



What Do Syrian Managers Know about Self-directed Learning?

PhD Thesis

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Declaration

I, Mohammed Maher Al-Jarrah, the author of this research, declare that the content of this thesis is my original work. All the material in this thesis which is not my own work has been appropriately cited.

Mohammed Maher Al-Jarrah

Acknowledgements

There are many persons who helped me in different ways to finish my PhD dissertation and achieve my dream. I am very delighted and proud of knowing them and being someone whom they like to help because it was impossible for me to finish this dissertation without their support, guidance and help.

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Dedication

This research is dedicated to my mother who has been very eager to see me as a doctor and because I promised her long time ago to become a doctor one day. Though it took me more than what I have expected to do it, I believe now that she will be the happiest person in the world when she knows that I have finished my PhD.

Mohammed Maher Al-Jarrah

Abstract

Although managerial Self-directed Learning (SDL) has been extensively researched, this research has largely been conducted within Western context. Thus, there is relatively little understanding of the influence of socio-cultural factors on managerial SDL in non-Western contexts. The significance of this research comes from being the first research that investigates the influence of factors that affect the form and extent of Syrian managers' engagement with SDL. Four subsidiary aims branched from this main aim; these concerned the reasons for Syrian managers' engagement with SDL, the influences of organisational culture, the development in technology and the Syrian context on the Syrian managers' SDL.

Drawing on literature from the fields of SDL, self-directed learners, learning, management learning, culture and organisational factors, this research investigated the influence of these topics on the Syrian managers' SDL. The research applied a qualitative interpretive approach involving twenty interviews with Syrian managers to collect the required data within a qualitative approach to examine their SDL, and the interview transcripts were analysed to understand how, why and what they learn. The main methods which were used to analyse the data are: observation, coding the interviews, deriving categories and conclusions, displaying the data and examining the relationships between all the findings. The analysis revealed their motivation for SDL, the difficulties and support that they have when they practice it, their aims of practicing it and the influence of the Syrian environment on their SDL.

Four principal conclusions emerged from the data analysis. First, the participants were classified into three types according to their level of engagement in SDL (i.e. some participants had a high level of engagement in SDL, some of them had a low level and the rest showed a 'moderate' level of engagement in SDL). Second, the participants' organisations were also classified into four categories according to three factors which are considered important forms of support and encouragement for learning. These

factors are: (a) financial support, (b) different forms of support (resources, days off to study etc), (c) rewards for learning. Third, the factor which comes from the Syrian context and has influence on the Syrian managers' SDL is the political factor (i.e. the Syrian government's decisions). Finally, the two factors that come from outside Syria and have influence on the Syrian managers' SDL are English and IT. Having concluded and explained these four factors, a model was developed based on them to explain how they practically interact in order to understand how the Syrian managers' SDL happens.

The principal contribution of this study is that it is the first research that examines the influence of the Syrian context on the Syrian managers' SDL. The research specifically highlights the role of the Syrian government in influencing the Syrian managers' SDL was highlighted within the model in addition to two factors that come from outside the Syrian context: English and IT. Therefore, the roles of the sociocultural, international, organisational and learners' characteristics factors and their interactions were all prominent in the model, and this fulfils the aims of the research as it gives a wider and deeper insight into the Syrian managers' SDL. The thesis concludes by making a number of suggestions and recommendations for more research arising from these findings. They include more research on the influence of civil war on managerial SDL, the differences between female and male managers regarding SDL and the influence of the reforms which the Syrian government implemented on the Syrian managers' SDL.

The thesis is structured as follows: Chapter 1 introduces the background and field of the research, Chapter Two presents the Literature Review, Chapter Three explains the qualitative methodology which I applied to implement the research to achieve the objectives of the research, Chapter Four explains how I coded the data and analysed it to obtain useful findings and results, Chapter Five presents the discussion and analysis of the findings from the collected data, Chapter Six explains how I used the four conclusions which I reached after examining and analysing the previous findings of the research to construct a model that explains the Syrian managers' SDL in addition to my recommendations and the limitations of the research.

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CHAPTER ONE: Background, Aims and Research Questions

1.1 Introduction

This chapter gives the introductory information and the basic definitions for understanding the study which is presented in the next few chapters of this research regarding the Syrian managers' Self-directed Learning (SDL). The subject matter of this research is examining and studying how the Syrian managers engage in SDL. SDL is defined as the process diagnosing of the learning needs, formulating learning goals, identifying the available resources, selecting and applying learning strategies and then evaluating the learning outcomes (Knowles, 1975). Implementing SDL by managers is an important subject that is related to management learning and development which is given great importance in the field of HRM. However, though there are many researches which are implemented in the west about managerial SDL in the past five decades, there are no researches related to this concept in Syria. This demands understanding the statement of the problem, the definition of SDL, the research aims and questions, my motivation and interest in this topic, background information about Syria related to its geography, modern history, politics and reform, economy and culture.

The importance of this research comes from the fact that there are only few similar researches implemented in the non-western countries, and no researches at all related to this topic were ever done regarding Syria. The other researches included studying the learners' characteristics, the interaction between the organisations and the learners, methods and stages of SDL, defining SDL and presenting models to explain it. Nevertheless, there are no researches that cover the topic of managerial SDL within a specific, non-western country or a culture that is different from the western culture.

The research questions cover the topic from four different perspectives. They include understanding why and how the managers in Syria practice SDL, the influence of the environments of their organisations on their SDL, the influence of IT on the Syrian managers' SDL and the influence of any contextual factors within Syria on the managers' SDL. Answering these questions from the conclusions which will be reached from the

collected data will present to us a thorough understanding of how and why the Syrian managers practice SDL and the factors which have influence on their SDL. However, understanding the problem first will lead us to realizing its importance and dimensions realistically in order to continue reading the research.

1.2 Statement of the problem

Researches in the field of adult self-directed learning (SDL) started in the 20th century with Houle's researches in the 1960s and then numerous other researchers (e.g. Malcolm Knowles, Caffarella, Stephen Brookfield, Candy, Long, Lucy Guglielmino, Roger Hiemstra and Pedler) continued the research to enrich the topic with many studies. Despite this rich history of research, it has not received considerable attention in the context of HRD. Both managers and employees are currently challenged to assume more responsibility for their own learning development in organisations (Ellinger, 2004).

However, adult learners need to undergo an educational transition process to realign themselves to fit the new environment and adjust to the changes within it because they became passive learners after spending many years practicing direct learning (Zemke 1998; Lunyk-Child et al., 2001).

There are researches that focus on the learners themselves, researchers that examine the process of learning itself more thoroughly, and researches that focus on the context. Caffarella and O'Donnell focus on analyzing the concept of SDL to reach a global definition that captures the essence of the concept, whereas Candy (1991) seems impressed by the extent to which self-direction has become more a rallying focus for adult educators or of remarkably diverse persuasions. He believes that self-direction contains several concepts and their differences are submerged and obscured by the use of one single term.

Brookfield (2006) believes that SDL comprises a major area of research and theory in adult education, yet the studies conducted have a culture- and class-specific level of generalisability. Most of the researches about managers' SDL were implemented in the West and there is far less research in the non-Western countries. There are no researches about how the Syrian managers practice SDL, how or why they practice it. The Syrian context is considered a different context from the Western context and it is not possible to generalise the results of the researches which were implemented in the West to

include Syria. This research is expected to explore this domain to yield new conclusions related to this topic that would fill this gap in the research field.

1.3 SDL definition

It is necessary to understand the definition of SDL from the beginning of the research to avoid any misunderstanding and vagueness. There are many definitions for SDL given by many researchers and this will be discussed and analyzed later in the Literature Review chapter. However, we can present Malcolm Knowles' definition because it will be adopted later in this research after examining and analyzing the other definitions:

In its broadest meaning, 'self-directed learning' describes a process in which individuals take the initiative, with or without help of others, in diagnosing their learning needs, formulating learning goals, identifying human and material resources for learning, choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies, and evaluating learning outcomes (Knowles 1975, p. 18).

1.4 Research aims

The aims of the research are to explore the factors that affect the form and extent of Syrian managers' engagement with SDL. This requires achieving 'subsidiary aims' to have a comprehensive view about the overall aim. These subsidiary aims are:

- 1- Reasons for Syrian managers' engagement with SDL.
- 2- The influence of organisational culture on the Syrian managers' SDL.
- 3- The influence of developments in technology on the Syrian managers' SDL.
- 4- The influence of Syrian context on the Syrian managers' SDL.

The questions which I prepared, to collect the required data, are expected to give the answers that contain the required data. They include questions to learn about the participants' engagement in SDL, their definitions of SDL, who and what encouraged or discouraged them, how they engaged in SDL, the characteristics of their organisations which are related to SDL and the characteristics of managers' SDL in Syria. These questions are:

1. Why/how do the managers in Syria engage in SDL?
2. Why and how do the managers in Syria choose certain methods to practice SDL?
3. How do the managers in Syria define or understand SDL?
4. Who and what encourage/discourage the Syrian managers' SDL?

5. What/who are the factors/elements/persons which are within the organisations that affect the Syrian managers' SDL?
6. What/who are the factors/elements/persons which are within Syria that affect the Syrian managers' SDL?

1.5 My motivation and interest in this topic

When I was a teenager I was bookish and I enjoyed reading about many different subjects. During my early twenties, I was studying a BA at Damascus University and I decided to continue my studies to earn a PhD, but it was not possible to study even a masters' degree at Damascus University because many colleges did not have research studies. I could then only study two postgraduate diplomas between 1994 and 1996. In 1997, I went to the United Arab Emirates and started to work as a professional translator at a reputable translation company in Abu Dhabi. I started to learn more legal and commercial vocabulary, but I also felt that I need to study more to increase my knowledge and education in the field of management because I started to think that one day I may establish my own translation company. Then I found a job at Abu Dhabi police and I had to interpret in important conferences and meetings.

I have to say that I enjoyed watching the difference between the work environment which was in Syria (when I was working there in the middle of the 1990s) and work environment in Abu Dhabi. There were no computers at that time in Syria as most public sector organisations started to use the computers in the end of the 90s, whereas in Abu Dhabi the public sector started to use computers a few years earlier. I could notice how easy it was to use computers to type and process documents when I compared that with the usage of typewriters in Syria. I quickly realised the importance of computers at work and I decided to learn how to use some useful programs. As a translator, it was only required from me to translate the documents by writing them by hand and then I had to give them to the typists. The manager did not asked me to learn how to use computers, but I decided to learn alone without any support from the management because taking decisions at public sector organisations usually takes a long time and I did not want to wait. Therefore, I bought some books that teach how to use programs like MS Word, MS Excel and MS PowerPoint and I increased my typing speed to become more than 40 words per minutes. Having done that, my work became easier because I felt that I saved

time and I 'gained my independence' as I did not need the typists anymore. I have to say that the typists did not like what I did at that time because they were afraid that they would be useless if most of the employees did like me, but my manager at that time admired and praised me.

Work at that organisation was neither well-organised nor well-supervised. The employees 'enjoyed' many weeks of doing almost nothing and then there were a few days which were full of hectic activities to finish certain tasks on time. I had to work within teams to finish big tasks that needed high standards of organisations and time management. I was responsible for a team of interpreters and translators for a few weeks to do simultaneous interpreting for VIPs and that gave me a good experience in time management, working with a team and project management. Moreover, a friend of mine advised me to learn how to use the internet because my English and IT skills were good. I had a few lessons at an institute to learn that and then I bought a computer and started to use it at home. I could chat with many friends in different countries and asked them about education and life in the west as I wanted to continue my studies abroad. This new experience made me see the importance of IT for communication and work and made me think that I needed to learn more skills to become successful. However, it was impossible to study at any university in the United Arab Emirates because the fee for one academic year equalled almost the half of my annual income, and that required attending classes because the distance learning degrees were not recognised in the United Arab Emirates (like Syria).

Therefore, I decided to continue my education in the UK and I came to London in 1999 to study and work. There were three reasons that made me decide to study through distance learning: (1) I was working and I could not attend the lectures at college (2) I did not like to spend two hours every day on the way (to go to my college and come back), and (3) I was confident that I can study alone at home with a minimum amount of supervision. I started to look for a suitable university and I discovered that the Open University was the best university in the UK for distance learning at that time and I started to study management and work as a freelance translator and interpreter for the government and private sector companies. After two or three years of studying successfully at the Open University, I started to realise that I have wasted thousands of hours in Syria on transportation when I studying at Damascus University. I believe that I

could have used those wasted hours in earning more degrees if we had had distance learning in Syria.

At that time, I did not know that what I was doing was called SDL and I did not know about this term till 2006 when I was doing my Master's degree. Then, I started to ask myself questions like: "Why do some university graduates in Syria continue their education after they find a job and others don't?" "Why don't some managers (and my friends) in Syria like to learn and improve their skills?" "How do some managers in Syria plan and implement their learning? What problems or difficulties do they encounter?" These questions occurred to me because at that time I had been living in the UK for a few years and I did not know about what was going in Syria in the field of management in general. During that period, I learnt about many issues related to management learning in the UK including the policy of Investment in People and the influence of IT on organisations.

In 2008, I decided to study a PhD and I spent a few weeks looking for a subject that interests me. One of my supervisors suggested SDL and I liked the subject because I like learning in general and I am a self-directed learner. Then I decided to do my research about the Syrian managers because: (1) I liked to know the differences between SDL in Syria and the West in general, (2) I wanted to know how the managers in Syria learn after the government's decision to recognise distance learning degrees and to allow many private universities to work in Syria (around 2002), (3) I wanted to know if SDL is well-known in Syria or not, (4) it was easier for me to gather the data from Syria than any other country because I know more people there, (5) doing the research in Syria would enable me of knowing the differences and similarities between SDL in the West and SDL in Syria and it would be a new contribution to knowledge in this field in general, and (6) I wanted my research to be useful for the Syrians and those who are in the West because there are no researches in this field about Syria.

When I started my PhD I was forty-two years old and some close friends and relatives asked me: "How long will you study?" I simply replied by saying that I will study all my life because I enjoy learning and if I do not learn for a few months, I feel that I have wasted my time and lost a lot. Then I discovered that my plan to study all my life was consistent with a concept called 'lifelong learning'. While I was doing my research, especially the interviews, I had the time to think about the relationship between SDL and lifelong

learning. I concluded later that those who apply lifelong learning are self-directed learners (because they have to plan/direct their learning all the time and practice it), but not all those who practice self-directed learning apply lifelong learning (because some of the participants mentioned that they stopped learning for a long time). This seems logical because if someone wants to learn all his/her life, he/she, at some point(s) in his/her learning path, has to: evaluate his/her learning needs, decide how and what to learn and practice learning. These are the principles of SDL and they seem applicable to those who practice lifelong learning and this makes lifelong learning a form of SDL.

Moreover, distance learning requires that ability to study alone with a minimum amount of supervision and support from a tutor. This means that those who practice it should have the desire, motivation, will-power and the ability to organise their study in order to practice it. These are the main constituents of SDL and this makes me consider distance learning a form of SDL. In addition to that, there is another 'logical' link between lifelong learning and distance learning. I believe that if someone decides to practice lifelong learning, sooner or later, he/she will find out that he/she cannot leave his work and commitments to go to colleges and he has to think of another method. Distance learning seems a good choice if someone wants to earn a degree or learn about specific subject. He/she may decide to learn about it alone from books or via the internet, but it would be better for him/her if he/she studies a distance learner course through which he/she can get academic specialised books and a maybe a supervisor to help him/her.

I can explain the relationship between SDL, lifelong learning and distance learning by using this figure:

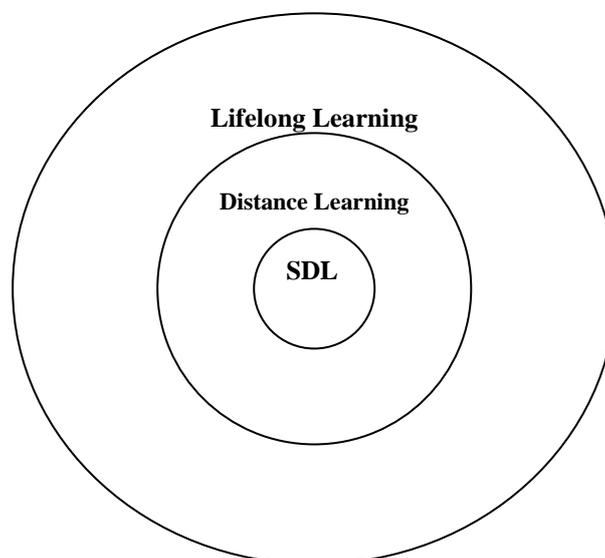


Figure 1: The relationship between SDL, Distance Learning and Lifelong Learning

SDL lies at the centre of distance learning and lifelong learning and this means that every learner who practices distance learning and/or lifelong learning is a self-directed learner, but the reverse is not true (i.e. not every self-directed learner applies distance learning and/or lifelong learning). The learner who practices distance learning is a self-directed learner, but he/she may not be practicing lifelong learning. Those who practice lifelong learning are self-directed learners and they also apply distance learning. There might be exceptions to this rule, but I really did not see any exceptions to it while I was doing my research as it was applicable to all the participants.

1.6 Syria: Background information

We need to know the basic information about Syria to understand the country within which this research is implemented. This will include information about the geography, economy, modern history, politics and reform in Syria.

1.6.1 Geography

Syria lies on the eastern coast of the Mediterranean within the Middle East region. It is surrounded by Turkey from the north, Iraq and Jordan from the east, Jordan and Lebanon from the south, the Mediterranean, Lebanon, Turkey and Israel from the west. The land area of Syria amounts to 185,180 sq. km (The World Fact Book, 2014), and the population are 17,951,639¹ (The World Fact Book, 2014).

