLHs were also seen by other students. After thematic analysis, the retrospective accounts revealed varying "degrees of identification or non-identification and investments with imagined communities" (2004, p. 86).

According to Murphey, Chen and Chen (2005, p. 85), asking students to reflect on their experiences through writing their own LLHs is beneficial, as such data is constructed by ''events, desires, decisions, strategies, beliefs, actions, and particular perceptions", moreover, writing histories allows learners to reflect on those forces and raise their awareness of taking

part in shaping their histories. This justifies the use of LLHs in this study to collect the initial insight on which the rest of the data collection is designed and based. [4]

Another element for LLHs to mention is, as Murphey (1999, cited in Murphey, Chen and Chen, 2005, p. 85) contends, them being so relevant and appropriate narratives for learners of the same level to read, making them suitable for presenting different strategies, beliefs and attitudes to be modelled. Such a point shows how LLHs are beneficial for all readers from teachers and researchers to other learners.

Despite being a useful tool in depicting language learners' experiences, LLHs can be faced with some challenges and limitations. Among which, the main issue concerning written narratives according to Barkhuizen, Benson and Chik (2018, p. 49), is actually getting the participants to write them in the first place, as motivation to write is usually not always high. Thus, securing motivated participants willing to write a 750 words story can be difficult. This is an issue that I had to be cautious about. A workaround that I found is to build a strong rapport with the participants and explain to them that their stories are important and deserve to be heard. The second is to use a simple instruction card that they can follow, which also serves to unify the chronologies of every participants' LLH[5] which will help me in the analysis process.

3.2.2.2. Interviews

Qualitative Interviews are the second phase of this study, however, the logic behind them was not as straightforward and direct as the previously introduced language learning histories, hence a more thorough overview is required. Here I present qualitative interviews and their types while focusing on the one that will dominate my interviewing phase. I also highlight on the use of interviews in narrative research to elicit "oral narratives" (Barkhuizen, Benson, Chik, 2014). The purpose of this part is to justify decisions on the chosen type of interviews and its procedure.

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[4] Check section 2.4 on data collection procedure.
[5] Check Data collection procedure and appendix 1

3.2.2.2.1. Defining the qualitative interview

An interview is an important tool in the arsenal of a qualitative researcher. This section defines it.

Kvale and Brinkmann (2009, p. 1) argue that:

The qualitative research interview attempts to understand the world from the subjects' points of view, to unfold the meaning of their experiences, to uncover their lived world prior to scientific explanations.

This quote shows that the qualitative interview is a method whose goal is to access to participants' experiences and achieve an understanding of their perceptions and beliefs about the researched phenomenon and its situated context.

According to Mann (2016, p. 2), there is no method as frequently used in qualitative research as interviews. Dörnyei sees such frequency as due to interviews being the most "'natural and socially acceptable way of collecting information" (2007, p. 134).

Denscombe (2007, p. 173) draws attention to the risk of the researcher already possessing skills of conversation, which may make some think that qualitative interviewing involves only drawing from this pre-possessed skill; however, qualitative interviews are not that superficial, and they are beyond simple conversations. Although, one must not confuse that with conversational interviewing, which is characterised by a focus on social aspects of speech to avoid a formal interrogative approach to maintain a relaxed and extended discussion (Mann, 2016, p. 66).

Following Richards (2003, p. 50), a qualitative interview can be described as a "conversation with a purpose" (Burgess, 1984, p. 102) or "professional conversation" (Kvale, 1996, p. 5). Qualitative Interviews, however, are not solely a tool to converse with and retrieve information from the interviewee, as that can turn into an interrogation, such as the ones seen in media interviews which can even be aggressive. A qualitative interview is a method that provides an array of ways to delve into the interviewee's experiences and beliefs (Richards, 2009, p. 183).

Therefore, depth of insight and access to participants' experiences are two important characteristics of such a type of interview. In that regard, Kvale (2007, p. 9) points out that:

The Qualitative interview is a key venue for exploring the ways in which subjects experience and understand their world. It provides a unique access to the lived world of the subjects, who in their own words describe their activities, experiences and opinions.

Thus, the qualitative interview is a suitable inquiry tool to explore subjects about language learning such as learning beyond the classroom, which is a dimension usually hidden but much could be learned about it by accessing the learner's personal views, experiences and interpretations.

3.2.2.2.2. Types of interviews

Having defined the qualitative interview, in this section I present the three types of interviews, to be followed by a section justifying my choice of the semi-structured interview that reflects the narrative orientation of the study.

There are three types of interviews, two of which are commonly seen in qualitative research which are semi-structured and unstructured interviews. Tightly structured interviews are the third type, however, as Richards (2003, p. 48) points out they are rarely present in qualitative inquiry.

The structured interview is the most controlled. It is designed to retrieve very specific data, giving little chance to variation, and therefore, sacrificing depth and richness for the sake of precision and comparability. Furthermore, data from such interviews can be analysed quantitatively, and structured interviews are usually thought of as spoken questionnaires and sometimes referred to as 'survey interviews' (Richards, 2009, p. 184). This makes structured interviews unsuitable for the type of research that I conduct, as they lack depth and personal involvement of the participants.

Unstructured or open interviews reside at the other end of the spectrum. According to Denscombe (2007, p. 176), the interviewee's thoughts are emphasized on, with the

interviewer being as less instructive as possible by letting the interviewee develop his/her chain of thought. It is true that such a type of interview is less controlled than structured or semi-structured interviews, however, that does not mean that there is no need to inform the interviewee about the purpose of the interview; because, according to Jones (1985), "If the respondents have no clear idea of what the researchers' interests and intentions are, they are less likely to feel unconstrained than constrained by the need to put energy into guessing what these are"(quoted in Richards, 2009, p. 185). This type of interview is characterized by its great advantage of depth and richness, but at the same time, it is challenging in terms of the difficulty of comparing respondents' answers. Richards (2009, p. 185) brings to attention the danger of implementing open interviews for specific issues with comparison as a goal because that is much more likely to influence natural development and corrupt analysis. To that end, in an earlier publication, Richards (2003, p. 91) points out that such interviews pursue construction and not excavation; which means that meaning is constructed through interaction, and analysis is a result of exploring the respondent's thoughts and understandings by means of reading the whole recorded interview event.

Semi-structured interviews are the third type which happens to be somewhere in the middle between the controlled structured interviews and the flexible unstructured interviews. Semi-structured interviews, therefore, offer opportunities for both comparability and depth of data. This type of inquiry should be based on what Richards (2003, p. 69) called 'interview guide', which is a term he preferred rather than 'interview schedule' that is more oriented for spoken questionnaires and invokes more of an 'eyes-down' approach neglecting opportunities within the interview in qualitative research. The interviewer then, as Denscombe (2007, p. 176) points out, knows what points to address and what questions to ask but, at the same time, he/she is ready to show flexibility in terms of question order, and also in allowing room for the interviewees to develop their line of thought spawning unexpected new areas.

In my study, I use semi-structured interviews. The following section explains the reasoning behind that in relation to narrative inquiry.

3.2.2.2.3. Interviewing in narrative inquiry

The qualitative interview allows access to participants' personal inner understandings and experiences of language learning in different contexts, making it a suitable tool for narrative research. In narrative inquiry, in-depth interviewing methods are used to gather, analyse and interpret people's stories about their lives (Marshall and Rossman, 2016, p. 155).

Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) distinguish between three types of interviewing: short story, life story and oral history. The short story is an interview about a specific event; life history is an interview about a person's life story in their own words; an oral history interview is about communal history topics. Life history is the popular choice among narrative researchers to capture long-term learning experiences (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009, p. 1).

Therefore, my study will adopt a life history approach, as I aim to explore participants' long-term experiences of learning beyond the classroom where they lived, paying attention to the positive and negative experiences, the environment's perceived learning affordances and the language learner beliefs involved.

Semi-structured and open interviews are seen in the field of narrative inquiry, although with the former being more used than the latter. Semi-structured interviews are common in language learning and teaching research and the researchers implement research guides to direct the process, however, they ask open-ended questions leaving room for elaboration and emergence of themes. Moreover, this type of interviews benefits from follow-up questions for the participants to further elaborate, offering flexibility and also giving each individual interview a distinctive personality (Barkhuizen, Benson and Chik, 2013, p. 17).

Open interviews are even more flexible, as the researcher does not possess pre-set questions, however, he/she may start the interview by introducing the topic and letting the interviewee elaborate (Barkhuizen, Benson and Chik, 2013, p. 17).

The semi-structured norm was picked in this study as it provides a structure to follow while maintaining flexibility, and there is always an opportunity for expansion and further elaboration of interviewee responses. In my choice of this type I kept in mind Mann's (2016,

p. 91) remark about the non-reflexive rush towards semi-structured interviews mainly due to two reasons:

The first is that it may be worth trying more unstructured or open formats before making this decision (at least in a piloting phase). The second is that there is too rarely an account of the challenges and learning points in preparing for, undertaking, and writing up such semi-structured interviews.

Therefore, there was a need for more reflection and thought in deciding between semi-structured and unstructured interviews. To that end, pilot interviews for both types were necessary and conducted to reach the final decision of using semi-structured interviews.[6]

3.2.2.3. Focus group

This section is an overview of the focus group which is the third stage of my study. An account is given about focus groups, my role as a moderator and the expected challenges with this type of data collection tool.

Individual face-to-face interviews are very common in qualitative research; however, academics possess the option of implementing focus groups. A widespread of using focus groups happened after the 1950s when it was developed and termed by market researchers aiming to investigate consumer motives and product preferences; by the 1980s they gained popularity in academic social research (Kvale, 2007, p. 72).

Such a type can usually be conducted with a group of five to ten homogeneous people sharing common experiences and views on particular topics (Riazi, 2016, p. 122). In the case of my study, six participants from the same area are to discuss common and contested vies concerning their experiences of learning English beyond the classroom in their environment.

Focus groups primarily aim at encouraging different viewpoints on the topic, hence characterized by a non-directive style of interviewing (Kvake, 2007, p. 72). Consequently, the interviewer takes the role of a moderator where he/she introduces the topic to the

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[6] Check Piloting section 3.4.2.1

participants and allows them the opportunity to express their opinions dialogically. As for the type of questions, open-ended ones are mostly used to maximize elicited narrative data; although, the interviewer is more likely to follow a semi-structured protocol that allows for probing and posing follow up questions (Riazi, 2016, p. 122).

This inquiry method carries an assumption that an individual's attitudes and beliefs are never constructed in a vacuum, instead, they are social since people often form their opinions and understandings through listening to others' (Marshall and Rossman, 2016, p. 154). In that sense, for a focus group to yield satisfactory results, a supportive environment that facilitates interaction between participants is important, and that falls under my responsibility as a moderator.

A moderator, in addition to organizing the sessions in terms of members, location and timing, is also responsible for:

- creating a comfortable atmosphere for the discussion;
- introducing the stimulus;
- keeping the discussion on track, focused around the topic;
- encouraging participation from all members;
- ensuring there is no abuse or intimidation (Denscombe, 2007, p. 179-180).

All of that shows how important my job as a moderator is, however, one must not assume that a moderator is supposed to lead the discussion, instead and in principle, my purpose is to be more of a facilitator, who will encourage participants to talk to each other instead of putting him/herself as the focal point and controlling the speech event sequences (Denscomre, 2007, p. 180)

A Focus group's social orientation is another strong benefit because of its natural and non-experimental atmosphere and is usually more relaxed than that of individual interviews. According to Marshall and Rossman (2016, p. 154), that makes it useful for providing access and focusing research site selection and sampling and even for checking tentative conclusions. For those reasons, focus groups can be a great addition to qualitative studies aiming for depth and richness of participants' accounts.

Kvale (2007, p. 72) points out that focus groups are perfect for exploratory studies as spontaneous expressive and emotional views are more likely to emerge from collective interaction than from cognitive interviews because this allows for the facilitation of expressing usually inaccessible views.

In a narrative study, Rajadurai (2010) included focus groups as one of her methods, in addition to student journals and reflective diaries to investigate and explore language learning beyond the classroom as process of identity negotiation in individual multiple communities of English language learners in Malaysia. Rajadurai (2010, p. 96) argues that accounts of social world inhabited by participants can be generated by means of joint negotiation; therefore, focus group interactions can create a "community narrative" resulting from converging dialogues.

Implementing a focus group can be faced with some challenges. An important one is that of power dynamics within a focus group setting, which requires great awareness and sensitivity (Marshall and Rossman, 2016, p. 154); as in some cases, a participant may dominate the discussion, therefore the moderator ought to have the necessary skills to avoid such issues and mend them should the need arise. Other issues include control over time which can be lost on irrelevant matters; difficulty of analysis; and finding a dedicated discussion site (Marshall and Rossman, 2016, p. 155).

3.3. Quality criteria and ethical considerations

This section covers the elements taken into consideration to assure that the work is ethical and of suitable quality. This includes a discussion around quality criteria which are: rigour, trustworthiness, generalizability, and credibility. This is followed by an account about efforts done to perform an ethical scholarly endeavour.

3.3.1. Quality criteria

As discussed above, my study is qualitative and draws insight from narrative inquiry. The purpose of this section is to show that the study is one that reflects trustworthiness and rigour and the right efforts in collecting, interpreting, and representing the findings. As the study is

not a total narrative inquiry, a middle ground needed to be found, therefore, in this section I discuss quality criteria from both the narrative and qualitative levels.

Following the qualitative research trend, Narrative inquiries are judged by similar criteria. This section aims at drawing a framework of quality criteria for my study.

In quantitative research, generating and evaluating findings follows specific procedures, consequently creating a degree of objectivity. For instance, hypotheses are tested through validated instruments and results are evaluated by means of statistical procedures (Barkhuizen, Benson, Chik, 2014, p. 88). However, findings of narrative inquiries and qualitative research, in general, are never objective, instead, it is explicitly acknowledged that they are necessarily subjective and interpretive (Barkhuizen, Benson, Chik, 2014, p. 88). Similarly, Morse and Richards (2007, p. 189) note that due to the inherently subjective, interpretive and the time/context-bound nature of qualitative research, "truth is relative, and facts depend on individual perceptions".

In qualitative research, there are many instances in analysis characterized with difficulty, in such moments, through intuition, the researcher brings out his/her subjective knowledge and cognitive capacities to "bear on the data in ways that only become apparent through their outcomes" (Barkhuizen, Benson, Chik, 2014, p. 88).

A quantitative research is "reliable" when data collection and analysis are done in a way that allows replication with the same results. Such a notion makes little sense in the narrative inquiry because of individuality and uniqueness which are seen in participants' experience, their stories, how they tell them, and the interpretation and retelling in research report context (Barkhuizen, Benson, Chik, 2014, p. 88). Thus, narrative inquiries are not replicable, and their findings result from the researchers' subjectivity (Barkhuizen, Benson, Chik, 2014, p. 88).

On the same note with replication of results being necessary for reliability, Dörnyei says:

The problem is that replication is not something that is easy to achieve in a research paradigm where any conclusion is in the end jointly shaped by the

respondents' personal accounts and the researcher's subjective interpretation of these stories (2007, p. 57).

However, he adds that it is possible to conduct reliability checks of sub-processes in qualitative research, for instance through a second coding of interview transcripts by someone else other than the researcher and then reviewing agreements or disagreements (2007, p. 57). In a similar vein Barkhuizen, Benson and Chik (2014, p. 89) talk about "inter-rater reliability" which can be insured by means of a second coding of data even in narrative research where replication is impossible. They further add that such a procedure belongs to narrative inquiry, not for the sake of objectivity or reliability, but for "a well-crafted, subjective interpretation of data".

Polkinghorne (1988) urges for the need to re-orientate measures in implementing narratives, as criteria of validity and reliability are not satisfactory for narrative inquiry (cited in Webster and Mertova, 2007. 93). In that sense and in relation to both quality and ethics of data analysis and interpretation of narrative inquiry, Barkhuizen, Benson and Chik (2014) stress on three issues that narrative inquiry should be mindful of: **rigour, trustworthiness and generalizability**. As for qualitative research in general, Rallis and Rossman (2009) argue for "competent practice and thoughtful sensitive ethics". In terms of competent practice, the researcher should ask the following about their research: is it **credible? Is it rigorous? Is it useful?**

For this study, I use both frameworks of Barkhuizen, Benson and chik (2014) in narrative inquiry, and Rallis and Rossman (2009) of qualitative study, to ensure rigour, trustworthiness, generalizability, credibility and usefulness.

Rigour:

Barkhuizen, Benson and Chik consider rigour as the extent to which analysis is systematic in terms of data coverage and analytical procedures (2014, p. 89). In narrative inquiry that is often achieved by means of thematic and/or discourse analysis procedures and the degree of rigour in data analysis is usually shown in the methodology section of published reports (Barkhuizen, Benson and Chik, 2014, p. 89). Therefore, the researcher should not simply provide a cursory account or none at all of the analysis, instead, he/she is responsible for

showing rigour in both data analysis and narrative writing and avoiding a "cherry picking" approach in selecting data that supports the argument over those that contradict and/or problematize it (Barkhuizen, Benson and Chik, 2014, pp. 89-90).

To achieve this, I opted for a detailed, almost narrative approach in presenting my study's paradigm, methodology, used research tools and data collection procedures, data analysis and the logic behind all of them.

From a more general qualitative research perspective, Rallis and Rossman point out that the term 'rigour' implies inflexibility and uniformity which are important in quantitative studies where replicability is of great value; however, in qualitative research replicability is impossible, instead, the focus is put on carefulness and transparency in design and conduct of the study:

> Was the study well-conceived and conducted? Is there a strong conceptual framework to guide the research? Is the conceptual framework explicated fully and clearly? Does the chosen data collection method fit the framework; that is, will the method provide data that inform the questions? Are decisions that you made as you carried the study out clear to the reader? Was good, strong evidence gathered and presented? Are the descriptions rich enough to give the reader a clear picture of what you studied? Were you diligent in searching for alternative explanations for what you learned? Have you put these forward and weighed them carefully? (2009, p. 276).

To guarantee a rigorous study, following Rallis and Rossman's (2009, p. 276) recommendation: I tried to clearly state my position to the reader through different sections; used multiple methods; and provided a diligent and justifying documentation of data collection, analysis and interpretation.

Trustworthiness:

Trustworthiness in narrative inquiry, as according to Barkhuizen, Benson and Chik (2014, p. 90), refers to the question concerning the relationship between findings and realities they claim to represent, and it can be asked at two different levels.

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The first one according to Barkhuizen, Benson and Chik (2014, p. 90) is "What do stories about language teaching and learning tell us about the reality of language teaching and learning?". They argue in favour of narratives being able to significantly depict the reality of experience and life in language learning and teaching contexts, granted that the researchers are aware of three levels of focus and incorporate them in the analysis: narrative as text, narrative as the subject's individual/psychological reality and narrative as an account of the reality of life. These Levels are drawn from Nekvapil (2003) who distinguishes three kinds of findings in language biographies:

1. what "things" were like, how events occurred (findings from the sphere of the reality of life),

2. how "things" and events were experienced by the respondents (findings from the sphere of the reality of the subject),

3. how "things" and events are narrated by the respondents (findings from the sphere of the reality of the text) (p. 69).

The second level stems from the question "What happens when researchers write about the stories of others?" (Barkhuizen, Benson, Chik, 2014, p. 90). It is concerned with the relationship between the researcher and the source of the narrative and can be seen in biographical and third-person studies. The issue here is in the risk of distorting meanings and intentions through the act of re-telling for research. A good strategy to mitigate this risk is through the explicit involvement of the participants through different stages of the research before the final report (Barkhuizen, Benson, Chik, 2014, p. 91). To achieve that, the design of my study was strategized to correlate with participants' written narratives, which guided the rest of data collection and served as a reference I would consult to maintain chronological coherence and accuracy of my writings about the participants' experiences. Therefore, the participants were involved by default. Furthermore, the participants were also involved in the construction of interview and focus group questions as I made sure to always ask their opinion and how they felt about writing their LLHs, the interviews they participated in and the focus group discussion.

Generalizability:

According to (Barkhuizen, Benson and Chik, 2014, p. 92), it is often expected that research findings should be generalizable in two senses, one is the applicability in different contexts and another is some degree of contribution to theory. Since narrative inquiry focuses on the particular and the individual, generalisability in those senses is limited. Based on that and the fact that narrative inquiry is much like any qualitative research, where a rich description of particular cases is significant as opposed to abstract generalisation of quantitative studies, Barkhuizen, Benson and Chik (2014, pp. 92-93) show how narrative studies contribute to the knowledge of language teaching and learning:

- one way is through rich perspectives in particular contexts of individual case studies;
- another comes in the form of patterns of shared experience going beyond particular experience of a single author;
- A third way of how narrative studies can contribute is their approaches possibly proving effective in other similar situations;
- A final contribution is through inviting readers (explicitly or implicitly) to make connections with other narratives and analyses.

Credibility:

For this qualitative research to be credible, it follows Rallis and Rossman's (2009, pp. 265-266) advice to adhere to the following strategies:

- First is to design to the data collection to span across a long period of time, or if on a short time, it must be intensive;
- Second is triangulation through multiple data sources, methods and could also be through various theories or concepts about the topic of interest;
- A third strategy, as Rallis and Rossman (2009, p. 266) show is 'member checking', which entails sharing descriptions and analysis with the participants to get their opinions on what was written about them;
- Another one is having participants as co-researchers through a participatory design of the study;
- A Fifth strategy recommends a 'Critical friend', who is a colleague or peer that asks challenging questions about the study; It is also beneficial to write about one's own perspective in the final report, "This can help the reader explore how and in what ways

you as the researcher have shaped the project and the findings you report" (2009, p. 266);

- Finally, the writing should carry a stance of humility making it clear for the reader that the findings are not 'facts' but instead are unique to the time and space they were gained from.

Usefulness:

The final criterion pointed out by Rallis and Rossman (2009, p. 276) is its usefulness for other language researchers and teachers and they recommend: providing detailed descriptions of the conceptual framework, research design, collection methods and details of implementation; a detailed description of the discovered themes and conclusions reached through them, all with emphasized reference to context. All these points are accounted for in this study.

To sum up, this section provided a general idea and a framework that I followed to ensure the quality of my research. It presented three issues that Barkhuizen Benson and Chik (2014) considered as important for narrative inquiry which are: rigour, trustworthiness, and generalizability in a sense different from that of quantitative research. This was combined with Rallis and Rossman's (2009) framework for competent practice as an important element for trustworthiness in qualitative research. It urged for three criteria: credibility, rigor and usability and it recommended several strategies to guarantee them. It can be observed that Rallis and Rossman's recommendations and the ones by Barkhuizen, Benson and Chik share similarities, thus, I consider them both as criteria for the research, since the study is qualitative and draws from the narrative tradition in terms of data collection and narrative thinking.

3.3.2. Ethical considerations

Trustworthiness, as previously shown (quality criteria section), is a vital element in qualitative research. For it to be guaranteed, researchers ought to follow numerous strategies and keep in mind several considerations to procure a credible, carefully constructed, and useful study. However, as many qualitative researchers show (e.g., Richards, 2003; Rallis and Rossman, 2009; Marshall and Rossman, 2010), It is imperative to also conduct research ethically and sensitively. This section will discuss those issues and how they were addressed in this study.

Guillemin and Gillam (2004, p. 71) distinguish between two different levels of ethics in research, procedural ethics and ethics in practice. The first involves following institutional guidelines, completing forms for the ethics committee to show competence and trustworthiness to conduct the research; whereas ethics in practice is a dimension concerned with issues that arise during the research or what Guillemin and Gillam (2004) refer to as "ethically important moments".

In discussing ethical procedures, Richards (2003, p. 140), roughly outlines five ethical issues that a researcher needs to be mindful of: consent, honesty, privacy, ownership and harm; however, he points out that "the ultimate arbiter of what is right and decent is your own conscience".

In my research which falls under the narrative inquiry scope, I aimed to elicit spoken and written narratives, to do that I conducted interviews, focus group and gathered written language learning histories. Barkhuizen, Benson and Chik (2014, p. 29) show basic ethical guidelines for narrative research, which are: fully informing the participants of the purpose of the study; obtaining informed consent that should be written in plain terms and offering information on the use of the collected data; sensitivity to changes in participants' lives should also be considered; finally, the researcher must promise anonymity and loyalty to participants' statements. As for written narratives, it is important to inform the participants about what their writing will be used for, as well as who their audience will be (researcher, supervisor and examiners, etc.), as we generally tell stories with an audience in mind, thus affecting what and how much information we voice out.

I considered these issues (Richards, 2003; Barkhuizen, Benson and Chik, 2014) in planning and throughout my research. Concerning consent, I made sure to receive written consent from every participant prior to data collection and verbal consent before starting the interviews and focus group. In terms of honesty and informing the participants about the purpose of the study, I explained in a simple direct manner that the purpose of the study is to explore their experience of learning English beyond the classroom. Richards (2003, p. 140) pointed out the fine line between "limited description and deliberate deception". Fortunately, I did not face that issue, because at the start of data collection, the study was at an explorative

phase and it evolved later during the analysis. Therefore, telling the participants that the study is an exploration of their experiences, without mentioning points such as their beliefs or exercise of autonomy, was enough, and those elements emerged later based on their contributions.

In terms of privacy, I asked the participants to choose their own pseudonyms, but I still had to be mindful. Narrative inquiry can face the issue of maintaining confidentiality as narratives are made up of participants' understanding and construction of their experiences, and if viewed by a smart reader, the identities of participants could be guessed to a certain degree. Elliott (2005, p. 142) explains that "once a combination of attributes and experiences is ascribed to a particular case in a research report it can be very difficult to ensure that the case does not become recognizable". She later proposes sharing research findings during different stages of the research with the participants and gaining explicit approval for publication of their stories. I do not believe that this has proved problematic as the experiences were fairly generic, in the sense that it would be hard to guess the participants, and the fact that the reports lack sensitive materials; although, one instance[7] arose from a participant's experience with bullying at a younger age, which seemed to be important to his language learning narrative. I asked him if I can include it and he saw no issue with that.

Following the principles outlined above protects the participants from harm to a great degree. Moreover, thanks to my familiarity with the setting of the study, its culture and society, I was able to make sure no harm attains the participants, especially the female ones' public image. As being in a closed classroom with a young male individual can warrant unwanted attention, I made sure to present myself around the university centre, to the security guards and to whoever asked, as a PhD student doing research at the university centre. I even taught a classroom there during my stay, so I was also seen as a teacher. In fact, at some point, a security guard barged in violently to the classroom while I was interviewing

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[7] Check interview procedure with Hind, section 3.4.2.3

one of the participants. Thankfully, he understood after some explanation but asked to keep the door open.

3.4. Data collection procedure

Having provided a theoretical basis to my study's methodology, I move forward to practical accounts of the data collection. Firstly, a description of the research setting is provided, followed by a rationale concerning participant selection, then an explanation of the steps done to attain access in the research setting. The second part of this section consists of a thorough narration of the process of data collection, starting from the piloting of the research tools. This section offers details of the data collection process and challenges faced.

3.4.1. Setting, participants and access

Setting

The study was carried out at the University Centre of Salhi Ahmed of Naama. Naama is the capital of the province with the same name located in the inner west region of Algeria. The area is characterised by a harsh arid climate, low development compared to northern areas, and a lack of job opportunities.

The University Centre is a fairly new one as it first opened its doors in 2010. It is a very popular choice among local students, hence its selection as a research site, as targeted participants who are successful local English learners happen to be in the English language department. The university follows the LMD model (License, Master, Doctora), which is the equivalent of UK's Bachelor, Master and PhD.

The study draws from narrative inquiry to elicit retrospective accounts of long language learning careers of the participant from their first contact of English, through the phases of middle school, high school (secondary school) to their present days as 'License' students at the time of data collection.

A more accurate setting is the area they learned English and lived in which is the province of Naama. This setting is central to the study as the low status of the English language

and economic difficulties are important elements. Therefore, much can be learned from successful English learners' experiences in such a challenging environment.

Participants

The participants of the study were six students (four females and two males) from the university Centre of the province who volunteered to participate in the study. The sampling was "purposeful" (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 125) as I aimed to have participants able to provide rich insights. The first criterion that I set was that they should have lived their entire lives in the province as this setting and its characteristics are important to the study. The second criterion was that they should be confident in their English level. All participants were 3rd year students since their program did not yet include topics about language learning and applied linguistics, which offers me a raw perspective of language learning instead of understandings and constructions of experiences influenced by theories of second language acquisition[8]. The recruitment was fairly simple, as I knew one of the participants and all I had to do was ask her to spread the word among her classmates and they contacted me through Facebook and Instagram.

Pseudonym	Gender	Age
Asma	Female	20
Habib	Male	22
Hind	Female	20
Malak	Female	20
Ritej	Female	20
Walid	Male	21

Table 3.1: Participants' profiles.

The six participants involved in the study are not the ones that it originally was supposed to start with. I first made contact with my potential participants around eight months before the data collection. However, after arriving at the data collection site and attempting to

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[8] This was an insight based on piloting. Check section 3.4.2.1

contact them again, three of them decided not to participate for different reasons such as not having time, being overwhelmed by the fact that I am a student of an English university and that their accounts may not be good enough and the third one simply did not like how serious I acted with them. These incidents helped shape how I was going to present my study and myself to my participants from then on. After finding new participants I met them individually and spoke very casually to create a good rapport and present myself, as in addition to me being a researcher, I am also a language learner like them.

Access

Gaining official access to the study was simple. It involved travelling to the university centre some months before the study and meeting up with the head of the English department who was a former tutor of mine. After explaining the aims of my research, the methods involved and the time required, I gained her approval and gained a 'gatekeeper'. With that, I made use of my existing relationship and contact which Silverman (2010, p. 204) deems useful. In addition to getting her written approval, we also agreed that I would teach a class during my data collection period.

With that, I gained a tutor status that was useful during the data collection. Identifying myself to the university security as a tutor was very helpful in avoiding the hassle of simply saying I was a doctoral researcher. Furthermore, by teaching a class of 28 3rd year English language students, I was able to gain more potential participants if the need arose. I also managed to get closer to 3 of my core participants who happened to be students in that class.

3.4.2. Data collection

Data collection was carried out across the span of three months whilst in the setting of the study. Although, a prior visit to the site was carried out in order to secure access and have an idea about the venue availability. The data consisted of written language learning histories (LLH), semi-structured interviews and a focus group discussion, all of which were preceded by a piloting phase that checked the main collection methods namely the written language learning histories and the interviews. That will be highlighted next as I explain how I benefited from the piloting and how I proceeded in collecting my data. A narrative form was adopted as

I believe it is useful in terms of me approaching the research in a narrative fashion and also for hopes of generating reflective and rigorous accounts.

3.4.2.1. Piloting the research instruments

The piloting consisted of trial runs of the core data collection tools and that involved several volunteers. In this section, I present an overview on the process of piloting and how it helped in improving the actual data collection procedure.

I first tested the efficacy of the language learning history guide with five language learners that I know, three of which were Algerian laureates at CCCU's pre-sessional program. I learned that different people read and answer differently not only in terms of content but also in terms of form. Later, I administered the modified language learning history (appendix 1) task to a volunteering colleague, who shares a similar experience to my targeted participants, and scheduled an interview with her afterwards.

Interviewing the volunteer proved very helpful. First, it was a motivating and assuring experience showing me that my questions and recently learned techniques actually work. Secondly, I took into consideration her suggestion that it could have helped if she was informed prior to the interview to think of her learning experience, so I designed a list of points to think of to use in my actual data collection (appendix 2).

A third and important purpose of piloting was to test whether a semi-structured form would work better than an unstructured one. Mann (2016, p. 91) warned about a tendency to rush unreflexively towards semi-structured interviews, because they provide the best of both worlds in terms of structure and flexibility, while there could be a chance when non-structured interviewing yields data more successfully. In that regard, I used the opportunity of the presence of a number of Algerian pre-sessional students at the university to simply sit with them and ask them to tell me how they learned English. In these interviews I noted that simply asking *how did you learn English?* is an effective approach, however, I found it a bit difficult to probe for more questions and there were instances where the interviewees asked me to explain what I meant. Therefore, following Richards' (2009, p. 186) advice, I settled with semi-structured because interviewees tend to be more comfortable with a structure and since non-

narrative data can be used in narrative inquiry (Barkhuizen, Benson and Chik 2014). It was also noticed that these interviews showed insights influenced by theories of language acquisition that the volunteers have studied in their MA, which is something I decided to avoid in selecting participants since my aim was to gain data mostly based on experience.

As a conclusion to this Piloting section, I can say that I benefited immensely from those activities. The accounts retrieved from them helped in shaping and improving the actual data collection. Moreover, as a novice researcher, I faced fears and anxiety of data collection which may have resulted from being overwhelmed with the quality of qualitative studies and especially those using narrative inquiry. However, once I started, I gained my confidence as a researcher, especially after doing my first interview.

3.4.2.2. Written language learning histories

The first procedure of data collection in my study was the acquisition of language learning histories. Language learning histories are written retrospective accounts where learners recall their past experiences and develop a written piece depicting the stories of how they learned a language (Murray, 2009; Barkhuizen, Benson and Chik, 2014).