Arabs constitute 90.3% of the entire populations, and Kurds, Armenians and other ethnic minority are 9.7%. Arabic is the official language of the country though there are other languages like Kurdish, Armenian, Aramaic and Circassian that are spoken locally or by the ethnic minorities. 87% of the populations are Muslims (74% are Sunni and 13% are Shia), 10% are Christians (Orthodox, Uniate and Nestorian) and 3% are Druz (The World Fact Book, 2014).

1.6.2 Modern history

Syria gained its independence from the French mandatory in 1946. There was a series of military coups that followed its independence and the last one was in November 1970 by

¹ Some references may mention that the population are more than 22,000,000. That could be correct before the civil war because many people fled to the neighbouring countries and other countries and they could be more than 3,000,000. Therefore, it is very difficult to estimate the number of population now because it is not possible for any party to conduct a census during the civil war.

Hafez al-Asad who belonged to the socialist Ba'th party, and he belonged to the minority Alawiy sect (Seal, 1995). This bloodless coup brought political stability to Syria that lasted for nearly 30 years till the death of Hafez al-Asad in June 2000. President Bashar al-Asad, the former president's son, was approved as president by a popular referendum in July 2000. In March 2011, antigovernment protests broke out in the south of Syria to call for the repeal of the restrictive Emergency Law allowing arrests without charge, the legalisation of political parties, and the removal of corrupt local officials. The demonstrations spread to many cities in Syria to seek the same demands and the government started to give concessions like the repeal of the Emergency Law and approving new laws to permit the new political parties. However, the demonstrators asked al-Asad to step down and this made the government's response below their expectations. The government's violent response against the demonstrators and its ongoing security operations and procedures led to extended violent clashes between the government and the oppositionists' demands and a brokerage of a cease-fire in October 2012. By December 2012, the National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces were recognised by more than 130 countries as the sole legitimate representative of the Syrian people. The clashes, security disturbances and military operations continued in 2013 and the death toll topped 100,000. In January 2014, the Syrian Opposition Coalition and Syrian regime began peace talks in Geneva, but this has neither stopped the violence nor led to any agreement between them (The World Fact Book, 2014).

1.6.3 Politics and reform

Hafez al-Asad participated with a junta of officers who belonged to the Ba'th party in a military coup to seize power in March 1963 in Syria. The Ba'th party became officially and practically the 'leading' party of the state since then. The three main goals of the Ba'th party are 'Unity², Freedom and Socialism'. These goals (in addition to many other factors) put the party in direct confrontations with many other parties and Arab countries that opposed or did not agree with them. The party tried to implement socialism through different methods including the nationalisation of many private sector companies in 1960's. Many of these companies were considered by the Ba'th party as 'bourgeoisies' who were responsible for the problems and agonies of the state. However, the

² Unity here means achieving the unity of all the 22 Arab countries as they were united nearly 1300 years ago.

nationalised organisations became inefficient and had negative influence on the management practices and reduced the innovation in the country (Seale, 1995). In the middle of 1980's, Syria suffered from a difficult economic crisis due to the strict economic boycott that was imposed on it by many European countries and the USA after accusations of attempting to implement a terrorist attack on one of the Israeli airlines in London. However, there were many incidents that made Syria's relationships with the west shaky during the thirty years of Hafez al-Asad's rule (1970 till 2000), and Syria was considered a strong ally of the former USSR (Seale, 1995; Commins, 2004).

Political reform started to become a national demand since Bashar al-Asad succeeded his father Hafez as president in 2000. Bashar tried to consolidate his political power to encounter stagnation, high unemployment, poverty and social tension. There was also an external pressure on Syria imposed by the USA after 2003 and this encouraged the Syrian opposition forces to intensify their demands for political reform. The regime implemented limited reforms and fostered nationalists and anti-Western sentiments to convince most Syrians that the USA and its allies are interested only in control over the Middle East, not in Syria's political evolution. Bashar claimed that he was seeking reforms according to the 'Chinese style' which are slow, gradual economic changes while maintaining political stability. The political reforms were slowed down and there was no distribution of power which concentrated in the hands of the regime. The regime repressed the opposition and gained some popular support through its anti-Western rhetoric. The regime spread in Syria its new view which considered that the USA and the EU disregard the Syrians' interests and simply concerned with defending their own, even if it means supporting a repressive regime (Lust-Okar 2010; Leverett 2005).

1.6.4 Economy

Prior to the outbreak of the demonstrations, the Syrian government began the liberalization of the economic policies and this included cutting lending interest rates, opening private banks, raising prices on some subsidised items and establishing Damascus Stock Exchange. Therefore, the Syrian economy witnessed a modest growth and reform prior to the outbreak of the demonstrations, and then the Syrian economy started and continued to deteriorate during the conflict. In 2013, the economy suffered from the international sanctions and this led to the reduction of domestic consumption and

production in addition to an increasing inflation. However, the economy is still highly regulated by the government and they impose economic constraints including foreign trade barriers, high unemployment, rising budget deficit and declining oil production. The continuous conflict and decline have created a humanitarian crisis that prompted the need for international aid (The World Fact Book, 2014).

1.7 The Syrian culture

There are no well-known researches about the Syrian culture in particular but it is possible to find some reliable researches that are related to this topic and that will help us to understand some of its prominent aspects. The official name of Syria is ‘the Syrian Arab Republic’ because the majority of the populations are Arab, and that made some researchers include Syria within their studies about the Arab countries or the Middle East (according to Syria’s geographic location).

If we start with Hofstede’s (2003) researches about the Arab countries, we find that Hofstede did not make researches about Syria in particular, but he made researches in six other Arab countries (namely Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, Libya, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia). However, Hofstede ‘generalised’ the results of his studies within these six Arab countries and concluded the following results:

Table 1: Hofstede’s indices for the Arab countries compared with the USA

Hofstede’s Index	Arab World	USA
Power Distance Index (PDI)	80	40
Individualism Index (IDV)	38	92
Masculinity Index (MAS)	52	72
Uncertainty Avoidance Index (UAI)	68	46

Therefore, it is worth mentioning that these indices may not be accurate regarding Syria. However, we can interpret Hofstede’s indices in this table to understand some important aspects about the Arab countries. The high Power Distance Index of the Arab countries means that people in these countries accept a hierarchical order in which everybody has a place that needs no further justification. The Individualism Index means that the Arab countries have a collectivist culture which indicates that they have a preference for a

tightly-knit framework in society where the individuals expect their relatives or the members of a particular group to look after them in exchange for unquestionably loyalty. The Masculinity Index of the Arab countries means they are in the middle regarding the preferences for achievement, heroism, assertiveness and material rewards for success (masculine side) and the preferences for cooperation, modesty, caring for the weak and equality of life. The Uncertainty Avoidance Index shows that the Arab countries maintain rigid codes of belief and behavior, they avoid changes and new technology and avoid risks, and they are intolerant of unorthodox behaviour and ideas (Hofstede, 2011). There are no other researches that show data about the Syrian culture that can be used in this research.

1.8 Summary

The material of this chapter constitutes an essential part of this research as it explains the Syrian environment and provides specific political and economic data regarding the Syrian context in general. The next chapter will identify and explore the principal theories and models of SDL and learning including some theories and models about learning and it will also incorporate factors including the internal environment, social factors and learners' characteristics. Therefore, a thorough understanding of the social, political and economic environment of Syria, as explained in this chapter, and the theories and models which are related to SDL will help me to construct a model that explains the Syrian managers' SDL after analysing the data which I will obtain from the interviewees. In other words, this material is included to support and consolidate the conclusions which will result from this research regarding the social, economic and political factors which have influence on the Syrian managers' SDL. However, comparatively speaking, the data of this chapter shows that Syria's social, political and economic environment is very different from the West where most of the studies about SDL were implemented. As a result of that, it is expected to reach conclusions, findings and model at the end of that are different from what is already known about SDL in the West.

CHAPTER TWO: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to define and delineate the field of research, present the key conceptual issues and debates and then to examine closely the aspects which are closely relevant to the data that I will seek from the participants about SDL. This will be done after highlighting the existing gaps in the current knowledge about this field of research in order to try to fill them through this research. Therefore, this literature review starts with explaining the strategy which I followed to collect the necessary data for this research and then it will be followed by a section to explain SDL which includes its origins in addition to important definitions. The next section will cover the concepts which are similar to SDL to highlight the differences between them and decide which definition I will use. Having done that, I will present the theoretical approaches to SDL to explain how the researchers viewed it from different perspectives and the models they constructed to explain it. However, understanding how SDL happens requires giving some general information about it, explaining the researches about self-directed learners and the process of learning through SDL. The next step will be presenting the current researches on SDL which will be followed by the important fields of study to my research. Finally, I will be able to analyse the researches to find some gaps in them to conclude the topics which I can study in detail.

2.2 Literature Review Strategy

My review focused on finding research reports, articles, books and empirical studies about SDL. I started by searching London Metropolitan University electronic library and I found the following journals which may contain articles about SDL.

Table 2: The Journals used to search for articles

Serial No.	Journal
1	Education and Training Studies
2	Industry of Higher Education
3	Educational Management and Administration and

	Leadership
4	Journal of Vocational Education and Training
5	Journal of Management Development
6	Active learning in Higher Education
7	International Journal of Management Education
8	Journal of Further and Higher Education
9	International Journal of Training and Development
10	Journal of Workplace Learning
11	Learning and Education
12	Management Learning
13	Studies in Higher Education
14	British Educational Research Journal
15	Journal of Higher Education
16	Journal of Education Policy
17	Teaching in Higher Education
18	British Journal of Guidance and Counselling
19	Innovations in Education and Teaching International
20	Higher Education Quarterly
21	Journal of Management Education
22	Journal of European Industrial Training

Then I continued my review which included the following reliable sources: books, academic work associated with the theory, practitioner-oriented professional publications, professional association publications and review and empirical social science.

I will implement the review of the literature according to the following procedural steps:

(1) I carried out a key word search through many sources. Since many researchers and authors have used many terms that are related to SDL, I used similar search terms like: “self-directed learning”, “self-direction in learning”, “self-development”, “self-planned learning”, “self-directed learner”, “independent learner”, “self-guided learning”, “self-managed learning”, “self-regulated learning”, “self-taught”, “self-direction”, “self-teaching” and “self-organised learning”. I could limit the results by adding the words: “managers”, “management”, “managerial”, “Syrian managers development”, “self-directed learning in Syria”, “Syrian managers learning” and “workplace” to these terms. I used the educational journal databases 'Education Research Complete' which is hosted by Ebscohost, Dissertation Abstracts International (DAI), the 'British Education Index' and the 'Educational Resources Information Centre' (ERIC); they are both hosted by Dialog.

(2) I implemented the second search by using websites like Escalate, the American Society for Training and Development (<http://www.astd.org>) and Human Resource Development International (<http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals>). I also searched for PhD theses in <http://ethos.bl.uk/> (a British site for downloading electronic theses).

(3) I did the third search by using Google Scholar in addition to a general keyword search in Google search engine. The search gave me hundreds of websites; some of them were very useful like the *International Journal of Self-Directed Learning* <http://www.sdlglobal.com/> and the *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* <http://jhp.sagepub.com>. I have used 6 search engines: Google, Google Scholar, fetchbook.info, ERIC, DAI and the 'British Education Index', and I reviewed approximately 500 articles. The articles, books and studies which I found guided me to the names of many prominent researchers in the field of SDL such as: Guglielmino, Hiemstra, Mezirow, Knowles, Zemke, Gibson etc.

The research strategy shows how I searched for the literature which is relevant for my research. It shows the starting point and the logical steps and procedures which I used to obtain what contains the most important theories, experiments, opinions and information for my research. Having read many articles about SDL, it is possible now to explain how this term originated and to define the 'self', learning and SDL.

2.3 What is SDL?

This section presents a brief explanation of the background and history of SDL, its definitions, the definition of the 'self', the definition of learning and the application of SDL. These topics are important for this research to understand SDL and its current application.

2.3.1 The origin of SDL: It is necessary to understand how SDL emerged as a separate field of study to know its origins and importance. Many researchers had been interested during the twentieth century in studying what is called 'adult learning' because they considered it as a separate field of study (Houle, 1984). Therefore, the roots of SDL exist in adult education, and since managers are adults, what is said about adult education is also useful in the field of management education and development because it is also applicable to them. Houle (1984) believes that it is obvious from the adult learning literature that adults do not cease learning after

leaving formal education but the organisation of their learning varies after leaving formal education. Knowles et al (1998) defined adult learning as “the process of adults gaining knowledge and expertise” (p.124). They also analysed adult learning and concluded that it includes the following elements: change, fulfilling a need, natural growth, fulfilment of potential, control, shaping, learner-evaluated, personal involvement, self-initiated, development of competency, and independent learning.

In the 1960s, Cyril Houle concluded from his researches which focused on 22 active learners that the learners had clear goals and they all perceived the value of education. Houle (1961, 1984) identified three types of learners according to their perceptions of their reasons for continuing their learning. Houle (1961) called the first type of learners ‘goal-oriented’ because they seek specific goals when they are faced with a need, interest or particular problem. He called the second type of learners ‘activity-oriented’ because they found meaning in the pursuit of new knowledge or skill without having a direct connection to a specific content or a reason for the activity. The reasons for continuing their learning might be escaping from loneliness or personal problems or searching for a mate. Houle (1961) called the third type of learners the ‘learning-oriented learners’ because they sought knowledge for its own sake because they believe in the intrinsic value of learning, seek fun, seek the benefits that might accrue from learning or for the value of learning itself. Houle also concluded that some learners do not belong to only one of these three groups because there was an overlap. Therefore, Houle considered that the learner and his/her needs are a complicated network of motivation and interest (Confessore & Confessor 1992). These conclusions and findings about adults learning helped Malcolm Knowles (1970) to construct a famous model of adult learning called andragogy. It consists of six assumptions about adult learning: (1) adults need to know why they must learn something, (2) they like others to consider them capable of self-direction, (3) Adults bring experiences which provide a rich foundation for learning, (4) Adult learners are ready to learn when immediacy for knowing is created by circumstances, (5) Adults have an orientation to learn through applying what they learn within real or task-based problems, and (6) Adults seek learning more due to their needs for personal satisfaction and growth rather than other ‘extrinsic factors’ like financial gain and/or promotions.

2.3.2 Important definitions: There are three important definitions related to this research:

a- Definition of the 'Self': There are many sociological, psychological and philosophical perspectives on the 'self'. However, I will only approach this concept to understand how the 'self' is defined within the context of SDL, and the relationship between SDL and the 'self'. One difficulty of defining the 'self' comes from the fact that it is intangible, immeasurable and changeable (Parrott A., 1991). When we try to understand the 'self' within the context of SDL, we have to understand several ideas that were referred to by several researchers within this field. There is no consensus among the researchers on the definition of the 'self'. First, Megginson & Pedler believe that "self-development starts with you and with your desire to learn- to learn a job ...without this desire, self-development cannot start" (Megginson & Pedler 1992, p.4). Second, Costea et al argue that the concept of 'self' has developed throughout history and states how different philosophers have defined or understood the 'self'. They believe that the 'self' seeks projecting its potentialities through a dynamic through which "the subject ought to continuously work upon itself to become a better 'human resource.'" (Costea et al., 2008, p.677). Third, the environment that surrounds the 'self' has different influences on the 'self'. Many researchers have tried to explain the relationship (or reaction) between the 'self' and the environment in different ways. These researchers believe that the self-assertion through labour is the only alternative for survival for the 'self' as the modern cultural synthesis has as one of its fundamental dimensions the fact that labouring activity becomes the constituting factor of human existence, and "the 'self' as a subject became a cultural reality" (Costea et al., 2008, p.679). However, the relationship between the 'self' and the SDL is expressed by Ricard (2007) as follows:

In the case of SDL, learners should understand process in terms of the following:
(a) It is related to what occurs within themselves, in formal or informal settings, that is under their control; (b) the entire educational process is not solely under their control; and (c) the relationship of themselves as learners to the settings and resources experienced during the learning process is complex (p. 53).

b- Definition of Learning: Learning is defined as "the acquisition of knowledge or skills through study, experience or being taught" (Oxford Dictionary, 2010).

Learning is a primary constituent of human beings; George Kelly described the importance of learning for humans by saying that it is necessary for "getting on with life" (Pedler & Aspinwall, 1998). There are different definitions of "learning", but there is no universally accepted definition for learning. It is possible to define learning as being about "how we change and become different from the way we were before" (Pedler & Aspinwall 1998, p.41). Honey (1998) stated that "learning is complex and various, covering all sorts of things such as knowledge, skills, insights, beliefs, values, attitudes and habits" (Armstrong, 2005:538). There are different ways available for individuals to learn and their extents of learning depend heavily on the degree of the external or internal motivation they have. Moreover, the effectiveness of learning is highly affected by the context within which it happens. Furthermore, we also have to take into consideration a field of research that is called 'adult learning' within this research because managers are considered adults. Merriam (2001) explained the difficulty of defining or understanding adult learning by stating:

We have no single answer, no one theory, or model of adult learning that explains all that we know about adult learners, the various contexts where learning takes place, and the process of learning itself (p. 3).

He has described the knowledge base on adult learning as being comprised of "a mosaic of theories, models, sets of principles, and explanations" (Merriam 2001, p.3). SDL is considered an important piece of that mosaic and it has been considered as a foundational multifaceted concept within the field of adult learning which has been a prominent area of research for more than three decades (Merriam & Caffarella, 1991, 1999).

Regarding the approach to learning, Brichall and Lyons (1995) declared that:

For effective learning to take place at the individual level it is essential to foster an environment where individuals are encouraged to take risks and experiment, where mistakes are tolerated, but where means exist for those involved to learn from their experiences (Armstrong 2005, p. 538).

As stated earlier, the term "learning" implies development and change, and according to this definition there are four types of learning: (a) Learning about things, i.e. knowledge; (b) learning to do things, i.e. skills, abilities and competence; (c) learning to become ourselves, to achieve our full potential, i.e.

personal development; (d) learning to achieve things together, i.e. collaborative enquiry. Personal development implies intellect, skill, purpose and identity and it means that the person is achieving his or her full potential. This type of learning has stages and it is incremental, but it is possible to say that it is transformational or it has a step-jump when the learner moves from one stage to another.

c- Definition of SDL: Malcolm Knowles (1975) presented the first definition of self-directed learning (SDL) as follows:

In its broadest meaning, 'self-directed learning' describes a process in which individuals take the initiative, with or without help of others, in diagnosing their learning needs, formulating learning goals, identifying human and material resources for learning, choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies, and evaluating learning outcomes (Knowles 1975, p. 18).

This definition is similar to a definition that is given by Merriam et al (2007): "Self-directed learning involves the learner in planning, implementing, and assessing his or her learner-controlled activities" (Merriam et al., 2007). Stephen Brookfield (1985a) did not accept this definition because his researches revealed that many adults learn without specific learning goals:

While some degree of direction and purpose is a necessary condition for any kind of education, it is possible for adults to embark on an intellectual quest with no closely specified, fixed, or terminal point in mind. Indeed, many adults engaged in purposeful learning do not specify the skills or knowledge that they are attempting to acquire (Brookfield 1985a, p. 10).

Therefore, Brookfield (1985a) concentrated in his definition on the development aspects of SDL:

...self-directed learning is concerned much more with an internal change of consciousness than with the external management of instructional events. This consciousness involves an appreciation of the continuity of knowledge and an awareness of the culturally constructed form of value frameworks, belief systems, and moral codes that influence behaviour and the creation of social structures. The most complete form of self-directed learning occurs when process and reflection are married in the adult's pursuit of meaning (p.15).

Long (1997) looks at SDL from a different point of view. He analyses SDL to understand the mental processes that make SDL unique from passive learning. He believes that the self-directed learners engage in deeper mental processes than

the passive learners because they have to change new information to insert it within the existing structures of meanings. He defines SDL as follows:

Self-directed learning is a cognitive process that is dependent on metacognitive behaviour, such as attending, focusing, questioning, comparing, contrasting, etc, that are personally controlled or managed by the learners with little or no external supervision by a powerful other (Long 1997, p.12).

Candy (1991) identified a particular concept of SDL called “autodidaxy” which refers to the self-instructions which specifically occur outside the formal educational system. Candy explained it by saying that it is a “fluid, organic and unpredictable process of self-teaching” (Candy 1991, p.167). He believes that it is possible to use constructivism to examine the activities of the self-directed learner to understand the knowledge and learning process because he believes that knowledge is constructed by learners, not taught to them, to include both content and learning context. Tremblay (1991) studied in detail this type of SDL to overcome the conceptual wavering regarding the degree of the learners’ independence in SDL. Moreover, Simons (2000) also agrees with Candy that SDL demands a high level of mental processing and interaction with alternate ideas due to the constructivist nature of SDL.

Canipe and Fogerson (2006) mentioned that there are several perspectives on SDL that emerged over the years. Piskurich (1993) defined SDL by saying that it is "a training design in which trainees master packages of predetermined material, at their own pace, without the aid of an “instructor” " (Piskurich 1993, p.4), whereas Stockdale (2003) gave a broader definition by stating that SDL is a “process of learning in which people take the primary responsibility or initiative in the learning and...a personal attribute of the learner” (Stockdale 2003, p.1). However, the absence of a universal definition of SDL does not mean that it is a vague term in the field of learning. It is usually broadly understood as self-learning through which learners take the primary responsibility for planning, implementing and evaluating their own learning activities and experiences (Caffarella 2000; Hiemstra 2000; Merriam & Caffarella 1991, 1999).

2.3.3 Application of SDL: Though the roots of SDL lie in the field of adult education, as stated earlier, SDL infiltrated many fields of specialisation in the past few decades. Guglielmino & Long (2011) stated that SDL is considered now essential for dealing

with the complexity individuals face in all aspects of their lives. Currently, SDL is taught at many educational institutions that have different specialisations and levels. For example, the accreditation standards of medical programs and engineering programs require evidence of preparation for future doctors, nurses, engineers, businessmen and pharmacists. Moreover, there is increasing recognition in a highly competitive global economy that the employees cannot be taught everything they need in order to keep their organisations productive and competitive (Friedman, 2005). Thus, each employee must be constantly alert to opportunities to improve products or services and they must be able to learn all what they need to do that.

Defining the 'self', learning and SDL is very important for my research because the definitions understand each term and give different points of view to look at it. I needed these definitions to decide what is considered SDL and what is not considered SDL, to understand the learning process and to know how the participants interact with the surrounding environments. Explaining the applications of SDL shows its importance and usage in many fields. However, there are other terms which are similar to SDL and it is necessary to know them to avoid any ambiguity or misunderstanding.

2.4 Similar Concepts

While I was reading the SDL literature, I found many terms that are similar to SDL, and this makes it necessary to clarify what the researchers mean by them, how they use them and for what purposes. These terms seem to overlap with the term SDL and they share similar or identical meanings.

Hiemstra (1997) stated that he found 205 terms used to refer to SDL in the initial eight books which emanated from prior symposia, from 1986 till 1994, about SDL, and 53 words also were introduced in the second eight-year period. Therefore, he stated that "The SDL sub-field is rapidly reaching the point where a discipline-specific thesaurus is needed" (Hiemstra 2004, p.4). He cited the following terms to explain how it is possible to refer to SDL in different ways: Assuming primary responsibility, self-educated, asynchronous learning environment, independent learner, self-guided learning, individual responsibility toward learning, self-regulated learning, inner directed self-taught, intrinsically motivated learning, solitary learning, isolated learning, student generated

learning, learning without a teacher, teacherless individual learners, self-acquired knowledge and unsupervised learning. Nevertheless, Hiemstra (2004) concluded that the term SDL is the most popular term used in the first period of his study. It is not possible within the frame of this study to explain all the terms he has found, but it is necessary to explain some terms which are frequently used to refer to SDL or used interchangeable with SDL and the similar terms.

Some researchers use the term 'self-development' and this implies SDL, for example, "Self-development means that learners take the primary responsibility for choosing what, when and how to learn" (Megginson & Pedler 1992, p.3). We should explain the meaning of 'self-development' because it has a meaning that might be similar to SDL.

Megginson & Pedler define self-development as:

Self-development means that learners take the primary responsibility for choosing what, when and how to learn. This implies the freedom of the individual to choose not to develop particular skills, knowledge or career directions at the behest of others (Megginson & Pedler 1992, p. 3).

Another definition of self-development is: "Self-development means seeking and using feedback, setting development goals, engaging in developmental activities, and tracking progress on one's own." (London & Smither, 1999).

Whetten & Cameron (2005) refer to the fact the 'self-awareness' must precede the processes of developing management skills because 'self-awareness' is necessary for understanding what skills should be developed and for what reasons. This is also confirmed by Grey & Antonacopoulou (2004). This refers to Plato's famous saying "Know thyself".

If we compare these two definitions with the definitions of SDL which were given by Knowles and Brookfield, we find that they are very similar because they all include the following concepts or ideas:

- 'Diagnosing' or 'knowing' what should be learnt or developed (knowing the goals and methods);
- 'Freedom' of the person to choose what to learn and how (or what to develop and how);
- Self-reliance to a great extent is required for SDL and self-development though it is possible to seek help from others.

Meggison (1996) presents his ideas in a way that means “learning leads to development” and “learning is implied in development” (Grey & Antonacopoulou, 2004). Other researchers also emphasise that ‘learning leads to developing’. For example, Boyce et al. (2010) state that “Leader development generally occurs through three mechanisms - formal instruction, work assignments, and self-directed learning” (Boyce et al., 2010, p.159). The same article also presents a new criterion to differentiate between SDL and ‘self-development’. Most of SDL activities of leaders focus on gaining defined and limited knowledge and behavioural domains, and, on the other hand, most of the leadership development activities include a more complex and diffuse domain that includes more multiple and integrated simple and complex skills. Then, the researchers state that “Self-directed learning represents an obvious synonym for self-development” (Boyce et al. 2010, p.161). Therefore, we have to take into consideration that the terms SDL and “self-development” might be used interchangeably by some researchers.

In contrast, other researchers such as Van Velsor and Drath (2004, p.396), assert that there is a difference between learning and development:

Development transforms the meaning of what one learns; it constitutes the basis on which learning is made meaningful. What a person can learn from an event depends on how the person construes the event into a meaningful experience...learning takes place within one's way of framing experience, within some generalised way of making sense of things, whereas development is the evolution and change of the way of making sense itself (Boyce et al., 2010, p. 161).

Tough (1979) preferred to use the term “self-planned” learning to describe the wide scope of resources which are used by the learners such as the books, classrooms, instructors etc. He used this term to focus on the process of planning for a learning project by an adult. Tough concluded from his researches that self-planned learning is deliberate and focused, it has many reasons and it is conducted within various frameworks. He believes that the success of a learning project depends on both the learner as a competent decision-maker and his or her environment. Moreover, the quality and availability of resources which the learner uses form another critical element. Therefore, the components of SDL, as identified earlier, are the same components of self-planned learning but the latter definition focuses more on the used resources and their availability.

The term “informal and incidental learning” refers to the type of learning that is gained from the natural opportunities which occur during someone’s life when he or she controls his or her own learning (Cseh, Watkins, & Marsick, 1999). It is a type of learning that is predominantly unstructured, experiential and non-institutional (Marsick & Volpe, 1999). SDL, social learning, mentoring, networking, coaching, trial and error and learning from mistakes are included in some types of informal and incidental learning. Therefore, SDL is related to informal and incidental learning, but it is not synonymous with it (Cseh, Watkins, & Marsick 2000; Marsick & Watkins 1997, 2001). Informal learning includes planned learning and the learning that is not designed nor expected because the learners themselves may not plan or intend to learn something through a planned course or method.

Cunningham coined the term "self-managed learning" (SML) in the 1970s to refer to a concept that merges action learning and self-development together (Hurley & Cunningham, 1993). Learning contracts is a mutual element between SML and SDL, but SML includes the notions of having several learners forming a group to within action sets to solve certain real-life problems and they work together to set their learning agendas and assuming responsibility for their learning. It is worth mentioning that the origins of SML come from focusing on self-development with an emphasis on strategic and proactive individual and organisational learning (Ellinger, 2004). The two key elements in SML are the learning contracts and the learning set (Gilligan 1994, Peckham 1995). Some researchers have used the term SML to mean “a self-motivated and self-directed process to learn, change and improve” (Abbott & Dahmus, 1992, p.58) though this description is more consistent with SDL (Guglielmino & Guglielmino, 2001).

The term Self-Regulated Learning (SRL) means the ability to develop knowledge, attitudes and skills that can be transferred from a learning context to another and from the learning situations through which that information has been gained to another context (i.e. leisure and work contexts) (Boekaerts, 1999). Zimmerman and Schunk (1989) defined SRL in terms of self-generated thoughts, feelings and actions that are systematically oriented towards gaining the students' own goals. Winne (1995) considers self-regulated learning as an inherently constructive and self-directed process. Moreover, three different schools of thought have contributed to understanding SRL, namely: (1) research on learning styles, (2) research on metacognition and regulation styles, and (3) theories of

the self, including goal-directed behaviour (Boekaerts, 1999). Therefore, though the definitions of SDL are more detailed, we notice that the definitions of SRL and SDL are very similar because the term 'regulation' is used in the definition of SRL to mean something like 'planning' and 'directing'. Consequently, as confirmed by Francom (2010), these two terms are used interchangeably in the literature (Loyens, Magda, & Rikers 2008; Zimmerman & Lebeau 2000).

Hoban & Hoban (2004) stated that the terms 'self-esteem', 'self-efficacy' and 'self-directed learning' are used by educators and psychologists alike to explain human behaviour and learning, But there is a tendency to blur distinction among these three terms. They explained that "self-esteem continues to be an elusive construct with multiple definitions" (Hoban & Hoban, 2004, p.7), and the term 'high self-esteem' is used in so many aspects of life beyond the scope of education and it is "almost accepted as a fundamental aspect of what it means to be a person" (Hoban & Hoban, 2004, p.7). Self-efficacy is "a perceived sense in one's ability to actually do something successfully" (Hoban & Hoban, 2004, p.7). Furthermore, Brockett and Hiemstra (1991) mentioned that terms like "self-planned learning, self-teaching, autonomous learning, independent study, and distance education" (Hoban & Hoban, 2004, p.18) are usually used interchangeably with SDL and they "...offer varied, though often subtly different, emphases" (Hoban & Hoban, 2004, p.18).

Most of the above-mentioned terms have the mutual theme of 'learning which is planned and directed by the learner himself'. In other words, they seem to imply the term SDL as defined by Knowles though Knowles' definition seems more detailed than most of them. However, the term SDL is the most common term and it is widely well-known (more than the other terms), and this term is also understood in Arabic when it is translated literally. The other terms may seem unfamiliar when translated into Arabic and they may make the participants confused and puzzled. These distinguished characteristics of the term SDL made me choose it to be used in this research.

Regarding the definition I will use and apply throughout this research to define what is considered or not considered SDL, Knowles' definition of SDL is also more common and well-known; it seems the most suitable definition of SDL for this research. The other definitions do not seem suitable because I cannot apply Brookfield's definition as it states that SDL happens without an aim (i.e. it is not expected to find the Syrian managers

learning without an aim). Long's definition concentrates on the mental process only and these processes demand a different research to study them and analyze them. Candy's definition (i.e. 'fluid, organic and unpredictable process of self-teaching') seems very vague, concise and it requires defining what is 'fluid', 'organic' and 'unpredictable' to understand it. Piskurich's definition states that SDL is 'training'; this makes it not suitable to this research because managerial learning includes training and other forms of learning (i.e. attending classes, courses, distance learning etc). Finally, Stockdale's definition is similar to Knowles' definition, but it does not mention the aims, identifying the human and material resources for learning, applying the appropriate learning strategy or evaluating the learning outcomes. This makes Knowles' definition more accurate and descriptive. Therefore, having examined the most common definitions of SDL, I selected Knowles' definition to apply it within this research to decide what is considered or not considered SDL.

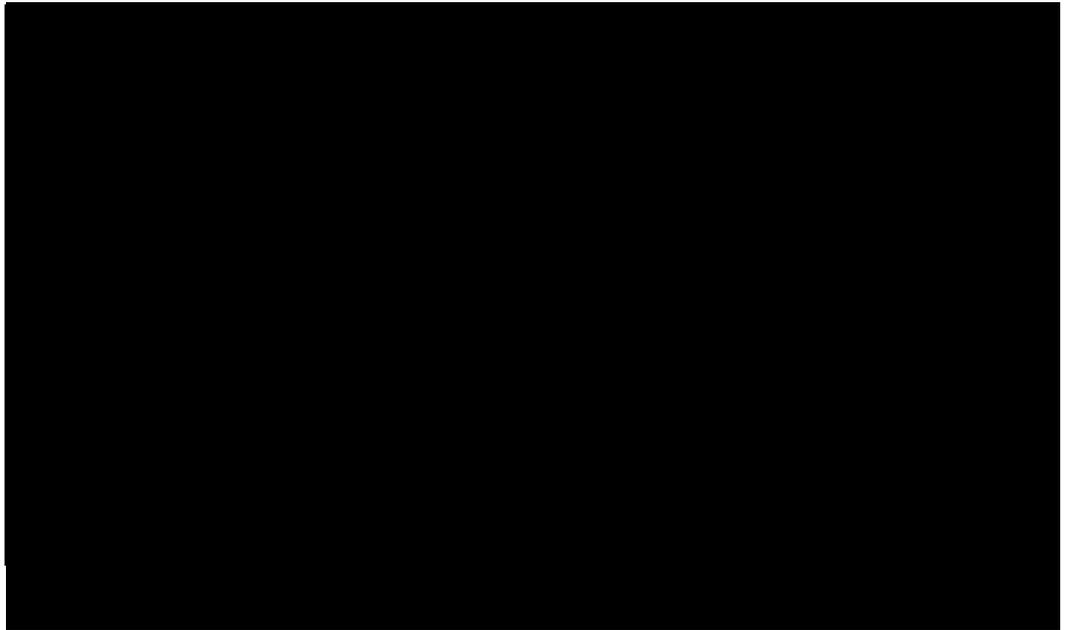
The relationship between SDL and lifelong learning is also an important topic that should be explained as Candy (1991) asserts that there is a reciprocal relationship between SDL and lifelong learning for two reasons. First, SDL is the most common way through which adults pursue their learning throughout their lifespan and it is also a way that people supplement learning received in formal settings. Second, one of the principal aims of lifelong learning is equipping people with skills and competencies required to continue their own 'self-education'. This makes SDL as a means and an end of lifelong learning education.