After meeting up individually with the participants, creating a rapport and receiving their signatures of approval of participation, as part of my research's ethical practice, I sent a Word file either through email or Facebook messenger, containing a set of prompts (appendix 1) designed based on the research questions, aims and insight from previous studies using LLHs (e.g., Menezes, 2011; Mercer, 2011a), and requesting language learning histories from each of the six participants. The instructions were constructed to offer a sense of structure to the participants and create some degree of unison between their accounts to simplify analysis. They were also designed so the resulting written accounts would be similarly sequenced chronologically in relation to the participants' learning careers. It must be noted that I avoided using the term 'language learning career' suggested by Benson (2011b), although I shared the same understanding, fearing that the participants would mistake me talking about 'career' in the professional (or French) sense, related to a CV (Curriculum Vitae), and not the sense of learning experience from first contact with English to the present.

The instructions of LLH guide were designed so not to ask direct questions about preferences concerning out-of-class or about autonomous learning, as I did not want to lead any participant to claim they solely learned beyond the classroom, were autonomous, or make them assume that I want them to tell me that. However, by their nature, language learning histories written by learners allow them to share their experiences of learning in contexts other than the classroom. In that regard, Menezes (2008, p. 201) says: "The narrators freely expose their memoirs and their emotions by giving their own explanations on how they learn or have learned a second language".

I stayed in contact with the participants and answered their queries about the given task. After some days, I received all 6 language learning histories (ranging from 700 to 1400 words)[9], where every participant spoke of how they learned English. They mentioned the activities that they performed, the people involved, some descriptions of their environment and themselves. The received language learning histories varied from a participant to another, while some wrote long, and linguistically well-developed accounts others produced short simple language learning histories. Fortunately, the differences were not problematic as every participant's account matters in the study. With that, I had an idea who they were and what my next step was going to be.

In addition to these 6 core language learning histories, I managed to collect around 20 accounts from a class I was assigned to teach while staying there (to ease access to the university centre). The question was simply telling me how you learned English with reference to out of class practices. The results were not as developed as the ones I received from my participants. It could be because it was part of a classroom and they only had around an hour to write, and perhaps they were not very interested in writing, which made me think about the six participants and how their enthusiasm and eagerness to participate showed in their LLHs. However, those less developed accounts give a general idea of the different activities and learning patterns learners identify with.

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[9] Check appendix 5

3.4.2.3. Interviews

Interviewing represented the bulk of my data as it yielded the most accounts, but it also faced the most challenges. During my stay at the area, the interviews with the six participants were conducted with each spanning more than an hour. They were all conducted at the premise of the university centre except for one which happened out and will be spoken about below.

Preparation and conduct

The interviews involved three steps each with equal importance. The first one consisted of creating a rapport with the students which involved meeting them individually and chatting with them about themselves, myself and the purpose of the study. It was also the chance, to tell them that I did not view them as research samples but as participants and important individuals to the research, and also equals whose opinions and experiences matter and are worth sharing. In that regard, I assigned them the role of choosing their pseudonym. This was my interpretation of my early readings (Giddens, 1991; Casey, 1995) of the postmodern turn in research and in narrative inquiry to practice research that aims to empower the participant.

The second step, which proved the hardest to me, was finding a venue for the interviews. The University Centre of Naama is new as that can be noticed from its name as it did not upgrade to university status yet. And because of that, it still occupies a small surface which does not correlate well with the big number of students who mostly originate from the different towns of the province. Therefore, finding an empty class to interview my students in was not easy, which delayed my initial plan from three interviews a week and to finish all six by week two, to two interviews a week and I ended up finishing in week 4. For sometimes, I would check with the administration and chose a room, when the time comes, I find it occupied by a teacher who felt they needed another hour for their lecture.

Conducting the interviews elsewhere was not an option. First, four of the participants were female which eliminated the possibility of conducting the interviews at a coffee or a tea place. Even though I piloted my interview questions with a friend at a coffee place I could not avoid the looks of the people of the place at us speaking in English, which at some points felt threatening; therefore, it would not have made a difference if I interviewed the two guys

there. Second, conducting the interview out in the halls of the university or its park was not an option because the area was flat and vast, and the weather was too dry, windy and cold, and I was not equipped for such conditions. Thus, five interviews were conducted at class-rooms at the university, while one male participant invited me to his house, and that was surprisingly the most comfortable interview, as we were not limited by time or venue.

These details may at first seem unnecessary, but I believe they play a role in describing the area that my participants and I belong to and the difficulties it presents. As there is not sufficient literature about the targeted setting, showing its nature and characteristics in the workings seems more reasonable than simple claims in an isolated section. Moreover, I put in effort to narrate this section specifically following Holliday's remark that details are important in demonstrating rigour (2016, p. 56), although I always have the opportunity to include less or even more when necessary.

As for the third step. A couple of days after agreeing on the interview times and location, I sent every participant a preparation card (appendix 2) containing a number of points to think of prior to the interview, which was decided on after piloting. Malcolm (2005, pp. 81-82) used a similar instruction card with her interviewee about his learning and they proved useful in her narrative study. Therefore, I used her instructions and questions as a guide to constructing my own.

The first Interview was with Asma who was the first one to send her language learning history. It must be noted that she knew she was the first to be interviewed, as she asked about that before the interview and showed signs of nervousness and anxiety. I managed to elevate her mood by thanking her for her participation in the study and for sending her language learning history and that it was a good piece of writing. After entering the classroom that was just vacated, I arranged and assigned seats, I made sure that she was comfortable and then I set up my humble equipment which consisted of a reliable Sony recorder and a smartphone acting as a spare (this routine occurred with every one of the other participants). The interview lasted 68 minutes. After walking out of the room, she told me that she was not prepared and that she could have done better. At that time, I hesitated on what to say but ended up comforting her that she did well, and the proof was the length of the conversation. I asked her

if there were any points, she wished I spoke about, and she said she would think about it. A week later, she informed me that she wished I used direct questions such as *which do you prefer most in class or out of class learning?* The purpose of asking her that is my will to involve my participants at different stages of the research as it is about them.

The second interview involved a conversation with Malak. Malak informed me beforehand that she was uneasy about the interview, as it was her first. And her shyness actually affected the first two questions, which I designed to elicit stretched narrative accounts about language learning and environment however not much was said, but still, what was said is useful. I also encountered this issue with Asma; however, this was expected as being a male with a sole female in a closed empty room tends to make any girl, especially in the Algerian community, nervous. After some time, the tension eased up and we were able to speak for more than 76 minutes. As always, when I finished the interview, I walked out with Malak from the class and on our walk, I asked her how she felt about the interview. She proceeded to talk about how nervous she was and how she would be more comfortable to answer through writing as that is what she excels at. In fact, that was the case, since her language learning history was the lengthiest and most linguistically developed among the participants. I asked what else she wished I interviewed her about, and she replied with how much she wanted to speak about issues related to and falling under the responsibility of stakeholders, however, felt that it was inappropriate to do so.

The third interview was with Ritej. She was, as opposed to the first two, very enthusiastic and excited to be interviewed. Before the interview, Ritej demonstrated her interest in the scholarship I am entitled to and was eager to know about it, so we had already spoken for a while about that topic, which to my belief eased our way to a stress-free interview. It lasted 55 minutes in total. After that, I asked her what she felt about the interview and if there were things, she wished I asked, however, nothing worth mentioning was said.

Hind was the fourth participant to be interviewed. Similar to Ritej, Hind showed great excitement and eagerness to share her language learning experience. However, while introducing the topic we were interrupted by a security agent suddenly opening the door violently and barging in on the interview venue. I did not hesitate to write it in this report as

the reason for him coming in, was that he was informed that a guy and a girl have locked themselves in a classroom which is indecent. After explaining to him that I was a researcher in the middle of an interview, he apologized but asked I do not lock the door. An unlocked door means that we might be distracted by people passing and speaking in the hallway but there was no way around it. This incident is important as it demonstrates a characteristic of the community and the challenge of interviewing someone from the opposite gender. The rest of the interview went well, and we were able to cover all the questions of the guide in addition to follow-ups, and the interaction lasted 54 minutes.

The fifth interview happened with Habib. At first, it was scheduled to occur at a classroom like the others, however, we did not succeed in finding a venue for that, and that Is when Habib proposed I come to his house on a Thursday afternoon. Once I arrived, I set up my equipment in his family's traditional guest room, which was a setting much more comfortable than a classroom. Habib demonstrated great analytical abilities and understanding of his experiences and was the one who code-switched to Arabic the most. After 72 minutes of talking the interview came to an end. As with the others, I asked if there were things that I missed and if he was happy to schedule another interview.

The last interview was delayed as Walid was feeling ill. After he got better, we met at a classroom in the university and he showed no signs of stress or anxiety, even though during his interview, he spoke about a very personal life phase regarding bullying and how that was involved in his learning. I hesitated to ask about that, but since he mentioned it in the LLH I felt that it was appropriate to probe for more insight. The interview lasted 74 minutes. I later messaged him regarding any points he wishes I discussed but he replied negatively.

My Approach to interviewing

My approach to interviewing was based on advice from Richards (2003), Kvale (2007), Mann (2016) and Barkhuizen, Benson and Chik (2014). If I were to define the type of interviewing, I would call it semi-structured qualitative interviewing, which is, at its core, aimed to illicit learners' in-depth accounts that can be reconfigured into narrative forms. In terms of narrative and non-narrative data, Barkhuizen, Benson and Chik (2014, p. 74) show that this area is always foggy as non-narrative data, which is data not in a story form yet such as

interview transcripts, can be a source of narrative data in language teaching and learning research if: (1) the interview's intention is to elicit a story; (2) the researcher may summarize a narrative of the participant's contribution for further analysis; (3) the researcher may extract a short segment from an interview to analyse in which the interviewee tells a story. In my interviews and while reading the transcripts I would go back to those points as consolation that even though my interview data is not principally narrative it will contribute to my narrative study and the transformation of non-narrative data to narratives.

The types of questions used were open-ended and each participant had their own customised set of questions, based on data from the written narratives and a standard interview guide. During the interviews, some questions were modified because participants found them hard to answer without more clarification. The modification included simple changes of words. All in all, every participant was asked around 12 questions with specific follow up and probes for depth.

In my approach to the interviews and their data, I was actively aware that, what is being said is not factual or taken for granted, however, it was a construction of experiences that could be affected by different variables, yet it is useful as such accounts are essential to qualitative research.

3.4.2.4. Focus group

The focus group is the last phase of the core data collection of the study. The purpose of implementing this method with the same participants was to encourage interaction and opportunity for developed collective insights and to gain time on following up shared points elicited in the individual interviews.

According to King (2004, p. 258):

Focus groups are a valuable way of gaining insight into shared understandings and beliefs, while still allowing individual differences of opinion to be voiced. They enable participants to hear the views and experiences of their peers and cause them to reflect back on their own experiences and thoughts.

After deciding on focus group thanks to its many features[10], it was time to implement it in the study. At first, it was designed that the study would start with a focus group to create rapport, learn about the participants and introduce myself and my topic. However, due to limitations of venues and empty time slots in the study site, focus groups were decided to be pushed until the end of the core study and that is what happened. Such a decision is based on a belief highlighted by Holliday (2007, p. 6) that in qualitative research, there is confidence in being able to devise research procedures depending on the situation and nature of the people involved. A need for a focus group arose right after the second interview was transcribed, as I started noticing commonalities between the participants' interviews. After finishing the transcription of all the six lengthy interviews, I conducted what I called a surface analysis, where I read the transcripts many times over and came up with a number of follow up questions for every participant, and also a number of points that occurred in all of them, such as environment, opportunities and obstacles and practice of English.

With those in mind and in addition to the research questions and aims, I designed the focus group guide with the help of references such as Dörnyei (2007), Denscombe (2007) , Wilkinson (2004) and Kruger and Casey (2002). At the outset I ended up with around 10 questions divided into: an icebreaker question, opening questions, core questions and ending questions (appendix 4). Although during the focus group discussion some questions were left out as they were brought up by the participants.

Concerning the conduct of the focus group, which first involved informing the participants about it through messenger and Instagram apps. Finding an empty time slot and a venue were not difficult thar time because I decided to conduct it a week before the term, exams when the university tends to be empty, since everyone will be home revising.

On the day of the focus group, I came earlier, arranged the seats and set up water and snacks and waited for my participants. After everyone arrived, I assigned them their seats which I thought of before, following tips I got from watching focus group videos By Kruger. An

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[10] Check focus group section in overview about research tools 3.2.2.3

example of the seating was having Habib sit right next to me because I had a feeling he will tend to be dominant; while on the other hand, Asma who was a bit shy during the interviews was sat right across from me.

The focus group started with introducing the topic, stating ethical points and telling the participants about the rules. After breaking the ice with everyone introducing themselves, the focus group started and lasted 90 long minutes.

During the focus group I faced several difficulties which are ever present in such discussions. One was that participants get excited and talk over each other, I had to interrupt them and restate the rule that only one should speak at a time, after repeating that couple of times, I regained control. Another challenge was that I was doing my best to avoid the discussion becoming an interview, as everyone waited for their turn to speak, but then thanks to the nature of the questions, discussions and opposing opinions arose and I had my focus group. At the end, I asked the participants how they felt about being part in the research, and they replied with how much they enjoyed the opportunity to speak about their experiences, and how they benefited from participating and getting to know more about themselves and each other.

3.4.2.4. Data Storage

The main data collected for the study consisted of written texts from the LLHs and audio recordings from interviews and the focus group. To save the data, I made sure to safeguard it in different mediums. The data was copied in an external hard drive and was uploaded to both my personal google drive and the university's OneDrive accounts. Thanks to this, I was able to access the data anytime and from anywhere. And this proved useful, as my personal laptop's drive got corrupted, thankfully I had backups and resumed my work on the new computer.

Concerning the audio files of interviews and focus group, I made sure to use both a Sony recorder and my phone. This proved useful when transcribing as one interview audio was hard to hear in the recorder but was clear on the phone.

3.5. Data analysis

In this study, I analysed the data thematically. Thematic analysis seemed fitting with my attempt to explore experiences of learning holistically and from the learner's perspective. It is also appropriate thanks to the advantages shown in the table below by Braun and Clarke (2013, p. 180):

Strengths	Weaknesses
Flexibility in terms of theoretical framework, research questions, methods of data collection and sample size.	Is perceived by some qualitative researchers as 'something and nothing', as lacking the substance of other 'branded' and theoretically driven approaches like interpretive phenomenal analysis and grounded theory analysis.
Accessible to researchers with little or no (qualitative) research experience; a great 'starter' qualitative method.	Has limited interpretive power if not used within an existing theoretical framework; in practice analyses often consist simply of (realist) descriptions of participants' concerns.
Relatively easy and quick to learn, and to do, compared to other more labour intensive qualitative analytic methods.	Lack of concrete guidance for higher level, more interpretive analysis.
The results of TA can be accessible to an educated wider audience (for this reason, TA can be an appropriate method of participatory approaches, where the participants have a role in the analysis of the data they help to generate, and is a useful method for applied research).	Because of the focus on patterns across datasets, it cannot provide any sense of the continuity and contradictions within individual accounts; also, the 'voices' of individual participants can get lost (especially when working with larger datasets).
	Cannot make claims about the effects of language use.

Table 3.2: Evaluating thematic analysis.

As demonstrated above, thematic analysis is a strong tool to use in the present small-scale qualitative research. The flexibility of thematic analysis supported the study's context-sensitive approach and its developing and evolving nature of gradual understanding of the learners' perspectives and experiences. The simplicity of thematic analysis eased the process and directed the efforts towards focusing on thinking, reflection and interpretations. In terms of the accessibility of results, their presentation in the forms of themes and subthemes allows

them to be simply understood when potentially read by stakeholders, teachers or language learners concerned with the topic of the study.

The weaknesses of thematic analysis mentioned by Braun and Clarke (2013) were taken into consideration in the study. Thematic analysis' shortcomings of 'lack of substance' and 'limited interpretive power' were noticed during the data analysis in this study. The lack of substance and clear-cut guidelines of thematic analysis were actually beneficial, as the study's purpose was to empower the participants' perspectives, thus, their narratives and experiences, and the categories and themes generated from them constituted the wanted 'substance' of the study. As for the interpretive capabilities of thematic analysis, this study was guided with insights from the ecological perspective of language learning and learner autonomy, contextual view of language learner beliefs and environment-based holistic application of Benson's (2011a) four model framework of location, formality, pedagogy and locus of control.

The table also mentions thematic analysis' inability to highlight continuity and contradictions, and also its tendency to lose voices of participants. These issues were avoided in great degree in the study thanks to the analysis being supported with a narrative thinking that prioritises the six participants' stories and their chronology. Using Nvivo software also helped in being consistent.

Taking those strengths and weaknesses of thematic analysis into consideration, the analysis was conducted with three principles highlighted by Dörnyei (2007) and further explained by Barkhuizen, Benson and Chik (2014, pp. 72-73). Therefore, the analysis of data in this study is:

Iterative: While in quantitative research there is an 'orderly' pattern of a clear separation between and an agreed upon order to data collection, analysis and the writing up of the results, qualitative research is Iterative, following a non-linear 'zigzag' pattern where I as a researcher "move back and forth between data collection, data analysis and data interpretation" (Dörnyei, 2007, P. 243). For instance, going back to the field for more data could be required at some point, or re-coding after developing new understandings. The process continues until saturation is reached, when further collection, analysis, or

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interpretation is not producing any relevant accounts. It is important however, to ask the right questions transcending surface meaning in order to avoid "saturation at a level of triviality" (Dörnyei,2007, p. 244).

Emergent: Qualitative research is characterised with emergence, that is to say, "a study is kept open and fluid so that it can respond in a flexible way to new details or openings that may emerge during the process of investigation" (Dörnyei, 2007, P. 37). Keeping Iteration in mind, through emergence, findings and even questions will be teased out, change and evolve all through a narrowing down approach that I as a researcher adopt after starting the study with a broad and open mindset (Barkhuizen, Benson, Chik, 2014 p. 72).

Interpretive: "Qualitative research is fundamentally interpretive, which means that the research outcome is ultimately the product of the researcher's subjective interpretation of the data" (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 38). Data could be interpreted in several ways and a simple example of that is that different people generate different codes for the same data set. This means that my presence in the research is a strong one as the emergence of data is not an automatic process, but a "result of hard, and often creative, interpretive work" (Barkhuizen, Benson, Chik, 2014, p. 73) and also a demonstration of my person, my personality and standpoint on features such as "gender, culture, class and age" (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 38).

The analysis went through two main phases, transcription, and coding. Below I discuss them in more detail.

3.5.1. Data transcription

The data concerned with transcription are interviews and focus group recordings. Whereas the LLHs were copied in the NVivo project as they were received. The process of transcription was long and tedious, with each hour of audio taking up to six to transcribe, in addition to relistening and evaluating my transcripts for accuracy. However, I managed to do it in the most time efficient and optimal manner to my capacity, using Express Scribe software and a foot pedal. This made pausing, slowing, forwarding and other utilities easily accessible which saved me time, as opposed to going back and forth and mouse clicking between the audio and text files.

There exist different ways to transcribe data and format transcripts. In this study, my transcripts followed advice by (Richards, 2003, pp. 199-203) which stresses on *fitness on purpose*, *adequacy* and *accuracy*. In addition to that, I tried to keep as much as possible of details of natural speech in the transcripts, as at that time I was not sure to which direction my analysis was going to follow in terms of focus on content and/or discourse. Therefore, my decisions concerning transcriptions were also made to prepare me for future steps in the analysis.

Furthermore, to maintain as much detail as possible I also took into consideration the languages used in the conversations. To save time on translation I would transcribe Arabic speech into Latin letters instead of Arabic and highlight it with square brackets.

To further explain the transcription, the following table shows the system that was designed:

1. **Use of Arabic or French:** typed in Latin and put between square brackets []
2. **Pauses:** short pauses (-), long pauses (+)
3. **Speech hard to understand** put between brackets ()
4. **Fillers:** all fillers were captured (um, uh, err…etc)
5. **Variables outside the conversation:** all non-speech elements were put between double brackets e.g., ((sound of moving chair))

Table 3.3. Transcription guide.

The extracts quoted in the data chapters however were modified and corrected for clearer reading while maintaining the speech or writing styles of the participants. The raw transcripts were used in the analysis.

The transcription phase also included registering analytic and reflective notes on a separate file which served well in immersing in the data and familiarizing myself more with the participants. Additionally, as transcription started directly after the second interview, it helped me improve the next ones and in knowing what to follow up and probe on in the focus group.

3.5.2. Coding and theme generation

I adopted in my analysis features of the thematic way (Richards, 2003; Richards and Morse, 2007; Dörnyei, 2007; Mann, 2016) as a general approach. all data was imported to a single

NVivo project[11] to guarantee the holisticness of the analysis, however, manual open-coding was used to analyse each file separately which allowed the opportunity to both view individual cases and also perform cross-case analysis. With my good understanding of NVivo's layout, I was able to view the data from different perspectives and identify and highlight key narrative experiences. In the next paragraphs I detail the process of coding and generation of themes:

It could be said that my analysis started after receiving the first learning history, although in less depth and more of a preparation for the next data collection phases. This involved writing notes on the word files margins which helped in designing questions for the interviews and the same process was done to the interview transcripts to design the focus group guide. During that period, I was in a conversation with my data and familiarizing myself with it, which is actually the first phase of thematic analysis shown by Mann (2016, p. 212).

After doing that, I delved deeper into the coding process. In doing so, I followed tips by Richards and Morse (2007) who highlight three types of coding: Descriptive coding, topic coding and analytic coding.

Descriptive coding involves storing information about data items such as respondents, events, or contexts. As my study only involves 6 participants, this process did not take much time, especially since I use the computer. I simply referred to my participants with their pseudonyms and coded the relevant data with that. For instance, a specific entry of a language learning history is referenced as (LLH, pseudonym) while an interview as (Interview, Pseudonym).

Topic coding is, according to Richards and Morse (2007, p. 139), implemented as a method to identify extracts about a specific topic in data for later retrieval and description. At first, after the lengthy transcription phase of the interviews, I read the collected data repeatedly and wrote analytical and reflective notes and initial codes on the word file comment section. Later I started using the NVivo software and initiated a sort of line by line

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[11] No automatic software-assisted coding was used. The analysis was manual using Nvivo as an interface to organize and view data and simplify access.

open coding by labelling every sentence or part of speech with its relevant code. It must be noted that that was the first time I used NVivo, however, I faced no problems getting used to it as the panels were fairly simple to master.

Choosing open coding was part of my attempt to elicit themes based on data itself, or as what Richards and Morse (2007, p. 139) refer to as "coding-up" approach resulting from the participants' contributions and understanding of their experiences, therefore following on my aim of participant perspective empowerment.

An alternative to using NVivo software is printing and manually coding through coloured stickers and writing notes. However, I felt that would "fracture the data" (Richard and Morse, 2007, p. 140), despite it being a simpler approach, as by the end of the initial topic coding I found myself with over 2000 nodes, some of which were uncategorized. This required further effort in categorization and finding duplicates. Despite the extra effort, I believe using NVivo helped in viewing the data holistically, as all files were in one single project. It also simplified accessing the data thanks to the search option and the ability to turn codes and categories into diagrams.

At some point, all data had been read multiple times and every significant segment had been coded. The next step was to find connections and code the codes themselves into relevant categories which are reflective, synchronised with the theoretical framework, and carefully thought of and commented on in NVivo's annotations' panel. This goes in line with **analytical coding** (Richards and Morse, 2007, p. 141), used to "make, celebrate, illustrate, and develop categories theoretically".

The final step in the analysis is **the generation of themes.** Their formation according to Holliday (2016, p. 103) "represents the necessary dialogue between data and researcher… which emerges from and then helps to further make sense of the data then to provide structure for writing" he further shows that "arriving at themes can be the result of formal data analysis, but can also be born from what was seen during data collection" (2016. P. 103).

Although I refer to it as a final step, it started after collecting all six LLHs as emergent hints to characteristics of themes. The thematization was perhaps the most complex phase in the analysis. On one side I had a set of final holistic categories with numerous references in

the data. On the other side, I had the individual participants' stories. And also, I had to be mindful of my own "background and latent theory" (Holliday, 2016, p. 103). Therefore, the themes emerged from reflections about the categories and making relations with literature, accompanied with narrative thinking considerate of the chronological alignment of events and critical incidents. All of this was guided by the research questions of the study.

The final themes and subthemes resulting from the data analysis led on to the construction of the three findings chapters as in shown in chapters 5 to 7 and are summarised in the table below.

Chapter 04: Environment through the eyes of the learners	Chapter 05: Language Learner beliefs and motivations	Chapter 06: Autonomous LBC practice
Challenging aspects of Local Environment: • *Challenging aspects in relation to the area's community.* • *Challenging aspect of English language status.* • *Challenging of family and friends.* • *Challenging aspects of the area.* • *Brims of hope.* School environment: • *Experience of middle school and high school.* • *University.* • *Experiences with teachers.*	Language learner beliefs: • *Importance of the English language.* • *The role of doing what one loves.* • *Value of communication.* • *Everyone is wired differently.* Learners' motivations: • *Motivation for language mastery.* • *Escape attempts.* • *Motivation for intervention and improvement of local English language learning situation.*	Perceived affordances beyond the classroom: • *The affordance of improving linguistic skills.* • *The affordance of intensive exposure.* • *The affordance of awareness of progress.* • *The affordance of a sense of authenticity* • *The affordance of a sense of connectivity.* • *The affordance of a sense of control.* Location, formality, pedagogy and locus of control of the overall LBC experience: • *Locations for LBC.* • *Formality.* • *Pedagogy of LBC experiences.* • *Locus of control.*

Table 3.4. Final themes.

3.6. Conclusion

In this chapter I presented the methodological underpinnings of the present study that aims to explore the complexity of LBC from the participants' perspectives.

The chapter was designed to include five different sections. In the first one I have shown the paradigmatic position of the study which is a postmodern qualitative that draws insights from narrative inquiry and thematic analysis. The second section shows the design of the study by first highlighting narrative inquiry and then offering an overview and justification of the chosen data collection tools. The third section details quality criteria to judge the study as well as ethical considerations, all from a combined perspective of the general qualitative tradition and narrative inquiry. The fourth section is an exhaustive and detailed depiction of the process of data collection that includes piloting the research tools, the LLHs, interviews and focus group. The fifth and final section deals with the analysis part of the study and shows the process in detail.

4. Environment through the eyes of the Learners

This chapter provides a background understanding of the participants' contextual reality, within which their experiences of LBC and their interactions with different resources and other learners occurred. This chapter discusses the participants' responses relating to the environment they learned English in. The data revealed two main spaces in which the participants learned and practised English. The first (4.1), which I refer to as the *local environment* is the immediate surrounding environment that includes the participants' towns, communities, friends, and family. While the second (4.2) is the *school environment* which concerns their experiences during middle school, high school and university levels. In this chapter, I will present findings about the environment and draw attention to its challenging nature and consequently how the participants managed to live and learn despite that[1]. Even though my focus is on out-of-class learning experiences, mapping out the local environment and its limitations is beneficial to eliciting themes about how learners navigate through them. In simple words, I cannot describe actions and practices without talking about the contexts they occur in and are influenced by, or in ecological terms, symbiotic with.

The data has revealed many utterances that describe the environment, one of which is Hind's following statement: "*I think the outside environment is not very helpful, you know, not all people talk in English in our society*"(Interview). And another was by Walid who said: "*In this area, we don't get many opportunities to practice the language because people don't speak English, and don't practice the language even, studying the language itself isn't considered important*"(focus group).

Despite the negative aspects, the participants demonstrated persistence, resourceful-ness, and creativity to learn English and perform their favourite activities in an under-re-sourced local environment presenting numerous challenges such as negative attitudes of the community and low status of English. The school environment was also challenging in terms

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[1] I present findings concerning how the learners managed through environmental challenges in the final findings chapter related to the autonomous out-of-class learning practices of the six participants. Check chapter 6.

of teacher performance, English hours provision and school peers unwilling to speak in English. Yet the participants saw light in their environment and managed to seek out and even create their own fitting learning opportunities.

4.1. Challenging aspects of local environment

The participants spoke about where they lived and grew up and how that influenced their English learning experience, with the bulk of data representing negative aspects. In the following sections, I present findings about challenging aspects of the environment involved in the overall LBC experience. These aspects are the community's negative attitudes and opinions, the low status of the English language, family and friends' involvement and challenging traits of the province the participants belong to. The findings about the environment also present some positive points observed and foreseen by the participants that are impactful to their learning experiences.

4.1.1. Challenging aspects in relation to the area's community

According to the participants, the general populace appears to possess a negative attitude towards foreign languages. Such a characteristic possibly hinders and obstructs English language learning and use out in the open. And by 'the open' I refer to the non-virtual physical gathering in public spaces.

Walid thought the following about the community:

oh my god, I think it's bad every day. It's a daily struggle for us. Because for example, even now, I'm specialized in the language, like when I use English outside the class you know, people give you that look, they eye-ball you, they give you that side look, why do you speak in a different language? you know, it's not our mother tongue… (Interview, Walid).

This judgmental attitude towards foreign language use is noted by other participants. For instance, Malak said: "the people around us used to judge us" (Interview, Malak). Ritej used stronger language: "*I think for me the community is full of discriminations, full of prejudice and full of judges, it's so disappointing, so disappointing for you to practice English outside the classroom*" (Focus group, Ritej).

Habib supported that point by showing a contradiction in how some people viewed English language:

> *people are not supportive, when they ask you what you are studying, and you say English, they say 'oh this is a good speciality like the specialities of the future', but when they see you speak English, and they say you are trying to show off* (Focus group, Habib).

Accordingly, when speaking English in public, Habib believed that others would think he is trying to flaunt, which is generally unaccepted in a small community. As far as people's negative attitude goes, Asma pointed out a different perception that language students are looked down on and belittled:

> *they're just making jokes on social media, jokes about how language students are cocky and ignorant. And I think in real life, they just, they don't care about that, they just think, they judge us as stupid because we're studying less* (Focus group, Asma).

In the general community's opinion, studying languages instead of science, physics or mathematics is unappreciated.

Somehow, Hind supported that idea, and to some degree, she thought the same as the community:

> *I think that people in the outer environment, they aren't supportive, I agree, they don't believe that if you study English you will have a bright future, and I think they have a reason to, because here in our country, of course, we don't have a bright future as the scientific field* (Focus group, Hind).

In addition to the negative attitude, Walid mentioned the idea of the community's unacceptance of change, however, he looked at it from a more positive lens:

> *just from another perspective, I mean we can't judge the society that much, because this is a small society at the end of the day, they are just being super protective, they don't like agree with, they don't support new ideas or new people trying to do new stuff…* (Focus group, Walid).

This conservative persona that people in the community project, in addition to the attitude towards foreign languages, seemingly limited direct opportunities for English language learning. In such an environment, a language learner, especially a young one, would

feel anxious and often hesitant to speak English aloud or participate in conversations that could aid in her learning. Therefore, these characteristics of the community are important elements of the language learning environment (ecology) and are involved in the shaping of the whole learning experience.

4.1.2. Challenging aspect of English language status

The status of the English language in comparison to the other languages present and used by the community, Arabic and French, affected the overall experience of learning English in terms of lack of opportunities and support.

In this regard, Walid reported:

people in the community support French and they support Arabic because it's our mother tongue, but English it's always going to stay like a foreign language, not that much important as the others (Focus group, Walid).

Hind also noticed the low status of English, as she said: "*for me, I think English comes at the end of the list*" (Focus group, Hind).

Similarly, Ritej exemplified the issue of English and French from her experience and showed how English is believed to be less prosperous as a speciality subject for a career. She expressed:

when I wanted to change my field from French to English, all people, 100%, all the people that I know, they told me you won't find job opportunities, you will struggle to find a job. With French, you can do whatever you want, even if you don't master the language, but English, even if you master the language and you're proficient in English, you won't have the job (focus group).

This could be a result of different reasons. Perhaps as Asma guessed:

because maybe it's a foreign language, we don't have a historical background related to English, we weren't colonized by English countries, we were colonized by the French and yeah French took over all the areas here (Interview, Asma).

As seen in the segments above, English falls behind Arabic and French, with the former usually being the mother tongue (it could be the Amazigh language in other areas of Algeria) and the latter as the second official language of the country (due to geo-historical events of

colonialism). The effect of this hierarchy is involved in the absence of English language use, as Asma exemplified "*it's a completely foreign language, it's not used in administrations*" (Interview). Therefore, such limitation of the English language is likely to make it considered non-essential to the community, thus the lack of support and often negative reactions towards English language interactions.

4.1.3. Challenging aspects of family and friends

Family and friend circles also presented some challenges to the English language participants. When asked about the environment, most of the participants spoke first about the people close to them, their families and then friends. Similar to the general community, these close people presented their share of problems that could have influenced the English learning experience in one way or another.

One issue was that the family members were not aware of the participants' interest in English. Asma for instance reported:

> *uh, just my family, my family didn't know I was fascinated by the language they didn't know a thing. I just became interested in English by myself also, I wasn't aware of the importance of English language, no one told me that it is the most powerful and the most popular language in the world, I just liked it and I wanted to learn it. That's all, no one helped me, no one knew about that* (Interview, Asma).

Asma implied here that if her family knew of the importance of the English language and her fascination with it, her experience with learning would have been different, although she did learn anyways, that could not be the same for everyone in the same situation.

Similarly, according to Walid:

> *my family, even though they supported me in everything, but when it came to English, they, they didn't because, you know, they didn't have much of knowledge in English and all of that, so they didn't quite show support* (Interview, Walid).

In Walid's case, even though his family were supportive of his hobbies and interests, their lack of knowledge about English nullified the possibility of them helping in his learning.

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When asked to describe the English learning experience beyond the classroom in their environment in one word, three of the participants said it was "challenging". When asked for the reason Asma replied:

> *Asma: in the area of Naama, people barely talk any English, even middle and high school students who are studying English, never speak this language out of classrooms, let me give you an example about a typical family from Naama. These people here are not aware of the importance of learning foreign languages, a typical family from Naama, wouldn't be like so proud of their son or daughter if she showed an interest in learning a language and in literary stuff. They would be happy; they would prefer if their daughter showed an interest in scientific stuff.*
>
> *Hind: that's true.*
>
> *Asma: they have this ideology and the shared mentality here, that people who chose scientific studies in university are smarter, have a brighter future ahead of them* (Focus group).

The example she gave (not necessarily about her family) revealed families' attitudes towards learning languages. They prefer if their child were to be interested in science instead of literary topics because of the work chances they supposedly offer. Therefore, limiting the support English learners receive and possibly demotivating them.

As for friends, some participants reported how they did not speak English. For example, Asma said: "*well for me, even my friends they don't discuss the language*" (focus group) and Walid thought: "*exactly, none of my friends speak the language*" (Focus group).

In these cases, friends do not speak in English either because of their inability to do so or unwillingness to communicate, as I will show in upcoming sections regarding school experiences[2].

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[2] Check section 4.2

4.1.4. Challenging aspects of the area

Other than the unsupportive community and sometimes family environments, the province itself where the participants belong has some difficulties due to the lack of development. These difficulties may have caused a lack of opportunities for out-of-class language learning such as the privilege of private language schools, self-access centres or simply venues for entertainment and meeting with friends.

The unsupportive nature of the area has appeared through different instances in the data. An example of that is what Asma said when I asked to talk about some positive aspects of her environment has in relation to learning beyond the classroom:

> *nothing comes to mind as positive aspects, I don't know why, I don't mean to spread negative vibes or something, but nothing comes to my mind as positive, thank god to the internet, that's all, and my friends here, but the environment and my family, nothing comes to mind* (Focus group, Asma).

Another example about the nature of the area is 'not having much to do around' which is a typical description young people from small towns in Algeria usually utter. Among them is Walid:

> *Even the environment like you know, I grew up in a small town, so we don't have much to do. so yeah, I think social media, and tv are always an option for us to live life. There's not much outside, to be honest with you* (Interview, Walid).

The shortcomings of the area mentioned above play a role in the challenging nature of the environment. The lack of diversity of 'things to do' in terms of entertainment or spending time with friends appears to limit sites of learning beyond the classroom. The learners thus are left with TV, social media and interactions with friends and family. This reinforces my rationale concerning the challenging nature of the environment and aids in directing my thoughts towards the participants' management to learn despite these limitations.

4.1.5 Brims of hope: positive aspects to the environment

In this section, I present a positive side to the environment highlighted by some participants. They reported noticing positive aspects around them that others might have ignored or were not fortunate to have. Such aspects include family and possible changes in the status of the English language in the area.

Malak, among the participants, generally looked at the environment and her experience of learning optimistically. Concerning family, she said: "*my parents, they always support me, they always support me to do what I want*" (Interview. Malak). She also said: "*they are teachers, but not of English, but they, they liked the language, they were passionate about the language, so they helped me to know more*" (Interview, Malak).

Malak's parents' involvement is seen in their support of her interests and hobbies. The fact that they are teachers seems to aid in their support as they are supposedly equipped with skills to help in learning.

Similarly, Hind's family is interested in languages too. When I asked her to tell me about the environment she has grown and learned English in, she replied:

> *About places I don't think I've experienced anything special, um it was you know simple and easy, it was in my family, they also helped a lot and my mom was obsessed with French. They all loved learning about languages, she used to read books in French, she used to teach kids in French. But meanwhile, my father and my brother used to talk English at home they used to listen to music in English, also they watched, they read books in English, sometimes we would sit at the table and talk in different languages so that's the environment that helped me* (Focus group, Hind).

There are other segments similar to the two above throughout the data. This shows that despite being in a challenging area, the family could afford a supportive environment for language use and learning, thus forming some kind of safe zone where the individual can be themselves and not worry about the community's judgment and prejudice. In this regard Malak said:

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My friends and my family are the only positive thing I see. I think seeing many negative things, pushed me to learn about the language and try to change this environment, the teachers, the way they think, I really want to be a good teacher to change this method (Interview, Malak)

Between those lines lies an interventionist sense in how changing her environment is a motivation for her learning.

In terms of status, as I have shown before, the English language falls behind Arabic and French. Fortunately, there seem to be some changes. Or at least according to the participants. For instance, Habib reported: "I can say we are seeing some improvement in our society, our social construct, the English language is becoming neater more popular, I can say that" (focus group).

Similarly, according to Hind:

I think English is becoming something, I mean, it's already something but here, for example, my uncle he's a doctor in France, uh he doesn't need English but he told me many times you should teach me English because I'm afraid English is becoming more important than French, even in France, so yeah (Focus group, Hind).

Habib commented on an observation he made:

I see, I see in my opinion I see some positive deeds are happening in our society, because like uh a lot of people are trying to know English. For instance, yesterday, I have this friend, he is going outside the country and he's like trying to meet up with someone on this app called Couch-surfing, so he didn't speak understand English, he came to my house and asked me, I like that, I like that a lot and also I have this friend, he's like trying to sell some merchandise online, I always find him like, asking some advice on how to learn English, I see lots of people like that, who are approaching English (Focus group, Habib).

These accounts reflect a futuristic view of improvement in favour of the English language. Through this perspective, the participants demonstrated their awareness of the importance of the English language and its position in society. Not only that, but they demonstrated their hopes of triggering a positive change in the future for better English language learning experiences for others. This seems to hint at a motivation or a goal that

some of the participants have in regard to the challenging situation of the English language in their area[3]

4.1.6. Concluding notes

This section was based on my contextually and ecologically guided theoretical framework to understand experiences of learning beyond the classroom according to the participants. The expressed perspectives have shown several challenges of the environment that the learners have faced. According to the participants, the local people's negative attitude and the status of English in the community seem to have limited opportunity for language use and that was seen in the lack of communication with the English language among community members, lack of practice opportunities and even an absence of those knowing more about the language.

Keeping in mind the idea that Learning beyond the classroom is situated in a context, Palfreyman(2011, p. 18) expressed that learning would be more effective in a supportive context that offers "comprehensible input and supports noticing of language forms and functions, practice and positive affect". In ecological terms, learning beyond the classroom is likely to be more effective in an affordance rich environment, which was not the case as highlighted in this section. with that in mind, I asked 'how did they manage to become successful English language users despite all of those challenges?'. The data have shown that every participant has managed, in their own way, through these limitations, by reaching out to a variety of out-of-class activities in limited contexts, or by creating new opportunities for learning, therefore demonstrating different levels of creativity, persistence and exercise of autonomous learning throughout their language learning careers[4].

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[3] Check section motivation for intervention and improvement of English situation in 5.2.3
[4] Check chapter 6 for more about autonomy.

4.2. School environment

The present section continues showcasing the environment of learning based on the participants' experiences. The Classroom and the school's premises in general, throughout the six participants learning careers, seem to have played an important role in the language learning beyond the classroom experience. I first bring forth the main themes about the three phases of education that the participants have gone through, I.e. middle school, high school, and the present university. Following that, I present the participants' experience with teachers.

4.2.1. Experience of middle school and high school

4.2.1.1. Middle school

Here I present perceptions and impressions about experiences during the middle school period of instruction.

to most Algerian learners' middle school is the official start of English language learning. The participants had different experiences which I present below.

Some participants had certain expectations from the English language classroom. In that regard Asma said:

I expected to become so very fluent, I expected myself to be able to talk like Americans in movies, I expected to have the ability to understand those movies without looking at the subtitles every time (Interview, Asma).

However, in some cases, expectations were met with a different reality. For instance, Malak reported:

at first when I started learning English I was expecting communications, maybe to communicate, to communicate the things I like, to debate, but it was the exact opposite, we only dealt with grammar (Interview, Malak).

Walid reported a similar experience:

you know, when you learn a language you start to fall in love with it through TV, it's fun, it's entertaining, but when it comes to the classroom, especially, you know my experience in the classroom. It was not that pleasant, to be honest with

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you, because most of the teachers used Arabic in English sessions. How ironic is that (Interview, Walid).

It seems that to some participants, the classroom, which was supposed to be the main environment for learning, gave them bad impressions from the start. Instead of engaging and fun experiences, the participants were disappointed with the grammar-focused approach and use of mother tongue. It must be noted that such impressions were first to emerge when asking the participants about their school experiences.

Continuing with challenging and discouraging aspects, classrooms in middle school were often boring and repetitive. Malak gave a detailed account about that as she wrote:

I have no memory of those classes. I found them extremely repetitive year after year. I remember the rote learning of irregular verbs. I remember that the pedagogical approach was to have some months speaking of one theme involving some vocabulary associated with that theme and the assignments were boring in my opinion and the uses of the language were quite artificial. (LLH, Malak).

She later added "*Middle school was boring for me because I got good grades without even trying, so it seemed like I was cheating*" (LLH, Malak).

To offer context, during the middle school period Malak had already been intensively interacting with English through video games and tv shows, and apparently classroom instruction did not satisfy her needs.

Practice opportunity was also a problem for some participants. Habib explained:

Habib: In the middle school, the program of the government wasn't good especially on the practising, side all you learn is grammar and some side stories as practice.

Moncef: what do you mean by practice?

Habib: Speaking! I mean speaking (Interview, Habib).

These personal accounts of middle school experience contribute to showing some of the challenges the learners faced in the early stages of their learning careers. In middle school, participants were faced with a repetitive style of the lessons at that time, an intensive use of Arabic in class and a lack of practice opportunities. Not only do these challenges help draw

the context of the learning experiences, but they also contribute to the narrative of persisting and being resourceful in attaining linguistic and language-related goals, as persistence and resourcefulness entail preceding feelings of disappointment and dissatisfaction. Therefore, since the learners had, in different degrees, demonstrated management of learning despite challenges at early stages of their learning career, it can be possible to say they were exhibiting autonomous behaviours, as they somehow took charge of their learning, although with varying degrees of intention and formality.[5]

4.2.1.2. High school

High school is the second phase of official instruction in Algeria that includes English classes. During this phase, students get to choose which educational stream they want such as scientific or literary. The following paragraphs depict impressions and aspects perceived by the participants from their high school experience.

Walid was in the science stream during high school and that had a great effect on his English classroom experience. According to him:

> *in high school, I was a scientific student, in the scientific stream which means I had to put much attention and effort to study in scientific modules, like science, physics and maths, and our timetable it wasn't good at all, because they had to put English at the end of the day, so you find yourself tired and completely exhausted, so I can't put effort in it at all. Even though I liked English, but the curriculum didn't help us much to put attention into English. Even the teachers didn't enlighten us with the further needs of the language. Because for example even we as scientific students had the opportunity to choose English to study in college which I wasn't informed of* (Interview, Walid).

Walid described how English language hours were inadequately allocated, as they were programmed in time slots where he would be exhausted from other subjects, therefore he did not have the energy to focus on English classroom. in fact, he wrote: "*the atmosphere*

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[5] Check 6.2

didn't help either due to the fact that scientific students considered English class time as a breather and not so important at the time" (LLH, Walid).

He also spoke about having been uninformed of the possibility to choose English as a major in university. It can be understood that he and others like him would have put more effort in the English language classroom if otherwise.

In a similar vein, Asma, who was in the literary stream, spoke of a more extreme high school experience. She wrote:

> *I'm going to be straight up with you. High school years were crazy! Our high school was Infamous! No qualified teachers, no one cared about the rules, students were so out of control so since toxic behaviour is contagious I didn't care about my studies either, yet I discovered that I have a thing for foreign languages because I was always getting the best grades in English/Spanish/French without even making efforts!* (LLH, Asma).

In a way, this is similar to Walid's case in terms of being unable to focus on classroom instruction and to Malak's who felt that she was cheating as she got great marks without putting effort into the classroom.

On the bright side, positive high school experiences, although scarce, were reported by the students. for example, Hind said:

> *as for school teachers, I loved my middle school teachers and high school teachers, I think school helped me in terms of lessons rules uh grammatical rules, conjugation, and also it helped me from that side, outside in terms of communication and talking* (Interview, Hind).

This short extract shows Hind's enthusiasm towards classroom instruction elements of grammar and rules which were judged as negative and boring by other participants. This demonstrates how one thing can be experienced differently from one individual to another. Therefore, what is considered negative to one could be positive to another. This is a simple example of the complexity of experiences.

Another positive aspect is the occasional good experience with teachers which should be discussed more in the last section of this chapter titled 'Experiences with Teachers'[6].

To sum up, during the middle and high school periods, the participants' English language learning experiences had several characteristics. During middle school, classes emphasised grammar and implemented repetitive and rote learning strategies and, in some cases, the mother tongue was heavily utilised. Additionally, some participants spoke about limited practice opportunities. High school was similar, although different in some ways. For those who were part of the scientific stream, English language hours were few and allocated at uncomfortable time slots. Furthermore, some spoke of not being informed of the possibility of being able to choose English for university, as subjects such as maths and science were taken for granted as university destinations. The points I mention here show how challenging classroom environments can be and this gives context to the six participants' experiences and aids in justifying their out-of-class learning approaches and chosen activities. This also helps me in delivering my point of the interrelation of classroom and out-of-class experiences, and how my personal mindset towards English learning beyond the classroom changed from one that is exclusive of classroom experience to one that admits its importance.

4.2.2. University

In this section, I present the main themes depicting the experience of learning English at university. As opposed to middle and high school periods, the university experience is somewhat more positive and motivating because the participants have access to more opportunities to practice and improve their language, despite some challenges reported concerning the lack of English interaction with and among their friends and peers.

A common positive element mentioned by the participants is that of oral presentations at university, which served as a chance to practice speaking and was a motivation for out-of-class efforts to improve speaking and pronunciation skills. Starting from the first year, students are expected to present different topics in front of their teacher and peers.

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[6] Check section 4.2.3

Hind reported:

in college sometimes, in oral expression, we are discussing a certain topic and then the teacher says: 'yeah you, stand in the board and start talking about it', so yeah I felt stressed whenever I was talking in front of the student so it needs practice to get over it, to get rid of it I would say (Interview, Hind).

To Hind, standing up and presenting a topic had been a source of anxiety but also a reason to practice the language out-of-class.

Habib shared a similar opinion and wrote about this topic in his LLH:

The constant presentation in the classroom drove me to find new ways to develop my speaking skills and practice English using new tools like some apps that gather English language learners (LLH, Habib).

In this case, Habib sought to improve his speaking skills out-of-class in order to perform well in the different classroom presentations. To do that, he reached out to online apps and gaming voice chat software called Discord that allows conversations with language learners as well as native speakers.

University offering a deeper knowledge about the English language was found to be another theme, which can seem at first as an obvious one, yet could still be of importance to the overall learning careers.

When I asked Hind how she thinks she has been learning at university she said:

I think I'm beyond the communication, I've gone through that and I'm finished with that, but now I'm learning more about eh, you know modules and technical subjects (Interview, Hind).

Similarly, Asma highlighted in more detail what Hind refers to as 'technical stuff'. She wrote:

Personally, I believe that studying all these different modules in English only and learning more and more about the English language everyday has definitely improved my English (the correct pronunciation in phonetics /Enhancing the writing skills in written expression / upgrading listening and speaking skills in oral expression /new grammar rules /knowing more about English speaking countries' culture and literature ... etc) (LLH, Asma).

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Malak thought the same:

ah it's a whole different thing now, it's like I know what, why do I have to use this word here and there, I know, it's like, it explains the things I was learning before, it gives more information, we used to learn simple things, now we are learning more complicated things. (Interview, Malak).

This theme of knowledge depth in university, as I said before, is an obvious one. But its significance lies in its influence on how the learners approach learning and act with the language in general and beyond the classroom. This revolves around the spectrum of perception and beliefs and how they are involved in language learning in terms of perception of opportunities and use of learning resources. In that regard, Habib's following statement was a clear depiction of this point:

English as a major at the university opened new worlds for me. now I became obsessed with linguistics the history of the English language and its origins, and also history in general, thus making me use English as an everyday tool for my research for the targeted information whatever it is, I found myself learning new things every day outside the university from important information to gaining vocabulary (LLH, Habib).

This shows that the university subjects triggered in Habib new interests that were translated into more out-of-class English learning efforts.

Another theme is that of people to talk to at university. Classmates and friends are a social resource of the environment that can be involved in the learning experience out-of-class.

What I understood from the data, especially during the focus group is the lack of communication in English and about English in the participants' university environment. The following long focus group discussion extract shed light on that:

Walid: even among friends that speak English, sometimes they don't like to speak English outside the classroom.

Asma: indeed.

Habib: it feels weird yes, I have this friend, I always when we start the new year, this year we will speak only in English when we entered the coffee shop, it feels weird, having people looking at us.

Asma: they are staring at you.

Hind: people think that you're showing-off or something like that.

Asma: why are you doing that? I'm just practising my language that I study in university.

Ritej: but it depends on the level, if you're talking to someone who you know his level or her level is good, you're comfortable while talking to that person, but, most of us we have a 100 students, of English students, but none of them, I'm not trying to show off but, not all of them know how to speak.

Walid: I think that's the reason why

Asma: they should speak

Hind: I think we should push them.

Habib: and we need to learn from each other.

Ritej: so as I said, it depends on the level of a student although a 100 students study English but not all of them do speak it, some of them they are shy, so even if you go, if I meet a girl who and I try to speak even if I say hi, she will say hi and then that's it, I say how are you and she will say [labes hamdoullah] good thanks to god, she will cut the English.

Hind: yeah (Laughs)

Asma: you are saying you should talk English only with people who has the same level as you and not those beginners or something?

Ritej: no, I said even if I try to speak to that person, she will cut the discussion in English she will start speaking Arabic.

Hind: I don't think it only depends on the level, because there are some students who are really good at English, they don't practice it outside of the, they don't speak they just write.

Asma: yes, they study English with me a lot, they know English like they are they master it, they are fluent, so fluent but they just don't practice it

(focus group).

The participants here talked about others' unwillingness to speak in English publicly and in front of others. The participants had different explanations in mind. It could be due to the low level and lack of confidence to speak as Ritej thought. Habib gave a related example, although the venue is not the university but a coffee shop instead, where he and his friend engaging in conversation in English could get them unwanted attention. This negative attitude towards English could be a reason why students at university shy away from talking English publicly. Another reason, as Hind and Asma guessed, is because some simply do not feel comfortable conversing in English despite having a good level noticeable in their writings and academic achievements. This also seems to be related to the general aspect of the community being intolerant of the use of foreign languages which extends inside university premise and shows an interrelation of out-of-class environments and their involvement in the language learning experience.

There are other mentions of unwillingness to speak in English among peers and friends at the university. However, there is one notable case of friends willing to communicate in English. It was Malak's group of friends that she had since middle school and who happen to be students at the same university and share her same interests:

Moncef: …, good, and what about your friends, what do you guys talk about?

Malak: we all the time talk about art and books, and movies. We watch one movie together, and then everyone shares their own opinion about this movie or book.

Moncef: really?

Malak: yes

Moncef: so, this happens regularly?

Malak: um?

Moncef: this thing where you watch a movie and then talk about it, how often?

Malak: yeah, we – every end of week, we have to watch one movie together and we have to read one book together, in one week at the end of the week everyone should give his views about the movies and the books.

Moncef: and how many are you in this?

Malak: three friends

(Interview, Malak).

This case shows how university is a place of gathering where it is possible to be part of a small group of individuals joined by friendship and common interests. This group affords activities that may help in learning. In Malak's case, she is involved in weekly intensive reading and watching sessions that end with discussions, which are according to Malak done in English in person or through chat messaging applications. This small group is perhaps a reaction and a coping mechanism towards the challenge of the community's attitude towards foreign language use.

A point worth mentioning in favour of university period is Intentional learning. I somehow noticed that when the university was brought out, some participants started using expressions such as 'putting effort', 'searching' and 'career' and this was reflected in the out-of-class learning approach which seems to have become focused and with a goal in mind, as opposed to pre-university where the learning seemed to be characterised as naturalistic and unintentional.[7]

In conclusion, the university environment which is the present stage to the participant has its repertoire of opportunities and constraints for out-of-class language learning. On the positive side, English university students are encouraged to present and speak about different topics, which proves to be a challenging task and often causes anxiety. This in turn motivated the learners to intentionally reach for out-of-class activities that will help in their oral session presentation's performance and speaking skills. Another good thing about university in the participants' eyes Is the depth and quality of linguistic knowledge compared to previous stages, which motivates the learners to expend more efforts to search and learn out-of-class. A negative experience that was reported was university friends and peers' unwillingness to speak in English either because of their low levels or due to the discouraging and Unaccepting attitude towards public foreign language use. On the bright side, the university could serve as

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[7] Check section concerning formality and pedagogy in 6.2

a meeting location for friends who share similar interests and could participate together in language learning activities as seen in Malak's case above.

4.2.3. Experiences with teachers

Teachers played a role in the learner's experience. Here I will present teachers' involvement through the eyes of the participants as either positive or negative experiences and highlight the two types' influence on learning.

4.2.3.1. Negative experiences with teachers:

There were several mentions of negative experiences with teachers in the data. Although the participants avoided deliberately criticising their teachers much, there had been some reports of their dissatisfaction and disappointment.

Walid for instance, when I asked him about the difficulties he faced in his learning, said:

Walid: some difficulties that I faced learning in English involved teachers. Like I said before, when it comes to middle school, I had the worst teachers ever, literally, I'm not even exaggerating about it, I had the worst teachers ever. For example, the first teacher that taught me English literally used to enter the classroom, sit on his desk, open his pc and let us do whatever we wanted, he never let us ask him to explain a lesson, he never spoke in English, never ever. just sit, just stay at his desk and play with the computer.

Moncef: so how did you learn in the first year?

Walid: I didn't ((laughs)) I really I didn't, yes, even though I was so excited to learn the language because you know from what you see on the TV and the social media, something fun, something flexible to do, something you have fun with (Interview, Walid).

Walid's experience with this teacher could be an extreme case, yet it can serve as an example of how a teacher's attitude and performance is noticed and perceived by the learners and how they act upon them, especially since this teacher was responsible for year one and year two of Walid's middle school experience.

Another case, which is more of a very personal and extreme experience is that of Asma. During the interview, the following conversation occurred:

Moncef: okay, so you mentioned that during middle school, there was a teacher you were dissatisfied with. Tell me about that.

Asma: well, as I told you I was quite motivated to learn English and I had no clue that I was about to face this teacher from hell, I remember that she hated me, but not all the students, just me, I remember that she dismissed me, but the reason why she had such a bad attitude towards me, I just don't remember , like she mistreated me without apparent or obvious reason, even though that I was, I have been always among the best students in her class , but she just treated me like if I was some procrastinator, like some not curious caring student. I don't remember why, her attitude, she was so cruel to me like uh , sometimes she would like kick me out of the class just because I was late, and those who came after me, she used to like accept to, easily.

Moncef: you never found out why?

Asma: no, I never found out why, I never did, her cruel attitude was completely traumatizing for me, because I was emotional, why would she do such a thing, but thank god, thank god that didn't that wasn't like a turn-off, didn't make me like lose interest in English (Interview, Asma).

Like Walid, Asma had a bad experience with a teacher, although more on an emotional level. The teacher did her job, however, her relationship with Asma was negative as Asma expressed. Yet that did not affect Asma's achievements as she came to the class already driven by her love of the language and interest and fascination with the American accent and Disney movies.

Asma and Walid thus are prime examples of how motivation to learn and interest in the language and its related cultural resources were maintained despite the challenging situations with teachers in the classroom.

As for university, participants reported some sort of an inferior treatment they felt from their tutors. In the following focus group segment, Habib's entry was interesting:

Asma: but in our environment, most teachers are not qualified to teach this language, even in university, we don't find such qualified teachers.

Hind: especially in university.

Asma: yeah, I was shocked in the university there were teachers like this.

Habib: no, it's not like uh, it's not in a way the problem of like speaking English, we can go out, you know you can pass that. But like the problem is the method of teaching, the biggest problem, some teachers like they are dealing with us like kids, like they are teaching in elementary school, this like the biggest problem (Focus group).

This here somehow rings a bell with an argument in the literature of language learner autonomy, especially in the Algerian academic community (e.g., Benaissi, 2015; Hadi, 2017; Arib and Maouche, 2021) where it seems that it is taken for granted that Algerian English language learners are not autonomous, and tend to depend on the teachers and like to be 'spoon fed', which is from my experience an expression often popular with Algerian university teachers.

Of course, not all teachers are bad, and most of the students' reports here are from memories years old, however, this aligns with my efforts to draw a picture of learning experience from the perspective of the participants.

4.3.3.2. Positive experiences with teachers:

In the above section, I shed light on some negative experiences in the classroom with English language teachers and how they affected the learners. Now I bring forth data containing reports of positive experiences and impressions.

Some participants were fortunate to have had the chance to receive support from teachers throughout their learning careers.

Asma who as I mentioned before that had an experience with a teacher who, according to her, did not like her, spoke about another teacher in middle school:

Asma: well the other teacher, she was the sweetest, she was so down to earth and she noticed that I had some great potential in this language, so you can say that she gave me a boost of confidence, a positive reward, like learning English with her was so easy and was so fun, and at the same time, effective and informative. She supported me, she told me to write as much as I want, as much as I can, she encouraged me, she supported me and believed in me and everything (Interview, Asma).

This experience with a good teacher, I consider a critical incident in Asma's learning career. Asma experienced an unsupportive teacher for the first two years of middle school, to then receive support and aid from another, whose attitude and treatment helped Asma in gaining confidence and motivation and stayed in her memory as a tipping point in her learning career. This teacher was involved in Asma's out-of-class writing activity (which should be spoken about in more detail in the final findings chapter about out-of-class practices).

The same teacher was mentioned by Ritej, as shown in the following extract of the focus group:

> *Hind: but it's not the case for me and Ritej we had good teachers in middle school*
>
> *Moncef: you studied together?*
>
> *Ritej: I explained it to her.*
>
> *Hind: she was talking about it in oral expression.*
>
> *Ritej: I had really good teachers, I want to meet them someday, I didn't meet them since middle school, Teacher 'A' as I said, she was one of my teachers, she's really sweet, she's really good, she masters the language, she made me curious, I think she's a really, she's the shift for me, to be who I am today, if I were to get the Oscars for my English, I would thank my two teachers, A and B, these two teachers are the best.*
>
> *Asma: yes teacher 'A', Ritej she taught me too, in middle school.*
>
> (Focus group).

In the two short interchanges above it seems that the teachers' treatment and tutoring were motivating elements and a demonstration of teachers' positive impact on the learning experience and the learners themselves.

Another instance of teacher support is in Malak's story. To Malak, books are an important resource and reading is a passion of hers as she even replied to my question about how she feels about books with "*love, friendship, they are my friends*" (Interview). When I probed, I found out that interest in books grew thanks to a teacher:

> *first my parents, they always support me – they always support me to do what I want and then my middle school teacher, she was the one, she was the one who planted the seed, she made me like love, the language , and then my high school*

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teacher, he provided me with more knowledge he introduced me to books, so I'm grateful to them, ah and my friends (Interview, Malak).

As the out-of-class activity with the most impact in Malak's narrative, reading books was brought to her attention thanks to her teacher which serves as a simple example of the teacher's positive involvement in the learning experience as a whole and in some out-of-class practices specifically.

Continuing with positive experiences with teachers, some participants reported teachers' involvement in making crucial decisions about university studies. I have spoken in a previous section (4.3.1) that some participants during high school were not informed of the possibility of choosing English for university studies. This could be related to more complicated matters of the Algerian schooling system and perhaps in some cases the lack or absence of advisory career and further study services. However, Malak for instance who had a generally good relationship with her teachers wrote:

> *I began to consider a college education in English during my last year of high school. Although the prospect of salary and jobs after college weren't and aren't the best for language students, I was encouraged by my teacher to go for it, see how it pans out. So, I ended up studying English at our university and it is good* (LLH, Malak).

The teacher, therefore, involved herself with her student Malak. The statements used here such as "*I was encouraged*" entail a pre-existing relationship between Malak and her teacher, keeping in mind the Algerian typical class size it is unlikely for a teacher to be personally involved with one student. This involvement with the student goes a long way in their learning careers as a source of motivation and guidance.

4.2.4. Concluding notes

Rounding up this section, both negative and positive experiences in classrooms were beneficial in the participants' careers. The positive ones offered guidance, support, and motivation. Whereas the negative ones seemed to have affected the learners positively, in terms of motivating them to find alternatives out-of-class. Although I will discuss out-of-class

practices more in the following chapters, the impressions some participants had from their negative experiences in class perhaps influenced their out-of-class interaction in terms of perception of opportunities that exist out there and which possibly would not have been sought out if the classroom instruction was perfect.

4.3. Summary of findings

The data presented in this chapter offered an image of the six learners' environment. It has given an indication of the extent to which the environment's constraints and challenges influenced the learning experience. The area where the participants lived was defined by a set of hindering characteristics that limited the possible opportunities for learning, and the ways one can practise the language, namely a community often unaccepting of English language use in public; the very low status of the English language compared to French and Arabic; generally unsupportive family environments in relation to English language-related aspirations; and finally the under-resourced state of the area, limiting places to meet and activities to perform. Yet, the participants demonstrated persistence and creativity in their learning.

The data also explored the classroom experiences throughout the three stages of middle school, high school, and university, in addition to the participants' experiences and impressions of their teachers throughout their learning careers. These experiences, either negative or positive, apparently influenced the participants' out-of-class approaches and how they perceived and made use of beyond the classroom opportunities. Limitations such as boring classrooms, use of mother tongue in class and among peers and friends on school premises, and occasionally unsupportive teachers, perhaps pushed the learners to look for opportunities elsewhere, while challenges such as oral session presentations influenced participants to exert out-of-class effort in order to perform better in class. Furthermore, experiences with supportive teachers have helped some learners in out-of-class practices and even in making important decisions like studying English at university.

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5. Reported Learner beliefs and motivations

In the previous chapter, I focused on the environment that the participants belong to and learn in, by presenting data on external factors influencing the learning, either as opportunities or constraints. The present chapter on the other hand is more internal in nature as it presents themes about learner Beliefs and motivations. Therefore, the findings of this chapter are introduced in two separate sections.

The first one attempts to address the research question "what Beliefs do the participants hold that reflect their language learning beyond the classroom experience?". It outlines themes of learner beliefs involved in the participants' personal experiences of learning English beyond the classroom in their environment described in the previous chapter. The themes include ones such as convictions of the international strength of the English language, its importance to them and their lives and the importance of emotional connections with the English language and English language resources and activities.

The findings in the second section concern goals and motivations behind LBC practices and the persistent and creative experiences of learning in such a challenging environment. These goals emerged from an effort to elicit learner beliefs and to holistically understand the learner's experiences from their own retrospective points of view. These motivations are involved in the perception of resources in the environment and learning through them.

It was found out that some participants were motivated by linguistic reasons of mastery, others used LBC as a form of escape from the environment, and others had wished to improve their environment for easier and better English language learning.

5.1. Language learner beliefs

Within this section, I present themes falling under the learner beliefs and conceptions spectrum. While writing and speaking about their language learning journeys, the participants have brought attention to several beliefs related to different aspects of their learning careers. Although I draw insight from the narrative inquiry tradition, I do not emphasize on when, but on what and how learner beliefs are involved in the participants' out-of-class experience in their environment (ecology) with all its opportunities and constraints.

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So far, four themes have been identified under the language learner belief category. The first one is about the importance of the English language. The second one is the importance of doing what one loves. The third one is concerned with the value of the communicative approach to learning. Finally, the fourth is about how everyone can learn in their own way which is about beliefs on self and aptitudes.

An Initial remark about these beliefs is that they reflect a strong contextual influence and also aspects of persistence. In a challenging environment where English has a low status, and the community has a negative attitude towards foreign language use and English related career aspirations, the participants voiced beliefs that clash with these limitations. This hints at aspects of active role and control over the learning experience.