Peter Jarvis (1987) studied learning from a sociological point of view and this made him realise that all the psychological models of learning were flawed as they omitted the social context and the interaction with others (Illeris, 2009). He defined learning as:

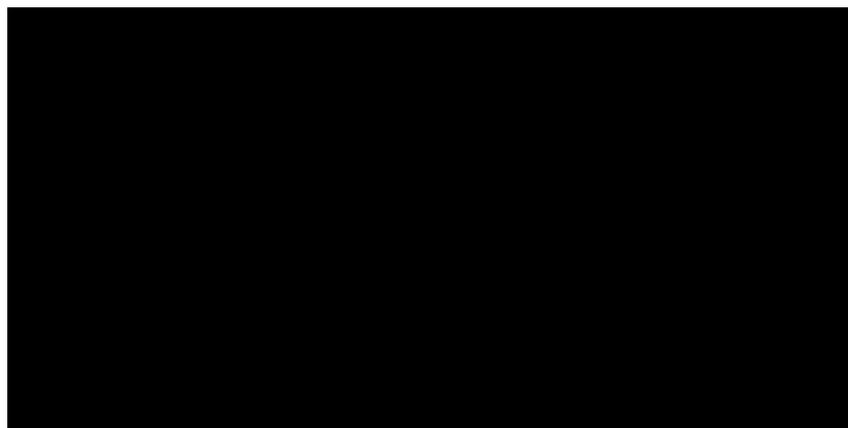
Human learning is the combination of processes throughout a lifetime whereby the whole person – body (genetic, physical and biological) and mind (knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, emotions, beliefs and senses) – experiences social situations, the perceived content of which is then transformed cognitively, emotively or practically (or through any combination) and integrated into the individual person's biography resulting in a continually changing (or more experienced) person. (Illeris, 2009:25).

This definition refers to the principle of lifelong learning as it is clear from the 'processes throughout a lifetime' and it also takes into consideration the concept of SDL as the learner can also practice it at any stage of his life within different situations. Jarvis

presented his model which included these elements. Jarvis' learning cycle presents many routes that the learner can take throughout the learning process as follows:



Jarvis believes that once the person is changed (as indicated in the bottom right box of the model), it is self-evident that the next social situation into which the individual enters is changed. Therefore, a person's learning must be seen from the psychological perspective and the sociological perspective as the psychologists traces the arrows out from the person to the external, objectified culture, and the sociologist starts with the objectified culture inwards to the individual person as indicated in the following figure:



However, Jarvis argues that we need to start with an understanding of the person, the learner, and this is a philosophical perspective that had been missing from the studies of learning. Analysing the person calls for a philosophical anthropology and this leads to

recognising the intersubjectivity of social living and human learning. He concluded that this broader perspective will help us to understand learning better though it is impossible to have a theory that explains all the details of the learning process (Illeris, 2009). This research examines the Syrian managers' SDL within the Syrian context which is a distinctive social, political and economic context and if Jarvis' perspective is applied, we can understand the interaction between this context and the Syrian managers during the process of applying SDL.

Examining the terms which are similar to SDL helped me to select the most suitable one for this research. I had to explain some of them to avoid any misunderstanding and ambiguity that the readers of this research might have regarding their meanings and whether they refer to SDL or not. However, the terms themselves are not enough to understand SDL as different researchers have applied different approaches to SDL and it is also necessary to understand them to complete this research. They provide us with a holistic view that covers the subject from different points of view.

2.5 Theoretical approaches to SDL

SDL is examined through six main approaches, namely: Humanism (Caffarella, Brockett and Hiemstra), Personal Responsibility Orientation, Behaviourism, Neobehaviourism, Critical perspectives and Constructivism. This section will explain how these approaches and their characteristics were studied by different researchers in detail.

There are several approaches to SDL. The following approaches are the most common:

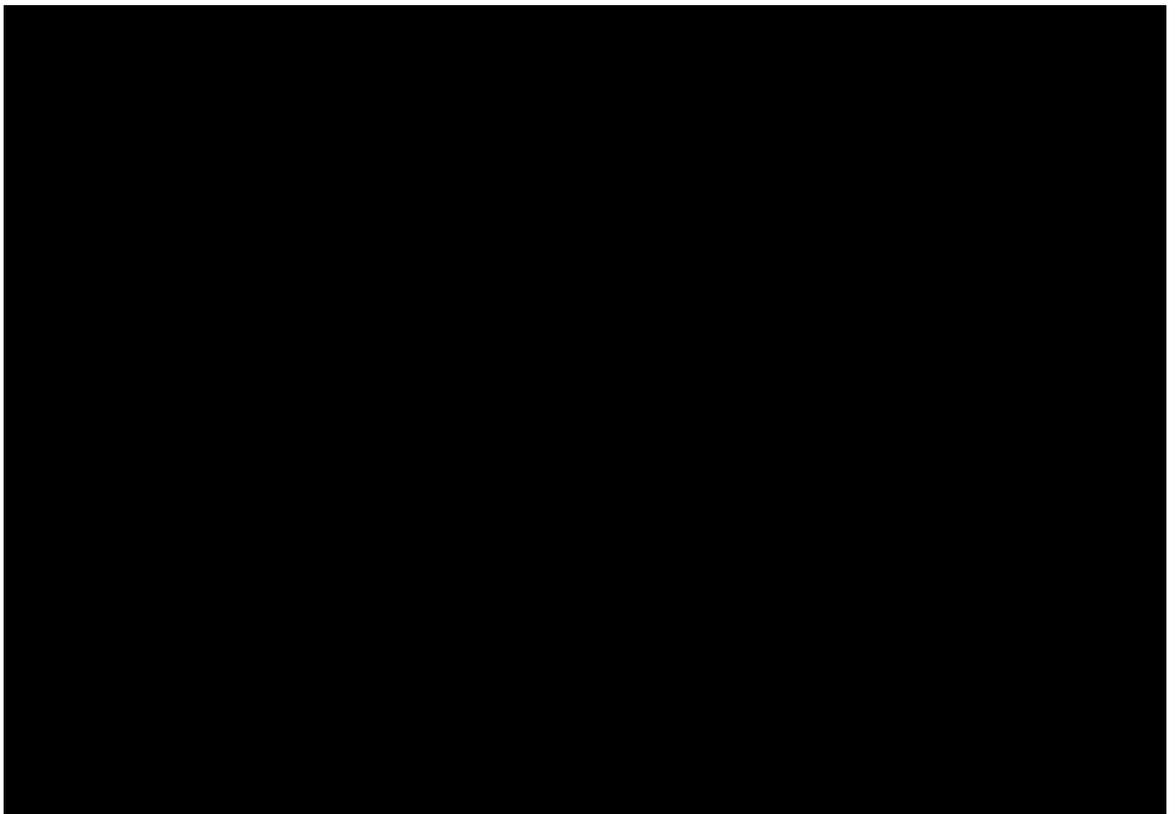
- Humanism
- Personal Responsibility Orientation (PRO)
- Behaviourism
- Neobehaviourism
- Critical perspectives
- Constructivism

Each one of these approaches examines SDL from a certain perspective and neglects the other perspectives. Therefore, it is necessary for us to understand them in order to have a comprehensive view about SDL.

A. Humanism: The humanist researchers (like Caffarella, Brockett and Hiemstra) believe that self-directed learners seek self-actualisation as a primary objective.

Self-actualisation, as defined by Brockett and Hiemstra (1991), as the highest level of human growth where one has reached his or her full potential and it is necessary to think of it as an extreme continuum that is an ideal state toward which one is continuously striving. Using the humanistic perspective is based on considering the development and responsibility of the learner the most important element and the method of delivering the course content is secondary.

B. Personal Responsibility Orientation (PRO): This approach explains the link between humanism and self-direction in adult learning as shown in this figure:



This model shows the differences and similarities between SDL as a method of learning and the self-directions, or the personal characteristics, of the learner himself/herself. The model stresses the importance of noticing the degree of willingness of the self-directed learner to accept the responsibility for his/her thoughts and actions. According to this model, personal responsibility is examined from two learning orientations: process and personal. The process orientation of this model examines the external characteristics of the learning method (teaching, learning environment, planning, evaluation etc). The personal orientation focuses

on the individual's characteristics such as creativity, self-concept and life-satisfaction. These two orientations together form the concept of being self-directed.

- C. Behaviourism:** classical behaviourism considers the environment the only determinant of behaviour.
- D. Neobehaviourism:** focuses on the interaction between the individual and the environment (Brockett and Hiemstra, 1991). According to these two perspectives, learning occurs via the reinforcement of the desired responses and human nature and it is shaped by environmental influences (a stimulus causes certain responses).
- E. The critical perspective:** Freire (1970, p.27) called the critical perspective as 'conscientisation'. It refers to a certain process through which people achieve awareness of sociocultural reality; it is a characteristic of adulthood that shapes people's lives and capacities to transform the reality. The goal of this process is praxis. Praxis is a continuous process of investigation and exploration and it is followed by reflection on actions that is followed by more investigation and exploration and then action and reflection again (endless cycle).

Some researchers viewed SDL from different critical perspectives. Mezirow (1991) considered SDL as 'perspective transformation'. He explained 'perspective transformation' as a process through which individuals become aware of how and why their presuppositions constrain the way they perceive and feel about their world. Mezirow believes that perspective transformation is triggered by disorienting dilemmas that transform the individuals towards new more accurate assumptions, perceptions and worldview. He stated that "Becoming critically aware of what has been taken for granted about one's own learning is the key to being self-directed" (Mezirow 1991, p.17).

Brockett and Hiemstra (1991) explained that if someone is critical, he/she is able to assume personal responsibility for his/her actions and beliefs rather than pass it to other sources. This helps us to understand what Brookfield (2000) means by claiming that SDL focuses on occurrence and scrutiny of critical incidents that includes identifying assumptions and analysing their accuracy and then

reconstructing them. Therefore, critical thinking forms an essential part of SDL because SDL demands analysing and judging the issues or cases.

F. Constructivism perspective: Candy (1991) believes that the constructivism perspective refers to an attempt to impose meaning and significance on events and ideas by someone. According to this perspective, learning means 'constructing' meaning and 'transforming' understandings, or as Candy (1991) states "how people make sense of the perplexing variety and constantly changing texture of their experience". Therefore, assumptions human nature, the nature of knowledge and meaning of learning are three domains that have the best relevance to SDL.

These different approaches helped me to understand how each participant looks at SDL. For example, when some of them focused on self-actualization, I could understand their point of view according to the behaviourism and neobehaviourism. I think that none of them examined SDL according to all these approaches, but I, as a researcher, have to do that to make my research deeper and broader than their limited views. These approaches enabled some researchers of constructing models of SDL and they are useful for this research to understand SDL more clearly.

2.6 Models of SDL

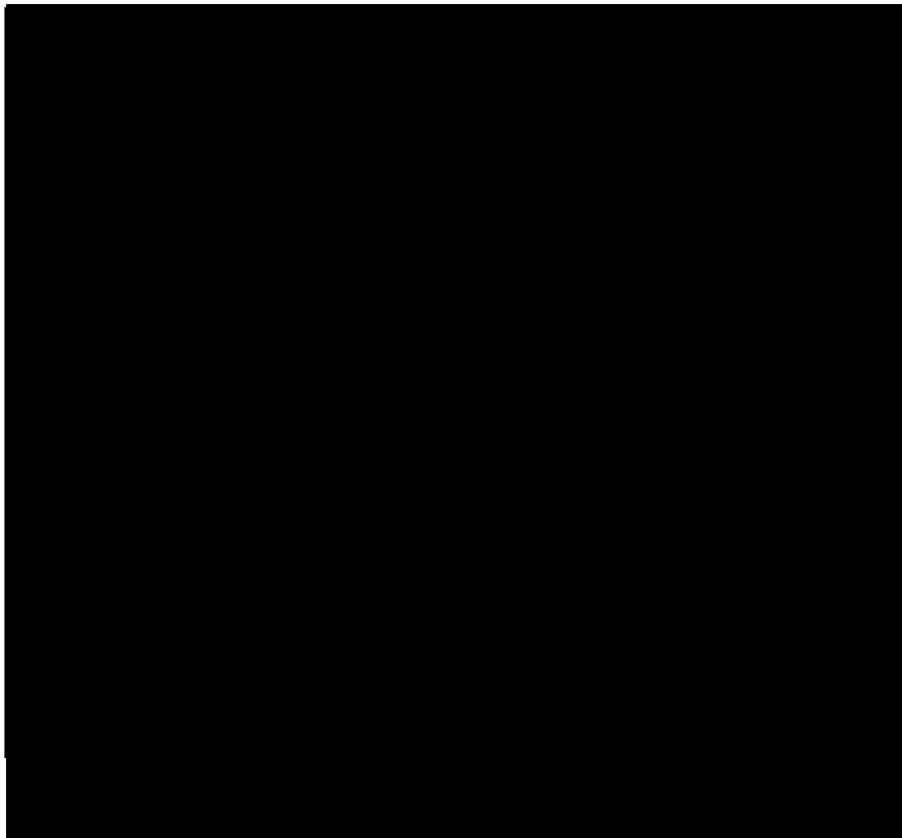
Some researchers tried to construct models to understand and explain SDL. These models have types and they are useful for those who like to know many things about SDL including its phases, elements, aims, sequence and processes. Therefore, it is necessary first to explain why we do not have a comprehensive model and the three categories of the available models. The first category is called the Linear Models and they include the models which were presented by Brockett and Hiemstra, Taylor, and Tough. The second category is called the interactive models and it includes models suggested by Cavalier and Garrison. The third category is called the Instructional models and it includes models constructed by Grow, Hammond and Collins and Boyer and Kelly. Finally, I will explain methods which are suggested by different scholars and related to the teaching process of SDL.

No researcher has ever presented a "comprehensive" model of SDL because all the researches focused only on certain aspects of the learning project. There is no consensus on whether SDL is an instructional approach or an innate characteristic of the learner. This leads to the existence of a conceptual ambiguity related to the nature of SDL and makes the development of a comprehensive model of SDL. Merriam (2001) stated that "we have no single answer, no one theory, or model of adult learning that explains all that we know about adult learners, the various contexts where learning takes place, and the process of learning itself" (p. 3).

It is possible to categorise the models which were presented by different researchers to study and analyse SDL into three different models, namely: (a) Linear models: self-planned and represent the key decision making points about choosing what, where and how to learn; (b) Interactive models: explain the opportunities that the learners should find in their own environments, past or new knowledge in addition to chance occurrences; (c) Instructional models: show how teachers can help the students to become more self-directed in their learning. The models of the first category explain how self-directed learners go through certain stages while they practice SDL. These models can help us to compare these phases with any similar phases of SDL that the Syrian managers may give us during the interviews. The second category models focus on the environment and resources of the learning process. Finally, the instructional models can help the teachers or instructors to plan and supervise the students' learning; this is useful for the managers and HR professionals who work in the field of learning and development. The models may not be 'universal' because there are different elements related to the environment, methods of learning, psychology, motivation and benefits that may have influence on the SDL process.

Some researchers like Brockett and Hiemstra (1991) were concerned because some personality variables such as the self concept, responsibility and creativity were not clearly examined within the SDL researches. Therefore, they presented a model called "The Personal Responsibility Model of SDL" which includes the learner's capability for self-direction, the context of the learning and the responsibility for learning. The model focuses on Personal responsibility because these two researchers believe that most adults like to assume responsibility for their learning when they have the opportunity and required support.

Taylor (1986) introduced a model that shows how the self-directed learners go through four phases of learning as follows:



In the first phase, the learners will not be 'well-directed' as they will feel disoriented because they will be experiencing a new method of learning that demands relying on themselves with limited or no help from others. This disorientation will make the learners try to explore these problems. The exploration requires reflecting on their strengths and weaknesses to find methods to solve the problems or adapt to them. Then, the third phase starts when the learners become capable of reprogramming or reorientating themselves with the new concept or learning. The final phase is reached finally when the learners accept the new concept of learning and feel comfortable with it. It is the phase of equilibrium where the learners become comfortable and have suitable strategies for learning.

Tough (1979) presented a list of 13 steps that a learner goes through to plan and implement a learning project. It is possible to classify these steps within four categories: (a) the learner oversees the entire process, (b) the learner regularly reflects on his or her progress, (c) the learner plans the next step of the learning process, and (d) the learner

assesses the success of the choices he or she has made (Tough, 1979). This linear model is similar to Knowles' (1975) analysis of SDL which consists of six steps: (a) climate setting, (b) diagnosing learning needs, (c) formulating learning goals, (d) identifying human and material resources for learning, (e) choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies, and (f) evaluating the learning outcomes. That there are many mutual steps within Knowles' description of SDL and Tough's steps (Ellinger, 2004).

Cavalier presented an interactive model of SDL that describes the two stages of the learning process and the cognitive processes within the learning project (Merriam & Caffarelli, 1999). She conducted a study called "How the Wright Brothers Learned to Fly" in which she identified five stages of learning: (a) inquiring, (b) modelling, (c) experimenting and practicing, (d) theorizing and perfecting, and (e) actualizing. Four repetitive cognitive processes occurred within these five stages of learning: (a) goal setting, (b) focusing, (c) persevering, and (d) reformulation (Ellinger, 2004).

Garrison (1997) presented a model to view SDL from a "multidimensional" perspective. His model incorporates three components: (a) self-management, which is related to task control, (b) self-monitoring, which is related to the manner through which learners construct new meaning for themselves, and (c) motivation.

Grow (1991) suggested a model that examine the role of the teaching in SDL (.i.e. from an instructional point of view). Grow's model is called Staged Self-Directed Learning (SSDL) and it consists of a 4 x 4 matrix that draws on Hershey and Blanchard's (1988) situational leadership model. The model suggests the style of teaching which should be matched to the learner's readiness and it aims at offering appropriate teaching methods (i.e. authority/coach, motivator/guide, facilitator, consultant/delegator) which match with the learner's degree of self-direction (i.e. dependent, interested, involved, self-directed). The model is supposed to help the teachers to match the learner's stage of self-direction and prepare the learner to advance to higher stages. For example, there is a more traditional approach to instruction that might be the most appropriate for the learners who are relatively independent, and if the learner is more self-directed, the teacher becomes like a guide, consultant or facilitator according to this model. Anyway, it seems that the model has not been tested by researchers (Ellinger, 2004).

Hammond and Collins (Merriam & Caffarelli, 1999) presented a critical SDL model which consists of seven steps: (a) building cooperative learning climate; (b) analyzing and

critically reflecting on the learners themselves and the social, economic, and political contexts in which they are situated; (c) generating competency profiles for the learners; (d) diagnosing the learners' learning needs within the framework of both the personal and social context; (e) formulating socially and personally relevant learning goals that result in learning agreements; (f) implementing and managing their learning; and (g) reflecting on and evaluating their learning (as cited in Merriam & Caffarella, 1999, p.305). It is worth mentioning that this model is distinguished by its consideration of the social, political and environmental contexts that have influence on the learners and promotes the development of the personally and socially relevant learners' learning needs. Merriam and Caffarella (1999) concluded from their researches that this model was not used in any research studies as a conceptual framework (Ellinger, 2004).

Boyer & Kelly (2005) referred to a useful design-based research protocol that was used to construct a global building within their qualitative project which addressed the outcomes of a pilot program implementation. The instructional design for the program was based on a model of social, self-directed learning that involved applying a complex and dynamic systems approach with the formula (*Input + Process + Output = Outcomes*) ($I+P+O = Oc$). Sloane & Gorard (2003) believe that this model is appropriate to explore within the design-based research method and there are two features of this model which are important and related to SDL: (a) the transferability of this model to a program setting versus a course design, and (b) its consideration for different elements regarding SDL, including the cultural and environmental elements. The following figure shows this model:



There are also suggestions presented by several scholars to articulate the components of the teaching and learning process (e.g., assessing needs; setting goals; choosing the instructional methods; techniques and devices; controlling the learning environment; promoting introspection, reflection and critical thinking; specifying learning content; pacing the learning; instructor's/trainer's role; and evaluating the learning) which can be combined with the formal settings with the tools, techniques and resources for SDL (e.g., individual study techniques, individual skill development, using the educative community, planning tools, personal reflection tools and group study techniques) (Hiemstra 2000; Hiemstra & Sisco 1990; O'Donnell & Caffarella 1998).

Dunlap and Grabinger (2003) have proposed using three teaching methodologies: (a) problem-based learning, (b) intentional learning environments, and (c) cognitive apprenticeships, to employ five instructional features: (a) student autonomy, (b) responsibility, and intentionality, (c) intrinsically motivating learning activities, (d) enculturation, discourse and collaboration among learners, (e) and reflection. The aim is

to build capacities for self-direction, a disposition toward lifelong learning and metacognitive awareness within more formalised setting. They believe that these capacities are essential for developing lifelong learning and the content that educators need for teaching methodologies that develop these capacities (Ellinger, 2004).

These models show us many factors that are related to SDL and they explain it or try to understand it from different perspectives. They helped me to construct the model in the end of the research because they show how these factors interact together to have influence on SDL. However, there are other researches about SDL that focus on how it happens, its characteristics and how it happens in reality.

2.7 How does SDL happen?

SDL as an action and process should be understood and explained thoroughly in order to gain a deep and comprehensive insight into it. This will be done through three steps. First, I will explain some general information which was concluded from many researches about SDL. Second, I will summarise the studies which are related to the learners themselves. Finally, I will explain some important researches which are related to the process of learning through SDL.

A. General information about SDL: There are some researches about the 'the percentage' of SDL, how it happens and self-directed learners themselves and the environment of SDL. These researches were implemented in different societies and some of them are relatively old. For example, some researchers estimate that 70 percent of adult learning is self-directed learning (Cross 1981). But, this estimate was done in a Western society nearly 30 years ago and it may not be valid in Syria. Other researchers believe that some forms of SDL happen in isolation in a secluded library or in interpersonal communication with experts, peers etc. The available resources for self-directed learners include printed, audiovisual materials, telephone, cultural institutions such as museums, zoos and arboretums and associations (Lowry, 1989). This opinion does not explain how the evaluation is done (according to Knowles' definition of SDL, there must be an evaluation process in the end). It may even make us consider anyone who reads a book he likes in a library a self-directed learner. Knowles (1975) explains that SDL is usually supported by teachers, peers, experts etc though people may think it happens in

isolation. But, the possibility of having self-directed learners who succeeded 'without formal training' is confirmed by several other researchers (Gibson et al., 1980).

Other researches indicate that SDL depends on planning, organizing and access to appropriate resources. Furthermore, it is shaped by the learning context and environmental circumstances (Berger 1990; Brookfield 1985a; Rager 2006; Spear & Mocker 1984; Spear 1988). According to other researchers (Brockett & Hiemstra 1991; Garrison 1997), SDL implies learner control, autonomy, motivation and responsibility for learning.

B. Researches about self-directed learners: this section aims at explaining the researches which are related to the self-directed learners. It is useful for my research because it delineates many aspects, characteristics and issues related to those who apply SDL.

1. The learners' goals: The goals of SDL were studied by different researchers and they are grouped by Caffarella (2000) into four categories: (a) the desire of the learners to learn a specific content or acquire knowledge or skill; (b) to enhance the learners' abilities to be self-directed in their learning; (c) to advocate the transformational learning and knowledge that is critical reflection by the learner is central to the process; (d) to achieve some social or political expectations or aims (Collins 1995, 1996, Mezirow 1985, Brookfield 1985b, Hammond & Collins 1991).

2. Measuring learners' self-directedness: In 1977 Guglielmino presented what is considered the first measurement scale of SDL and it was called 'Self-Directed Learning Readiness Scale (SDLRS). SDL readiness is defined as the "complex of personal characteristics which individuals possess to varying degrees, which predispose them to be self-directed in their approach to learning" (Guglielmino & Klatt, 1994, p.164). Guglielmino considered it "the most widely used quantitative measure of readiness of self-direction today" (Guglielmino, Long, & Hiemstra, 2004). Guglielmino used Delphi technique to apply a factor analysis and this revealed eight factors: (a) openness to learning opportunities, (b) self-concept as an effective learner, (c) initiative and independence in learning, (d) informed

acceptance of responsibility for one's own learning, (e) love of learning, (f) creativity, (g) future orientation, and (h) ability to use basic study and problem-solving skills (Ellinger, 2004). The scale consists of 58 questions to measure the perceptions of SDL attributes and the results of using the SDLRS show certain characteristics like initiative independence in learning, and the learner's perception of responsibility and love or learning in addition to some other important qualities of the self-directed learner.

3. Learners' personalities: Oddi (1984) applied a different perspective on SDL. She studied SDL as a personality construct, not as mode of self-instruction. She developed a theoretical framework to examine the personality characteristics of the learners who showed a continuous clear initiative, persistence and perseverance in learning because she considered that it is very difficult to quantify the link between personality dimensions and SDL. Her framework is called Oddi Continuing Learning Inventory (OCLI). It is similar to the SDLRS because it identifies the SDL readiness and it identifies three personality dimensions which Oddi considered essential to self-directed learners: (a) a proactive drive that makes the learners start and continue their learning by themselves regardless of the existence of support from others, (b) a cognitive openness that makes the learner open to new ideas and opportunities, adapts to changes and tolerates ambiguity (if any), and (c) a commitment to learning that makes the learner enjoy learning for its own sake. Many researchers like Brockett & Hiemstra (1991) and Harvey, Rothman & Frecker (2006) considered the OCLI a valid measure to self-direction, but other researchers like Six (1989) and Landers (1989) raised concerns regarding this instrument.

Kirwan et al. (2010) conducted a study on 2102 colleges students and concluded that learner self-direction was found to be significantly related to four of the Big Five traits: Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Emotional Stability, Neuroticism and Openness in addition to four narrow personality traits: Sense of Identity, Optimism, Tough-Mindedness, and Work Drive. Results of multiple regression analyses indicated that, after controlling for age, year in school, and sex, the Big Five traits accounted for 37% of the

variance in learner self direction, with other narrow traits accounting for an additional 15% variance. A combination of six Big Five and other narrow traits account for over 52% of the variance in learner self-direction.

Many researchers studied the motivational-cognitive factors of self-directed learners and they concluded that they have personal initiative, perseverance, self-discipline, determination, being systematic, organised by nature, and goal,-task- and action-oriented (Candy 1991; Carré 2000; Courtney & Rahe 1992; Foucher & Gousselin 1995; Grow 1991; Guglielmino 1997; Guglielmino & Nowocien 1998; Long 1989; Oddi 1987). Moreover, many other researchers studied the affective-emotional factors and they concluded that there is a link between self-confidence, self-esteem (Candy 1991; Cheong, Lee & Long 1995; Hoban & Sersland 1999, 2000; Jones 1994, 1995; Kitson, Lekan & Guglielmino 1995, Jones 1992; Long, Agyekum & Stubblefield 1995; Long & Stubblefield 1994), life satisfaction (Kitson, Lekan & Guglielmino 1995; McCune, Guglielmino & Garcia 1990; Oliveira & Simões 2006) and SDL readiness (i.e. if someone has a high self-confidence, self-esteem and life satisfaction, he/she will also have a high SDL readiness). Other researchers studied the metacognitive factors and concluded that there is a link between SDL and internal orientation (Carré 2000; Cheong, Lee & Long 1995; Deci & Ryan 2000; Kreber 1998), conceptions about knowledge and learning or epistemological beliefs (Candy 1991; Garrison 1997; Tennant & Pogson 1995).

- 4. Learners' skills, characteristics and styles:** Understanding learners' skills, characteristics and styles can help me to understand how the managers learn or the best methods for learning for each manager according to his skills or style. Garrison (1997) also focused in his researches on the learners themselves and he concluded that the learners' cognitive skills and their ability to access adequate learning strategies is considered a strong factor causes the success and persistence of the learners. Moreover, Garrison focused on the goals that the learners set and their acceptance of responsibility to construct meanings and then to reflect on

their progress through their learning projects. Since motivation drives the initiation of new learning, Garrison considered its existence very important to initiate SDL projects. This is not consistent with what Danis and Tremblay (1987) concluded from their researches because they discovered that motivation increases as competence is realised and the adult learners' motivation increases through curiosity and challenge. Hiemstra (1994) believes that SDL is a continuum or characteristic that exists in everyone but with varying degrees when learners can take the responsibility of their decisions associated with the learning endeavour. He also states that SDL does not necessarily mean that the entire process of learning will occur in isolation because SDL can include different activities such as self-guided learning, participation in study groups, electronic dialogues etc. Knowles (1980) and Brockett and Hiemstra (1991) believe that SDL requires a certain amount of independence and maturity and they mostly exist in adult students. Moreover, Zemke (1998) states that SDL might be a natural common characteristic of adults, but many adults may become passive due to being subject to the traditional form of directed education. Long (1997) studied SDL from a different point of view. He examined the mental processes that distinguish SDL from more passive learning and he asserted that self-directed learners are more aware of their learning aims and they are more likely to show more attention on their learning. His researches showed that SDL demands delicate processes like concentration, synthesis and analysis which tax the learners' memory and energy. However, many researchers like Candy (1991), Garrison (1997) agree with Long that there are different psychological learning processes such as psychic energy, strategy, intention and level of processing involved in SDL. Brookfield (1985a) concluded that SDL is related to changing the awareness of the learners more than managing the learning episodes and he believed that reflection can be restricted to the learning process. He concluded that SDL as a process of designing an effective instructional event by the learner without changing the norms, assumptions and or values that guide his or her aims. Moreover, Brookfield believes that all the possible actions and

guiding frameworks should be evaluated by the learner before he or she starts implementing the intended process of SDL.

Honey and Mumford (1986) developed learning styles which are based on Kolb's work and they identified four distinct learning styles or preferences: Activist, theorist, pragmatist and reflector. They believe that these are the learning approaches which individuals naturally take; they also recommended in order to maximise one's own personal learning style the learners ought to: (1) understand their learning style, and (2) seek out opportunities to learn using that style.

5. **Learners' autonomy:** Chene (1983) and Candy (1991) studied the notion of autonomy in learning and they discovered that autonomous learners are generally thought to be independent, have the capacity to articulate norms and limits of a learning society and able to make choices and critical judgments (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). Moreover, Candy believes that autonomy contains personal and situational dimensions and it may not always show itself in the learning situation (Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991), and Candy (1991) and Cranton (1996) suggested that what lead to SDL and transformative processes are personal autonomy and autodidaxy. Boud (1981) stated that autonomy in learning requires that students take the responsibility for their own learning beyond responding to instructors. Other researchers concluded that there are four variables that influence the extent to which learners show autonomous behaviour in learning situations: (a) technical skills related to the learning process, (b) familiarity with the studied subject, (c) sense of personal competence as a learner, and (d) commitment to learning at that particular point in time (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). However, Nah (2000) advocated that autonomy may not be a cultural construct reflective of SDL as it is practiced in North America, but interdependence may be a characteristic of self-directed learners in other cultures (Ellinger, 2004). The notion of autonomy of learners was also studied by Confessore and Park (2004) and they concluded that the learner's autonomy is a behavioural construct and this makes it possible to facilitate it through a planned intervention. The aim of this intervention is

to help the learners to develop certain skills which lead to behavioural changes that may make them capable of practicing their ability to choose what is suitable for them and leads to better results. Ng and Confessor (2010) conducted a quantitative research to examine the relationship between learning styles and learner autonomy to understand how these two variables are related to each other. They distributed the Learner Autonomy Profile and Grash-Riechmann student Learning Styles Scales among 249 distance learners from public and private universities in Malaysia. They concluded from this study that there is a significant positive relationship between the number of preferred learning styles and the learner autonomy profile scores. This means that the learners who are flexible in using different learning styles according to their needs and situations are more autonomous. This result confirms what Candy (1991), Fitzgerald (2003), and Oladoke (2006) concluded that autonomous learners or the self-directed learners are often Collaborative and Participant, yet Independent.

6. **Age and gender differences:** Age and gender differences in SDL readiness were studied by Reio and Davis (2005). They used the SDLRS and a demographic survey to three age groups which included: (a) high school students, (b) university dental students, and (c) adult students who were continuing their education. Their studies showed that both male and female participants between the ages of 30 and 50 had higher SDL readiness scores than teenagers and young adults. They did not discover gender differences regarding readiness to learn in most of the participant age groups, but female teenagers, between 14 and 20, had higher scores in readiness than the male participants of the same age. Gender differences were also studied by McCauley and McClelland (2002) in Ireland. No significant gender differences in SDL readiness were found. However, they found that the higher scores on SDLRS correlated positively with higher course achievements. Reio's (2004) research showed that the lower scores in SDL readiness correlated to lower achievement among female participants. Confessore and Barron (1997) focused in their studies on the

influence of age on SDL. They discovered that the participants who were under thirty years old had an average of 2.4 more learning projects than those who were over 49 years old. Moreover, they noticed that the learning goals of individuals become less occupationally oriented and they are usually more directed towards general knowledge. Moreover, One of Knowles' (1975) assumptions about adult learning is that adult learners become more self-directed while they mature. Scott (2002) studied self-directed learners who are over the age of 50 and she discovered that they showed extraordinary confidence in their abilities to work despite the obstacles they encountered. Many of them set certain landmarks or roadblocks within their learning projects and when they reached them, they conducted reviews of all their learning projects to form renew their long-term perspectives regarding their projects.

- 7. Planning and assessment of SDL:** Chrsitensen (1986) concluded from his studies on nonhuman resources which are used in SDL that none of the self-directed learners which he studied were really engaged in any long-term planning during their learning efforts because they plan and learn simultaneously. On the other hand, if we consider learning contracts as a planning step for SDL, the studies of Caffarella (1983) and Kasworm (1983) indicated that learning contracts helped the learners to become effective self-directed learners. More studies by Caffarella and Caffarella (1986) showed that learning contracts helped the self-directed learners to develop their skills in accepting responsibilities for learning and identifying their learning needs, but learning contracts did not enhance SDL readiness. Caffarella and O'Donnell (1991) tried to understand how self-directed learners assessed the quality of their SDL. They concluded the following: (a) the learners were the primary judges of the quality of their own SDL and other external judges were also taken into consideration, (b) their judgements of the quality were not accurate or clear, (c) the judgements regarding quality evolve over time, and (d) the learners assessed the quality of their learning according to the products and processes of the learning projects. However, they did not conclude from their studies any

criteria for assessing the quality of SDL. The researches of Spear and Mocker (1984) also revealed that there are several factors that have influence on the route, or plan, which is taken by self-directed learners. First, the location and circumstances (i.e. environment) of the learning process itself can force the learner to follow a specific order. Second, the interests and needs of the learner may have influence on the learning path he or she takes. Third, the learner's mental schema which consists of his or her past experience and understanding of the studied subject may have influence on his or her pursue of learning. Moreover, regarding the learning process itself, Spear and Mocker (1984) concluded that there are three essential elements that define it: (a) the learner's expectations, (b) the learner's skills and knowledge and (c) the available resources within the learner's environment. The combination of the various degrees and types of these three elements yielded a wide scope of different results. Based on these results, Spear and Mocker concluded the following: (a) the trigger for SDL is a change in the personal circumstances of the learner, (b) the learner's new circumstances contain only limited options for learning, (c) the learner's circumstances dictate most of the available learning conditions, and (d) those circumstances facilitate the movement from a learning episode to the subsequent ones. The results of this study show that the circumstances have the supreme influence on the learning process.