5.1.1. Importance of English language

As the target language of their learning, The English language has been at the heart of the discussions with the participants. Here I try to bring up data that mainly shows the participants' belief in the strong status of English and its importance for careers.

Some of the participants have directly voiced their understanding of the significance of the English language and consequently the benefits of learning it.

Asma justified her increased focus on English during university:

Moncef: can you tell me how are you learning English now?

Asma: well now I focus more on learning English, English is just existing in my everyday life situation.

Moncef: and why is that?

Asma: because I study at university, I have to master to it, I have to be fluent in it, because I'm going to be like a future teacher or I don't know, so I have to - and it is so important to, to at least know how to speak the English Language because you know it's the most powerful language in the world (Interview, Asma).

Two points reside in this statement. One is concerned with the future career involving the English language. Hence Asma's voicing of her 'intentional' efforts for language mastery fluency. This points to an association between career path and intentional learning. The second is the awareness of the strong international status of this language.

Concerning career, there were mentions of how mastering the English language will help in securing work. This rings a bell with one of the challenges of the learners' local environment that I spoke about in the previous chapter relating to the challenging aspect of English language status[1]. In the environment, English is not believed to be a prosperous career path. Habib however, had a different point of view:

> *I have a lot of things to say, but I will only say this, it's like a piece of advice to you as my colleagues and friends, something that was said about work and getting a job with this diploma. Actually, in my opinion in this world, in this tech world, English is like a weapon and we have this weapon, so we don't need to rely on the government for a job or something, you have a lot of things to do on the internet, even if you don't secure a job or a position in real life, you can always work as a freelancer, as a translator, as a graphic designer, just learn the medium, you have the weapon, just have the medium and start working, this my advice to you* (Focus group, Habib).

Here Habib perceived the strength of the English language as a mediator for a career. it could be said that, despite the difficulty of finding a job with a degree in English, other opportunities exist thanks to English's strong presence, potential and the international status that Asma mentioned. It seems that seeing that opportunity however is crucial. If one's perception was limited to their immediate surroundings, they would miss the chances the English language offers in contexts like online freelancing and skill acquisition. Therefore, awareness of English potential and status allows the perception of opportunities[2].

In addition to providing careers, the English language is perceived to facilitate livelihood, or at least that is what Habib thought:

> *Habib: when you learn English, your life will be a lot easier. I'll give you an example, I breed birds if you can say, and I always need information, I like animals in general, I always liked to breed birds, bats, any type of animal. You'll find some information in Arabic but the more detailed information, you find it in English. For instance, I have a bird right now, it got sick, I looked for the medicine or the solution for my bird in Arabic, I find the solution, but it's not that good, so I*

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[1] Check findings section 4.1.2
[2] Check findings section 6.1 learner affordances

searched English and I managed to find a lot of bloggers, lot of western breeders,
they know better than you because they have better resources, so they will give
you better and more detailed solutions, so this like uh if you didn't know English,
your bird will die (Interview, Habib).

Habib claimed that English makes life easier and exemplified this with a personal experience of his. Although not every language learner will necessarily benefit from information on breeding birds, with English as a medium, they can access a vast array of information through search engines and in forums that might not be available in Arabic or French, and this information can actually be important as in saving Habib's bird.

Another way in which English is important to the learners is illustrated in the following passage written by Malak as she talked about her own experience:

The rewards, however, are immense. In that self-humiliation and mental obstacle
course, you gained a whole new skill that sets you up to be a part of a whole new
world you never even could have dreamed of. You can read famous texts in their
original words, speak to people who otherwise would have been alienated from
you, be introduced to a new culture, and so much more. Your worldview will
change after having learned a new language. I guess it all boils down to the love
of the language, the knack to try something new, the immersion in it and your
curiosity. (LLH, Malak).

Similar to Habib's statement, Malak showed that being motivated and curious to learn the English language, despite the difficulties that her environment presented, is important. It seems to allow the learner to be integrated into and exposed to a *new world* that offers several resources and cultural artefacts and even ways of thinking, that one would be oblivious to if they only spoke their mother tongue.

To sum up, the importance of the English language is shared among the participants. Abedini, Rahimi and Zare-ee (2011, p. 1032) despite using a modified version of BALLI which is quite different to my qualitative approach, found in their study that the most agreed-on category of beliefs is the perceived value of learning English, as students in Iran felt the need to learn it. What I found expands on that by focusing on the contextual nature of the importance of English. Learning English according to my participants could aid in securing

their future careers if they were to navigate around the environmental limitations and broaden their views. The English language is also important thanks to its dominance in many fields thus it offers access to almost unlimited information which could make life easier thanks to the resources available such as online forum entries and video tutorials. Finally, thanks to the English language's strong international status, learners will be able to perceive the world differently as with this language they can read new texts and communicate with different people.

5.1.2. The role of doing what one loves (emotional connection)

The participants share a strong belief in the importance of loving the language. Accordingly, a strong connection with the language and its activities is a prerequisite for language learning as it offers them a chance for enjoyment, motivation to learn despite the environmental constraints and aids them in making use of the different resources and opportunities for learning out-of-class

Some of the participants, more than others, have voiced their conviction of the importance of valuing the target language, its culture, and activities. According to Hind

> *I loved everything about this language and I think that's the key to learning any sort of language, if you love it, it is going to be way much easier to learn, in fact, you'll acquire it without being aware because you're not forced to, however, you're finding some sort of pleasure in learning it, that's what I think and that is exactly what happened to me as an English learner*. (LLH, Hind).

In this extract, Hind brought up her own experience and claimed that loving a language will make the process of learning easier. Furthermore, according to her, when one loves the language, she is more likely to learn without being aware of that, which is reflects unintentional learning.

Ritej shared a similar idea. When asked how she would advise a young learner from her area on the best way to learn English, she started by saying that "*the best way to learn English, first of all, you need to love it*"(Interview). And she went on by stating different strategies of hers such as listening and the importance of having friends who talk in English. Malak answered the same question by saying "*you need to love the language; you should have that feeling*" (Interview).

The second aspect that Hind mentioned and is associated with loving the language is enjoyment. Apparently, Enjoyment is related to love of the language as part of the learner's belief system and the two have been mentioned together. For example, while giving their advice during the focus group for successful English language learning outside the classroom in their area, the following was said:

Walid: you also tell them to enjoy the language, take it easy on yourself

Habib: you can't do anything if you don't like it at all, don't enjoy it, that's my opinion. Always love what you are doing (Focus group).

So far, love seems to be an important factor for language learning to the participants. Their accounts are based on their personal experiences; therefore, the context of their beliefs is crucial. In many instances in the previous chapter, I have brought attention to the different difficulties the participants have faced because of their environment's aspects and community's beliefs and opinions on foreign language use. With that being said, love of the language could be considered as a means to overcome language learning challenges in the environment.

For example, at the end of the interview, Walid proposed: "*Yeah another thing, I think, you will find obstacles of course, but if you love that thing, I think you will be able to pass them and I think you should*"(Interview, Walid).

Here Walid continues his advice for the imagined young learner from his area. He stresses on the need to love the language and the activities that use it to overcome environmental obstacles. In Walid's narrative, among the obstacles that he faced in his life was bullying during middle school. He often expressed that his love for the English language, music and movies seemed to have aided him in maintaining his motivation.

Still with the theme of loving the language, appreciating it, from the participants' perspective, means appreciating everything that comes with it. In Ritej's words:

when you've given a lot of importance to the language, you give importance to anything linked to this language. Music, books anything, to be honest, you give importance to anything around the language. So yeah, I think it's the importance

of the thing, the value that you give it because I really appreciate it, I really love
English, so I appreciate anything around English. (Interview, Ritej).

To put this in context, Ritej was answering a question on why some people around her do not listen to music in English. These people in her environment, in her opinion, do not value the language, thus music in English does not interest them. However, she feels differently and that is seen in her intensive listening to English songs from an early age.

The conception of totality that sates that *everything in English should be appreciated* is extended in a similar understanding of *everything in English helps in learning.* Hind for instance spoke about her activity of following celebrity news: "It definitely did help in my learning. I think everything helps even in a small way, but everything helps, even if I'm watching the news or you know, celebrity news, I am learning something new every day" (Interview).

Likewise, in his language learning history, Habib wrote: "*I always try to find fun new ways to learn the language so I can learn without even getting the slightest of boredom*" (LLH). He later explained: "*everything with the English language, like everything it is like spoken or written English language, you can learn something from it especially when you are aware that you are English learner*"(Interview).

These statements reflect the participants' attitudes towards English language activities and artefacts and somehow show that all it takes is to be open-minded towards different resources and their possibilities of contributing to learning. Habib even brought up the benefit of awareness of intentional learning, which may seem to contradict his accounts and also the other participants' in their telling of their stories, as most give the impression that learning in most cases was unintentional. However, the level of intentionality was seen differently at different stages of the learning careers.[3]

The idea that everything in English can aid in English language learning is not shared with all the participants. Asma's experience with songs and music is a prime example of this:

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[3] For more on intentionality check section on formality 6.2.2

they told me listening to English can improve your English skills, they told me to try listening to English songs and American songs, but I didn't, I don't know why, I just didn't because I'm not um, I tried to, I actually tried to listen to English songs but I just, I couldn't keep listening to them all the time, it seemed boring. And I don't think that English songs can help you improve, like no grammatical rules, no grammar structures, just the street English, that I like but I don't think I can learn with music (Interview, Asma).

Despite being advised by her friends on the benefits of listening to music on language improvement, Asma did not agree with them. One reason is that music was not interesting to her, thus she does not enjoy it. Second, to her, song lyrics are an unrefined version of the language in terms of grammar. The last one somehow contradicts with her interest in street and slang language, which she said she liked and is a reason why she watched movies and online videos. This contradiction means perhaps that it is not the language that turned her away from music but simply because she does not enjoy it.

This section has demonstrated the participants' beliefs on the importance of love or strong emotional connection to language learning beyond the classroom. it was shown that it is important to love the language itself which could, although not in all cases, lead to loving all the resources and cultural artefacts that accompany it. Furthermore, love is associated with enjoyment. This shows that the awareness and perception of an environmental resource's benefit (Menezes, 2011) to language do not necessarily mean that it will be used and contribute to language learning, instead it seems that a personal connection with said sources is involved. This connection appears to be of an emotional nature. In a previous study, Aro (2015) found out that emotions are related to agency and beliefs because it was hard for the learners to be agentive if they felt unappreciated or neglected in class. It can be said that Being in a challenging environment beyond the classroom entails that the participants are agentive, which seems to be a requirement for successful language learning[4]. Therefore, the participants' belief in the importance of loving the language despite the local community's

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[4] this will be addressed in detail in relation to autonomous learning in chapter 6

negative attitudes and all the challenging characteristics of the environment[5] can serve as a proof of the interrelatedness of emotions, beliefs and agency.

5.1.3. Value of communication

Another theme apparent in the participants' contributions is their emphasis on communication as a condition to learn a language.

In that regard, I firstly bring up Malak's impression of her environment as a place for learning:

> *it's sometimes, helpful, and sometimes not. I believe that communication is the key to mastering the language. but in our environment, we don't really communicate with the language, especially not a foreign one* (Interview, Malak).

Here Malak clearly stated her belief in the importance of communication for language learning despite being challenged by the immediate surrounding environment. A note that I made is that this belief clashes with her unsupportive environment that discourages the use of foreign language in public. The result of this is observed in Malak's out-of-class English language interactions which include her being a member of a highly motivated small group of friends that she made in middle school period, and shared with them an interest in the English language and its culture. This group regularly partakes in activities of watching movies, reading books, and then discussing them together in English.

This view is also shared by Ritej in this next extract of the interview, while she was suggesting ways to best learn English:

> *The second way is to have contact with friends who speak the language, listen to the language all the time don't be bored of it and try to use it, it's okay to make mistakes it's okay we all make mistakes I do also, I do make mistakes but don't be discouraged by making mistakes so listen to it each all the time, eh use it all the time and that's it* (Interview, Ritej).

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[5] Check chapter 4

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With this, Ritej admits the significance of having friends to talk English with. She stresses however that this practice should be paired with a positive attitude and tolerance towards mistakes made in utterances as this will aid in overcoming anxiety.

Habib was not fortunate enough to be part of a group that spoke English until a later stage of his learning career. On that note, he expressed his discontent:

> *Habib: uh, I didn't have any person, that I learned with, I practised English with myself like in primary school, middle school, even high school*
>
> *Moncef: how did you practice?*
>
> *Habib: I didn't practice, I didn't speak you know, all I did was repeat some songs' words. When you hear a word, the sounds of it is good like it's great, its grandeur, like you know, in the movie, and you try to repeat it like when you are alone or doing something. yeah, but you can't practice, because uh, the surrounding, no one is interested in English, let's be honest in Algeria, maybe French, maybe Arabic, but not English* (Interview, Habib).

In these lines, Habib's lack of practice of the English language with others is observed. He justified it here and throughout our conversations as a result of the status of English in his environment. At those times, the only ways he could practice were by repeating what he heard in songs and movies. Additionally, He mentioned taking part in a Facebook group to discuss comic books during high school with other members from Arab countries such as Iraq and Jordan. Unfortunately, the group mainly used Arabic as a medium of communication even though the comics were in English. However, the importance of communication comes at a later stage in his learning career, when the need arose for him to improve his speaking skills which are required for classroom oral presentations at university. With that need in mind, Habib sought out a virtual conversation environment in the online chat software Discord, which is originally designed for gaming chat. Perhaps here I can say that in his early stages, Habib did not value communication much, or he was not able to see its importance at that time, but once being in a context that required speaking skills, his mentality changed and thus his intentional effort to communicate emerged.

Still with the importance of communication, Malak saw that it is important to be able to communicate with someone who possesses higher linguistic skills and intellect. In her own words she wrote:

> *I constantly talk to people who are much smarter and better educated and worldly than me. I make sure that I am learning not only English as a language but new ways of viewing the world, new ways of thinking about the past, new ways of imagining the future for is all. All this thinking leads to being good at English because when you have to talk about your views when complicated, you have to use the right words otherwise you cannot communicate what you think. So, start with surrounding yourself with very smart people and start rethinking life as it were and then start explaining your views to people. That's one way of getting better* (LLH, Malak).

Among the participants, Malak's written language learning history was remarkable. This extract especially brings forth the value of communication but also shows that learning to Malak is not only about language but also about culture and how she views the world. According to her, partaking in conversations about one's beliefs and views about the world is of benefit to learning. And if these conversations are with people she deems smarter than her, she would be able to express herself freely, or as she explained: "*maybe, using difficult words, you can use your vocabulary, the things you learned before, and you will be sure that they understand whatever you are saying*" (Interview).

Habib mentioned a similar matter that somehow rings a bell with Malak's opinion, *"if only I had some person that I can practice and have better knowledge than me in English and show me the other side of the English language, not like music movie"*(Interview, Habib).

Therefore, communicating with someone who is better linguistically and maybe smarter, as Malak said, could be a significant addition to the different ways one can develop their language, practice and test what they have learned.

Even though communication is important to the participants, not all of them agree on that, or more accurately, not all of them agree anymore. Hind talks about how she is learning English at her university period in comparison to before:

> *it's definitely because I now have realized it's not only about communication or talking fluently or you know, it's more about linguistics, learning about the*

language, history about the American and British history, that's what makes you a good English student in college (Interview, hind).

Here Hind somehow hints at a difference between being a language learner and a university student, where she is the latter and not the former anymore. Therefore, communication is not a focus of her learning and is not as important to her as focusing on her subjects of linguistics, language history and culture. This shows a change of belief that correlates with a change of perception of self.

The data extracts I presented here have shown the participants' shared beliefs about the value of communication in language learning. In the data chapter highlighting the environmental challenges for English language learning[6], I have shown how it was difficult for learners to find opportunities to practice the language comfortably. Because of these difficulties, the learners had to find other affordances for communication and practice, which may have consisted of creating a small group of like-minded friends, joining online communities with shared interests, or using online chatting and discussion Software. This belief and the accompanying activities demonstrate the importance of social resources (Palfreyman, 2011) in language learning beyond the classroom, and although the environment had not afforded many "other people" (Palfreyman, 2011, p. 19) to practice the language with, the participants had to make extra effort to find them, therefore demonstrating persistence and creativity, which at this point I can consider as the main characteristics of learning beyond the classroom experiences in a challenging environment.

5.1.4. Everyone is wired differently

Another held belief by some participants is concerned with the uniqueness of every individual's ways of learning, and the freedom this trait supposedly affords learners in choosing their fitting strategies. In this section, I present and comment on data relating to this theme without delving much into the learning strategies themselves.

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[6] Check section 4.1

Asma said during the focus group: "*some people are wired to understand scientific stuff, and some are wired to understand literary stuff and being successful and creative in it*" (Focus group).

This statement is the reason why this section came to be. Despite the statement's focus on a dichotomy of literary vs scientific orientation, this section is not. Instead, I use it to imply the possible presence of some traits that may make the participants unique among others in their surroundings and perhaps highlight these traits as helpful characteristics to be nurtured for successful learning beyond the classroom in unfavourable learning environments.

Malak wrote about herself: "*I believe having sort of a predisposition, a feel for languages is also important, some people are good with languages, some just aren't*" (LLH)

In this extract of her learning history, she described herself as someone who possesses an ability or as she calls it a *feel* for languages that not everyone has and in some way is a requirement for successful language learning. Through this, she justifies her great marks during middle and high school despite not putting much effort into classes.

This concept has been mentioned on different occasions in the data, mainly in response to a question asking about the reason for others' low English level.

Ritej for instance replied:

> *I don't know to be honest, because I believe that each one of us is different from the other, I cannot compare my level to their level, not because I think my level is higher than them but I think it's something internal it's something about feelings it's different from the others because each one of us feels different towards the language okay so I don't think there's a different between me and them* (Interview, Ritej).

Ritej shows above a sense of humility as she does not believe those who possess lower English levels are inferior. She Instead believes that the difference lies in the internal factor of feelings one has towards the language. In a previous section (5.1.2. Doing What One Loves) I spoke about the importance of loving the language and its different activities, which could be related to the *feel* concept mentioned here. With these in mind, it seems that the

participants' language learning carries with it a strong sense of connection with either the language itself, the activities involving it or maybe both.

Asking the participants about others in their environment who possess a sort of lower level in English generated data about what the participants think makes them different or better than the others, which could be related to the *feel* that Malak mentioned and maybe the *wiring* Asma brought up. The following are separate extracts about those beliefs about others:

1. *Malak: because people aren't really interested in English, because it's the third or fourth language, they don't really give it importance* (Interview, Malak).

2. *Ritej: well in this area you know, it's not all the time available or useful to use English, it's a little bit hard, as you know people lean to French more than English so as a place or environment I Think it's not suitable, it's a little bit discouraging* (Interview, Ritej).

3. *Malak: because most people think that to discuss another language rather than your mother language is showing off* (Interview, Malak).

4. *Ritej: although a 100 students study English but not all of them do speak it* (Focus group, Ritej).

The extracts above could serve as examples of how the participants are different to those in their environment who are not as proficient in English. The differences that make the participants unique to others in their environment reside in their high interest in the English language, their perceived importance of it, how much they value it and their willingness to communicate using it.

In addition to the differences between the participants (successful learners) and other people (non-successful learners), there are differences among the participants themselves which I will write about in the chapter about autonomous LBC practices[7]. But for now, the fact of being unique is what matters.

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[7] Check chapter 7

Asma wrote that she hates academic elements of learning like writing essays and she justified that with the following:

I believe that humans should be free and do whatever they like whatever they have fun in doing during the process of learning languages. It is enough for a person to have a strong desire and he/she will find out ways and strategies that suit them best to learn a language (LLH, Asma).

The freedom that Asma spoke about is of course in the context of learning. What she brings here is both the concepts of preference and fun as criteria for choosing how to learn. As everyone has things they like and prefer, this should allow them the agency to choose how they learn and all that is needed, as Asma shows, is a strong desire, or motivation and suitable strategies will emerge.

This freedom of choice means that there is no single specific way to learn beyond the classroom. instead, a learner has the ability to choose among a different array of activities all based on their preferences, beliefs and needs.

Under this heading of '*everyone is wired differently*' I tried to show an emergent belief that the participants seem to have about themselves. Apparently to be a successful English language learner in challenge laden environment entails possessing several characteristics by which the learners are different from other individuals in their entourage. As shown in the data excerpts these traits can be high interest in the English language, perceived importance, and willingness to communicate with it. These three somehow connect with the previous belief's themes of the importance of English, emotional connections and the value of communication. Another trait is what some participants referred to as *a feel* for the language. Based on the data from the learners' careers and insights from the ecological perspective (Van Lier, 2004; Menezes, 2011) this *feel* seems to reflect the participants' ability to perceive language learning affordances meditated by their beliefs about language and learning. A simple example is seen in how the participants love the language and its activities whereas others in their environment often sharing the same classroom do not, hence participants demonstrate better mastery and willingness to use English.

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5.1.5. Concluding notes

In this section, I demonstrated the beliefs the participants have about language learning. Through that effort, I identified four main themes. The first one lies in the participant's understanding of the strengths of the English language, as thanks to its international status, is able to help them in their future careers, offer them ease of access to information that helps them in their daily lives and it allows new ways to view the world. The second theme is an emotional one in which loving the language and its different aspects is a requirement for motivation, enjoyment, and mastery. A third theme that was understood from the participant's contributions is the value of communication for learning, despite the constraints set by the environment on foreign language, which is a difficulty that they overcame through creating small groups or using online voice chat apps. The fourth and final one consists of the participant's understanding that every learner has their own ways to learn, which supposedly mean that they are entitled to pick whichever out-of-class activities they prefer and whatever learning strategies they wish to employ. What I believe is a common characteristic of all the four themes is their contextual nature as they are conceptions about language learning in an environment that requires specific efforts and measures.[8]

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[8] Check environment influence section in the discussion chapter 7.1.1

5.2. Learners' motivations

The present section is concerned with the motivations and goals behind the participants' efforts for learning and interacting with English language resources and activities beyond the classroom. Through a holistic lens of the six participants' long learning experiences, I try to capture some of the complexities of the motivations governing LBC practice through their involvement in the perception of affordances of LBC, eventually making them an important aspect of the creative and persistent experience of learning in a challenging environment. In this section, therefore, I identify three main themes about the reasons behind learning English efforts in the participants' language learning careers: motivation for the sake of language mastery, wishes for escapes, motivation for intervention and improvement of local English language learning situation.

5.2.1. Motivation to learn for language mastery

LBC experience for some participants was triggered with a motivation to improve in a linguistic sense. This manifested itself in various ways including through an early desire to comprehend English of a favourite activity, a desire to understand a sibling's utterances and a desire to develop vocabulary knowledge.

In Malak's case, for instance, her interest in the English language started due to her fondness of an adventure pc game titled Monkey Island. In that regard, Malak expressed her fascination and the role this game played:

> *I was always curious to understand the language first because of video games. When others are always satisfied with understanding what should be their next move, I really wanted to understand every word and every dialogue. I remember the swearing battles on Monkey Island. I was not only interested in winning, I wanted to get the jokes. Of course, I was too young. But this really got me started.* (LLH, Malak).

The video game dialogue here played the role of a catalyst for learning efforts in Malak's story. Malak was fortunate to have access to video games at that age, but more importantly, she was attracted to the linguistic aspect of the game. Hence her motivation to understand what was being said in the game texts: "*I had to search for some difficult words like come, go over, yonder…*" (Interview, Malak). Her efforts were worth it as she said: "*I had the pleasure,*

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I was satisfied by knowing the dialogue that was happening between the characters and so on" (Interview, Malak)

Ritej had a somehow similar experience, however instead of video games, the catalyst was her own elder sister:

> *when I was 10-11 years old. I used to hear my sister talking in English so for me it was something different and new. it was like codes and I wanted very badly to decode them* (Interview, Ritej).

Throughout our discussions, Ritej revealed that her sister used English often at the premises of their home. The sister spoke English and listened to English songs. Wanting to be like her sister, Ritej learning journey started with a motivation to decode and thus understand what her sister said, and what the song lyrics meant. This characterises hers and Malak's onsets of English learning careers as instances of intentional learning.

Habib had also encountered English early on, by means of Arabic subtitled cartoon CDs that his father brought for the sake of learning French, and often there would be ones in English mixed in. The difference between Habib and Malak and Ritej is that in contrast to them, he did not gain any interest in English. There could be many reasons, but one of them could possibly be that he did not need to understand because they had Arabic subtitles to read and his mother was there to explain, or simply because the activity of watching was originally for the sake of learning French. What is remarkable in Habib's learning career is that he thinks that his interest in the English language did not spark until high school, but this could be due to him correlating interest with the intention to learn which reflects the complexity of perceiving one's experiences (and a shortcoming of narrative inquiry and its dependence of retrospection). The purpose of bringing up Habib's case is that early-career motivation to learn for the sake of comprehending and understanding does not necessarily occur with every language learner, however, when it does it can be reflected in visible learning efforts and intentions.

A more specific motivation that some participants voiced is that of vocabulary acquisition. This motivation is apparent in some choices of activities of learning and the chronological order under which they fall in the overall learning careers. For that, I use

Malak's case, which I have spoken about before, concerning reading mangas and novels and the upgradability relationship between the two.

Malak started reading mangas at the recommendation of a friend. She said: "*Simple English is the reason I started with manga*" (Interview). Later in her learning career, she felt a lack in her vocabulary level, *"It was in high school, I found myself needing. I found that I didn't have the amount of vocabulary I wanted to have, so I had to switch to books, big books*" (Interview)

Similarly, Habib reported upgrading from comics to novels, however, for a different reason. He said: "*I had to read, because my favourite writers, they wrote some comic books and graphic novels I loved, so I had to read their novels, their books*" (Interview). Although he admitted gaining vocabulary from reading comics and novels, he read because he liked the stories, and English versions were easily accessible. Therefore, his upgrade was motivated by his passions while in Malak's case the upgrade was due to her awareness of vocabulary needs.

In various ways, therefore, the participants were motivated to engage in LBC to develop their language. To some this need was what initially drove their LBC activities, though as will be discussed in the next sections, other motivations were involved, and at different stages, and in some cases, other motivations took over.

5.2.2. Escape attempts

The multitude of influences of the environment had proven influential in the learning careers. Due to the different faced difficulties, the participants had sought escape and sanctuary in out-of-class learning activities. In one case, it was due to mistreatment by peers, in another, it was for wishes to experience something new, and for others, it was to travel abroad.

The first case is that of Walid who was subjected to bullying at school in the early stages of his learning career. He said:

> *Walid: well, you know, as a young child, you're somehow vulnerable and so sensitive. now that I think about it, I know it really sounds ridiculous. but as a kid, I mean, ((scratches the table)) it was a struggle, not getting well with people, always being separated from people, I don't know why, I mean, but children they do that, child cruelty. and even teachers they didn't stop it, you know, they didn't*

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show, some curtsey, they didn't show us that you should be more socialized, you shouldn't be somehow isolated

Moncef: did the teachers notice the bullying?

Walid: yes, I guess, normally they have and I think uh, as I said, it makes me isolated from people, I didn't have that much, I had a small group of friends, till now I have a small group of friends that I talk to, but most likely I spent my time my home, in front of my computer and in front of the tv. and you know, you start to watch tv English channels and you start to like it. (Interview, Walid).

School bullying is a very common phenomenon. In Walid's case, this treatment resulted in his desocialization and distancing from his peers. He became more prone to spending his time at home, where he had access to the internet and TV. What is important in his story about bullying is that home provided a sanctuary, especially at a young age. This sanctuary afforded the opportunity of intensive exposure to English language materials such as series, movies and what MTV channel broadcasted at that time. Looking back at that period, Walid believes his favourite out-of-class activities allowed him the opportunity to escape unsatisfactory and even grim states. Following on his statements, he explained as follows:

I didn't want that environment, I wanted a different lifestyle, different people around me. even different language, different everything, different culture. I think that's when I started to figure that out somehow, there'll be some people who are different. you know after you start watching TV, you start to figure out that they somehow treat things better than my country will do. I cannot sound bad, but it's the reality, especially in school. since you see in movies, they always you know provide them with lockers, they provide them with therapist sessions, clean bathrooms. even the teachers are good, there are some programs that support students' creativity. (Interview, Walid).

The motivation to escape from circumstances of the environment seems to extend beyond that and hints at intentions or wishes for integration. By watching movies, series and reality TV, Walid got exposed to cultural phenomena associated with the English language. These phenomena are ones that he needed in his life at that time. Simple things such as distinguished American style school lockers, counsellors or even clean toilets have attracted his attention and helped in creating his perhaps imagined sanctuary.

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Another case of motivation to escape is In Malak's experience with video games, mangas and novels. Among the participants, Malak had expressed her deep relationship with reading and gaming. Solely using the word *escape* in her case could be misleading as it does not cover her whole experience with these out-of-class English language resources. Another description could be *change of scenery through imagination.* In her learning history she wrote:

> I'm still fascinated by the whole principle of language and its connection to the imagination and what those two can produce together. It's something beautiful and worth perfecting. (LLH, Malak).

Imagined escapes thus are part of her experience. In the interview when asked how she felt about video games, she replied *"Happy, because I am far away from reality, I want imagination"* (Malak, interview). when asked if she's not dissatisfied with her life she said "*no, I am satisfied, but I would like to enjoy other lives, plural, like many games, and books, by books I travel too "*(Malak, interview).

Another type of escapism motivation is the wish to travel abroad. This has not been spoken much about in the data, however, it seemed to be one of the end goals of language learning. For example, Walid justified what he hoped to achieve by exposing himself to language and western culture:

> In terms of language just being able to communicate with other people. You know, always dreaming to travel outside Algeria. I hope that one day, maybe I travel abroad. So, right now, it's just me practising for going abroad. you know, so I can be able to communicate with people outside of Algeria with different languages, one of the reasons. and the other thing is to see things from a different perspective. (Interview, Walid).

Therefore, his learning efforts, and activities of watching movies and TV shows and such, seemed to serve as a preparation motivated by the assumption that he may get to travel abroad one day, and he will need to not only be able to communicate but also to see the world from the perspectives of those from outside Algeria. The last part seems to be important to him. He expressed in the interview that exposure to western culture has opened his mind to different points of view, and he explained:

Walid: Problems or some issues in western culture versus problems in my country, you'll see that not everything is bad in Algeria, although there is a good side to people outside.... you know, it gives me the idea that people are different, but not necessarily in a good or a bad way. (Interview, Walid).

Perhaps here through looking at different cultures, Walid realizes the good in his environment and culture, and hints at the uncertainty of escape through going abroad, or in other words, he does not wish to move out permanently. This last part was also brought up by Ritej and Asma who both wished to travel abroad, but only to study.

Ritej said:

Ritej: I have friends who said they like to go abroad, I do share the same passion, but they want to live there, but for me, I want to just continue my studies there and I will come back (Interview, Ritej)

Similarly, Asma explains when asked if she wants to go to America:

Asma: permanently? like no, I would come back here.

Moncef: why not?

Asma: because I can't live there, I don't imagine myself with them there, like permanently, the long terms, no. because I like to live here surrounded by my family my childhood friends, I don't like to be isolated there with foreigners with non-Muslims, I fear racism, I fear bullying lotta things (Interview, Asma).

Like Walid, Ritej and Asma both wish to travel abroad for reasons like studying, however both show having no intentions to move there permanently, which somehow contradicts with the very common rhetoric in Algeria (and North Africa in general) that young people wish to move out to the other side of the sea, i.e. Europe. This brings us to the idea of wanting to improve one's local environment which I shall talk about in the next section.

5.2.3. Motivation for intervention and improvement of local English language learning situation

The idea of changing the environment for the best has been mentioned in different ways during my interactions with the participants. Earlier I spoke about some participants' wish to come back to their home place if they ever travelled abroad. In this section, I present themes

of intervention in and improvement of environment that manifests in the participants' hopes to influence the local English learning situation and public opinion.

All of the six participants are university English language students. The outcome of their studies is verily likely to be in the profession of language teaching. The participants themselves have voiced their wishes to teach, however, what is remarkable is that not only do they want to teach, but some also even strive to become better than their teachers.

Walid, among the participants, had the chance to teach in a cram school, which he considers as a positive experience of language out-of-class. The following statement shows relevant realizations relating to the theme of this section:

> *Last year, I had the opportunity to teach in a private school, to teach English level A1 and I think, beginners. And I think it's good when you see people, when you see students basically at the end of the session telling you how they feel they're studying English for the first time or they congratulate you about the work you did, I think it warms your heart, to be honest with you, it pushes you to be a better teacher, and I think it's one of the reasons me trying to be a teacher is that I want to be a better teacher than the teachers that I had*. (Interview, Walid).

Walid as I mentioned previously had the most extreme experience in middle school with teachers who just sat there or spoke Arabic most of the time. My goal is not to criticize the teachers but to contextualize experiences and, in this section, motivations. In Walid's case, his experience with teachers remained with him and perhaps now serves as a reference of what to not become as a teacher because he wishes to become one who is well-qualified and appreciated by the students.