8. **Self-directed learners via the internet:** some researchers (Ho et al., 2009; Yen & Liu, 2009) indicated that SDL habits contribute to online success and satisfaction. They suggested that promotion of better self-directed learning habits, meta-cognitive skills, and online collaborative behaviors will facilitate adult learners' levels of e-skills readiness (Ho et al., 2009). In addition, Moore (1987) noted that online learning requires a fairly high degree of self-motivation, self-direction and self-discipline. Yen and Liu (2009) link higher learner autonomy with completion of community college online courses and the overall success in grades. Guglielmino & Guglielmino (2002) link course success in online environment to concepts

of independence, self-direction or autonomy. Moreover, Kop & Fournier (2012) conducted a research on self-directed learners who learn through the internet and they concluded that time management, goal setting, and time availability were mentioned as the most important *algorithmic* factors influencing people's participation. In addition, the best motivations for the learners were finding particularly striking resources and information, getting involved in an online community, and the opportunity to learn something new.

C. Researches about the process of learning through SDL: The influence of barriers and interruptions on SDL was studied by Guglielmino et al. (2005). They used Guglielmino's (1977) SDLRS to evaluate the SDL readiness of the participants. They discovered that time constraints, difficulty in accessing human or non-human resources, technical difficulties, personal limitations and inadequacy of resources are the most common barriers that have negative influence on the SDL projects.

Knowles (1975) concluded from his researches that SDL produces better learning, and everything we do must be treated as a learning experience and SDL reflects growing independence from the control of teachers towards the assumption of responsibility by the learners. The degree of control that the learners have over their SDL remains a source of controversy between the researchers.

Knowles presented a self-assessment checklist of the competencies which are required for SDL and he also suggested the use of learning contracts which contain a statement of the learning objectives in addition to activities that help the learners to achieve the required objectives and the expected outcomes. Moreover, Knowles concluded that learning contracts cause a dramatic increase in motivation if used in college courses. Learning contracts are considered like a useful SDL tool which is used to enable learners within formal settings to assume more control of their learning. They are also useful within organisations to be used like a map for SDL in liaison with performance plans (Caffarella, 2000). Furthermore, learning logs are also used as a useful tool for SDL and self-development within different learning settings (i.e. formal academic, training and

informal settings) because they help the learners to become more aware of their own learning styles and to gain valuable experiences in learning (Barclay, 1996).

The issue of the quality of self-directed projects was identified by Tough (1979), but he did not suggest any methods for evaluating the process, the planner or the resultant learning. This was considered a gap in SDL research and it was acknowledged by Brookfield (1985a) and Caffarella (2000). Other researchers, like Long (1994), believe that more recent researches on SDL tentatively addressed quality issues.

Garrison (1987) started his researches on SDL to include distance education and Johnson (1988) expanded the researches to include personality types. The presentation of SDLRS indicates that learners have different degrees of readiness to become self-directed learners. The researches about the self-directed learning readiness were conducted in different workplace environments by different researchers such as utility firms (Guglielmino, Guglielmino, & Long, 1987), manufacturing firms (Ravid, 1986) and the telecommunication firms (Roberts, 1986). The SDLRS was validated by many researchers who used it in different settings (environments) (Long & Agyekum 1983; Long 1987). Furthermore, different researchers (Guglielmino, Long & Hiemstra 2004; Roberts 1986) concluded that there is a positive relationship between success at workplace and SDL readiness. However, Field (1989) expressed some concerns regarding the validity of SDLRS because he criticised the manner through which the SDLRS was developed. Researchers like Durr (1991) and Owen (1999) also focused in their researches on the SDLRS because it was proved to be a useful tool for measuring the readiness of individuals in different workplace settings.

Inman (2000) investigated the resource access used by black and white southern women entrepreneurs. The study included 65 women entrepreneurs and she could conclude and explain how those participants could access financing, skills and business services. They accessed their previous business experiences in addition to miscellaneous external resources according to the nature of the businesses they were running. In order to learn what they needed, the participants joined formal training programs, seminars and conferences, courses at colleges and they started their own independent study, read different books

and business publications. Moreover, some of them were engaged own their own in learning specialised skills like carpentry, computerised accounting and computerised embroidery. This study proofs that SDL is also applied by women entrepreneurs though it does not focus in particular on the process of SDL.

Kim (2004) studied the motivation of the students who study online courses. He concluded from his study that they were all highly motivated in the beginning of the course and then their motivation gradually decreased for thee reasons: (a) lack of human interaction, (b) they felt bored with the material, (c) poor course design. Those who were enrolled on part-time courses seemed more self-directed than the full-time students. They all liked their ability to control their learning pace and sequence.

Hiemstra (2006) believes that the learners might be motivated by technology when they exert learning efforts because it satisfies their curiosity and gives them excitement while they learn and explore. But, regarding the usage of technology, Rager (2006) states that some people may not have the necessary abilities to use technology and this may create a gap between them and the learning materials they seek. Moreover, the Internet itself makes the self-directed learners encounter other problems such as: technology skills requirements, information overload and the lack of quality controls over the contents which they obtain through the Internet.

Spear and Mocker (1984) focused on the process of SDL (i.e. sequence of events in a learning project) to discover how learners start learning if there is no plan. This revealed the influence of 'organizing circumstance' and showed that most of the learners use one single resource that was available to them within their immediate environment. This resource may not be the best resource for the learning project. Therefore, the term 'organizing circumstance' means that most self-directed learners learn through projects which usually have limited resources. Further researches on the organizing circumstance revealed that many learners 'seize opportunities' to learn within their environment and this may even include resources that become available to them by chance (Danis & Tremblay, 1985). Candy (1991) also confirmed the idea of the 'organizing circumstance' by stating:

...in view of the way self-directed learning activities often unfold, an approach that emphasises and allows for the ebb and flow of circumstances would seem preferable to one that presumes a simple linearity (p. 255).

Kolb (1984) concluded from his theory of growth and development that there is a relationship between learning styles and self-directedness. He used Kolb's Adaptive Style Inventory in his researches and he mentioned that there is a relationship between SDL and four of the learning styles. Moreover, he concluded that there may not be a high degree of self-directedness distinctly within any one learning style, but it is more closely related to all the learning styles. Long (1990), Felder (1996), Oladoke (2006) and Robotham (1995) concluded that self-directed learners are autonomous, flexible and adaptive. Ng and Confessor (2010) find this description as an important link to studying the relationship between SDL and learning styles because it is an indication that autonomous learners can be found within all learning styles. Robotham (1995), Felder (1996), Adenuga (1991), Canipe (2001) and Ware (2003) also believe that there is a link between SDL and learning styles, but there is no general consensus on the specific nature of that link. These indications to the notion that self-directedness implies flexibility and adaptability support the claim that highly self-directed or autonomous learners are able to utilise skills from all the learning style when they process the information throughout their learning.

The environment that is conducive to learning and development can enhance the individual and organisational performance. Therefore, the environment within organisations is also an important factor that should be taken into consideration when learning is studied. This idea has been well established in the scholarly literature and learning is also considered a significant source of competitive advantage for organisations (Ellinger, Yang, & Howton 2002; Marsick & Watkins 1999; Pfeffer & Veiga 1999). Moreover, the learners within organisations are being increasingly challenged to assume more responsibility for their own learning and development and become continuous lifelong learners to remain employable and marketable. This is visible as leaders, human resource professionals and managers continuously work on building learning infrastructures that improve formal and informal learning within their organisations (Carré 2000; Dunlap &

Grabinger 2003; Durr, Guglielmino, & Guglielmino 1996; London & Smither 1999; Maurer 2002; Stansfield 1997; Vann 1996). There are also other types of pressure or motivation that exist simultaneously with these challenges such as the escalating pace of technology, growing emphasis on cost efficiency and effectiveness and continuously increased global competition. These factors motivate the organisations to become more responsive towards addressing their employees learning needs and to adapt more flexible approaches (Guglielmino & Guglielmino 2001; Guglielmino & Murdick, 1997; Zemke 1998). Thus, different approaches were adapted by organisations towards learning have emerged regarding flexible learning, delivery and SDL as responses to meet the complicated demands which were created within the continuously developing work environment (Smith 2001; Stansfield 1997).

Hiemstra (2006) concluded that the Internet addresses Tough's (1979) view as he stated that the learners engage in SDL because they have the ability to choose the time and place they like for their learning. In the beginning of the twenty-first century, some of the famous researchers in the field of SDL whom we have mentioned earlier started to study the influence of the Internet on learning and the applied online learning methods because they considered it an important resource for SDL (Garrison 1997; Guglielmino & Guglielmino 2002; Garrison & Cleveland-Innes 2005). Hiemstra (2003) believes that the Internet may make SDL the norm due to its pervasiveness and its other characteristics.

Different researchers have studied the relationship between the Internet and SDL and the interaction between them from different points of views. Boyer and Maher (2004) concluded from their researches that learners who learn through the Internet respond positively to learner-generated learning goals and they assume personal responsibility for learning and group-based decision-making. The learners also could improve their abilities and skills such as time management and autonomy, but the researchers believe that more face-to-face time to learn new technology tools which are required for the coursework. Other researches were conducted by to study the learners who self-direct themselves through online learning courses. The results indicated that those learners score higher on an

autonomy measure than other learners who are enrolled in the same course which is taught through traditional methods (Derrick, Ponton & Carr, 2005).

Many researches have examined and explained how SDL happens and this includes its planning stage, goals, how to measure its readiness, the relationship between SDL and other variables like age, gender, assessing the quality of the learners' SDL and the influence of barriers and interrupts on SDL. These topics were useful for my research because they helped me to understand the stages of SDL and what distinguishes SDL from other types of learning. Moreover, this also helped me to understand the self-directed learners' personalities in addition to their interaction with the environment and technology. These researches are generally related to SDL and self-directed learners. However, there are other fields of study that are more related to this research.

2.8 Current Research on SDL

We need to know the status of research activities within the field of SDL to understand the current trends within this field, the suggestions and opinions of the prominent researchers regarding the research in future. This will be helpful later to detect the existing gaps in the field of SDL and then to decide what to examine through my research. This is the subject of this section and it will be achieved by examining what different researchers like Merriam, Caffarella, Rager, Brockett etc have mentioned regarding this topic.

There were in the past decade many researches and opinions related to the impact and advantages of the internet on SDL. For example, Bulik and Hanor (2000) believe that the internet supports SDL through increasing learner control and providing mechanisms for learners to select and determine what information is pertinent for them. Mathai (2002) suggests that the Internet is considered an ideal tool for enhancing SDL because of its ready access to massive amounts of information and its ease as for communication. Draves (2002) mentioned various reasons why the Internet enhances learning, including being able to learn at a peak time of day, learning at your own speed, accessibility to much information, an ability to track personal progress, and the capability to test personal learning efforts. He also believes that cognitive learning via the Internet is actually better than in-person learning. Rager (2006) stated that being skilled at using the

Internet is critical now when thinking about the organizing circumstance concept introduced by Spear and Mocker (1984). He cautions us to think about the challenges that the Internet can present to some learners.

Candy (2004) stresses the Internet's liberating value regarding the continuous information access and no geographic boundaries or restrictions. He believes that some SDL forms are well suited to the Internet:

. . .Self-directed learning is one key way in which people keep up with change and, since we are currently experiencing an unprecedented level and pace of change on a global scale, it is plausible to expect the demands of a changing world to lead to greater amounts of self-directed learning (p. 20).

The researches of Downes (2010) and Siemens (2008) led to highlighting a new example of SDL which is based on connectivism. They suggested that being a member of an online network, communicating with others and filtering information and ideas which others present leads to knowledge creation and learning advancement. The concept of connectivism advocates the active engagement of people with resources in communication with others rather than transferring knowledge from the tutor to the learner. More researches indicated that some *literacies* are critical for learners to be able to effectively direct their own learning in an open online networked environment. These literacies include information and media literacy, the ability to critically analyze resources and information in order to understand the new semantics of the web. Other researchers highlighted creative abilities and a flexible mindset in an environment that is characterised by change and complexity (Downes 2009; Partnership 21st Century Skills 2009; Sahlberg 2009). This is important for my research because some participants might be using the internet for learning. It is useful to know about the necessary literacies and connectivism to understand how SDL can be done through the internet.

Many researchers acknowledged that there has been a considerable decline in the interest and research on SDL (Brockett 2000; Brocket et al., 1994, 2000; Merriam 2001; Merriam & Caffarella 1999; Rager 2003). This unexpected trend happened though many adult learning researchers and practitioners and human resources professionals had been for more than 30 years interested in SDL (Wentling, Brinkley, & Nelson, 1997). Consequently, there were different reactions and suggestions regarding how to deal with this trend. Brockett (2000) suggested that there is no need to abandon the research in the

field of SDL because the challenge is now "how to take the study of self-direction to a new level" (Brockett, 2000, p.543). He believes that this can be implemented through four methods: (a) updating what is known about SDL through literature reviews, (b) researching new ways of measuring self-directedness, (c) extending the research approaches to include more qualitative approaches, and (d) promoting the dialogue about SDL among scholars researching in this field.

Despite the noticeable decline in the trend for research in the field of SDL, Guglielmino (2008) asserts that there is a growing importance in SDL in three contexts, namely: (a) formal learning settings, (b) learning in workplace, and (c) other personal settings. Moreover, she also confirms that SDL offers a path to increased life satisfaction. For example, SDL is important in our every day life for parenting, managing health care and health emergencies, pursuing interests and leisure activities and seeking meaning. She states that "self-directed learning is our most basic, natural response to newness, problems, or challenges in our environment" (Guglielmino, 2008), and she believes that SDL is necessary for survival in a changing environment.

Merriam and Caffarella (1999) advocated testing the SDL models, taking care of the researchers' past recommendations and using different research paradigms to study SDL such as the interpretive, critical and feminist approaches. Brookfield (2000) believes that the political context, social construct of SDL activities and cultural contingency had been ignored, and SDL should be reconstructed to become a political concept.

Merriam and Caffarella (1999) and Merriam, (2001) believe that it is necessary to present more theoretical studies and researches on SDL to broaden its existing literature. Therefore, they have presented many useful research questions to improve our understanding of SDL. Other scholars believe that more researches on SDL should be implemented within the business and industry environments to improve our perception of SDL within these environments (Cho 2002; Clardy 2000; Confessore & Kops 1998; Durr et al., 1996; Vann 1996; Wentling et al., 1997).

On the other hand, there is a growing interest in other concepts in the West like lifelong learning, communities of practice, tacit knowledge and situated learning. We can examine the definitions of these concepts to see how they are different from SDL. Lifelong learning is the ongoing voluntary and self-motivated pursuit of knowledge for either personal or professional reasons (Department of Education and Science, 2000). The concept of

communities of practice refers to a group of people who are interested in a certain task they do and they learn how to do it better through regular interaction (Wenger, 1998). Tacit knowledge is the type of knowledge that you gain through personal experience of working in an organisation, but it is not written down and difficult to share (Financial Times, 2014). Situated learning is a form of learning that takes place in the same context in which it is applied (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

There are some differences between SDL and these four concepts as communities of practice and situated learning refer to a 'group of learners', and learning tacit knowledge could be done by one individual or a group of learners. Lifelong learning and SDL refer to individual forms of learning but lifelong learning differs in its duration as it is 'lifelong' whereas SDL can be implemented for a limited period. However, if SDL is intended to be practiced for a lifelong, it will be lifelong learning. These four concepts seem to be building on the concept of SDL as they have its components (as stated by Knowles) with some differences. For example, situated learning and communities of practice seem to challenge the emphasis on individualism.

Therefore, these four concepts (i.e. lifelong learning, communities of practice, tacit knowledge and situated learning) have the following mutual characteristics:

- They have a great importance for companies and management learning;
- they are forms of SDL (regarding tacit knowledge, the reference here is not to its definition, but to how to acquire it, i.e. learn it, from others);
- these four concepts can be considered forms of SDL because Knowles' definition of SDL is applicable to all of them except the notion of individualism regarding communities of practice and situated learning and the duration of the process regarding lifelong learning (this means that they need an initiative, planning diagnosing the learning needs etc);
- they are important for my research as I may find some Syrian managers who practice them and believe they are forms of SDL.

However, despite this decline in the researches in the field of SDL, this subject is still taught at many reputable business schools because it is considered necessary for managers and organisations. Moreover, SDL is strongly related to the concept of lifelong learning, tacit knowledge, situated learning and communities of practice as they all lie

within the topic of management learning and development and these four concepts can be considered forms of SDL (as explained earlier). I agree with Guglielmino (2008) that SDL is a 'necessary for survival in a changing environment' and it is not expected in the foreseen future to see a decline in the researches which are related to learning in workplace. This research also follows Brockett's (2000) advice as he wanted the researchers not to abandon the research in the field of SDL. This research is also useful as it: (1) updates what is known about SDL through its literature review and conclusions, (2) it extends the research approaches by including a qualitative approach, and (3) it increases the existing knowledge about SDL in the non-western countries.

This section explained the current researches in the field of SDL and highlighted some differences between SDL and other concepts which seem to receive great interest and attention in the West. It shows the current field of research within which my research is situated and explains its relatedness to different important concepts. It is possible now to advance towards other fields of research which are closer to my research focus on the topic more closely.

2.9 Important fields of study to my research

The studies which examine the interaction between self-directed learners and their institutions and managerial learning are very useful for my research because they are closer to managerial SDL than the pervious studies. Since this research is about how the Syrian managers' SDL, I need to understand the previous researches which were done in the west in these two fields to be able to benefit from them in this research. These fields include studying the interaction between the self-directed learners and institutions, the application of SDL in the field of management learning, culture and analysing the researches to include what other researches could be done to fill the gaps which may exist in this field.