In the same pretext of becoming a better teacher. Habib, during the focus group, spoke about how he was affected by his classroom experience:

> *I think when it comes to me, they affect me in a certain way that pushed me to be a better teacher. They give me a good example of how not to be. so, in the future, I will do anything except the things they used to d*o (Focus group, Habib).

These extracts are examples of motivations to improve the classroom learning situation with personal experiences as references. The way through which they believe that could be done is another question. The next examples are from a focus group conversation. The

participants expressed what they would do in an imaginative scenario of possessing unlimited power to modify the environment for better out-of-class English learning:

Walid: I'll start by changing my teachers, changing the methods they use, the program the curriculum, I will try to change uh, people's mind, I don't know if I can do that, people's mind, try to make them more comfortable and more open to the idea of doing other things, learning other stuff, that's it.

Ritej: or me, I want to change the system of the university, all the system, the system of choosing the teachers, the system of giving opportunity for this student to be a teacher, for me, I want to focus on the personality of the teacher.

Habib: uh, if I had unlimited power, we need to inject English into our culture, we need our surroundings, as a student, if you want to learn English, you need to surround yourself with the English language, everything you do should be in English.

Malak: I would include, other modules, funny, fun modules like reading playing games, playing Minecraft. It would make it more fun, exciting. um maybe change the way we think – you all are so negative, you kept talking about how bad our environment is, it's true, but you should ignore it.

Hind: change how teachers treat us, sometimes, they mix their professional life with their private life and uh, sometimes they, you know, blame it on the students.

Walid: and I think also including facilities that help us to develop our level. For example, language clubs, like book clubs something like that. For example, I enjoy having conversations with you people, I'm learning new stuff and I think it's good (Focus group).

A variety of suggestions were introduced. One group proposed to tap into the educational system itself with hopes such as changing the methods of teaching, including compelling school modules and improving the process of teacher recruitment and creating out-of-class language learning facilities. Another suggestion was to encourage English language cultural exposure. Some of these suggestions could seem farfetched or idealistic, however, their strength lies in the learners' awareness of their environments' needs and also the different strategies they use and the varying resources they employ.

Another motivation that could be considered as part of a higher goal of local environment improvement is influencing other people's minds. In the previous focus group

example, Walid expressed his wish of changing people's minds to facilitate out-of-class English language learning. Considering the challenges of English language status and the community's attitude to foreign language use in public, Walid's proposition aimed at helping others to better accept foreign language use and tolerance for ambiguity, which were missing elements during his and most other English language learners' and users' experiences in that environment.

This wish of changing attitudes also manifests itself in the wish to speak about one's own learning experience. This could be seen in Ritej's interest in Motivational speech and TED talks. According to her "my goal now is to master the language. I want to be able to speak about my journey in English to the others so I can motivate students" (Interview). Perhaps here, her efforts to improve her language skills are a result of her wish to be a convincing speaker, so others in her environment could be influenced by her experience.

5.2.4. Concluding notes

Three themes of motivations behind language learning were highlighted in this section. Motivation for language mastery; escape attempts; and motivation for intervention and improvement of local English language learning situation. These three themes share a clear interaction between the learners' experiences and the different interrelated contexts of learning and living. It shows how learners who are elements of the environment had been affected by its characteristics and circumstances, and how they could possibly influence this environment to fit their purposes and needs of out-of-class language learning and use.

This section expresses that the participants' use of out-of-class activities and learning through them are paired with goals/motivations. This aligns with Palfreyman's (2014, p. 183) definition of autonomy from an ecological perspective which considers it as "the capacity for intentional use in context of a range of interacting resources toward learning goals". These goals can either be linguistic or general life-oriented. This simple distinction can be made for themes shown in this section where the motivation to learn for language mastery is linguistic and the rest are general life-oriented. Another way to look at the motivations is through the Self-determination theory (SDT) distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Ryan and Deci, 2002). Attempting to view the themes of motivation through SDT reveals that the

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participant's LBC practices are mostly intrinsically motivated, including motivations for language mastery where the language itself is a means by which participants get to interact with their favourite English language actives and cultural artefacts. Moreover, the four emergent themes can be explained further by borrowing insight from some theoretical and analytical frameworks from motivation literature which seem, in different degrees, to align with the socio-contextual nature of the ecological perspective that my study is based on. Such insights include Ushioda's (2009) Person-in Context Perspective, Dörnyei's (2005) L2 Motivational self-system and perhaps complex dynamic systems perspective (Freeman and Cameron, 2008).

5.3. Summary of findings

In this two-part chapter, I presented data concerning the participants' language learner beliefs and motivations involved in their English language learning careers.

The first part highlighted beliefs about the importance of the English language, the importance of doing what one loves, the value of communication and finally the uniqueness of the learning experience to each learner. In terms of the importance of English, the participants saw the career options it offers them, provided they look beyond local opportunities. English was also perceived to make life easier thanks to the almost unlimited and varied knowledge accessible online. The English language's importance also lies in its strong international status which can help the participants broaden their worldview. As for the role of doing what one loves, this is an emotional dimension of the participants' belief system. It shows that being emotionally connected to the language leads to the appreciation of all English sources as potential activities for learning. The participants also placed importance on communication as a requirement for successful learning, which is seen in their ability to find and/or create social opportunities for language learning and practice. The final belief concerns how everyone can learn in a way that suits them, their circumstances and personal agendas. Additionally, it shows that the participants possess certain characteristics which differentiate them from less successful English language learners in their environment. Some of these characteristics include the three previous themes of beliefs in addition and the ability to perceive affordances in unfavourable circumstances.

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In the second part, the emergent themes are a motivation for language mastery, escape attempts and a motivation for intervention and improvement of local English learning situation. The first one demonstrates efforts to learn the language, firstly for the goal of understanding linguistic materials in their environment that have caught their attention, such as a video game in the example of one participant while another was drawn to the use of English at home by a sister that she looked up to; and secondly, for the sake of improving one's vocabulary level, which was seen in the intentional selection and upgrades of reading materials. The second theme of motivation concerns itself with finding solace in English language materials such as tv shows, movies, literature and video games to escape difficult situations such as bullying at school or to simply indulge one's imagination in other worlds. The escape can also be seen in a degree of willingness to travel abroad, but to still want to come back home, which brings us to the third motivational theme of intervention and improvement of the environment. This last theme shows the learners' enthusiasm to better the English language situation by means of improving the teaching and learning system and the community's attitudes and impressions of English language and English language users.

6. Autonomous LBC practice

In the previous findings' chapters, I highlighted the participants' perceptions of their environments' challenges and presented a set of language learning beliefs and motivations behind LBC efforts. The findings of both chapters demonstrate a relationship between the learner and the environment.

This chapter presents findings that will show the learner-environment relationship through a practical lens. It reveals this relationship in terms of perceived affordances of LBC resources in the environment, and highlights LBC practice and autonomous learning.

Taking an ecological perspective and using a holistic environment-based application of Benson's (2011a) four-dimensional model of location, formality, pedagogy and locus of control, this chapter addressed the third research question "to what extent is autonomy exercised throughout the learners' careers beyond the classroom?"

6.1. Perceived affordances beyond the classroom

The participants reported interacting with a variety of out-of-class learning resources, all of which afforded a host of functions that include: improving language skills, the opportunity for intensive exposure to language, the awareness of progress and abilities, and finally the senses of authenticity, connectivity and control.

The affordance of improving linguistic skills:

Firstly, the participants stated that out-of-class activities allowed them to better their linguistic repertoire and skills. It was often that the participants mentioned vocabulary retention from partaking in out-of-class activities including reading novels and comic books, watching tv shows, movies and short online videos. For instance, Habib had a hobby of reading comic books, where he would encounter new words and expressions that he had to search for because they were crucial for him to understand the events and stories:

> *So this is like my vocabulary learning practice, you can say that, when I like uh when I read comic books, I reached a point that I am, you can say, good at English, good at reading English fast…"*(Interview, Habib).

Out-of-class is also where some participants learnt grammar and sentence structures. In Asma's case she used YouTube to watch online English language teachers as she expressed: "*I use them to know about grammatical rules and tenses*" (Interview). Walid whose favourite activity was to watch movies believed that they were not as good as books to learn grammar because "*if you want to gain correct knowledge and correct information and good structure of the language, books are much better*" (Interview). Habib on the other hand expressed his strong opinion on the value movies played in his life: "*Because I picked up two things, a lot of vocabularies, lot of sentence structure, and a lot of pronouncing the right way*" (Interview)

Out-of-class activities also help in improving listening and speaking skills. Music, for instance, was mentioned by the participants as an opportunity to improve the language, especially in the early stages as Ritej explained: "*from listening to English continuously during the day I got used to it and I started to learn it and acquire it easily*"(LLH). Music was also present in Hind's career as she mentioned singing's involvement in her learning: "*Singing helped my pronunciation and accent*" (Interview). Hind also challenged herself through rap songs which can be difficult to sing with: "*I even sing rap songs to get my tongue used to the language*" (Interview). Another activity that affords the opportunity for improving speaking skills is reading books which was noticed by Walid *"when I read books, I find new expressions which give me a sophisticated form of language, beautiful language. If you want to speak and sound like someone with knowledge, you should read*" (Interview).

The affordance of intensive exposure:

The variety of out-of-class resources and the ease of access offered the learners the possibility of intensive exposure. The learners reported watching lots of TV shows and movies, playing lots of video games, reading lots of comics and books and listening to lots of music. As an example, Hind reported: "*I was 24 hours in front of the TV, watching movies, reality shows, everything, cooking shows, all in English*" (Interview). Similarly, Walid expressed his intensive viewing activity "*Oh god, I was obsessed and somehow addicted to tv. I watched TV almost all the time. Quite often, I come back from school, I turn on the TV and I start watching till late hours at night*" (Interview). This behaviour was ever-present within all of the participants' accounts, and it could be said that the affordance of intensive exposure is somehow paired

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with an emotional connection with the involved activity hence the voluntary behaviour of spending hours reading a book or watching a series.

The affordance of awareness of progress:

Out-of-class practices allowed the learners to gauge and measure their own progress and abilities. During their engagements with their favourite activities, some participants reported being able to know where they stood in terms of linguistic prowess. For instance, Asma spent a great amount of time watching American short funny videos (Called Vines at that time), and was able to see the results, as she reported: "*I learned many things from constantly watching all those videos. Like many phrasal verbs and my listening and speaking skills have improved in a noticeable way*" (LLH).

Hind watched series and reality tv shows because she mostly loved their content. However, by the time she started high school, she noticed her abilities: "*with time I've noticed that I no longer needed subtitles to understand English, I was also able to speak fluently*" (LLH). The move from subtitles was a sign of improvement and perhaps also a source of motivation as coincided with her efforts to speak with friends in school and close cousins

> *So, by the time I went to high school, I started practising more talking to my friends my schoolmates in English my cousins also on social media. Social media really helped me a lot. So yeah, that's when I was able to get rid of subtitles whenever watching.* (Interview, Hind).

Therefore, these examples show that in out-of-class contexts, learners can notice their progress in a natural non-controlled way. The progress is demonstrated in their out-of-class conducts and practices such as the ones mentioned above or others, in line with being able to listen to music without having to read lyrics, or feeling the need to change the reading material from comic books to novels in search for more sophisticated and better-structured language.

The affordance of a sense of authenticity:

Another affordance that out-of-class offered the participants is a sense of authenticity carried within the different resources beyond the classroom. It allowed them to learn about the actual use of the language. Watching several American movies and short videos online, for

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instance, helped Asma learn lots of expressions as "*Americans use Phrasal verbs a lot*" (Interview, Asma). Walid considered his heavy exposure to western media as a preparation for the possibility of moving abroad and using English in an authentic setting to communicate with native English speakers and also with international people, "*it's just me practising so I can be able to communicate with people outside Algeria*"(Interview). Walid also spoke about how classrooms were lacking linguistically, and that out-of-class is where real language is better learnt, "*you should do efforts on your own, outside the classroom. Because class doesn't give you many needs and information about the language*" (Interview).

The affordance of a sense of connectivity:

An additional affordance is a sense of connectivity found through out-of-class activities. These activities allow the participants to connect with native speakers, people with the same interests and with other cultures.

In terms of native speakers, the Internet offers an array of ways one can get in contact with people who can be of help in their learning. However, what was noticed with the participants is that most of them were not able to recount a memorable experience with a native speaker. Only two participants reported doing so. One short experience was when Hind had a conversation with a group of English nuns who visited her town's church and were invited home by her mother. Hind received praise for her English level from the nuns. When asked why she does not have contact with native speakers online, she explained "*I just didn't do the first move to speak with them*" (Interview). Habib on the other hand voluntarily sought out contact with native speakers through the gaming chat software Discord. These native speakers often participate in conversations and help the learners. He explained: "*the British, the native speaker, the British native speaker, he would like to correct some mistakes when you express something. As English learners we sometimes express it like in our native language*" (Interview).

Additionally, out-of-class contexts are places where one can connect with likeminded people, people who share similar interests related to the English language. Two examples that

I mentioned before[1] are of Habib and Malak. Habib was able to connect to the discord community in addition to being part of a Facebook group that discussed comic books. Malak on the other hand has mentioned being part of a small group of friends since middle school who share her interests in books and movies: " *every end of the week, we have to watch one movie together and we have to read one book together, in one week. At the end of the week, everyone should give their views about the movies and the books*" (Interview). Other participants reported not making friends who spoke English mostly until university period.

Another type of connection afforded by out-of-class is a connection with other cultures, which was possible through viewing and interacting with the different resources such as movies and comics which all carried some sort of authenticity with them. Walid had a strong interest in western culture, as he wrote: "*I was so influenced by the western culture (pop culture, music, lifestyle, fashion…) and the way it has been represented by the media*" (LLH). As shown earlier[2] Walid found solace in western culture as it opened his eyes to different aspects of life in the west, more essentially, aspects important to his life such schools offering therapy and counselling to learners. In a different way, Asma was attracted to a different aspect of culture that is American slang and everyday language that she discovered through Disney movies and short funny videos online. Malak on the other hand had gotten familiarised with Japanese culture through reading translated Mangas (Japanese comics): "*I learned a lot about Japanese culture and different cultures, their ethics, the way they maybe treat each other, they are so polite, they have a different life styles*" (Interview).

The affordance of a sense of control:

The final affordance is a sense of control that out-of-class activities offer to the learners to some degree. This affordance is clear in Habib's use of the Discord chat software in which he found a setting for English language learning and practice. Through this app, Habib had the power to choose from a multitude of channels with different levels

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[1] Check section about learner belief about communication section 5.1.3
[2] Check 5.1

Yeah, so the thing is, the good thing about this app is the fact that you have lots of rooms, or you can say channels like they named them in the app. so you have channels for basic beginners, advanced and you also have native speakers (Interview, Habib).

With these channels to choose from, he had control over the content of his learning and where to learn. He also possessed the choice of when to practice. For instance, he explained: "*uh, the good thing about it is when I become rusty in my English-speaking skills, I go to this app immediately*" (interview). In addition to control, out-of-class activities have been found to offer some degree of independence from reportedly incompetent teachers, or as Walid expressed:

Walid: for me as I said about my teachers was a huge disappointment. most of my teachers back in the days they speak Arabic, and they were English teachers. so, I had to count on my own. (Interview, Walid).

6.1.1 Concluding notes

The functions mentioned here are affordances of out-of-class practices the participants perceived from their learning beyond the classroom experience. The different out-of-class activities served several functions that benefit language learning. These functions of linguistic and social natures show the importance of learning beyond the classroom. They allow the learners to improve their language and also provide them with the opportunity for intensive exposure and the ability to monitor their progress. In addition to that through LBC activities, learners can interact with what they believe is a real use of language. Moreover, these activities afforded opportunities for different connections. Learners can get in contact with native speakers who can help in evaluating and correcting their language. They can connect with people who share similar interests either in their immediate entourage or through social media. Finally, the different out-of-class resources such as tv shows and social media afford the learners the ability to connect with other cultures, thus broadening their world view and perspectives. This shows how the world beyond the classroom is rich in terms of affordances that can help in language learning.

As for how the learners came to perceive these affordances. This process seems to reside within the overall interaction with the world around them. It involves their perceptions about their environments' challenges and characteristics, which I presented in the first data chapter[3]. It also involves their learner beliefs, goals and motivations[4], which are contextual in nature. All of these will be discussed in detail in the discussion chapter[5].

6.2. Location, formality, pedagogy, and locus of control of the overall LBC experience

In the present section, I mirror the participants' experiences on Benson's (2011a) four model framework of learning beyond the classroom. The six participants reported having interacted, throughout their learning careers, with different out-of-class activities. I look at these activities from a holistic perspective to demonstrate the nature of the LBC experience of the participants in their environment and to explore both the settings for LBC and the modes of practice the participants employed within them to reach their learning goals.

6.2.1. Locations for LBC: creativity and resilience

In a previous chapter[6], I have demonstrated the array of challenges that the environment put in front of the learners' experiences. These challenges ranged from a community with negative attitudes towards foreign languages and foreign language use in public, to limited access to learning opportunities. In doing so, I have offered an insight about where the learners lived and hinted at the limited venues for out-of-class learning. In this section, I show how the participants created and employed social and material resources around them. What all mentioned activities and resources share is that through them, learning beyond the class-room was either at home, online or at school premises. However, despite being limited, the

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[3] Check findings in chapter 5
[4] Check findings in chapter 5
[5] Check discussion in chapter 7
[6] Check findings in chapter 5

participants managed to learn beyond the classroom reflecting persistence, resourcefulness and creativity.

Through asking the participants where they practiced specific out-of-class activities, I received several answers such as "*my room at home*" (Interview, Walid), "*was totally 100% at home*"(Interview, Ritej) and "*at home, home only*"(Interview, Asma).

The prevalence of home in their experiences is, as I have shown before, a result of the participants being limited to this location, whereas other possibilities outside are either non-existent due to the area's economical situations, or often threatening and anxiety-inducing because of the reactions a foreign language user can receive if they were to speak something other than Arabic. These reactions can possibly include but are not limited to unwanted attention or negative comments. Therefore, the home location is abundant with naturally occurring resources such as TV, books and family. It then offers sanctuary and an environment where language learners can practice freely, which also invokes the *motivation of escape* themes that I mentioned previously[7].

Looking at the location dimension through all the activities used by all six participants is also a way to observe creativity and decision making to adapt to environmental situations, as well as personal needs. The latter could be seen in the online environment that offers an array of opportunities for the learner to make use of.

All of the participants reported online interactions that may have been involved in their learning. for instance, Asma watched a lot of American funny short video clips, Hind followed celebrity news, Malak read mangas, and Ritej watched TED talks. Another example is Habib, who also read comics but mostly because he enjoyed the stories, instead of wanting to learn English. A problem that he faced is that no one in his environment shared his interests. and that is why he reached out to the internet: "*I was actually searching for people to talk with*

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[7] Check section 5.2.2 of findings chapter 2

about this. People who can suggest other stories, I had a group, I even found a group, we created the first Arabic group with an Iraqi guy" (Interview, Habib).

In this Facebook group and sometimes through Reddit[8], Habib was able to connect with like-minded people, thus creating a safe non-judgmental environment that could contribute to his learning, therefore, demonstrating resourcefulness and control. Not only was that online environment supportive for learning it was also competitive:

> *While discussing some comic books, comic book stories, I felt that I wasn't good enough compared to other online friends, we were with some Iraqis people and we were discussing the story, the event that was happening In this comic or this novel so they were good in English. I think it's like because of their system the schooling system or other things, so I had to learn more vocabulary to learn how to make a cohesive sentence. Because they were better than me, so I needed to get to their levels* (Interview, Habib).

Habib also demonstrated the dimension of location online in his use of the Discord app. Habib sought out an online environment where he can practice speaking so he can perform better at oral session presentations at university. In a Reddit post, Habib was directed to the Discord App, which is usually employed by gamers for in-game voice chat. In Discord, he could interact with other language learners from different backgrounds and levels of English. All in an easy-to access-to virtual environment in his smartphone or personal computer.

Therefore, his example shows how a learner can actively seek out learning and practice opportunities when they are limited in their immediate environment, thus reflecting creativity, and persistence.

The third setting of beyond the classroom English language learning is within the borders of educational institutions, i.e., middle, high school and university. At school, the participants can interact and communicate with other learners benefiting their overall learning in different ways. Malak's group of friends comes to mind here. Being a member of

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[8] A popular forum website

a small group of friends has afforded Malak an opportunity to practice English and discuss topics from their favourite activities of reading books and watching movies:

> *yeah, we, every end of week, we have to watch one movie together and we have to read one book together, in one week .at the end of the week everyone, um, should give his views about the movies and the books* (Malak, Interview).

Here, her school friends offered an outlet for discussion and a small safe environment to speak English freely, as opposed to the general environment of the area Malak and her friends belong to.

Ritej shared a similar experience:

> *yeah now I talk with my friends, those who study with me we try to discuss daily, like daily situations and problems, in English, we try to speak English once a time and I try to help them to develop their language and they do the same for me* (Ritej, Interview).

In her case, Ritej can practice her English as she is able to provide and receive feedback from her friends.

The examples here show how learners accessed and created learning locations despite being in a resource-underprivileged area. The locations might have been limited to home, internet through smartphones or personal computers and to school premises. however, these supposedly few locations afforded several out-of-class learning opportunities thanks to their many possible activities and configurations for learning, practice or simply seeking-out what one loves and enjoys. The process of finding and benefiting from learning opportunities in these limited locations involved the learners' resourcefulness, creativity, and persistence. This therefore, is a sign of autonomous behaviours as the participants demonstrated their capacity to take control (Benson, 2013) of their lives beyond the classroom, to attain their personal goals and manage and navigate through environmental challenges, which limit them to the confines of home, internet and sometimes school premise.

6.2.2. Formality

In this section, I attempt to highlight the formality dimension from the learners' perspectives. According to Chik (2018, p. 82) "*Formality concerns the extent to which a learning activity is*

part of an institutional programme that may lead to formal qualifications". In general, taking Chik's definition into mind, it appears that most if not all the activities mentioned by the participants are instances of informal learning as none lead to formal qualifications. However, within that informality, degrees of intentionality varied.

Looking at how learning started for every participant can offer a holistic image on intentionality. Malak and Ritej can be an example of early intentional informal learning. For Malak, her learning started with an interest and a curiosity to understand the dialogue of a video game she used to play on her PC when she was young:

> *My "learning" started before I realised it. I was always curious to understand the language first because of video games. When others are always satisfied with understanding what should be their next move, I really wanted to understand every word, and every dialogue. I remember the swearing battles on Monkey Island. I was not only interested in winning, I wanted to get the jokes*. (LLH, Malak).

Her high interest, which was due to her attraction to the game and wanting to understand the dialogues, can be a sign of intentional learning. Although intention in her case it is not that clear, as she stated that her learning started prior to her realising it. What made me consider this as intentional learning is the actual existence of strategies (although humble ones) that helped her, as she reported: "*translating, um, whatever I heard from the video games using the dictionary of course, and asking my parents, I was curious to know*"(Malak. Interview). Labelling this as intentional learning correlates with Hulstijn's argument (2008, cited in Chik, 2014, p. 91) which considers intention to learn and the implementation of language learning strategies as features of intentional learning. What is remarkable about Malak's case is the thin line between intentionality and unintentionality as she, herself, considered her learning through video games as non-intentional despite the fact she wanted to understand the dialogues and that she implemented her own strategies.

However, that could be due to her video game experience being part of her early efforts of English language learning brought here through retrospection. Looking at the next activity in her English language learning career, an explicit display of an intention to learn is observed in her experience with translated Japanese comics (Manga) then upgrading to books, because

she felt the simplicity of language in the manga and the possibility of gaining more advanced vocabulary from conventional books, which fit her vocabulary needs at that time. "*I found myself lacking the amount of vocabulary I wanted to have, so I had to switch to books, big books*" (Malak, Interview). Therefore, her intentions of learning through reading were clear, and following Hulstjin's (2008) argument, she reported a set of strategies to learn from books:

> *Malak: uh most of the time I use a dictionary with the book, I write the interesting words, which I think would help me in the future, I used to write words in my mirror, in my room, so I can read them whenever I want, I used to leave it for one week and then I delete it, and rewrite again, and I have like a special notebook for quotes I like from the books*
>
> *Moncef: alright, and how often do you read?*
>
> *Malak: always, every day, two hours, I have to read two hours a day.* (Interview, Malak). (Interview, Malak)

To Malak, high school was when she gained a higher interest in her classes, as she reported that through middle school, no efforts were made but things changed in high school. She expressed: " *I wanted to know more about the language, because I had to search more, about, I knew that the language has like boundaries, so I had to search more and know more about the language*" (Interview, Malak)

The spark of interest in classes at high school was paired with intentional efforts beyond the classroom. This hints at a pattern in which learning beyond the classroom in Malak's case started from a curiosity to understand, thus in a way reflecting intentional learning, and the degree of intentionality would later increase as her motivations become clearer, in her case demonstrated in realising the need to improve vocabulary. Later on in high school, as she became more interested in formal classrooms, her out-of-class activities, despite being informal, reflected aspects of formality as some of them such as searching and browsing the internet with the classroom in mind, and this could also be said about her university period.

A similar pattern to Malak is Ritej's experience as was seen in her first contact with English:

> *when I was, 10 to 11 years old, through my big sister, at that time I was still in primary school, my sister used to talk in English all the time, sing in English, I*

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thought it was something cool, weird and different in a way, so for me her speech, it was like codes, and I wanted so badly to decode them, I wanted to speak like her and sometimes understand what she's saying (Interview, Ritej).

here, from an early age, Ritej had a motivation to learn in order to understand and communicate with her sister in English. To do that She would put a great effort into listening to music intensively and reach out to dictionaries for translations when needed, hoping to pick up new words. Intentional learning is also seen in her activity of watching movies and TV. According to her

the difference between music and TV and movies is that in music they are singing to the rhythm, but in movies, it's more about the accent the pronunciation, it's more like they're speaking I'm trying to understand, trying to listen to the accent so I I'll try to imitate them and use it, imitate like I bring a word this is how it is pronounced and try to pronounce it in the same way (Interview, Ritej).

Therefore, her strategy with movies involved paying attention to accents and pronunciation and practising through imitation.

The barrier between formal and informal learning in Ritej's experience weakened in high school. It was the time when her love for the language grew stronger. That period was the onset of an at-home activity consisting of writing texts and paragraphs. The activity itself was voluntary and out of her own volition to fulfil classroom needs.

when the teacher gives a homework to write about something. at first it was a little bit hard. so, I tried to work on random subjects and each subject, and I tried to work on it and then go for the dictionary to search for a word and I use it. I wanted to develop my writing skills and that was a big push for me. (Interview, Ritej).

This segment shows how this simple out-of-class activity of writing started as an attempt to fulfil formal classroom needs of difficult homework. It shows that even if an out-of-class activity is informal and does not lead to any degrees or qualifications, could still be connected to formal education. This eventually reflects the interrelatedness of formal classroom education and informal out-of-class practices.

The extracts presented here show that the participants' learning beyond the classroom experience had been mostly informal. However, it was found out that degrees of

intentionality changed as I identified patterns of increase in intentionality paired with a clearer motivation for learning, and also patterns, where informal activities would start to gain aspects of formality as LBC activities were performed with classroom learning in mind or in other words, as the boundaries between the in-class and out-of-class dimensions start to thin.

6.2.3. Pedagogy of LBC experiences

The third dimension of LBC that I cover is pedagogy. The data revealed learning practices at both ends of the pedagogical continuum of this dimension, which are self-instruction and naturalistic learning. While the former involves specially designed materials occupying the role of the instructor, paired with explicit learning intentions, the latter lacks both instruction and an intention to learn (Benson, 2011a, p. 93). This is reflected in a variety of LBC practices and patterns throughout the participants learning careers. In the next paragraphs, I will highlight experiences of both naturalistic and self-instructed learning.

Concerning naturalistic learning, it is most apparent in the early stages of some participants' learning careers. The motivations behind interacting with the involved resources were due to the interest in the said resources themselves or for reasons such as fun and enjoyment. For example, Habib explained how listening to music and watching movies during middle school improved his language without him knowing it:

> *during middle school we were introduced to the English language, although I didn't focus on English I developed an interest in western music (hip-hop, rock, pop) also movies and that made my English language skills evolve without me knowing and that was the reason that my marks were always good* (LLH, Habib).

through these resources, Habib was able to improve his language and to observe that in his classroom grades. He further explained how he believed naturalistic learning occurs:

> *the good thing about movies that I always advise my friends, is to watch movies. When you watch do that just to be amused not and to learn because when you try to learn you will lose the main reason you are watching the movie. You need be interested, you need to concentrate on the story, you are reading the subtitle, subconsciously you are surely learning new words, a word like 'pal' you will hear this word maybe like uh a 100 in this movie or maybe in three movies and you will pick it up* (Interview, Habib).

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Habib engaged in watching movies for the fun and enjoyment of their content. According to him, high interest in the content will eventually lead to learning. In his case, learning was a result of paying attention to the content of the movie and making meanings through the aid of subtitles and intensive viewing. This demonstrates how naturalistic learning is related to high interest and emotional engagement with the language, which I spoke of before in the learner beliefs section about emotional connection[9]. A remark I made however, is that the friends Habib spoke about who he advises to watch movies will surely have a different experience in-term of pedagogy. Because as opposed to him, they start with an intention to learn, while enjoyment of and attention to the content will aid in that, which will put their learning further in the pedagogical continuum at self-directed naturalistic.

Similarly, Walid engaged with music and movies and reality shows when he had to stay home due to the difficult situation of bullying outside. He explained that there was no structure behind them, "It was less of planning I will listen to music so I can gain knowledge or I will watch TV so I can listen to pronunciation for example or something like that, it was just me living my daily life. So, it was a result of me enjoying myself" (Interview).

Yet he did learn from these activities as he explains how later in life, he made the following realisation:

> *through time, especially right now as I'm studying English at college, you will figure out that all that you did wasn't a waste of time. You had fun it was a good experience you kill time but at the same time, it helped you to gain knowledge, more vocabularies more expressions more* (Interview, Walid).

Other instances of naturalistic learning have appeared in the data such as Malak's watching of subtitled cartoons and kid shows and Asma's infatuation with Disney movies and American accents. The shared characteristics are both absence of clear intentions and learning strategies as well as an emotional connection with the activity and the resulted enjoyment and fun from doing it.

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[9] Check beliefs about doing what one loves in 5.1.2.

At the other end of the continuum, facing naturalistic learning is self-instructed learning where "specially designed books or television and radio broadcasts take on the role of classroom instructor and there is a strong intention to learn on the part of the learner" (Benson, 2011, P. 11).

Self-instruction can be seen at different stages of the participants' experiences such as Ritej's reading of English learning books, Asma's watching of online English language teachers and Habib's interactions with native speakers on the Discord app.

Concerning specialized books, Ritej explained:

> *Ritej: I try to read and eh link them to the lesson that I had before maybe, and I got new information about it*
>
> *Moncef: and what role do you think they play in your learning*
>
> *Ritej: they play a big role I got to expand my knowledge a lot, and I apply them in exams and tests* (Interview, Ritej).

This activity is performed during Ritej's present university period. At different stages, Ritej expressed her enthusiasm about having great academic achievements. As a highly motivated learner, Ritej indulges in self-instruction through textbooks outside the classroom, or as she called them "books specialized in English". Through them, she expands her knowledge and tries to link what she learns to the classroom by using her out-of-class knowledge in her tests and exams. This demonstrates a high intention to learn and puts her a step ahead of other classmates, who she believes do not read as often as her outside the classroom.

Another example of self-instruction is observed in how Asma viewed YouTube English lessons uploaded by native speaking teachers. During the interview she clarified:

> *just like teachers in the classroom, there are teachers online that always use some very clear English, some easy English to teach the non-native speakers. I use them to know how more about the grammatical rules, the tenses, to know more about that, to know more about the commonly used language, like at home, what do you say in a restaurant, what do you say in an airport, what would you say in the zoo, in interacting with others. They teach all these things, idiomatic expressions, I focus on the idiomatic expressions, I just love idiomatic expressions, so I watch*

a lot of videos, where teachers are explaining the idiomatic expression (Interview, Asma).

Here, Asma referred to watching online English lessons with hopes to improve her grammatical knowledge, as well as proper language use. A particular aspect of Asma is her great interest in American accents and their way of speaking, which she liked in shows and movies. This demonstrates her high intention, which Is reflected in finding and watching these lessons. Walid also reported watching such videos but with more focus on learning academic topics related to his university courses and less on language learning in general.