A. The interaction between the self-directed learners and institutions

SDL is an important subject for many organisations. Understanding its importance and how organisations encourage or apply it is the subject of this section and it will be explain through four steps. First, I will explain the importance of SDL, learning and developing individuals for organisations; this includes the reasons for

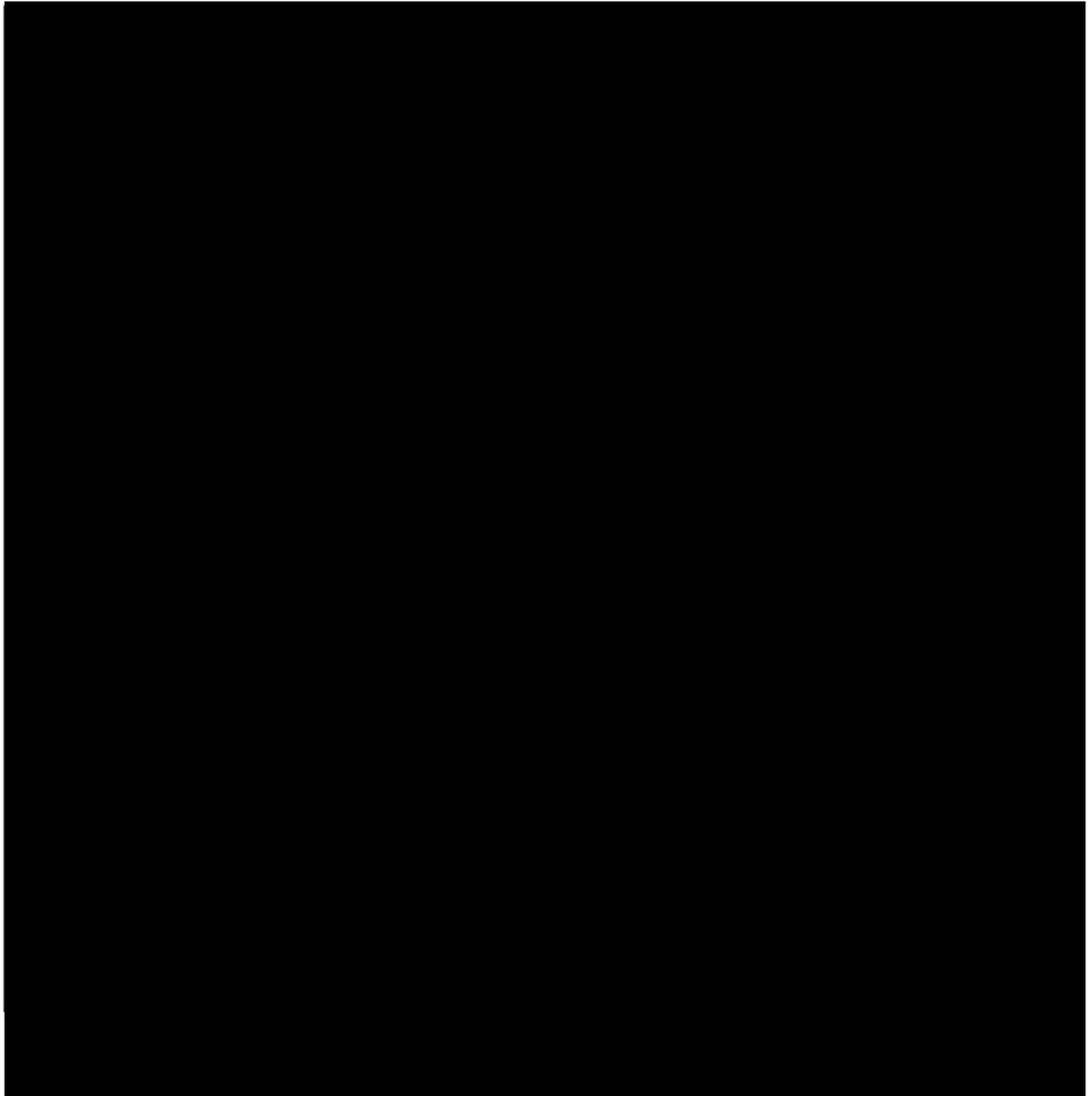
fostering SDL and its value for organisations. Second, I will explain how SDL occurs within organisations as examined by different researchers. Third, the influence of the environment on SDL within organisations should be summarised. Finally, the role and influence of managers and leaders on SDL will be highlighted and explained to understand their role in encouraging their employees to become self-directed learners.

1. **The importance of SDL for organisations:** Development of individuals is now very valued by organisations (Pedler & Aspinwall, 1998). Revan (1998) explained the value of self-development within organisations by stressing that if someone cannot change themselves, they cannot change what goes around them. This shows us the link between individual personal development and the process of change within the environment or organisation. Collaborative enquiry is considered like a bridge between individual learning and the learning organisation (Pedler & Aspinwall, 1998). Senge (1990) considers learning as an individual and a group experience that is deeper than receiving information and storing in someone's mind; it is related to changing individuals to make them capable of giving results they about and achieve aims that are important to them. He also believes that business is becoming more complex and dynamic while our world is getting more interconnected, and work must become more "learningful". It is neither sufficient nor suitable any more to have one or few persons learning for the entire organisation, and it is no longer possible to do it from the top and then command the subordinates to obey the orders of the supreme strategists. Only those organisations that can tap the commitment and capacity to learn of their employees at all levels will excel in the future.

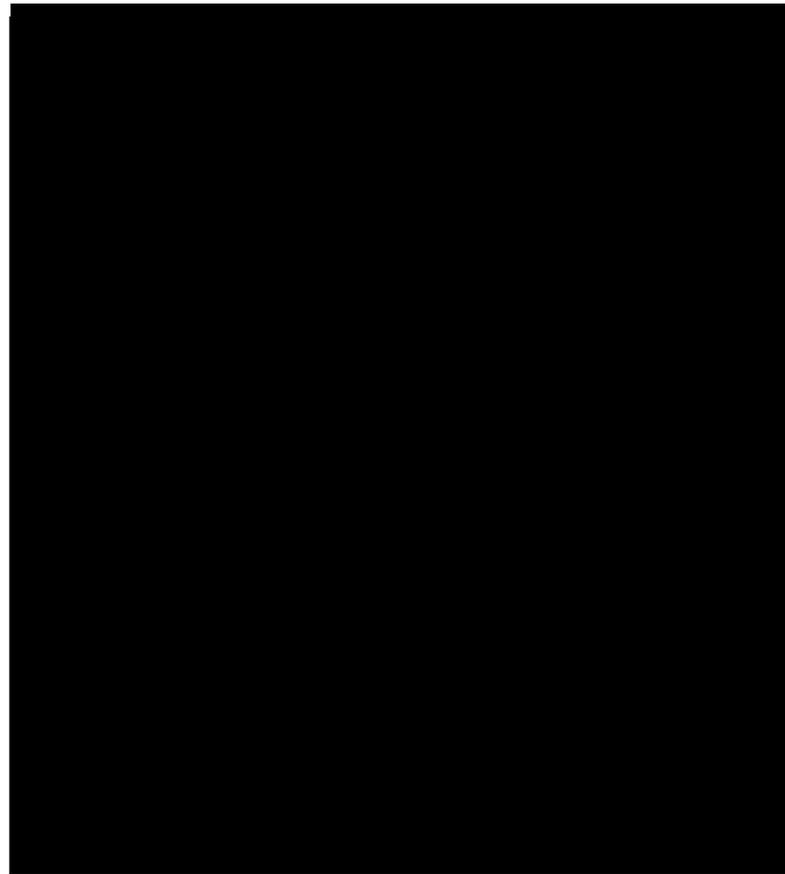
SDL skills are considered very useful skills for learners because they enable the learners to become self-directed, self-regulated and independent, and they increase the availability of information. Therefore, they are among the most important skills that should be fostered by formal education (Meichenbaum & Bolhuis 1998; Grow 1991; Lyman & Varian 2003). These

skills also increase the career change frequency (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2008). Therefore, graduates need to know how to acquire and apply independently knowledge effectively and this led to a major focus in the SDL literature on improving students' SDL skills within formal educational environments (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007). Bulik & Frye (2004) also concluded from their research about the rapid change of teaching beliefs and their influence on SDL that "The concept of self-directed learning has moved from the margins of educational dialogue to a more central position as an essential outcome of adult education" (p. 74).

Francom (2010) investigated the perspective principles for fostering SDL skills and he found the following four categories: (a) Match the level of SDL required in learning activities to students' readiness, (b) progress from teacher to student direction of learning over time, (c) support the acquisition of both the subject matter knowledge and SDL skills, and (d) make students practice SDL in the context of learning tasks. He suggested the following figure to explain these skills:



Guglielmino & Guglielmino (2001) believe that there is currently a transition to a Distributed Learning Model as shown in this figure:



Guglielmino & Guglielmino believe that everybody in the organisation should be expected to assume major responsibility for his/her own continuous learning and that includes identifying learning needs, setting learning goals etc (Guglielmino & Guglielmino, 2001). This shows us the main difference between SDL and the other forms of learning and training in organisations as employees must rely on themselves to learn instead of expecting the HRD department to provide training sessions or mentoring. Smith (2002) also believes that encouraging the employees to become self-directed learners has a great commercial value because when they become self-directed learners, they can develop and pursue their learning goals and outcomes which contribute to the competitiveness of their organisation without the need for instructors and formal training. Moreover, Long & Morris (1995) assert that the commitment to SDL and development has benefits for the learners and their organisations at the same time. Many researchers found in the past two decades positive links between SDL and workplace performance (Durr 1992; Guglielmino 1996;

Guglielmino & Guglielmino 1994; Guglielmino & Klatt 1994; Oliveira, Silva, Guglielmino & Guglielmino 2010).

Guglielmino & Murdick (1997) concluded that there are two types of benefits from incorporating SDL within work organisations that include the link between SDL readiness score, job performance scores and job performance in addition to considerable savings in training costs. Rowland & Volet (1996) also concluded that self-directed learners are more likely to share knowledge and build networks with others. Bierema (1996) explained the challenge that organisations face to promote SDL by stating: “The ultimate challenge in organisations is to harness adult learners’ propensity to be self-directed learners and not create barriers that prevent or discourage it” (p. 25).

2. **How SDL occurs within organisations:** Several studies have explained how SDL occurs within institutions (i.e. universities, organisations, colleges etc) and certain types of interaction happen between the self-directed learners and the institutions. These studies also mentioned that the role of the learner and teacher within SDL are different from their roles within the traditional model of learning. For example, several researchers, Brookfield (1986), Knox (1986), Knowles (1990) and Boone (1990), confirm that the students who have independence and initiative in their learning are more successful and satisfied at their academic. Moreover, Landriault & Gosselin (1997) found that nearly the third of the workers whom they questioned were engaged in different types of SDL. The view of the teacher's role has also changed as more organisations started to apply SDL. The teacher's role within SDL is a mentor or facilitator, not a dispenser of knowledge as it is in the traditional learning. On the other hand, the learner (within SDL) is a thinker and creator of knowledge, not a passive recipient of knowledge from others.

It is possible to see that there is an ‘interaction’ between the changes that occur within the organisations regarding their demands for knowledge and skilled workers and SDL itself. This can be understood from several surveys and studies that happened in the past few decades. A survey made by

Confessore and Confessore (1994) revealed that SDL was not of particular importance within the surveyed organisations (work fields). But, another survey (Desai, Richards & Eddy, 1999) showed that a big technological shift happened within businesses and it caused an increasing demand for educational and training programs for employees and even the potential employees (American Society for Training and Development, 2004). Due to the rapid technological changes in the 1990s, the employees and employers started to demand more training to adapt to the changes (Long, Agyekem & Stubblefield, 1995). Candy (1991) stated that:

...it is apparent that only a minority of people (generally estimated at between 10 and 20 percent of the adult population) choose to engage in formal educational activities. By contrast, the overwhelming majority of adults (estimates vary from 80 to 100 percent) undertake sustained self-directed learning activities each year (p. 145).

In the middle of the 1990s, some researchers gave recommendations for companies at that time to invest and rely on SDL. For example, Heimstra and Brockett (1994) stated:

...business and industry trainers increasingly will need to depend on self-directed involvement by employees in the future because of declining dollars available for training (p. 63).

Other surveys later showed that employees rate the opportunity for self-improvement within a work environment at a higher priority than compensations (Shaw, Sterrett, Chesser, & Whitmore, 2001). Approximately 23% of training programs were developed to be used in SDL within companies by 2004 (American Society for Training and Development, 2004).

Some researchers suggested different strategies to help organisations to implement flexible learning approaches more extensively (London & Smither 1999; Smith 2002; Smith et al., 2002). Clear training policies that indicate management support for flexible learning at the organisational learning is essential in addition to the structures that provide support and development of HR professionals' skills to support the development of SDL, facilitation of new learning and the acquisition of knowledge and skill

should be implemented within a community of practice (Ellinger, 2004). Smith and his colleagues (2002) examined the feasibilities of many of these strategies and they confirm that most of the identified strategies are feasible.

A research by Kops & Pilling-Cormick (2004) shows that organisational trainers have started to teach their students how to apply SDL within their teaching projects. They teach their students mentoring, peer tutoring, learning from mistakes and computer-mediated instruction. The need for SDL in organisations is triggered by the necessity for continuous and rapid development in workplace. The existence and importance of SDL within training in organisations was confirmed by Johnson's (2006) research which examined the processes used by trainers who needed new content expertise to use it in their work.

3. **The role and influence of managers and leaders on SDL:** The influence of work environment on SDL was revealed by (Foucher & Brezot, 1997) as they studied SDL within health institutions in Canada. They discovered that the continuous change, work design and budget cuts made SDL a learning mode within these institutions. In this "unstable" environment, the top management decided that improving the skills of employees through SDL was an important goal to guarantee the implementation of professional development which is the essence of continuity and success of their business. Those who were responsible for training in these organisations stated that the employees often learn informally or through SDL and these types of learning were difficult to assess and supervise by them.

Clardy (2000) studied the influence of changes in workplace on the SDL of the employees. He asked the participants questions to understand their learning projects and the motivation or the trigger mechanism for that. He discovered that changes in duties, work progresses, licensing and certification requirements were the main trigger that makes employees start learning projects. Their learning projects can be divided into three types: (1) projects triggered by work requirements, (2) voluntarily projects, and (3) "synergistic" projects which were projects stimulated by

organisational climate factors. The learners who implemented synergistic projects were highly motivated and this made them go beyond formal training or learning within their work environment. Therefore, Clardy (2000) stated that "changes in organisational capability and performance are ultimately mediated through employee learning" (p. 123), and this is happening increasingly through self-directed and informal approaches to learning.

James-Gordon and Bal (2003) investigated the learning methods of the design engineers to understand the influence of workplace on their SDL. They discovered that the engineers were stimulated to learn by problem-solving events and they used peers, books and the Internet to find solutions for the problems they have encountered. The need for solutions triggered this type of learning and it was self-paced and its aim was solving the problem.

Ravid (1987) examined the effect of organisational climate on the readiness for SDL. On the other hand, the organisational factors that are conducive to SDL were also studied later as a result of the increasing interest in SDL within workplace (Foucher & Brezot 1997; Maurer & Traulli 1994). Moreover, the relationship between SDL and the learning organisation (Cho 2002; Confessore & Kops 1998), the types and occurrence of job-related SDL (Clardy, 2000) and the readiness for SDL and occupational categories (Durr et al., 1996) were also studied.

Williams (2004) conducted a research to try to enhance the self-directedness among nurses who work within a complex and rapidly changing health care environment. Their work environment required from them a high level of continuous SDL throughout their careers. He used Guglielmino's (1977) SDLRS to test the readiness of the participants for SDL before they enter the program and then he tested that again at the end of the first year of the program. In the beginning of the study program, the participants indicated that books were the main learning source, but in the latter stages they included other learning sources like journals, peers etc within the learning resources. However, using the SDLRS, as indicated

earlier, showed that there were no changes in the students' scores, but the data of the focus group showed that the participants developed characteristics associated to self-directed learners. Therefore, it is possible to say that the learning program helped the participants to increase their responsibility for learning and it enabled them of identifying their learning needs and assessing the effectiveness of the learning strategies they used during the program.

Chuprina and Durr (2006) studied the relationship between SDL readiness and cross-cultural adaptability among American expatriate managers and they used Guglielmino's (1977) SDLRS and another cross-cultural adaptability instrument in their research. They concluded that there is a strong relationship between SDL readiness and cross-cultural adaptability. Therefore, this means that SDL readiness can be used as a guide in selecting managers for working in foreign countries.

Brookfield (1984) stated that the importance of context should be acknowledged when SDL is studied. He (1985) also discovered that many self-directed learners believe that their learning occurs within a social context within which they exchange information. The self-directed learners evaluate their learning outcomes when they compare it with the work samples of their peers and in many cases they use informal networks instead of books and instructional programs.

Many prominent researchers consider the promotion of SDL within organisations an important issue because many skills and types of knowledge are now 'perishable commodities' and the employees must adopt continuous learning to guarantee their success in their careers (Guglielmino & Murdick 1997; London & Smither 1999; Zemke 1998). Many approaches to learning that incorporate technology and decrease the reliance on traditional training have emerged as a result of the organisations attempt to build more responsive and cost-effective learning infrastructures. These approaches tend to require learners to be more self-directed and promote for relying on SDL (Ellinger, 2004). Moreover, while organisations exert continuous efforts to become learning organisations,

building their learning capabilities at the individual level becomes important for them to create group-level and organisational-level (Confessore & Kops, 1998). Thus, Guglielmino and Guglielmino (2001) believe that the self-directed learner forms the cornerstone of the learning organisation.