Self-instruction is also seen in Habib's experience with the Discord App. As mentioned before, Habib reached out to this community-based App voluntarily, when he felt the need to improve his spoken English as required for classroom oral presentations. As Habib explained, discord possessed different characteristics that afford the opportunity for self-instruction. One merit is in the variation and organisational layout of the chat rooms as the app offers access to different servers which include different chatrooms. The available chat rooms for language practice are structured by the community of learners and others hierarchically depending on learner levels ranging from beginner to advanced. Habib thus has the choice of entering whichever chat room he feels suitable for his level or language needs. In Discord, the learners can converse and correct each other and as shown by Habib, there will be occasional native speakers who contribute to the process:

The native speaker, the British or American native speaker, he/she will correct some mistakes especially when you express something, because when you when we express in English, learners, we express it like how it is said in our native language expression (Interview, Habib).

In this example, other users of discord would help each other correct some errors transferred from the native language and offer authentic feedback. Consequently, the learners, and in higher-level chat rooms, the native speakers take on the role of the instructor.

To sum up, the pedagogical dimension of LBC was demonstrated in two forms. The first one was naturalistic learning, often associated with enjoyment and high interest in LBC activities and resources like watching Disney movies and reality tv shows. The second was

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self-instruction where specifically structured materials are involved, namely, textbooks, YouTube English language Teachers and participation in Discord app chat rooms. These structured materials assist in learning about language rules and structures and even feedback and constructive criticism as seen in Habib's use of Discord.

Another finding from this section is the pattern of change in pedagogy. Benson, Chik and Lim (2003) found out that for proficient Asian learners, learning English starts in the classroom and gradually becomes naturalistic later in life as LBC experience is accumulated. However, learners in other countries may follow different patterns (Bensons and Reinders, 2017, p. 567). This is the case of my research wherein early English learning careers the process was mostly naturalistic at home and it gradually changed to self-instruction as the motivations shifted from enjoyment and interest in out-of-class activities to classroom and academic achievements.

6.2.4. Locus of control

In this section, I will highlight and comment on data concerning the fourth dimension of learning beyond the Classroom. The dimension of locus of control attempts to reveal who makes the decisions about learning. In other words, is the learning self or other-directed?'

Here I cite different instances through the learning careers beyond the classroom and explain whether the decisions were made by the learners themselves or not.

As highlighted previously, the participants interacted with various activities to satisfy their needs and motivations. Through the retrospective approach to the data, I believe one way to observe the locus of control is to view how some out-of-class activities were first initiated. In other words, who made the decision to use and incorporate said activity.

Let us consider the locus of control in Malak's case for instance. Her experience with reading started with translating Japanese comics out of her own intention, as she wanted to improve her vocabulary and was introduced to this medium by a friend. Despite the friend's involvement, her learning was self-directed, as the search was initiated by her and so was the decision to engage with the activity. Later, her reading activity was, as she reported, "*expanded to real bo*oks" (LLH, Malak). Concerning how she started reading for learning, as I

have shown before[10], she explained that it was due to her awareness of the need for more vocabulary, as mangas only afforded a simple version. However, she mentioned that she also got the idea from her teacher in middle school "*he is the one who supported us to read more and write reviews, so, he planted the seed*" (Interview, Malak). it seems that the teacher was involved in her reading activity and in a way directed her and her friends' learning through books as he asked for written reviews. Later in her career, Malak and her small group of friends continued the activity on their own. They would choose which books to read and have discussions about them at the end of the week, in so demonstrating control and collaborative learning.

Notably, locus of control Also resides in the making of crucial decisions for one's learning that reflects acts of persistence against the different difficulties of the environment, which I have shown in a previous chapter[11] to be classroom-related such as teachers using the mother tongue exclusively or the inadequate English session hours; or they stem from the community's negative attitude towards foreign language use, the low status of English, and family and friends' lack of support. This persistence appeared in the learner's narratives in different degrees.

For instance, some participants had supposedly demotivating negative experiences of classroom language learning during middle and high school, yet they did not report a loss of motivation or interest in the English language. Instead, their out-of-class practices remained the same as they loved the language and the activities involving it.

Locus of control can further be observed in the decision of choosing English for university despite disapproval. An example of that is how some participants got to be English language students at the university. According to them, families for instance were mostly unsupportive for the choice of English or at least not completely agreeing. For example, Asma explained:

> *Asma: in the area of Naama, people barely talk any English, even middle and high school students who are studying English, never speak this language out of*

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[10] Check 5.2.1. motivations for language mastery
[11] Check findings chapter 1

classrooms, let me give you an example about a typical family from Naama. These people here are not aware of the importance of learning foreign languages, a typical family from Naama, wouldn't be like so proud of their son or daughter if she showed an interest in learning a language and in literary stuff. They would be happy; they would prefer if their daughter showed an interest in scientific stuff (Focus group, Asma)

Walid reported similarly:

first of all, they didn't offer much support when I made the decision of changing from studying as a scientific student to studying English but through time, they saw that I liked the language, I practised the language at my home, even with myself, even with people who don't speak, so they became supportive (Focus group, Walid).

In these excerpts, the parents' words and sometimes advice to opt for more scientific topics to study could be considered as other-directing or as attempts to redirect the learners' mindsets. Locus of control thus, resides in the learners' decision making, despite community and family disapproval. The learners took responsibility for their own learning and reached out to their favourite activities.

Crucial decision making is also seen in Malak and Ritej's experiences of changing fields of study from French to English. While Malak choose French out of her volition and later decided to switch to English because she had personal problems with an instructor, Ritej was forced to study French for a long while after the University entrance exam. Two years later, however, she interrupted her progress and enrolled in the English language program:

I really disagreed with it I was really depressed, and I really had sort of an anxiety because I didn't like French. I remember clearly that the French classes time tables and the English time were posted next to each other, all the time I don't look at the French timetable but at the English timetable, and when I see people going to class , the English students, I was envious, I really wanted so badly to study it so, I blocked the second year, I didn't study it at all, with the disagreement, full disagreement of my family it was my own choice no one pushed me to do so (Interview, Ritej).

Ritej expressed her clear disdain over her inability to study English at university. Despite being a French language student, she yearned for English education and to fulfil her dream of becoming an English language teacher. Thanks to her high motivation and emotional connection with English, she was able to transfer programs without worrying about losing

two years. She exercised control over her classroom learning and consequently the related out-of-class practices.

The way this connects to learning beyond the classroom lies in the interrelation of in-class and out-of-class learning which is seen to a high degree at university levels, where motivations for out-of-class efforts are mostly related to classroom needs, thus exercising control over crucial decisions at university ripples beyond the classroom. This was noticed in Habib's voluntary effort of searching for, choosing, and using the discord software to improve his speaking skills. Or in Ritej's case, using textbooks in her out-of-class practices: "*I like to match information and I try to read and link them to the lesson*" (Interview, Ritej).

To conclude, I can say that the locus of control can be seen in the overall experience of learning beyond the classroom in a challenging environment. In this study, the locus of control resides in the persistence towards the environment by seeking out and creating learning opportunities that fit with one's needs and goals. It also resides in the crucial decisions made by the learners over the long term of their learning careers, in taking charge of their learning, in choosing their preferred activities and own learning strategies and in deciding their own University education paths.

Furthermore, it appears that the locus of control is not stable. In other words, learning beyond the classroom through a resource is not necessarily always self-directed or other-directed. Instead, the distribution of control seems to change and shift. For example, from the teacher to the learner as seen in Malak and her friend's experience with books. In Chik's (2014, p. 96) study about autonomous learning through digital games, the findings revealed locus of control as disturbed between the learner, their community, and artefacts. Additionally, it was suggested that both the age of the learner and the language of the game's interface limited exercise of control (2014, p. 96). The difference between my research and Chik's is while her focus was on analysing learning through a single out-of-class activity, mine used Benson's (2011a) framework to explore experiences through whole learning careers which involve different LBC activities. In doing so I was able to capture a more holistic image of LBC practice and consequently offer a general perspective on the exercise of control within boundaries of a challenging environment. So not only is the locus of control determined by age, community and artefact(chik, 2014, p. 96) It seems to be determined and influenced by

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attitudes of the community, difficulties and obstacles of the environment and how the learner lives and learns through them. Therefore, the exercise of control, its shifting nature and the acts of gaining and regaining it all reflect high motivation, persistence and resilience and consequently different degrees of autonomous language learning.

6.3. Summary of findings

This chapter shows the participants' learning experience, and consequently autonomous practice beyond the classroom which is usually invisible to teachers and educators (Benson, 2011a, p. 8). This invisibility aspect of the LBC experience could be one reason for claims of Algerian students' passivity and unreadiness for autonomy (e.g., Missoum, 2015; Hadi, 2017; Arib and Maouche, 2021). To offer a glimpse into learners' experiences, the chapter was divided into two parts. The first one displayed the affordances for language learning beyond the classroom perceived by the participants, which are an important aspect of the ecological perspective influencing the study. The second part of the chapter drew from the narrative nature of the data in order to present a picture of the autonomous LBC experience through a myriad of activities with reference to the four dimensions of location, formality, pedagogy and locus of control.

The findings revealed an array of perceived language learning affordances of the resources the world beyond the classroom offered. These affordances included the function of improving language skills and repertoire, the opportunity for intensive exposure through easily accessible and compelling resources, the awareness of progress and abilities, and the senses of authenticity, connectivity with different learners, cultures and native speakers, and a sense of control over one's learning.

In the second part. The location dimension revealed limited venues for LBC practices, consisting of home and school premises and online. Despite the few locations for English language use and practice, the learners demonstrated creativity and resourcefulness in identifying and/or creating learning opportunities.

As for the formality dimension, throughout their learning careers, the participants' experiences with LBC were mostly informal. However, the experiences varied in terms of

being intentional and non-intentional. The scale would pivot towards intentional learning as learning motivations and goals became clear, instead of the LBC activities being performed for the sake of enjoyment. Furthermore, experiences with LBC resources appear to become instances of formal learning when done in relation to classroom practices especially in later stages of the participants' learning experiences (high school and university), reflecting a thinning of the layer separating learning outside and inside the classroom.

The third dimension is pedagogy, which revealed that the learners engaged in both naturalistic and self-instructed learning. The findings also revealed a pattern in the learning experiences explored in my study. This pattern involved a change from naturalistic learning in early learning careers towards self-instruction as motivations changed from interest and enjoyment to classroom and academic achievements.

The final dimension is the locus of control. The findings suggest high levels of control and self-direction in the learners' experiences beyond the classroom. This can be seen in their resilience and persistence towards their learning goals despite environmental challenges such as limited resources and anxiety-inducing and negative attitudes of the local community towards English language use. Locus of control is also seen in the making of crucial decisions that affect not only their language learning but also the learners' future careers and prospects. The nature of locus of control also appears to change and shift throughout the long language learning experiences, where sometimes learning is self-directed, whereas at other times it is other-directed. This is perhaps a reflection of interdependent autonomy (e.g., Little, 1995; Palfreyman, 2014; Sade, 2014; Yashima, 2014).

7. Discussion

This qualitative study has explored the experiences of language learning beyond the classroom of a group of Algerian learners throughout their whole learning career in their environment. It aimed to understand holistically the nature of learning beyond the classroom, the challenges facing the learners, and the way they managed to learn and reach their goals. The study followed an interpretive qualitative approach that took on an ecological perspective and contextual view of learner beliefs. In terms of methodology, the study is influenced by narrative inquiry. The data was collected through three related stages over my stay at the participant's university. The first stage was language learning histories written by the participants. The LLHs were initially analysed then the accounts were used in customising semi-structured interviews which represent the second stage. The third stage consisted of a focus group discussion in which common points and issues about the environment were discussed.

In this chapter, I address the core message of the research that revolves around a persistent creative experience of learning beyond the classroom in a challenging environment, which reflects learners' perception of their environment, their beliefs, motivations, and exercise of autonomy.

At the onset of the study, I sought to find which opportunities for language learning beyond the classroom were available to the participants and how they learned through them. This helped in the initial direction of the study towards relevant areas. Later, however, as my thinking evolved, the following research questions were formulated in hopes of capturing an in-depth understanding of LBC experience in a challenging environment from a holistic ecological perspective:

1. How has the environment influenced the participants' language learning beyond the classroom experience?
2. What language learner beliefs do the participants hold that reflect their language learning experience in their environment?
3. To what extent is autonomy exercised throughout the learners' experiences beyond the classroom?

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These three research questions are addressed in the three interrelated data chapters. Here I make sense of the three data chapters and construct a discussion based on each research question, emergent, and unexpected insight, all in relation to previous studies and with consideration of the present study's contributions to LBC theory practice.

In this chapter I address the research questions and discuss findings concerning the environment's influence on LBC (7.1.1), the learners' beliefs and motivations (7.1.2) and finally their exercise of autonomy from an ecological perspective (7.1.3), highlighting perceived affordances and LBC dimensions(location, formality, pedagogy and locus of control)

7.1. Making sense of the complexity of LBC experience in a challenging Algerian context

The study started with a curiosity to understand the interplay of the environment's difficulties and learners' experiences of learning English Beyond the classroom. The findings revealed a complex nature of the experience of learning through interrelated narrative accounts of the six participants. In this section, I address the research questions by closing the gap between the findings and establishing a convergent understanding of the different areas addressed in the three data chapters.

The three chapters addressing the research questions respectively are interrelated and serve in capturing the holistic experience of Language learning beyond the classroom in a challenging environment.

7.1.1. Environmental influences

Concerning the environment's influence, the findings suggest that it shaped the learners' experience by presenting them with a set of challenges and limitations but also affordances and opportunities. The question "**How has the environment influenced the participants' learning experiences beyond the classroom?**" was addressed in two parts in the findings' chapters. The first part, which seen in Chapter 4. Environment through the eyes of the learners, consisted of presenting the aspects and the difficulties perceived by the participants throughout their learning careers both within their school premises and in the local environment to which they belong and have grown up in. The second part, although hinted

at through data chapter one and data chapter two, was addressed more directly under the heading of *Perceived affordances for LBC* in data chapter three which depicts in more detail the process of LBC and the involved activities in the environment. This goes in line with the understanding that learning affordances are not properties of the environment, but a result of the learners' interactions and perceptions (Van Lier 2004, Menezes, 2011).

In my exploration of the complexity of the relationship between the learners and their environment, I was able to identify several challenges and difficulties. It seems that the LBC experience was affected by both worlds outside and inside the classroom, which are interrelated.

The environment out-of-class, which I referred to as *Local Environment* is characterised by the sociocultural elements consisting of circumstances and people. As for the former, I have shown that learners have no access to direct learning activities out-of-class, such as the likes of private language schools and self-access centres. Moreover, they even reported difficulty of even finding places to hang out and talk in English with friends. Therefore, technically, this limited their opportunities for language learning and practice, however, they still managed to learn successfully, and their long learning careers prove that.

Concerning the element of people as part of the challenging environment, this seems to have played a major role. The learners were faced with a community that generally supported neither their English language interests nor their public use of it. The participants often reported anxiety and discomfort to use English or even voice out future career aspirations that involve the language. Furthermore, in the area to which the participants belong, the English language falls in status behind Arabic and French, even among young people, although this situation appears to be changing. The home environments also had their share of problems, as family members rarely offered support for the participants' English language activities or future careers and aspirations involving the English language. Despite all of that, the learners had positive futuristic visions concerning the improvement of English language status and even expressed wishes to contribute to improving English learning in the area by sharing their experiences and even becoming better teachers themselves.

School environment housed the participants' experiences through middle school, high school, and university; and their interactions with official English language learning, teachers, and with peers and friends. The perceptions were mixed, although leaning towards more difficulties and challenges. In middle school, Arabic was often used, the classes mostly involved drills and rote learning, and the participants complained about the scarcity of practice opportunities. In high school, the English sessions were usually allocated in late hours after a long day of maths and science, which made them hard to focus on. University, however, appears to be perceived more positively. It afforded deeper knowledge about language that the participants seemed to enjoy, and which changed their LBC practice to include research and more self-instruction. Furthermore, spoken presentations challenged some participants to find ways beyond the classroom to improve their speaking skills. University also was a meeting point for peers and friends sharing the same interests which allowed the opportunity to practice and discuss in English, although this was limited to small groups as the majority of others rarely spoke English, possibly due to the already mentioned negative attitudes towards English.

At this point, these aspects of the environment (local and school), especially during middle and high school periods, could discourage English language learners, considering these are reports based on long learning careers, starting from ages as young as 8. This might have been the case for other individuals in the same environment, however, the participants are successful language learners who demonstrated the ability to find or create learning opportunities.

The participants' perceptions of their environment and how they expressed their experiences mirror themes of persistence and creativity for language learning beyond the classroom. At first, the limitations they faced can mean a lack of learning affordances, however, this seemed to ignore the human element, or in other words the learners' role in learning. Thus, as the study follows the ecological perspective, it does not solely focus on the environment as a negative or difficult situation that the learners react to, but instead, it pays attention to the relationship between the learner and environment and how it is translated to their LBC experience. The learners project persistence and resilience in learning and practising English despite all the challenges, thus, reflecting responsibility and capacity to take

charge of linguistic lives, which are in an ecological sense important elements of autonomy that focus on aspects of volition and Control (Van Lier,2004; Palfreyman, 2014). This point is further reinforced with findings in chapter 6. Autonomous LBC practice[1], concerning the location dimension of LBC. Accordingly, LBC is limited to activities in the confines of home, school premises and the internet.

Although the focus goes beyond the confines of the classroom popular in ELT in difficult situations' literature, the findings discussed here seem to backup insights on English learning and teaching in *difficult/unfavourable* situations (Bertoncino, Murphy and Wang, 2002; Copland, Garton and Burns, 2014; Verspoor, 2008), by providing a different case of study with unique characteristics and challenges based on the participants' understanding of their experiences. The study carries the idea that the environment's limitations did not eliminate possibilities for successful LBC learning, but instead shaped the experience to reflect persistence and creativity. This Echoes a positive perspective to unfavourable situations shown in previous works like Smiths' (2015) Teaching English in Large Classes (TELC) agenda[2], which calls against problematising seemingly bad situations, therefore, empowering learner perspectives and seeing the positive in the negative. With this idea in mind and the themes of creativity and persistence in consideration, the learning experiences in a challenging environment entails degrees of control in different forms throughout the learning careers which is a sign of autonomous learning (Holec, 1981; Little, 1991; Cotterall, 2008: Benson, 2013) which I shall discuss in the extent of autonomy exercise section.[3]

The participants' contributions also described an environment different from other LBC studies set in different settings. For example, in Kalaja *et al*. (2011), experiences of Fins' learning English and Swedish in the contexts of school and out of school were compared. For Swedish language learners, the school was the major source of learning opportunities, while for English language learners, out of school was favourable thanks to media, English's very

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[1] Check section 6.2.1
[2] Check section 2.1.3
[3] Check section 7.1.3

high status and the opportunity to have face to face conversations with native speakers or simply other Fins who spoke good English. This is the opposite of the present study. According to the participants' narratives, neither school nor the world outside afforded considerable direct opportunities for language learning or use. In the Fin student's case with English, they were agentive in picking and choosing among many opportunities. On the other hand, for the Algerian students in the present study, it seems that it required more effort to achieve their language learning goals beyond the classroom, which again puts forth the notions of creativity and persistence and eventually degrees of autonomy.

All of this presents the learners' narratives as examples of successful LBC learning in challenging circumstances that reflect stories of persistence, creativity, and the ability to notice, find or even create learning opportunities. This statement entails that the participants possess some traits that shape their experience of LBC. These traits are addressed in the discussion concerning learner beliefs and motivations.

7.1.2. Beliefs and motivations

The second research question addressed is "**what learner beliefs do the participants express that have been involved in their LBC experience?**".

As part of my holistic exploration of the experiences of learning English beyond the classroom in a challenging environment, I sought to discover what language learner beliefs participants hold about English and LBC, and how these beliefs are involved in the perception of learning affordances, and in what way is that reflected on their LBC's persistent and creative experience. I highlighted four themes about learner beliefs: the importance of the English language; the value of having a strong emotional connection with the language, its artefacts, and activities; the significant role of communication in learning; and finally, the idea that every individual learns differently. In addition to learner beliefs, the learners' goals and motivations emerged as important individual variables during my attempt to understand the complexity of the LBC experience in a challenging environment. The themes of motivation are language mastery, wishes to escape and wishes for improvement of local English language learning situation.

Language learner beliefs

In terms of learner beliefs themes, a major commentary that I can make is how they seem to oppose the challenging nature of the environment perceived by the participants. At first, this seemed to contradict my statement that the environment shaped the experience. However, as the study follows the ecological perspective, the focus here is not only on the learner in the environment but also on the complex and interrelated relationship between the two, which in turn reinforces the learner's active role. In that regard, despite English's low status in the environment, the learners valued it as it helped in their daily lives by offering access to almost unlimited knowledge online; it can also help them in their future careers, provided they are to be perceptive beyond local opportunities, which are scarce because of the low status of the language. Lastly, English can help them broaden their worldview as they can read new texts and listen to and communicate with different people.

The second theme of belief mentioned is the importance of loving the language and all its cultural artefacts and language learning activities. Having this belief seems to have aided the participants in persisting and maintaining motivation throughout their long learning careers in an environment where English related aspirations are ridiculed or are unfavoured. This belief entails being able to perceive all forms of English as opportunities for learning. However, it seems that awareness and perception of a resource as potentially useful are not enough for it to contribute to learning, as each participant had their own favourite (or least favourite) activity. Therefore I can suggest here that a resource's contribution to learning depends on two aspects: one is the learner perceiving it as useful for learning (Menezes, 2011, p. 63); and the second is the learner's strong emotional connection with it. This connection was seen in different ways throughout the participants' learning careers, such as Asma's fascination with Disney movies, or Malak's with literature.

The importance of communication for learning is another theme of the participants' belief system. The challenging situation of the environment was an obstacle to the learners in terms of opportunities for communication in English. The negative attitudes of the community, the anxiety and the absence of other people willing to converse in English were all factors the participants had to face. However, as persistent and creative individuals who

valued the English language and the necessity to communicate, they were able to find other social resources (Palfreyman, 2011), either by creating small groups of friends, becoming part of online communities with shared interests, or using discussion software like Discord.

The fourth identified theme of learner beliefs revolves around the uniqueness of the learning experience for every individual. The participants spoke fondly about their LBC experiences and described the different activities and resources they interacted with. Again, the negative attitudes of the local community towards English language use or practice did not deter the participants from the language as opposed to other individuals in their surroundings. What allowed them to do that is a set of characteristics these learners possess which may consist of high interest, the perceived value of English and willingness to communicate in it. Another characteristic is a reported *feel* for language, which I believe, in an ecological sense (Van Lier, 2004; Menezes, 2011), is their ability to perceive affordances of environment, as well as the emotional engagement with said resources, which can be demonstrated in fun in and enjoyment.

The language learner beliefs presented here support a contextual approach to learner beliefs (Kalaja and Barcelos, 2013), and are in line with ecological/sociocultural research (White, 2008; Peng, 2011; Yang and Kim, 2011). It seems that the nature of these themes reflects social and contextual influence intertwined with personal interests and experience. These beliefs held by the participants seem to be in line with Bakhtin's notion of heteroglossia and polyphony (Dufva, 2003; Pan and Block, 2011), as they are not purely individual, but instead reflect the learners' personal experiences as interactive with others around them, and the others' negative attitudes and discourse about English such as its low status and low career opportunity.

Furthermore, these beliefs reinforce the active role of the learners in their experience of learning beyond the classroom through their assistance in perceiving learning affordances in such a limited environment and in their exercise of agency, which appears to echo White's (2008) call for more studies on Learner beliefs' assistance or constraint on agency in particular contexts of learning or use.

Learner Goals and motivations

The qualitative thematic analysis led to the emergence of future conceptions, which seem to fall under the scope of goals and motivations, and are involved in the participants' Beliefs system and overall holistic experience of learning beyond the classroom in a challenging environment that reflects persistence and creativity. These themes of motivations consisted of motivation for the sake of language mastery, wishes for escape, and motivation for intervention and improvement of local English learning situations.

The first theme here concerns the use of LBC activities to specifically improve language skills. This motivation was interpreted from participants' understanding of different periods of learning careers. In some cases, wanting to improve linguistic skills manifested in early career stages through a desire to understand the language of favourite activities such as texts and dialogues in a video game, which happened to be in English, or through wanting to understand and imitate an elder sibling who often spoke or sang in English. This motivation in the early stages seemed to be accompanied by clear learning efforts (or intention to learn) such as checking dictionaries and asking family members for help. Another linguistic aspect behind LBC learning efforts is the improvement of one's vocabulary which was seen in choices in selecting LBC activities and further changes and upgrades from one resource to another such as from mangas and comic books to literature and novels written by comic book authors (link motivation for learning section and page).

The second theme of motivation titled *escape attempts* has a clearer presentation of the environment's shaping influence on the LBC experience. This theme was identified on two different dimensions. The first dimension was first co-constructed from Walid's experience with bullying. This personal experience had a strong impact on his LBC career. To avoid being bullied, he found solace in the comfort of his home where he had access to TV and the internet. Media afforded Walid intensive exposure to movies, tv-series and music on MTV, which aided him in learning English, and also allowed for him to immerse himself in English language culture, where he would watch things he needed in his life, such as school councillors and even clean bathrooms at school, all of which afforded an imaginary sanctuary and lead to wishes and intentions for integration. Another participant who voiced similar

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motivation was Malak. Although reticently, she expressed wanting to escape reality and was able to do that through intensive reading of novels and Japanese comics. Her contributions regarding this matter lead me to think of her escapist motivation as more of a *change of scenery through imagination*. Other than the motivation of imaginary escapism, the second dimension is more practical and consisted of wanting to travel abroad, which seemed, for some participants, to be an end goal behind LBC efforts. What is surprising about this motivation is that none of the participants expressed wanting to travel abroad permanently, which is usually the popular rhetoric among Algerian youth, but instead they wanted to travel abroad either for tourism or for studies. Hearing the participants say they want to come back to the challenging environment that appeared to limit their opportunities for language learning and practice, in a way aided in transforming my approach to challenging and unfavourable learning situations from a negative perspective into a more positive point of view, considerate of the learner's active role.

What reinforced my positive lens more is the third theme of motivation titled *motivation for intervention and improvement of local affairs.* Under this theme, the participants expressed, on different levels, their wishes to change the situation of English learning and status in their local environment. LBC efforts to improve vocabulary and speech abilities seem to be related to the aspiration of influencing others. To Ritej for instance, this was noticed in her interest in public speaking and influencing others' mentalities, where she wants to speak about her experience and show others in her area that learning English is important and not complicated. Related to this, Walid suggested the need to increase English language cultural exposure in the area and perhaps influence others to have more tolerance for ambiguity. To others, such as Habib and Asma, the intervention consists of wanting to become well-qualified teachers, better than the ones they encountered, and more appreciated by students. This theme of motivation appears to reflect the participants' high awareness of their environment's needs for a better LBC experience. This again highlights their active role in their learning experience.

With the ecological and contextual perspectives governing the study, the themes of motivation shown here, concerning language mastery, escape, and intervention and improvement of local affairs strongly mirror the environment, its physical, social and symbolic

affordances and constraints (Van Lier, 2004. P. 5). In the ecology of learning, the learner and the environment are seen in an interactive and dynamic relationship. The environment influences the learner and can be influenced by the learner too (Palfreyman, 2014, p. 191) and this is what I can notice in the themes of beliefs shown previously and the three themes of motivation seen above. The environment's influence resides in its overall shaping nature of the experience. It involves the environment's characteristics (physical, social, and symbolic), affordances and constraints. The learners' influence on the environment can be seen in their futuristic aspirations to change and improve the English learning situation around them. The learner's involvement can further be inferred from their active role of perception of affordances and their personal (and emotional) involvement with the different resources.

Considering both the environment's shaping role of experience and the themes of language learner beliefs and motivations, Language learning beyond the classroom in the participants' case is a demonstration of persistence and creativity. This demonstration is seen in the learners' active role of interaction with the challenging environment, and in their awareness and perception of learning affordances of the different social, material, and discursive resources. All of which seems to involve, in different degrees from one learner to another, an emotional investment with the English language, its resources and the learners' future goals.

The statement above represents a major contribution to the present study. To strengthen it further, the following sections discuss what affordances the learners have perceived, how they learn beyond the classroom and most importantly the extent of their autonomy throughout their language learning careers.

7.1.3. Participants' exercise of autonomy

The third research question of the study is "**to what extent is autonomy exercised throughout their language learning careers beyond the classroom?**"

To address this question, I discuss the learners' exercise of autonomy by first revisiting the approach taken in the investigation then reflecting the findings over the employed definitions of autonomy from an ecological perspective.

The findings so far concern the environment, the learners' beliefs, and motivation and most importantly the themes of persistence and creativity that govern the experiences with LBC resources. The narratives reflect an actual exercise of autonomous language learning. The participants seem to have been autonomous on different levels, which fit with their circumstances, needs and their own persons. This statement in a way sits opposite of a good number of Algerian scholars' claims about Algerian English learners' unreadiness for autonomy due to culture and other variables (e.g., Benaissi, 2015; Hadi, 2017; Arib and Maouche, 2021). The difference between my study and previous ones in Algerian settings is that they attempt to apply western understandings of autonomy and a direct approach that neglects the world outside the classroom, which could simply be due to LBC occurring beyond the reach of teachers and scholars. My approach is holistic, based on participants' understandings of their experiences and interpreted through a qualitative ecological lens. Additionally, it was indirect in that no mentions of the term autonomy were made during data collection or discussions with the participants, as previous studies in Algerian settings reported learners and even teachers finding difficulties in defining what autonomy even is (e.g., Hadi, 2017).

The complexity of the holistic LBC experience in a challenging environment and the dynamic exercise of a learning autonomy custom to the learners' beliefs and motivation were all captured in my approach to LBC. I combined a contextualization of the learners' experience and interpretation of their goals and motivations, which happen to be represented in chapters 4 and 5, with the perceived affordances of LBC and an analysis of the settings and modes of practice of their LBC experience shown in chapter 6.

In this study, I applied two levels of understanding and defining learner autonomy. The first one was a departure point and consisted of Bensons' definition of autonomy as "the capacity to take control over one's learning" (2011b, p. 86). This control is viewed over three dimensions: learning management, cognitive processes, and content of learning. The findings of my study revealed that the participants, throughout their learning careers, used a variety of resources including video games, watching tv shows and movies, reading comics and novels, participating in online communities, and using textbooks. From one participant to another and at different stages, they reported varying degrees of control in choosing what

activities they want and enjoy, in maintaining motivation and in selecting modes of learning (different degrees of formality and intentionality). This sets the scene by presenting the participants as ones who were able to take control over their learning in different ways on different occasions.

The second level is to approach autonomy from a holistic ecological perspective. This was guided principally by two main definitions. The first one is Van Lier's (2004, p. 8):

> Autonomy in an ecological approach does not mean independence or individualism, however. It means having the authorship of one's actions, having the voice that speaks one's words, and being emotionally connected to one's actions and speech (Damasio, 2003), within one's community of practice (Wenger, 1998). This type of autonomy is dialogical in Bakhtin's sense (1981): socially produced, but appropriated and made one's own.

Using this definition, I was able to let go of the assumption that autonomy means independence, which allowed for viewing the participants' different degrees of control over their learning at different stages in their learning careers, which also correlates with their learner beliefs and motivations. Furthermore, this definition is considerate of the participants' emotional and personal involvement with LBC resources and practices.

The second definition was by Palfreyman (2014, p. 182), which considers autonomy from an ecological perspective as "a capacity for intentional use in context of a range of interacting resources toward learning goals". Through this definition, I was able to highlight the participants' active role in their LBC experience that carries their perceptions, beliefs and their personal agendas depicted in their goals and motivations. Therefore, the autonomous practice is viewed as shown below:

1. By considering '**intentional use**' I was able to view the temporal dimension of autonomy as autonomous practice and degrees of intentionality and control are dynamic at different times in the learners' narratives, which suggests patterns of autonomous learning.
2. In terms of the '**range of interacting resources'**, the participants demonstrated the ability to notice different resources of LBC in their environment, perceive their learning

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affordances, and the ability to adapt to changing circumstances and needs by moving from one resource to another.

3. As for **learning goals**, the findings revealed themes of motivation which were for language mastery or in the form of life goals carrying linguistic aspects (motivation for escape, motivation of improvement of local affairs). It also seems that the motivations were contextual in nature and they would change at different points in the long careers and so did the modes of learning as well as the degrees of control.

Using this also helped in capturing interdependent autonomy from an ecological approach where learning was not a disengagement from the environment's unfavourable circumstances, but instead, the challenges stimulated the learning in a direction that reflects persistence and creativity and consequently autonomy. Moreover, within the learners' experiences, interdependence was seen in interacting with peers, friends and online communities and even getting help and following some teachers' advice.

This section discussed the participants' exercise of autonomy. To further continue the discussion, the complexity of the LBC experience of the participants and their personal exercise of autonomy are all captured from their perceived LBC affordances and an alternative ecological and holistic application of Benson's (2011a) four dimension model of LBC, through which instead of focusing on one LBC activity at a time, I viewed the whole learning careers of the 6 participants together to highlight the locations of LBC, the formalities of activities, the levels of pedagogy, and the degrees of control the participants reflected. These aspects of the exercise of autonomy are discussed next in one part detailing the perceived affordances and the second dealing with the four dimensions of LBC.

7.1.3.1. Revisiting the perceived affordances

It can be understood from the discussion above that for the participant's case, autonomous learning involves perceiving and acting on affordances mediated by their language learner beliefs towards their personal agendas. The affordances perceived by the participants were: affordance for improving linguistic skills; affordance for intensive exposure; affordance of awareness of progress; affordance of sense of authenticity; affordance of sense of connectivity; and affordance of sense of control.

In terms of improving linguistic skills, the participants perceived different LBC resources as helpful with different language skills. For example, comics, novels, and movies helped enhance vocabulary and grammar. These resources were enjoyable, easy to access, and the participants were even able to upgrade from one resource to another depending on their needs. LBC sources such as music helped in improving listening and speaking skills through activities of listening and singing and even challenging one's self with complex rap songs. Literature helped also in speaking skills as participants like Walid reported paying attention to what he referred to as a sophisticated and beautiful form of language.

Regarding Affordance of intensive exposure, TV, movies, comics, books, music, and video games were all sources that the participants enjoyed and had effortless access to. This seems to explain the hours they would spend on these activities.

LBC also afforded an awareness of linguistic progress. Some participants were able to pick up words and idiomatic expressions from watching short videos online just for leisure. Being able to watch tv and movies and understand the language without reliance on subtitles was also a sign of progress that the participants were able to feel. Furthermore, the feeling that some resources such as comics were not enough for vocabulary leading to upgrade to novels and short stories is also an instance of awareness of progress.

Authenticity was another affordance of LBC resources the participants were engaged with like through exposure to western media, which served as a preparation for potential communication with people outside Algeria, and also as a source of what the participants called real language.

LBC also afforded a sense of connectivity. At the start of the study, I assumed that most, if not all, of the participants, were creating friendships online with native speakers of English, however, through their learning careers, contact with native speakers was actually rare and limited to one single personal experience of meeting a group of English nuns in person by Hind. As for online contact, only Habib used the Discord app to engage with other learners of English and sometimes native speakers for the sake of improving his speaking skills. This shows, even though native speakers are one Facebook request away, the participants did not perceive this affordance. However, contexts beyond the classroom afforded connections with

a small number of other like-minded people (online or small groups in person) who shared an interest in the English language and English language resources such as movies and literature. Some participants reported going through their learning careers without ever finding friends to talk to in English, until their last years of high school and into university, which shows how challenging LBC can be in their environment.

The affordance of control is accounted for in choices and decisions the participants make about their LBC. First, despite the limits of the environment, LBC contexts offer an array of activities to pick from, therefore allowing the learners to have control over the content of their learning (Benson, 2013). Second, learners can choose how and when to learn, this was very clear in Habib's experience with the Discord software. He was able to pick the discussion channels depending on his needs and level whenever he wanted, as the language community in Discord was large and international. In fact, Discord has recently gained academic attention on its effect in improving vocabulary and speech, and its potential benefits if used by educators (Odinokaya, *et al*, 2021; Wahyuningsi and Baidi, 2021).

These affordances for learning shown above are not properties of the resources in the environment, and their existence does not translate automatically to a contribution to learning. Instead, they were a result of the participants' perceiving them. This perception was mediated through the participants' language learner beliefs, goals and motivations and ecological/sociocultural nature of experience with their environment. This confirms with previous studies using the ecological perspective (e.g., Menezes, 2011). What my study further suggests is that perception of LBC affordances also involves a personal connection with the English language and resources, and a strong emotional involvement is seen in the participant's enjoyment and commitment to specific activities and seemingly an open-mindedness to try more.

This nature of affordances being a result of perception rather than being a property of the environment can be noticed in how not all LBC resources were perceived in the same way. Consequently, each participant had their favourite activities, and, in some cases, some resources were not considered as sources for language learning at all, as seen in Asma's case with music.

Another observation made about the perceived affordance is that LBC resources' benefits are not limited to linguistic development, they also offer the learners room for agency and control, and opportunity for language use and practice that their local and classroom environments lacked. Through perceiving those affordances, the participants were able to transform their environments or access new ones. Consequently, perhaps Algerian English learners operate on a different plane than what is accessible to teachers and researchers. Therefore, claiming that learners are not autonomous or unready for autonomy is perhaps synonymous with a lack of vision and consideration of the learner's perspective. So, adopting an interpretive qualitative lens, drawing from narrative inquiry, and applying thematic analysis all characterize my study as one that empowers the learners' experiences and views their autonomy as based on their perceptions mediated by their socially and contextually constructed beliefs and motivations.

7.1.3.2. Insight from dimensions of location, formality, pedagogy, and locus of control

In this section, I show autonomous practice in the participants' experiences from the LBC's four dimensions.

Benson's (2011a) model to analyse settings and modes of practice was adopted in my study to comprehend the depth of the LBC experiences. Technically, this framework was designed to analyse specific settings and researches of learning beyond the classroom one at a time such as digital games (e.g., Benson and Chik, 2011; Chik, 2014) and learning apps like Duolingo (Chik, 2018). However, in the present study, I applied this framework alternatively to analyse the holistic experience with an array of resources throughout the long learning careers of the 6 participants. This was done after attaining an in-depth understanding of the complexity of the experiences that entails the nature of their environment, their language learner beliefs and motivations. They learned beyond the classroom through video games, cartoons, tv shows, reality shows, movies, YouTube videos, comics, mangas, literature, social media, Discord rooms and others. The application of this framework enriched my understanding of the persistent and creative LBC experiences in challenging circumstances

and highlighted the importance of learner beliefs and motivations in the perception of learning affordances and eventual exercise of autonomy.

Location:

The findings concerning the location dimension are important to the study. they showed that most of the LBC activities were performed at home, online, or on a few occasions at school premises with friends. Viewing this dimension also meant paying attention to the challenging and unfavourable circumstances of the environment that shaped the LBC experience. Therefore, considering the environment and the learners' perception and reaching out to learning affordances despite the limitations means paying attention to the participants' creativity, and persistence. Moreover, the location dimension is an important aspect in highlighting the learners' autonomous practice. The participants searched for or created learning opportunities in a few locations out-of-class. This seems to be a demonstration of autonomy in taking charge over the content of their learning without being compelled to but instead personally selecting what they prefer based on their goals (Koketepe, 2017, p. 105).

Formality:

Concerning the formality[4] of LBC, it seems that informal learning was prevalent, but within that informality, degrees of intentionality varied, and some patterns were noticed. The standard of measurement of intentional learning consisted of any level of intention to learn paired with an implementation of learning strategies. To some participants, it appeared that LBC was intentional at first as it was due to interest in language in the immediate environment of the participants (e.g., video game dialogues, sibling's language, music) and the learners implemented some learning strategies (checking dictionaries, asking parents, intensive listening to music), although humble ones. What was noticed, however, is that the learners themselves considered early learning as unintentional despite their high interest and implantation of strategies, which reflects a thin line between intentionality and incidental

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[4] "the extent to which a learning activity is part of an institutional programme that may lead to formal qualifications" (Chik, 2018, p. 82)

learning at early stages of learning careers. Later then, the degrees of intentionality appeared to shift towards clear intentional learning with correlation with clearer motivations. Furthermore, these cases of informal learning seemed to gain some formality the more the participants had classroom achievements in mind, or in other words, the more learning became *curriculum oriented* (Koketepe, 2017, p. 105). This then shows the thin boundaries between in-class and out-of-class learning, which again supports my statement of the learners possibly being autonomous but simply being so out of the educators' sight.

Pedagogy:

The third dimension is pedagogy[5] where learning practices were either cases of naturalistic learning or self-instruction. The difference between the two lay in the absence or presence of an intention to learn and use of specially structured materials in the two modes, respectively. Naturalistic learning was seen in experiences with resources like music and movies, where learning was a by-product of high interest, emotional connection, and enjoyment of the activities rather than an intention to learn English and implantation of learning strategies. As for self-instruction different sources were used. Ritej supplemented her classroom learning with the use of specially designed textbooks. Asma watched YouTube videos of online English language teachers. Habib also put effort into improving spoken language by joining Discord discussion rooms which were adequately structured by other learners and sometimes native speakers to help in English learning at different levels.

An important finding from the pedagogy dimension is the unique pedagogical pattern the experiences of the participants followed. It was found that LBC experiences with the English language started in a naturalistic way. In later stages of the experiences, the learning would turn towards self-instruction as the motivations changed from enjoyment and interest to focus on classroom and academic achievements. This finding is different from other

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[5] "Pedagogy is the extent the learning activity involves instructions, structured progression of materials, explicit explanation, and assessment" (Chik, 2018, p. 83)

settings like in Benson, Chik and Lim's (2003) study of Asian learners who started in the classroom and later in life, their learning became naturalistic. This pattern also seems to be related to the pattern of formality mentioned in the previous paragraph where informality characterised the whole learning careers until later stages where classroom and academia became important.

Locus of control:

The fourth dimension is the locus of control and it concerns the decisions made about one's learning. In the case of the participants, the locus of control is dynamic through the long learning experiences and shifts between self and other-direction. Locus of control also resides in the act of persistence and following up on personal language-related agendas, despite environmental limitations.

The dynamic nature of locus of control means that it shifts and changes between the learner and an outside other. The other in the participants' case was either a structured resource such as textbooks, Discord chatrooms, or a school a teacher. The learning experiences of the participants started from an interest in English or English related resources, and the decisions to use and learn through said resources were self-initiated. Thus, the learning was initially self-directed. At different stages of the learning careers, some participants willingly gave up their locus of control. An example of that is Malak who loved reading as an LBC activity but voluntarily gave up the control to her classroom teacher who directed the activity by asking for weekly book reports. Another example is Habib who, for the sake of improving his speaking skills at university, searched, found the discord App, joined and participated in different discussion rooms, where he would often meet native speakers or higher level English learners, who would correct him and offer him advice. In both cases, and the case of the other participants, they all had clear learning goals and motivations which are an important element of autonomous learning from the ecological perspective (Palfreyman, 2014, p. 182). Therefore, clear learning goals paired with self-initiated decisions about learning and dynamic locus of control (even if it is other-directed) are signs of dynamic exercise of autonomy and interdependence. This shifting nature of control through different stages is perhaps one of the reasons why some Algerian teachers and scholars (e.g., Hadi, 2017) claim that the learners

are passive and not autonomous. Their claims may be based on observations made at specific points in the learning careers where the control seems to be with the teacher, or as shown before, simply because learners' autonomy could be invisible to the teachers as is LBC experience in general.

The findings also suggest a strong relationship between challenging environments and locus of control. Benson (2011a, p. 12) notes how LBC and locus of control are related: "non-classroom settings often demand that the learners make many of the decisions about their learning". The findings have shown that beyond the classroom environment of the participants was challenging, hence decisions about learning are more necessary for a successful experience. The locus of control is in the life and language learning related decisions, while faced with disagreement and lack of support in the environment. Therefore, the fact of studying English at university, despite its low status in the community, and parents' encouragement for scientific fields instead of language related ones, are all signs of high motivation and control. Thus, I can suggest here that the more challenging non-classroom settings are the more crucial decisions to make about learning are demanded from the learners.

8. Conclusion

In the following chapter, I revisit and summarize the study. I then highlight its main implications in terms of theory and practice. Next, I discuss the research's dilemmas and limitations. I finally provide some suggestions for further research.

8.1. Summary of the study

As I have shown in chapters one and two, there has been a call for research on LBC (e.g., Benson, 2011a, Richard, 2014, Lai, 2014) and fortunately, this field has gained popularity and studies from different settings were produced (e.g., Lamb, 2004; Palfreyman, 2011; Menezes, 2011; Murray, Fujishma and Uzuka, 2014; Chik, 2014; Lai, 2015). However, most of these studies are conducted in environments usually abundant with direct target language learning opportunities. This thesis presents an LBC research about a small number of participants' experience in an Algerian setting that seems to lack such direct opportunities and instead present the learners with several challenges. This study, therefore, from a context-appropriate perspective based on ecological perspective (Van Lier, 2004; Barron, 2006; Palfreyman, 2014) sought to explore the complexity of LBC experiences in a challenging area with a focus on the relationship between the learners and the environment, their language learning beliefs, perceptions of language learning affordances, and these learners' exercise of autonomy beyond the classroom, which is usually hidden from teachers and researchers in the classroom. To achieve this, six English university students from a southern inland province were involved. The data collection was conducted through the implementation of participant language learning histories that elicited retrospective written narratives about learning experiences from the first contact with English to the present. Insight from the LLHs was used to design customised semi-structured interviews for each participant, based on their own understanding of their experiences and how they remember them. The data collection ended with a focus group discussion that followed up on shared and contested views from both LLHs and interviews.

The findings addressing research question 1 *"how has the environment influenced the LBC experience?"* revealed that the environment shaped the participant's learning experience by presenting a set of challenges and difficulties, which nevertheless were managed through,

and the participants' narratives demonstrated persistence and creativity in noticing and creating English language learning opportunities.

In terms of findings related to research question 2 *"What language learner beliefs do the participants hold that reflect their language learning experience?"*, the study suggests that the participant possess a set of beliefs involved in the process of perceiving learning affordances beyond the classroom in the environment. The research question about language learner beliefs is addressed through four themes: the importance of the English Language; the value of having a strong connection with the language, its artefacts and activities; the significant role of communication in learning; and the uniqueness of the learning process for every learner. An emergent finding concerning language learner's beliefs is a set of themes about future goals that motivate LBC activities: a motivation for language mastery; a wish to escape; and a motivation for intervention and improvement of local affairs.

As for research question 3 *"To what extent is autonomy exercised throughout the learners' careers beyond the classroom?"*, the findings revealed that the participants demonstrate different degrees of autonomy in their learning careers. This autonomy appears to be dynamic with the locus of control shifting from self-directedness to other-directedness, nevertheless, the first decisions for LBC practices came from the participants themselves, which in turn reflects autonomy.

8.2. Implications of the study

This section highlights the implications of this study at three different levels: Theoretical, methodological and at the level of language learners.

8.2.1. Theoretical implications

In this section, I present some reflections that concern theoretical implications that emerged from the study. They include the environment-focused application of Benson's (2011a) LBC framework, the positive perspective to challenging circumstances that characterises my study, and finally a number of implications about the role of the ecological perspective in this study.

The first implication concerns my *ecologically guided application of Benson's (2011a) four-dimension framework that prioritises the relationship between the learner and the environment.* To do so, I first wish to return to Benson's (2011a) paper which inspired the study and guided my early framework. Benson presented LBC as a field ripe for research and suggested a four-model framework to describe and analyse LBC settings and modes of practice. however, he expressed that it is unlikely to move forward from a framework to a theory due to the wide range of settings beyond the classroom (Benson, 2011a, P. 15). Therefore, my study, which is an exploration of LBC practice of a number of Algerian learners in a challenging setting, is an attempt to participate in enriching the LBC theory background by presenting a context with a unique configuration and scholarly approach.

An important implication, therefore, is that *my study offers evidence for an alternative way of using a framework such as Bensons'(2011a)*. Before I analysed and discussed the settings and modes of practice of LBC activities, I first contextualised my thinking by prioritising the environment and the learners' lives in it. In doing so, I believe I was able to achieve a holistic understanding of the learners' complex beyond the classroom experiences in the environment. This understanding was sensitive to the challenges and limited opportunities for learning in the environment and to the participants' successful persistent and creative management of learning, all of which was mediated through the learners' beliefs, motivations, and emotional involvement. At a personal level, I found comfort in a recent publication by Benson (2021) which corresponds with my findings. Benson (2021, P. 129) admitted that the framework was lacking in vision as it settled on "a focus on the analysis of settings for language learning" which he referred to as "the trees", and it needed to transition to "the idea of language learning environments" which he called "the woods". Therefore, my approach, which draws insight from the ecological perspective (Van Lier, 2004; Barron, 2006; Menezes, 2011; Palfreyman, 2014) and person-in-context views on language learner Beliefs (Kalaja and Barcelos, 2013) and Benson's (2011a) framework, was able to *see the wood for the trees*. It included a variety of LBC settings and activities and identified different beliefs and motivations that were involved in the learners' perceptions of learning opportunities, which aided in successful learning experiences in a challenging environment.

A second implication is *the promotion of a positive lens to unfavourable language learning situations, that allowed noticing the environment's shaping nature to experience and highlighted the learners' active role, mirrored in themes of persistence and creativity*. The study followed Smith's (2015) advice to avoid referring to unfavourable situations as 'difficult' because that denotes an ideal alternative state and directs the research to focus on the difficult aspects, instead he proposes terminology such as 'challenging circumstances' or 'low-resourced classrooms'. In this study, therefore, I believe that initiating it from a positive lens prevented the analysis and interpretations from stagnating at the level of challenges of the environment. Instead, it revealed findings of how the participants learn beyond the classroom despite the limitations, which echoed their active role and eventually degrees of autonomy. Therefore, by taking such a positive stance, my research prioritises the learner first in its attempt to understand LBC experiences in a challenging environment.

Another set of related implications concerns the ecological perspective's enabling nature to view different aspects of the complexity of learning experiences, which are in this study learner *beliefs, motivations, and autonomy*. As shown throughout the study, the ecological perspective plays a big part as an analytical tool to delve into language learning beyond the classroom from learners' perspective, and providing an insight into their interactions with a vast selection of activities in different settings and spanning over the long period of their language learning histories.

In terms of language learner beliefs, taking on an ecological perspective helped to view them from a contextual, social and dynamic point of view. The revealed language learner beliefs (the importance of the English language; the value of having a strong connection with the language, its artefacts and activities; the role of communication in learning; the uniqueness of learning experience for every learner) mirror the nature of the environment and the attitudes of the community and the status of the English language; not only that, but these beliefs helped the participants to perceive affordances of a variety of resources at different points in their language learning careers. Without developing these beliefs, the participants may not have been able to perceive affordances of learning in their challenging environment and eventually not have become the persistent and creative learners they are.

The study's application of the ecological approach also promotes learners' goals, more specifically what have been motivating the participants to be persistent and creative learners who followed specific personal and context-driven learning patterns. The emergent motivation themes (motivation for language mastery, motivation for escape and motivation for the improvement of local English learning situation) are involved in the perception of affordances and overall experience of learning. Their influence in the study is seen more in their effect over patterns of intentionality and formality of Learning beyond the classroom. The change of motivation to become clearer and more considerate of academic achievements and future goals is related to learning becoming less naturalistic and non-intentional and shifting towards self-instruction. This pattern is different from studies in different settings, which shows that people in different places can be motivated by different goals.

The final theoretical implication of adopting the ecology of learning perspective concerns the emergence of what I termed universality of the uniqueness of autonomy. This notion means that different language learners can exhibit autonomous behaviour beyond the classroom unique to their person, their learning, life, and behaviour in their environment. However, reviewing literature in contexts like the Algerian one revealed a general agreement that Algerian learners lack autonomy. Such studies as I have shown in the review of literature focus on classroom practice and are mostly based on teachers' perspectives, while out-of-class is usually hidden from them. Therefore, the implication that can be derived from my study is a call for the promotion of learner perspectives and their interpretation through holistic ecological/sociocultural (Van Lier, 2004; Palfreyman, 2014) principles. In a more practical sense, the focus was on the learners' own understandings of experience, and autonomy was approached indirectly with no mentions of it during data collection. Eventually, the findings revealed that the participants exhibited autonomy differently at different times throughout their learning career. What is remarkable is that at some points, the participants willingly gave up their locus of control to the teacher or another outside pedagogical authority when that fit with their goal, which still makes them autonomous as the first decision to give up control came from the learners' themselves.

8.2.2. Methodological implications

Here I discuss the methodological implications of the present study, these concern prioritising learner views when planning data collection and analysis, the need for awareness about positives and negatives of research in familiar settings, and finally the study's design possibly serving as a template for research limited by time or circumstances.

The learners' personal understanding of experience and the empowerment of their perspectives are the basis of this work's methodology. A number of scholars agree that studies about language learning beyond the classroom are scarce in comparison to ones in the classroom (e.g., Benson, 2011a; Menezes, 2011; Richards, 2014; Lai, 2014; Koketepe, 2018). As I have shown before, studies on learner autonomy in the Algerian context (e.g., Missoum, 2015; Hadi, 2017; Arib and Maouche, 2021) often base their conclusions on teacher/researcher perspectives, while learner perspectives are simply considered secondary despite the topic being about the learners themselves. My study about LBC and autonomy in a challenging environment empowers the learners and promotes their perspectives and understandings of their own experience; hence, its findings shed light on actual LBC reinforced with participants' retrospective accounts. Therefore, the data collection design, analysis and the findings of the present study could serve as an example of a contextually appropriate approach to researchers interested in language learning beyond the classroom as experienced by the learners.

Another implication is both a call for LBC studies in familiar settings and a need to raise awareness of their possible pitfalls. It is important to admit that sharing a similar experience of learning English beyond the classroom in the same area as the participants have simplified the research in different ways. To some degree, this research can be categorised under what Smith, Kuchah and Lamb (2018, p. 21) called "research with and by Learners", which is "appropriately autonomy-oriented" (2018, p. 19). It is the case because my study is based on a learner-in-context perspective about participants' experiences. As a researcher, I happen to be a language learner too. Exploring the participants' experiences was initially motivated by wishes to study and share my own, and while reading and listening to their experiences, I could clearly picture their stories, and I was able to understand and connect with their

circumstances, the beliefs they voiced and the motivations behind their LBC efforts. I know the places they mentioned, the problems they faced, and the community's negative attitudes they complained about. Moreover, this familiarity helped me gain access to the participants and create with them a good relationship that guaranteed me their presence, and if the need arose their willingness to participate in follow-ups.

However, this familiarity raised some issues that I was unable to notice in the early phases of the study as a novice researcher with a lack of understanding of the concept of reflexivity. Therefore*, the implication is to raise awareness about the importance of reflexivity concerning the effect of being a researcher in a familiar setting.* After I decided that the study shall be qualitative and draws from narrative inquiry to empower learners' perspectives about their learning experiences, which were similar to my own, I became overconfident that I was perfectly suited to conduct this research, and neglected the possible outcomes of my closeness to the topic and context on my judgments and interpretations. At that time, reflexivity to me meant 'taking one step further and two steps back' in terms of being ready for unexpected events during data collection such as losing a participant or access to the research venue. Later, however, my idea of reflexivity evolved to consider how my subjectivity, presence and even familiarity with the setting could all influence the research. After that realisation, I was able to focus my efforts on promoting the learners' opinions.

Another implication centred around familiarity of setting is the possible benefits of a bottom-up approach by local researchers. What I believe supported the empowerment of the learners' perspectives and the ability to notice their dynamic contextual interdependent autonomy is that I did not try to impose specific definitions or characteristics of autonomous practice, instead, I decided to adopt an ecological approach that considers learning as non-linear and autonomy as "a capacity for intentional use in context of a range of interacting resources toward learning goals" (Palfreyman, 2014, p. 182). I believe this approach opened possibilities for different forms of autonomy to emerge. Through such an approach I was able to avoid imposing ideas on the participants' LBC experience and making claims such as the learners' being unready for autonomy because findings show disagreement with a pre-set idea of what autonomous learning actually looks like. Instead, my study generated contextually appropriate findings, such as the learners being autonomous even if they give

up their locus of control to teachers or other outside pedagogical authorities like a native speaker on Discord, because the decision of transferring control originated from the learners themselves.

A final implication is about the design and planning of data collection itself. *The study can serve as an example for researchers aiming for rich and holistic learner-centred perspectives when limited by time and/or circumstances*. The data collection period coincided with certain political events that raised the risk of the unavailability of participants, these events were then followed by the Covid-19 pandemic. Fortunately, I designed the data collection to have each phase be a follow up based on the previous one. The LLHs provided the main narratives for the study. The interviews helped to follow up and probe the language learning histories in more depth. The focus group then allowed the participants to engage in discussions with each other in order to elicit shared and contested views. This limited the need for intensive follow-ups or perhaps second phases of interviewing or focus group which would have been difficult to do online after leaving the research site.

8.2.3. Implications for pedagogy

The rich and holistic data and interpretations about LBC experiences collected in this paper could support language learners in general and in challenging environments. This section thus highlights the implications of this study which are LLHs ability to allow learners to reflect on their experiences, the study's introduction of different LBC activities that can be accessed by learners in similar settings, a set of beliefs that can aid learners in challenging circumstances and finally ways through which stakeholders and teachers can benefit from this study and support learners.

The written language learning histories elicited were not only a source of insight about how the participants learned beyond the classroom and the chronology of the events but also *a tool by which they were able to reflect and raise their metacognitive awareness of themselves and their learning experiences*. As Mercer (2011a, p. 164) shows: "such awareness can be empowering for learners as a vital ingredient in autonomy-inspired approaches to teaching and learning". In the participants' case, writing their LLHs and participating in the following interviews and focus group discussion served as opportunities for them to voice out

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their experiences, their beliefs and think of their motivations and future goals. Additionally, the participants were able to learn about each other and discuss and compare their opinions.

The findings also revealed a set of *LBC activity options through which a learner from a challenging environment can improve and practice her language*. In addition to obvious choices such as watching tv shows and reading, learners can be part of small groups sharing similar language-related interests to discuss them with. As shown in the findings, Malak, a female language learner who liked to read literature extensively, was able to make friends with two other language learners with which she would discuss books they read together or movies they watched. Finding other people to practice with can also be done online in different ways. In the case of the present study, Habib used The Discord app to join English language learning and practice specific servers, which had numerous discussion rooms, which are community organised based on criteria such as language level. Habib reported being able to interact with other English language speakers who he could speak with, and they could sometimes point out and correct mistakes.

The participants expressed a set of language learner beliefs that aided them in perceiving learning affordances in their environment and other learners from similar contexts can benefit from them. These Beliefs are: the importance of the English language; the value of having a strong emotional connection with the language, its artefacts and activities; the significant role of communication in learning; and finally, the idea that every individual learns differently than others. It would therefore be beneficial for learners to adopt similar beliefs and this can fall under educators' and policy makers' responsibility to introduce and instil them in the learners' belief system.

Finally, in a more practical sense, *stakeholders and teachers could benefit from this study's insights to broaden their views and aid learners in their LBC*. One way is through adopting more flexible and holistic definitions of the autonomous learner. Instead of rigid and clear-cut profiles of autonomy that can only be observed in classroom practice, teachers can be more open-minded to the complex and dynamic autonomous practice that extends beyond the classroom and takes different forms in different contexts and for different learners. Consequently, more effort is needed in aiding learners in contexts out-of-class. The

second way this study is beneficial to practical pedagogy is its use of a learner perspective empowering approach. This study draws from narrative inquiry to put forth learners' own understandings of their language learning stories. It will, therefore, be helpful to incorporate some aspects of this study in classrooms as part of initiatives where learners share their stories and potentially learn from each other (e.g. LBC experiences sharing workshops, trading and sharing Language learning histories); as was revealed in the study, narration is a powerful tool to access learners' inner understandings and to gain contextually appropriate perspectives about their language learning, autonomous practice, beliefs and motivations. A final remarque is that this study calls for more qualitative and learner focused insights to be involved in making decisions about learning and teaching, instead of being limited to indirect approaches such as the use of mass questionnaires, the prioritization of teachers' perspectives and approaching a complex, elusive and dynamic construct such as autonomy through rigid, pre-conceived and perhaps contextually-insensitive ideas.

8.3. Limitations and dilemmas

The limitations of the study concern its retrospective approach, focus on long experiences, lack of detailed focus on individual activities, participants being only successful language learners, and the matter of generalizability.

One limitation is the study's overreliance on retrospective accounts. I believe the study would have benefited from some sort of an ethnographic observation of actual language learning beyond the classroom practice. At the very early stages of the study, I was open to the idea of including observations. However, as most of the participants are females, I thought it would be difficult or even impossible for me as a male researcher to conduct a direct observation of LBC practice. This is due to the norms in the community where it can be problematic for unrelated males and females to be seen together[1]. Although after data collection and familiarizing myself with the participants and their preferred LBC activities I

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[1] see Hind's interview for security guard incident in section 3.4.2.3. Interviews

noticed that I had the option of being creative through an ethnographic observation of activities such as Habib's use of the Discord software online, or Malak's small group of friends' weekly book readings and discussions. Journal diaries were also an option that my study considered at planning phases. However, I decided to exclude them and focus on retrospective accounts for two reasons. First is that retrospection in narrative inquiry is a strong means to access learning "as lived experiences that take place over long periods of time and in multiple settings and contexts"(Barkhuizen, Benson, Chik, 2014, p. 12) which fits my goal of exploring long language learning careers from the first contact with the English language to the present across multiple settings and resources, and using journals may limit my outlook. The second reason is that writing LBC journal diaries is time-consuming and not a process all participants would be willing to partake in.

A second limitation is that by adopting an approach that attempts to explore long learning careers and a myriad of LBC practices, the study may lack in detail about individual activities. Fortunately, the focus was not the activities themselves, but the life of the participants learning beyond the classroom in their challenging environment. However, I believe more insight could have been generated if I probed more for perspectives about specific activities. This could have been performed through observation of practices like Habib's Discord use and Malak's small group of friends' weekly book discussions.

Another limitation of the study is its focus on successful English language learners only. All mentions of non-successful learners were based on the participants' own words. Also, the study revolves around learners who happen to be English language students at university. Therefore, it is wise to admit that the conclusions and interpretations in this study are influenced by the fact that the participants are successful English language university students, and others, who may not be as successful nor specifically following an official institutional English language program, may offer different perspectives, as their learning settings and motivations are different. In justification, six is an easy number of participants to manage and most importantly it allows for a detailed longitudinal perspective on the learners. On the other hand, a larger group of participants with more variety would have proved counterproductive in preventing my study from depth and holisticness, especially when limited by time.

The final limitation is the generalizability of the findings to other contexts. In this study, which is based on the participants' perspectives, I presented the environment, where the LBC in question occurred, as a challenging one with specific characteristics and sociocultural configurations. The motivation behind the study, its findings, and interpretations, including learner beliefs and goals, are all heavily context-based; thus, relating findings and interpretations should be applied to other contexts with caution and taking the specific contextual considerations into account. Furthermore, generalizability is not a purpose behind postmodern qualitative and narrative research (Holliday, 2016; Barkhuizen, Benson, and Chik, 2018). The aim was to elicit holistic in-depth insights about language learners' experiences beyond the classroom in a challenging Algerian environment. What could be taken from the study is its application of ecological perspective to language learning, its contextual approach to learner beliefs, its narratively driven methodology and most essentially its learner perspective empowerment as learning beyond the classroom is about the learners' lives as they happen away from the direct observation of teacher and researcher observation.

8.4. Suggestions for future research

The research conducted was concerned with exploring experiences of English language learning beyond the classroom in an Algerian context. The focus was on the environment, its challenges and affordances and how have the learners managed to be successful learners and users of English with reference to their language learner beliefs and motivations behind their efforts. The study hints at a number of suggestions for future research:

For the sake of gaining more understanding of LBC from learners' perspectives, I would suggest future studies in *different contexts*. In Algeria's case, there is a variety of environments and contexts to explore each with their own unique sets of challenges and affordances for learning. What can be taken from my study is to let go of the following ideas when conducting LBC research: Algerian learners are unready to be autonomous due to certain traits and characteristics they possess; the classroom is the natural environment for language learning; the difficulty of observing what learners do out-of-class; the certainty of difficulty of learning in challenging environments. Instead, I advocate for these alternative conceptions:

all language learners can be autonomous in a way that is unique to them in their environment; there are countless settings for language learning other than the conventional classroom; out-of-class practices can be observed through methods that empower learner perspectives (e.g., narrative inquiry); challenging learning environments can promote learners' active role and generate experiences of persistence and creativity.

Another possible direction to the study is *the incorporation of different methodological approaches*, namely introspective (such as journal diaries) and/or ethnographic approaches (such as ethnographic observations) to understand the complexity of learning beyond the classroom through individual resources. From my study, notable examples include participating in Discord discussion rooms; and joining or creating a small group of friends sharing an interest in language-related activities.

Whose LBC experiences to study is also another important matter. *For future research in similar settings it would be best to conduct research with different participants*. For instance, LBC and LBC in challenging environments can be examined in the case of non-successful language learners. Also, successful learners who are not part of any English language related program unlike school or university students. Focusing on female participants can also offer different insights, especially in Arabo-Islamic environments to further understand the complexity of language learning and use beyond the classroom.

Another suggestion is *studies by different researchers* in similar environments to the present study. It would be worth investigating by a researcher unfamiliar with the environment and the learning experience which may offer different insights. On the other hand, a study by a familiar researcher with access or rapport with participants better than mine, especially a female one, as I believe being a male researcher limited my possible methodological approaches to female participants, such as ethnographic observations and more comfortable interviews.

As done in my study, *initiating data collection about long-term LBC experiences is better done through LLHs*. These written narratives allow the participants to recall and reflect on their learning, which not only helps them personally but also prepares them for the next data collection phases like qualitative interviews in my study. LLHs can help the researcher to

anchor her thinking around the participants' stories, and they also serve as a reference for maintaining trustworthiness and chronological coherence of the analysis and researcher's reports and interpretations.

The findings revealed future goals motivating the participants' LBC such as wanting to be a better teacher and language user. It would, therefore, be worthwhile to *conduct a study on LBC in challenging circumstances, that draws from theoretical frameworks related to person-in-context perspectives* (e.g., Ushioda, 2009) *and ideal L2 self and future selves* (e.g., Dörnyei and Ushioda, 2011).

This research is a qualitative one that draws from narrative inquiry and uses thematic analysis and focuses on the content of the narratives elicited. A further suggestion is to *focus on the discourse of the participants' narratives* to elicit an understanding of "discursively constructed experience" (Barkhuizen, Benson, Chik, 2014, p. 81). This is because not only we can learn from what the learners tell us but also from the ways they do.

Personal notes:

This thesis started six years ago with a desire to speak up about my experience of learning a language through things I loved. I then found six other learners who were eager to share their stories. In this four-year long journey, I travelled through time and memories together with Asma, Habib, Hind, Malak, Ritej and Walid. I learned about them, their experiences, their hopes and their struggles, but I also thought about my own. By the time I finish my PhD journey, they will have received their Masters degrees and embarked on journeys of their own. When I started this study, I did so as an English language learner from Naama province in Algeria first and as a researcher second. I had preconceived ideas and assumptions on what learning English entailed. But with the help of the six participants, my understanding of English language learning evolved to encompass and consider the acts of persisting against all odds and learning creatively in an environment that did not offer much and among a community that did not love the language as we did.

While reading or listening to the participants' experiences, I often thought about my own. When Malak told me that books were her friends, I recalled how attached I was to the characters in video games I played on my Nintendo DS as a 15-year-old and how sad I would get after finishing each game. When she told me about the first manga she read, I remember how the interview changed, at least temporarily, into a conversation as I started talking passionately about my favourite mangas and she started to ask me what I liked about them. When Ritej started talking about how she listened to lots of music, I recalled that one time when my family lived in a small apartment and the neighbour knocked on the door to complain about the noise my high-pitched preteenager voice was making while singing to Iron Maiden after I finished writing the lyrics for a whole album. On the evening of the day, Hind told me how she would act as if she was a cooking show host and speak in English to an imaginary audience, I went home and found a folder of my attempts to Vlog, made for the channel that I never had the courage to start. Asma spoke about how typical families in Naama would prefer their child chose maths or science instead of languages. That reminded me of how much my parents did not like me singing at home or spending hours playing video games, and how disappointed they felt when my baccalaureate exam score was too low for

me to enrol in medical school. When Walid told me how bullying in middle school left him friendless and isolated, yet he found sanctuary in the television at home, I thought of how I only had one friend throughout middle and high school because we preferred to stay home and play online video games rather than spending time with others our age who made fun of us for speaking in English.

When the overall experiences of my participants reflected persistence and creativity, I realised that I was persistent and creative too. Due to my parents' lack of support for my singing and video game hobbies, I realised that my efforts to improve my English language were a stand against parental authority and the idea that being a doctor or an engineer is better than specialising in English. I believe that the six participants' experience of learning English beyond the classroom is also a stand against the challenges of our environment.

Despite the study initially emerging from my wish to speak about my experience and despite making all these connections with the participants' stories, I decided not to include my story within the thesis alongside theirs. The logic behind my decisions resulted from my intensive readings of the Algerian literature that considered Algerian learners as non-autonomous, but were based on perspectives that did not prioritise the learners themselves, nor offer them an opportunity to directly to voice their experiences. This thesis, therefore, sought to foreground the learners' stories to sight and empower their marginalised perspectives. Putting my own story with theirs may have distracted the reader from this aim.

After finishing this study, I believe that I found my calling, which is to further conduct studies that empower the perspectives of the learners. I believe that future research about learning experiences will benefit from the insights shown in chapters 4, 5 and 6. Qualitatively adopting frameworks, such as the ecology-based one used in this study, which consider the relationship between the learner and the environment will yield holistic, context-sensitive and culturally appropriate conclusions, provided that we acknowledge the subjectivity inherent within such an approach. Pairing such a framework with participant-centred methodologies, like narrative inquiry, for example, has shown depth and richness of insight concerning how the participants learned, the beliefs they carried and the motivations fuelling their efforts. Furthermore, the perspectives guiding this research revealed that LBC is not only

a dimension to learning that we should pay attention to but also an aspect of life that can be nurtured and improved.

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Appendix 1: Language learning history task card

Your Language Learning History

For this task, I would be happy if you could write about your English language learning history, from the point you first developed an interest in English to the present. Below are some guide points to follow in your narration. The purpose of this activity is to gain an understanding of your language learning experiences beyond the classroom and prepare for the interview that will be scheduled later.

1. Start by telling me about your earliest memory with the English language (when was the first time you encountered it or developed an interest)
2. How did you learn English during middle school, and what activities unrelated to schoolwork you did outside the classroom that involved English and you think have played a role in your development?
3. How did you learn English during High school, and what activities unrelated to schoolwork you did outside the classroom that involved English and you think have played a role in your development?
4. How are you learning English during university, what do you do outside the classroom now that involves English and what do you think has changed from before?
5. describe yourself as a language learner, u can address your strengths, weakness, style, what you like or hate?

Appendix 2: Interview preparation card

As a preparation for the interview, think of the following:

- Your English language learning experience.
- The environment that you lived in.
- Think of, list or draw your learning environment (people, resources, places, things you did/do… that you think has contributed to your learning of the English language).
- Any sort of contact with English you had outside of the classroom? What contact do you have now?
- Any experiences out of class that you think had a positive or helpful impact on your English language learning.
- Any experiences out of class that you think had a negative or discouraging impact on your language learning.

Appendix 3: Standard interview guide

Q1: Could you please recount and talk me through your English language learning from the very beginning.

SQ: What were your expectations at the beginning?

SQ: What were your goals?

Q2: Please describe in detail the environment that you lived, grew in and learned in English (surroundings, places, people)

Ask for rich descriptions of physical places.

SQ: How do you generally feel about your environment and surroundings as a place for learning English?

Q3: What difficulties have you faced in learning English (**if not mentioned before)**

SQ: Can you give some examples?

Q4: **This is to be tailored based on the LLHs with space for further elaboration:** What have you done outside the class that involved the English language?

For every activity they mentioned in the LLH:

SQ: If you look back, what was your first encounter with said resource/activity?

SQ: How do/did you use it? How do/did you learn from it (how often,)?

SQ: How do you view your experience with this? What role does it play in your learning and life in general? What feelings do you have when doing this activity?

SQ: What did you hope to achieve through this activity, what were your goals

Q5: Which of the activities do you think have played a great role in your learning

   SQ: For what reasons?

   SQ: Can you exemplify?

Q6: Tell me about out of class experiences of learning English that you have liked

Q7: Tell me about out of class experiences of learning English that may have been uncomfortable or gave you negative feelings

   if they mention more than an experience, find out if they think they are related or connected to one another, why/why not? or in what way?

Q8: If participant mentions anything related to interacting with others, ask them to elaborate. If not, ask: in your learning beyond the classroom or general use of English, have there been other people involved? If yes, who? Describe your relationship with them?

Q9: How are you learning now, how is it different from before? What role do your Past experiences of learning play?

Q10: Are there any other resources available to you, or you heard of a fiend or a family member using them, but you don't? why don't you use them? why do you think they use them?

Q11: In your opinion and based on your experience how would you advice a young person of your area on the best way to learn English?

Q12: Is there anything else you would like to add or say about learning English outside the classroom?

Appendix 4: Focus group guide

Introduction

Good afternoon, welcome and thank you for taking the time to attend this talk. You have known me for the last three months, and you were part of my PhD research concerning Language learning experiences beyond the classroom. Today we will have a talk concerning some matters related to the topic.

You were invited here because you have provided many accounts about your language learning experiences as members and long time residents of the area of Naama.

Rules:

There are no wrong answers but rather differing points of view. Please feel free to share your point of view even if it differs from what others have said. Keep in mind that I am just as interested in anything you have to say.

Make sure that one person speaks at a time.

Turn off or silence your phones.

You have probably noticed the microphone. I am recording the session because I don't want to miss any of your comments. People often say very helpful things in these discussions, and I cannot write fast enough to get them all down. We will be on a first name basis today, and I will use pseudonyms in the reports later. You may be assured of complete confidentiality. Data from this talk will be used in my research for further analysis.

My role as a moderator will be to guide the discussion and you will talk to each other.

Well, let us begin.

Questions

Icebreaker:

Let us find out some more about each other by going around the table. Tell us your name and where you live and how long have you lived there.

Opening questions:

1. What we all share here is that we are all from this area, and that we have attained a certain level of English while living here. Think of your experience of learning English as a resident of the area of Naama and try to describe it with one word. You have one minute. (What do you think of English language learning in this area that you live in?)
   a. What influences lead you to think that? (trying to avoid simply asking why)
2. In the interview every one of you spoke of a few out of class activities that aided in your English language improvement, I want each one of you to write them in a list and then we will share them with the others.
   a. Think back through your whole experience, for what reasons did you use those activities?

Core questions:

3. How do you practice English?
   a. From your experience, what is your view on having people to talk to in English?
4. Please describe the community in this area (state the characteristics of the people here, values, structures)
5. Please describe your environment in terms of English language learning
   b. What is the state of English language in your area in comparison to the other languages? give examples.
   c. Think of the obstacles or inconveniences your environment presents to English language learners out-of-class and make a list
   d. What positive aspects to language learning out of class does your environment have? make a list.

6. What effects did classroom instruction during middle and high school have on your out-of-class use and learning of English?

ENDING QUESTIONS:

7. What do you think of out of class English language learning and its effect on language development (elicit beliefs) (and how did you come to that resolution)?
8. Please tell us your suggestions for successful English language learning outside the classroom in this area.
9. If you had the power, what would you change about your environment for more effective English language learning out of class?
10. All thing considered from what we discussed today what is the most important?

Do you think we have missed anything? is there any point you wanted to bring forward.

Appendix 5: Language learning histories

Asma:

As far as I can remember, I was about 9 or 10 and as all same-aged kids at that time I was constantly watching MBC3, and every weekend they used to broadcast those Disney movies (in English of course) with Arabic subtitles. Those movies were very fun and enjoyable to watch. So every time, I used to wait impatiently till the weekend so I can watch a new Disney movie and I was excited every time a new one was shown! so to speak (excuse my poor English).I started to develop an interest in English language since then, because it seemed beautiful easy and so fun, I don't know I just wished I could speak their language you can say I was fascinated by the language I fell in love with the American spoken English. Their accent also sounded wonderful to my ears and if the movies were in any other language or in just the basic formal academic English I wouldn't have liked them that much (I wasn't aware of the fact that English is the most powerful universal language in the world) so you can say I loved the American casual language so much that I did my best to have an acceptable amount of vocabulary by watching those films, and I learned many words and expressions only by watching 2 movies per week. I used to read the subtitles (as I was fast in reading) and also pay attention to the way they pronounced the words. That's before I started going to middle school and actually learn the English language.

In my first year in middle school, I was overexcited that finally, I'm going to be able to learn my favourite language (Disney movies' language) in a more correct and sound way, but unluckily my teacher of English was a teacher from hell! She was so mean and inconsiderate! or at least she was like that to me. She hated me for no reason! Even though I was the best student and always getting the highest grades, especially in her class! She dismissed me she treated me as if I wasn't there! Anyways, thank god her horrible attitude towards me wasn't a turn off for me. I remained interested and committed to improving my English no matter what! so I had always been fully focused in her class, not missing anything, doing all the homework and always participating and so on. However, I was still watching Disney movies, but I don't remember doing something that major outside the classroom to develop my English that year. During the 3 years after, we got a new teacher she was so soft-hearted she

loved me as I was her favourite student because she saw potential in me she was always supporting me pushing me towards the greatness (yep despite my young age) that's when I started to write dialogues. I mean, ever since I was little I've been into writing (writing anything: dialogues, short stories or putting into words how I feel) and then in middle school, I started doing that in English, writing short stories and turning any idea into a dialogue describing my feelings, describing myself, my personality what I love what I hate and the list goes on. So the strategy that I'm 100% certain played a big role in my development outside the classroom is writing (Especially dialogues). I would also say reading and listening to English songs but like I wasn't that much of a reader although I used to read all the texts that were in my school book over and over again because I just loved the language you know. I also wasn't listening to English songs that much either I used to listen to an English song only once in a blue moon so (when I needed translation or help in writing and reading or some difficult words in a song) I just used to ask my teacher or search for words in dictionaries and when we installed internet service in 2012 I started using google translation.

During my high school years I became a real procrastinator yet I didn't lose interest in English language so I decided to continue in my academic career by choosing literary stream then the branch of foreign languages, But I'm going to be straight up with you. High school years were crazy! Our high school was Infamous! no one cared about the rules, students were so out of control. So, since toxic behavior is contagious, I didn't care about my studies either yet I discovered that I have a thing for foreign languages because I was always getting the best grades in English/Spanish/French without even making efforts! And I didn't give up on writing!! I was still writing (dialogues/things that happened to me) constantly(in English only) in addition to that I was addicted to watching vines you know those short funny videos and YouTube videos of Americans doing funny stuff or vlogging! You may think this was useless and a waste of time, but I just loved the American slang language (I do till now) and I learned many things from constantly watching all those videos. Like many phrasal verbs and my listening and speaking skills have improved in a noticeable way...

As an English student at university, I would say that learning English during university is deeper and more effective. Personally, I believe that studying all these different modules in English only and learning more and more about the English language everyday has definitely

improved my English (the correct pronunciation in phonetics / Enhancing the writing skills in written expression/upgrading listening and speaking skills in oral expression / new grammar rules / knowing more about English speaking countries' culture and literature etc.). I've learned so many things about English in university like for example: before I started university I didn't know about English idioms but once we learned about them I just couldn't stop using them in everyday life situations because I think they fill the gaps in my vocabulary and make me sound more fluent and more like a native speaker. Outside the classroom I don't really do something that major to be honest but since English is my favorite language, I watch plenty of videos in English every day. Literally, this is my addiction: watching American's creative funny videos(with subtitles and without) I also watch British and American movies, so often I still write from time to time and I search for new idioms new phrasal verbs almost every day I watch English lessons on YouTube also from time to time and so on.

As a language learner, I believe my strength is in my willingness and my desire to learn, without motivation and eagerness we can't learn anything. When you're genuinely interested, attracted and fascinated by a certain language you'll do whatever it takes to master it, because you do want to master it and you won't be satisfied with anything less and I assume my weakness is that I don't read a lot I'm not a fan of reading. Reading is just not my thing but I'm not disregarding its importance in learning foreign languages. I prefer learning a foreign language by listening to native people talk and not necessarily by reading. That's why my style of writing is a bit poor. I usually write as if I'm speaking but I'm okay with that. I care about and focus more on my speaking skills (the correct pronunciation) and my fulfilment comes when I can speak like native speakers do in everyday life. you can say I hate academic stuff like writing essays and being tied up to write about certain scientific or literature topics or to speak about mind-numbing topics that you're not interested in not even the tiniest bit. I believe that humans should be free and do whatever they like whatever they have fun doing during the process of learning languages. It is enough for a person to have a strong desire and he/she will find out ways and strategies that suit them best to learn a language.

Habib:

My first encounter with English was through an animation film. I remember it was dubbed in English with an Arabic translation I didn't understand a word because I wasn't that good with Arabic either so my mother was always explaining to me the events that were taking place in the movie until the day developed my Arabic reading skills then I was on my own. I didn't care about the English language at that point. It was something nebulous for me just another language spoken by some people from another country that I didn't even know,

During middle school we were introduced to the English language, although I didn't focus on English I developed an interest in western music (hip-hop, rock, pop) also movies and that made my English language skills evolve without me knowing and that was the reason that my marks were always good.

in high school I started paying attention to my English studies especially grammar in conjunction with me developing a new hobby wish is reading comic books and novels that made me pay attention to my English skills ,and putting more effort in my English learning process leading me to choose English as a specialty in the university .

English as a major at the university opened new worlds for me. Now I became obsessed with linguistics and the history of the English language and its origin also history in general thus making me use English as an everyday tool for my research for the targeted information whatever it is, I found myself learning new things every day outside the university from important information to gaining vocabulary but the thing that challenges me the most is when it comes to spelling word and writing it in the correct way and that is my biggest weakness.

The constant presentation in the classroom drove me to find new ways to develop my speaking skills and practice English using new tools like some apps that gather English language learners and even native speakers to speak and practice English online. I always try to find fun new ways to learn the language so I can learn without even getting the slightest of boredom.

Hind:

Besides the fact that I've grown up watching my dad and especially my three years older brother reading books in English, listening to English music and mostly watching American movies while I was completely focused on French just like mom was, I started paying attention to English when I almost finished my primary school, so by the time I passed to middle school I began to discover about this quiet strange language that I pretty much had no idea about, I think that's when my interests totally shifted from French to English.

I remember I started looking for English TV channels, because I obviously had no internet back then, I started watching reality TV shows which helped me a lot, it wasn't just about acting, it was more about real lifestyles, whenever I watched anything in English, I would focus on their accent, their language, their way of thinking, even their sense of humor and mostly on the Arabic subtitles. I would rewind a scene many times and try to understand what each word really meant, I followed celebrities' news, sometimes I would stand in front of the mirror and start imitating certain actors. That's when I realized that I was passionate about this language and that I'm curious to learn more about it.

By the time I went to high school, my English was pretty well, I even had excellent marks, I started practicing by talking English with my schoolmates and I challenged myself in dictating. Meanwhile, school was also helping me, I cannot deny or lie and say it didn't, it was like 50/50 I would say! with time I've noticed that I no longer needed subtitles to understand English, I was also able to speak fluently. When I got my baccalaureate, I was a hundred per cent sure that I'll choose anything that includes English, didn't even need to think about it and that's what actually happened.

Now that I am a third-year English student, I'm learning more from college, it isn't just about communication or talking fluently, English in college is maybe more about grammar and especially about anything that relates to English history. Also, I pretty much do the same activities I used to do before and other than developing my skills and learning more about it every day, I guess nothing has really changed!

As an English learner, I have definitely experienced some negative things, for example, anxiety! it's very common, sometimes I get anxious in oral expressions or during presentations

but I think with experience and practice I was able to somehow control my weaknesses. Other than that, I loved everything about this language and I think that's the key to learning any sort of language. If you love it, it is going to be way easier to learn , in fact, you'll acquire it without being aware because you're not forced to, however, you're finding some sort of pleasure in learning it, that's what I think! and that is exactly what happened to me as an English learner.

Thank you!

Malak:

Dear Mr. Bendebiche,

As honoured as I am to write this essay, I am equally sceptical about the fact that whether my hold over the English language is that good or not. I won't say I have impeccable English and I can beat anyone in the language, in fact, I believe that learning is everlasting, but I can proudly say I have attained the level where I can talk to anyone in English and now it's easier for me to differentiate between "word" and "world". And, "she has", "they have".

The thing you must realize first is that learning a language doesn't happen overnight, especially learning the subtle differences between meanings, nuances, proper use in sentences etc. I believe having a sort of a predisposition, a feel for languages is also important, some people are good with languages, some just aren't.

It is not easy to get a clear answer, though, my "learning" started before I realised it. I was always curious to understand the language first because of video games. When others are always satisfied with understanding what should be their next move, I really wanted to understand every word and every dialogue. I remember the swearing battles on Monkey Island. I was not only interested in winning, I wanted to get the jokes. Of course, I was too young and I failed at that. But this really got me started.

I first came in contact with English in middle school, where it was an obligatory third language. I never had a problem with my English classes; however, I never took English as a language, only a school subject instead.

I have no memory of those classes. I found them extremely repetitive year after year. I remember the rote learning of irregular verbs. I remember that the pedagogical approach was to have some months speaking of one theme involving some vocabulary associated with that theme and the assignments were boring in my opinion and the uses of the language quite artificial.

It was a delight to learn the basic grammar from early days in school but wasn't enough to understand the games. Plus, only basic vocabularies were taught (why would a kid need to know 'apple' and 'niece'? I needed 'attack', 'skills', 'teleport', 'art ').

It was in high school that I again picked up an intense interest in English. Middle school was boring for me because I got good grades without even trying, so it seemed like I was cheating, and basketball wasn't occupying all my time anymore, so I naturally had to find other interests. I played video games like it was my religion as a kid, so needless to say I had become quite good at reading in English by the time I was a teenager. As I got older and the internet got faster, I also started reading Japanese comic books translated into English for free online. Then I expanded to real books.

Books and dictionaries were and still are my strongest area and friends.

It might sound silly, but being bombarded by the English ads, Tv shows, books, games etc. Leaves an ingrained understanding of the language. Having that feeling for languages I mentioned somewhere above, I was able to slowly, through the years, absorb the words and their meaning. I'm still fascinated by the whole principle of language and its connection to imagination and what those two can produce together. It's something beautiful and worth perfecting.

Being so much better at English, also loving the subject I thought I'd better major in what I thought I was good at.

I began to consider a college education in English during my last year of high school. Although the prospect of salary and jobs after college weren't and aren't the best for language students, I was encouraged by my teacher to go for it, see how it pans out. So, I ended up studying English at our university and it is good. I updated my knowledge of English, especially the theoretical parts, the rules and whatnots and it is fun. I admit I never really enjoyed theory of anything since for years I've been acing exams going on my feel for the language alone, but it gave me a new insight into word formation, structuring. It explained to me why certain things that I have been using without realizing it while speaking/writing English are the way they are.

Today I'm not a complete professional, still in the learning stage, but yes, I can say that I have a strong foundation. Whoever I'm today, it's all because of my teachers, my friends and my family. I'm so grateful for all of them.

I am not going to sugarcoat this segment, it wouldn't be comprehensible. It's intellectually tiring, and as a beginner, you really feel like you're not going to get anywhere. Your pronunciation is not going to be the best, and your accent will always reflect the region from which you hail.

The rewards, however, are immense. In that self-humiliation and mental obstacle course, you gained a whole new skill that sets you up to be a part of a whole new world you never even could have dreamed of. You can read famous texts in their original words, speak to people who otherwise would have been alienated from you, be introduced to a new culture, and so much more. Your worldview will change after having learned a new language. I guess it all boils down to the love of the language, the knack to try something new, the immersion in it and your curiosity.

In short, the rewards really do outweigh the costs.

Time to end such a long and boring story. If there is anything, I'm grateful for is the people I'm surrounded by.

I constantly talk to people who are much smarter and better educated and worldly than me. I make sure that I am learning not only English as a language but new ways of viewing the

world, new ways of thinking about the past and new ways of imagining the future. All this thinking leads to being good at English because when you have to talk about your views when complicated, you have to use the right words otherwise you cannot communicate what you think. So, start with surrounding yourself with very smart people and start rethinking life as it were and then start explaining your views to people. That's one way of getting better.

Yours faithfully,

Malak.

Ritej:

My language learning history:

Well, the first time I encountered the English language is when I was 10-11 years old. I used to hear my sister talking in English so for me it was something different and new. it was like codes and I wanted very badly to decode them. Although I was young but I thought that this language is different from the one that I know. so I wanted to speak about it because I liked to be different from my sister.

The middle school was the first time I got access to the English language in an academic way and in an official way, of course, my teachers during that period played a big role in motivating me to love and learn this language, however, school was not enough for me. I remember clearly, I used to listen to a lot of English during my day by listening to music, watching movies, shows …etc. Social media helped me a lot. From listening to English continuously during the day I got used to it and I started to learn it and acquire it easily and I used to search for foreign friends so I can talk with them in English.

My love of English during high school was getting higher because during that period I was all the time speaking in English with my friends, family although most of them didn't understand anything, but I decided that this is the language that I want to speak, learn and be my career. I used to imitate what I hear because I wanted to develop my level the same thing for middle school hearing English all the time and trying to write texts and paragraphs in different subjects. through imitation, I developed my pronunciation.

The best part of my life is the university because now I'm accomplishing my dream and studying English for me is so enjoyable, fun and interesting. Actually, now I'm reading books which are specialized in the English language and I watch a lot of motivational speakers in English of course such as TED talks. I use English to discuss with my colleagues everywhere. Now is very different from before, not in terms of my feelings or my intentions, not at all, but in terms of my knowledge and my level in this language. Now I have access to much information and I deepened in this language.

Thanks to Allah I'm a very self-motivated student, I adapted to English easily and I'm very curious and eager to know more about it. I'm trying to correct my attitude because I don't read much. I can write and speak but I don't read many books and so on. I like the practical way of learning the language more than the theoretical part. I know that the theoretical side is also important but the practical side is more enjoyable and is more technical for me to acquire and learn the Language and I think you can never learn a language without being an interested and an active person.

Walid:

My journey with the English language

my name is Walid, I'm a 21 years old English student at University Centre of Ahmed Salhi Naama (C.U.N), and same as other students I had my reasons beyond me choosing English as a speciality to pursue. it all started during my childhood living in xxx which is a small town in Naama, through this time I was being bullied at school, so I didn't socialize with people as often as I should, I had a small group of friends that we hang out together from time to time but most likely I spent my time at home watching TV. I watched BBC, MBC and MTV..., even though I wasn't allowed to watch most of the programs, especially on MTV. I was so influenced by western culture (pop culture, music, lifestyle, fashion ...) and the way it has been represented by the media. I became a huge fan of cinematography, still, actually, I enjoyed watching movies and series frequently. I started adopting words from the English language and using them in my daily discourses, sometimes I was able to express my ideas in the English language better than in my mother tongue. It was me taking my first steps into my language journey. When it comes to the classroom, I started paying less attention to French knowing

the fact that it is the second language in Algeria. English wasn't fun inside the classroom either, most of my "English teachers" used Arabic instead of English during the lecture more than they should have. I didn't do any activities outside the class that was related to our curriculum I just stuck to watching English TV programmes more often.

In my high school days, I was a scientific pupil, so I had to give more time and energy to study maths, physics and science, although I was trying to focus and pay attention during English sessions, it was hard because of the timetable, I had English at the end of the day. the atmosphere didn't help either due to the fact that scientific students considered English class time as a breather and not so important at the time, even teachers had a role in this issue of taking English for granted because they didn't enlighten us with the further needs of this language. after I got my bachelor's degree, I decided to choose something that I'm passionate about regardless of my scientific background. now and since I'm specialized at the language things have definitely changed, counting on movies and tv shows to gain knowledge from is just not quite enough for academic studies. I'm finding some issues and difficulties, especially in grammar and writing. I read books and academic articles and watch YOUTUBE videos occasionally to improve my skills

If I have to describe my aesthetics as a language learner, I would say that I'm outspoken because I'm good at oral expression and public speaking, I try to use new terms and expressions and challenging myself for the better.

Appendix 6: Customised interview guide sample

Interview guide for Malak:

Q1: Could you please recount and talk me through your English language learning from the very beginning. Starting from your earliest memory of contact with English

> SQ: What were your expectations at the beginning

> SQ: What were your goals

Q2: Please describe in detail the environment that you lived, grew in and learned English (surroundings, places, people)

> ask for rich descriptions of physical places

> how do you generally feel about your environment and surroundings as a place for learning English?

Q3: what difficulties have you faced in learning English (if not mentioned before)

> SQ: Can you give some examples from your experience?

> SQ: How did you overcome them?

Q4: what have you done outside the class that involved the English language?

> **Video games. Mangas, Internet, real books, dictionaries, tv shows, movies, others**

> For each one of the above and additional ones she mentions ask the following:

> SQ: If you look back, where did you get the idea that this activity could be used for learning?

> SQ: where did you use this activity

> SQ: how do/did you use it, how do/did you learn from it (how often,)

> SQ: how do you view your experience with this? what role does it play in your learning and life in general? What feelings do you have when doing this activity?

> SQ: what did you hope to achieve through this activity, what were your goals

Q5: which of the activities do you think have played a great role in your learning

SQ: For what reasons?

SQ: Can you exemplify?

Q6: Tell me about out of class experiences of learning English that you have liked

Q7: Tell me about out of class experiences of learning English that may have been uncomfortable or gave you negative feelings.

if they mention more than an experience, find out if they think they are related or connected to one another, why/why not? or in what way?

Q8: In your language learning history you spoke about friends and family and how grateful you are to those surrounding you. Who are these people? describe your relationship with them, how are they involved in your English language learning? To Whom did you and do you speak English? What about the professor who encouraged you to study English at university?

Q9: In your LLH you said that it was in high school that you picked up an intense interest in English. Tell me more about that, what happened, and how that affected your English language outside the classroom?

Q10: How are you learning now at your university period, how is it different from before? What role did your Past experiences of learning play?

Q11: in your LLHs you mention how you like to talk to people you deem smarter than you and how you like to surround yourself with such people. How is that related to your language learning?

Q11: Are there any other helpful resources available to you, or you heard of a friend or a family member using them, but you don't? why don't you use them? why do you think they use them?

Q12: why do you think others in your environment, classmates could not reach the level of English you're at now?

Q13: In your opinion and based on your experience how would you advise a young person of your area on the best way to learn English?

Q14: Is there anything else you would like to add or say about learning English outside the classroom?

Appendix 7: Summarised emergent findings

The following list is a recapitulation of the main findings of the study seen in chapters 4,5 and 6.

1. (4.1.1/4.1.2/4.1.3/4.1.4) It appears that the LBC experience was challenged by the community's negative attitudes to foreign language public use, the low status of the English language and the families' lack of support to the child's English language-related interests, friends' lack of interest in English and finally the area's challenging economical and development situation.

2. (4.1.5) the participants perceived some positive aspects of the environment, and also possessed an optimistic future view. In some cases, family members supported their LBC experience (although this was the case for participants whose parents worked in education or were language teachers). Some participants also perceived a positive change in the environment as more young people are gaining interest in the English language and cultural products.

3. (4.2.1/4.2.2) Middle school period presented the participants with a set of challenges in class. At these early stages of their careers of learning English in-class, the learners faced repetitive learning drills, intensive use of Arabic in class and lack of opportunity to practice the language, which required them to some degree to take charge of their learning beyond the classroom to fulfil their language-related goals. As for high school, it was reported that English sessions often had bad hour allocations, and learners were not encouraged to consider English for future university education. At university, peers were unwilling to communicate in English beyond the classroom. Some participants perceived positive aspects to university, which are the need to improve speaking skills, the need for more research efforts involving English out-of-class and the university being a place to meet with others sharing similar interests.

4. (4.2.3) The participants reported negative and positive experiences with teachers, which influenced their LBC and language learning in general. In the case of negative experiences, the participants reported maintaining their motivation to learn and interact with English

language cultural products despite issues such as teachers' use of the mother tongue or underestimating the students. That also seems to have encouraged them to take charge of their learning. As for positive experiences, some participants reported receiving support and guidance and, in some cases, direct involvement in LBC activities.

5. (5.1.1/5.1.2/5.1.3/5.1.4) The participants had a set of beliefs that seems to have aided their LBC experience in their challenging environment. These beliefs are: the importance of the English language; the importance of loving the English language and all related activities; the importance of communication for LBC; and some learners believe that successful English learning entails a predisposition or a "feel for language".

6. (5.2.1/5.2.2/5.2.3) Goals and motivations emerged from efforts to understand the depth of LBC experiences. The themes of motivation are a motivation for mastery of language; a motivation to escape environmental difficulties either in terms of exposure to media, video games and literature or through a wish to travel abroad; and a motivation to improve the local English language situation by sharing personal experiences or becoming good teachers.

7. (6.1) Perceived affordances of LBC practices include: improving linguistic skills; offering an opportunity for intensive exposure to language; a sense of authenticity; a sense of connectivity; a sense of control. The perception of the affordances resides in the interaction of the learners with their environment and the contextual nature of their beliefs and motivations.

8. (6.2.1) The learners were limited to the locations of home, school premises and internet. Their successful learning experiences reflect creativity, resourcefulness, persistence and eventually signs of autonomy as they demonstrate control over their LBC experience to reach their goals and manage through environmental difficulties.

9. (6.2.2) Most of the experiences reflect informal learning. Within the informality degrees of intentionality increased in correlation with clearer motivations behind LBC practices. Furthermore, informal activities would gain formality as they are performed with classroom learning in mind showing thin boundaries between in-class and out-of-class learning.

10. (6.2.3) In terms of the pedagogical dimension, the participants' experiences involved both naturalistic learning and self-instruction. The pattern of change identified consisted of

dominant naturalistic learning in early career followed by a change towards self-instruction. This was in relation to a change in motivation, from enjoyment and interest in LBC activities to classroom and academic achievements.

11. (6.2.4) Locus of control beyond the classroom resides in the overall experience. It is seen in the persistence against environmental difficulties. It also resides in crucial decisions made by the learners (taking charge of learning, choosing LBC activities, choosing learning strategies and deciding their university education paths). Furthermore, it appears that the locus of control is dynamic, and changes back and forth, between self-direction and other direction. Moreover, voluntarily giving up then regaining locus of control reflects high motivation, persistence and aspects of autonomy.