The 'political' aspect of SDL should also be taken into consideration when we study it within organisations. Brookfield (2000) believes that the issues of power and control and access to resources lie at the heart of SDL. He stated that:

Who defines the boundaries of intellectual inquiry is always a political question...exercising self-direction inevitably requires certain conditions to be in place regarding access to resources, conditions that are essentially political in nature (p. 16).

Therefore, we have to take into consideration the important role that managers and leaders play in organisations to influence the different conditions which support self-development (Maurer & Tarulli, 1994). Therefore, we find that the direct manager generally has a significant role in creating a learning environment for self-development and this is usually expressed with encouraging the employees to be confident to have the initiatives to start and plan their own learning (London & Smither, 1999). Moreover, managers are responsible for supporting and guiding the employees' needs for development as they work as mentors, learning facilitators and coaches; they also provide the employees with feedback about their development and learning (Beattie 2002; Ellinger & Bostrom 1999; Ellinger, Ellinger, & Keller 2003).

Zsiga (2008) conducted a quantitative research at YMCA to examine if levels of SDL readiness are related to leaders' effectiveness in YMCA directors. The research included 471 directors and he concluded from the correlations that it is expected to find the individuals who exhibit SDL tendencies to be effective as leaders. Moreover, leaders' effectiveness is supported by the possession of SDL skills. Furthermore, many other researchers also concluded that SDL readiness is related to leader effectiveness (Connolly 2004; Durr 1992; Guglielmino & Guglielmino, 1988;

Guglielmino, Guglielmino, & Long 1987; Hillard & Guglielmino, 2007; Roberts 1986).

4. **Aspects related to employees as self-directed learners:** Some researches within British and Australian organisations proved that many vocational learners within workplace and institutional environments are not ready or well-prepared yet to use independent learning methods (Calder & McCollum 1998, as cited in Smith 2001; Sadler-Smith, Down, & Lean, 2000; Smith, 2001; Smith, Robertson, & Wakefield, 2002). Smith (2002) stated that:

... the development of an ability among workplace learners to effectively engage with self-directed learning has been observed by several writers (Edwards, 1995; Calder & McCollum, 1998; Morris-Baskett & Dixon, 1992; Robinson & Arthy, 1999) as an objective worthy of pursuit by organizations wishing to achieve knowledge and skill development for a competitive edge in a rapidly changing industrial context. However, the evidence that such training is not well supported in the workplace is disappointingly compelling (p. 109).

Confessore and Kops (1998) concluded that SDL research has identified several organisational characteristics that self-directed learners and training experts prefer and these include: (a) tolerance for errors, support of experimentation and risk taking in addition to an emphasis on creativity and innovation; (b) the use of participative leadership style and delegation of responsibility to the members of the organisation; (c) support for learning initiatives that are linked to the organisation's goals and values; (d) encouragement of open communication and of information systems that provide for collaboration and teamwork and use both internal and external learning resources; and (f) providing opportunities and situations for individual learning. It is worth mentioning that many of these environmental characteristics are consistent with the learning organisation concept (Ellinger, 2004).

A research at Motorola revealed several useful approaches for improving practice through using the SDLRS to measure the self-directed readiness of the learners at various occupations (Durr et al., 1996) or the Learning Profiles Questionnaire (LPQ) (Confessore & Kops, 1998) because the

human resource department professionals could help the learners effectively through using these assessment tools. They could identify the learners who have low scores on the SDLRS and those who have low perception of their SDL abilities and then they provided them with developmental programs to explain SDL and facilitate learning skills to improve their SDL. On the other hand, those who had high scores on the SDLRS or high perception of themselves as self-directed learners, it would be appropriate to offer them opportunities for coaching and supporting SDL and creating and implementing some learning projects for them. Moreover, it is possible also for the human resource professionals to provide the learners with learning resources to encourage them to become better self-directed learners (Ellinger, 2004).

The above-mentioned researches show that there is a strong and continuous interaction between managerial learning and the organisations because the latter represent the environment within which the managers themselves work and interact in different methods. Understanding this topic made me capable of analyzing the relationships between the participants and their organisations more thoroughly and it was also useful to construct the model at the end of the research.

B. Application of SDL in the field of management learning

Understanding managerial learning can help us to know about how managers learn and the importance of SDL for them. This is the objective of this section and I intend to do it through explaining three topics: (1) the need for managerial, (2) how managers learn, and (3) female managers' learning.

- 1) **The need for managerial learning:** Ohlott, Ruderman and McCauley (1994) defined managerial learning as the development of a person's ability to manage effectively. Managers usually initiate their own learning pursuits (Vaill, 1996). The need for managerial learning was expressed by Tough (1979) by saying: "It is hard to imagine that one could serve usefully in certain occupations without frequent efforts to learn" (Vaill,

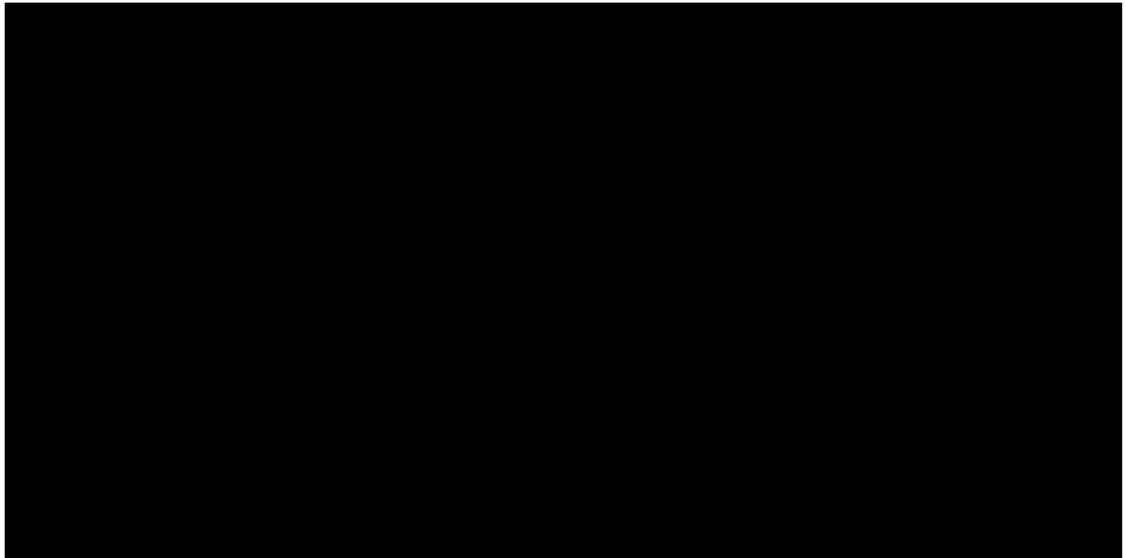
1996, p.32). Moreover, managing is considered a complex skill in which experience matters (McCall et al., 1988). Many researches proved that managers learn throughout their careers (McCally, Lombardo & Morrison 1988; Mumford 1993; Wouters & Buyens 2006). Bennis and Nanus (1997) concluded from their research about leaders that the most essential skill for running organisations is the ability to learn.

Dechant (1990) discovered that the ability to learn, which was considered later the first essential skill for running organisation by Bennis and Nanus (1997), was often neglected. She also concluded three learning competencies that help managers to overcome the mismatch between their current circumstances and the set of skills that they need for running their organisations: (a) the ability of the managers to diagnose their learning needs, (b) the managers have to find resources and devise learning strategies to suit their needs within their situation, and (c) they should evaluate the stages that they have accomplished to reach their learning goals.

The volatility and instability of the current managerial landscape and the necessity for SDL in this environment was studied by Vaill (1996). He concluded that the managers must be flexible and adaptable learners within their work environment and this can be implemented through SDL. He describes the managerial and organisational landscape as "permanent white water" within which self-directedness becomes essential as managers have different circumstances. Moreover, he believes that the manager is the only person who is capable of identifying his or her learning needs which leads him or her to implement an inventive, exploratory learning. The notion of "white water" which is used by Vaill makes the managers feel confused and unable to control. Therefore, the traditional, passive models of learning become ineffective in this unstable, turbulent environment because they cannot satisfy the managerial learning needs.

Pedler et al. (2007) believe that self-development is a continuous process and the managers should review their progress to set new goals as time

proceeds. Then, they should evaluate their progress against their goals and decide what further action, if any, to take. Ideally, this method of thinking, diagnosing and goal setting should be incorporated into the managers' everyday activities to increase their effectiveness continuously. The following figure explains their learning cycle:



2) **How managers learn:** Guglielmino and Klatt (1994) investigated 162 successful entrepreneurs to study their SDL abilities. The researchers used the SDLRS (Guglielmino, 1977) and they concluded that there are statistically significant differences between the participants and the general population because the entrepreneurs had higher scores on the SDLRS than the managers and supervisors. Therefore, this was considered a clear indication that if someone is considered a self-directed learner according to the SDLRS, he or she will be successful at doing jobs that require skills like problem-solving, change and innovation and these are necessary skills for managers.

Many researchers showed that managers learn throughout their careers (Davies & Easterby-Smith 1984; McCall, Lombardo, & Morrison 1988; Mumford 1993; Wouters & Buyens 2006). These researches also indicated that continuous management development relies strongly on managers' individual initiatives, nearly half of the managers' development happens through on job experience and another third of

managers' learning occurs through relationships within the workplaces (McCall, Lombardo, & Morrison, 1988). The relationship between managers and learning was also explored by Cope (2003) who confirmed that managers need certain professional competencies to be able to manage their business successfully.

Some researches indicated that only 20% of managerial learning is done through formal training programs (Dechant, 1989). Cope (2003) stated that "Many managers become actively engaged in learning to be effective managers of people and resources" (Cope, 2003, p.429). Moreover, a survey of 84 managers was done by Enos, Kehrhahn, and Bell (2003) in the insurance industry to learn to how managers learned core skills revealed that informal learning was the predominant method for acquiring managerial skills. The survey also indicated that managerial learning occurs through interactions with and observations of other managers. Moreover, the surveyed managers stated that job experience provided included work problems that required action and this provided essential learning, and 70% of their job-related learning activities were informal in nature.

Contant (1996) made a survey of public sector managers and he concluded that job experience was the most highly rated form of learning. The survey indicated that 56% of the survey respondents considered their interactions with their peers, i.e. managers, very important constituent of their learning. Moreover, nearly the third (30%) of the surveyed managers stated that classroom education was important for their development throughout their careers. The surveyed managers also indicated that they consider their learning from the results of their decisions important for their development.

A survey of 84 managers in the insurance sector was made to understand how managers learn core skills. The results showed that the predominant method for acquiring managerial skills was informal learning which happened in particular through interactions with other managers and observing them. Moreover, informal learning, as the surveyed managers

stated, formed 70% of all their job-related learning activities (Enos, Kehrhan & Bell, 2003). This survey also indicated that managers consider job experience as the source of challenging work problems that need taking decisions and actions, and this experience is highly regarded by those managers as it provided them with the essential learning that they needed.

Many researchers (McCall, Lombardo & Morrison 1988; McCauley, Mumford 1993; Ruderman, Ohlott & Morrow 1994) concluded that challenging assignments are considered the essence of their managerial learning experiences throughout their careers. The studied managers in these researches stated clearly that they have learned many useful skills from the difficult assignments. They indicated that they have learned important issues like how to handle ambiguity and strategies of identifying the important or key ideas, factors etc. Furthermore, the traditional skills of managers like selection, training and motivating employees were also considered by the studied managers as important issues that they have learned and mastered.

The importance of assignments for managerial learning was studied in detail by Mumford (1993). He studied 141 managers who work at 41 different organisations and concluded that they learn from certain assignments. The study showed that learning appears in many occasions which were grouped into three categories: (a) the present job of the manager, (b) assignments like projects and committees, and (c) the new jobs. Moreover, it was discovered that the managers' present jobs provided them with important opportunities for learning when there were new demands or changes, or when the managers changed their opinion regarding what was included in that job. It is worth mentioning that most of the participants stated that their learning was unplanned, disorganised and unreflective. Sherlock (2000) concluded from his studies of transformative learning that CEOs lack critical reflection on learning.

McCauley, Ruderman, Ohlott & Morrow (1994) concluded that learning environments need support to be established during highly stressful managerial assignments. The required types of support include the approval of others, relationships between co-workers and peers, endorsement of one's ideas in addition to permissions to fail. Moreover, the study also revealed that severely challenging assignments may cause a severe stress which may make managers fail to recognise the inner opportunities that they have.

Tinelli (2000) conducted a study of two corporate leaders who were working on transforming their organisations and he concluded that managerial learning is both accidental and incidental. He explained that accidental learning happens during overcoming obstacles that occur when managers try to accomplish their tasks. On the other hand, incidental learning is rooted in the work itself, i.e. it was not planned nor managed by the managers. Moreover, it was discovered that reflection happens within the framework of the job when decisions must be taken by managers. The study also revealed that the essential factors that influenced the leaders' learning were: (a) the organisational context, (b) the usage of intuition to guide the processes of decision-making, (c) the network of professional relationships, and (d) the daily prayer.

Away from the Western societies, Man (2006) conducted a research in Hong Kong to study twelve entrepreneurs in order to know how they learn. The interviewees considered critical events as an important source of learning throughout their career. The study concluded that there are six behavioral learning patterns which can be regarded as learning competencies: (a) learning constantly, (b) learning in depth, (c) learning selectively and purposely, (d) transferring learning into current practice (e) reflecting upon experience, and (f) seeking learning opportunities. The study indicated that formal training for entrepreneurs should focus mainly on practicing these six learning behavioral patterns more than focusing on gaining certain knowledge and skills.

Antonacopoulou (2006) studied 78 managers at three different banks to understand how they develop their activities. The study revealed that the managers received a strong motivation to learn by themselves from the level of organisational support. On the other hand, the managers who received low levels of support learnt only what was expected from them to perform their duties. Anyway, most of those managers felt that they were encouraged to learn more and develop their skills.

Tremblay (1991) concluded from his study that a large amount of workplace learning is either self-directed or informal despite that fact that training programs at organisations usually focus on learning in classrooms. McCall, Lombardo & Morrison (1988) concluded that continuous management development depends generally on the initiatives of the individual managers, and almost half of this development results from the experience which is gained from work. Moreover, nearly the third of the managerial learning happens throughout relationships within the job environment. However, Landriault & Gosselin (1997) found that the training managers showed interest in knowing more about SDL in workplace and they believed that the workers lacked the required skills to practice SDL. The study also revealed that those training managers ignored or did not have adequate understanding of SDL.

- 3) **Female managers' learning:** The aim of including this section is to understand the main topics and researches which are related to the female managers' learning. This will be useful for understanding any similar issues or topics that the participants may raise regarding gender differences in the field of SDL. There are many researchers in the West who studied managerial learning by women and gender differences regarding managerial learning. It was proved that gender has influence on how managers obtain developmental opportunities and the types of the opportunities sought by managers of both sexes. For example, it was discovered that in the USA female managers are 45% of managers, but in general, women managers find difficulties in gaining the developmental

experiences they want to go up on the management ladder (Catalyst, 2004, 2007). Other researches also indicated that women's methods of learning are unique because they gain their managerial advancement through methods that are different from men (Bryans & Mavi 2003; Catalyst 2004, 2005).

The notion of how male and female managers report or regard their experience in the field of mentoring was studied by White, Cox, and Cooper (1992). Their research indicated that both sexes had positive mentoring relationships and they also gained what is called 'informal' networks through their mentors. The women managers who had been mentors reported that affirmation from their mentoring relationships and the men said that they have taken into consideration the benefits of being mentors for their own career progression. Moreover, the women also stated that they have learned from their ex-mentors how to exert an appropriate corporate image. On the other hand, the men said that they have learned this from their observation when they thought it was necessary to learn it (White et al., 1992). Powell (1993) concluded from his study that many women have problems regarding mentoring such as failing to recognise the value of the mentor, encountering difficulties in finding a mentor or lacking the necessary skill to find the mentor they need.

Fenwick and Hutton (2000) investigated through interviews 95 women entrepreneurs to understand how they develop while they were managing their businesses in Canada. Most of these women did not have a business education. The researchers concluded that there are three important themes related to entrepreneurial learning: (a) the entrepreneurs chose what they wanted to learn by themselves, (b) the knowledge produced indicated what these women valued, and (c) the learning process itself was described by networking experiences with people who were internal and external to their businesses. Moreover, most of the interviewees referred to the importance of learning how to learn and indicated that they mentioned that their confidence had

developed. Half of them stated that they had personal weakness in business finance and marketing, and they also considered hiring and managing staff a necessary management skill. They learnt how to manage their employees through intuition, seeking advice and experimenting. Regarding SDL, the researchers concluded that the emergent and unpredictable nature of the participants' experience as entrepreneurs cannot be properly described by current depictions of SDL.

Van Velsor and Hughes (1990) implemented studies that included 189 male managers and 78 female managers to know the differences between them regarding their learning experiences. The participants were asked to identify significant learning events; job assignments were considered as the significant learning events, but many women managers indicated that they consider other people significant for their learning (i.e. women managers learn more from other people than male managers).

Bryan and Mavin (2003) conducted a study to investigate the experience of six women managers in the UK to understand how they have learnt to become managers. The studied participants clearly indicated that they have used their former managers as role models to gain their knowledge about management and they also stated that social interactions with others in addition to their observations were adopted and used by them to develop and gain their managerial experience.

Singh, Vinnicombe and James (2006) conducted a research which included interviews with ten English women to explore what they have learned through their usage of role models about management. The researchers concluded that there are six categories of learning: (a) control, (b) determination, (c) style, (d) personal characteristics, (e) leadership, and (f) life skills. The interviewees informed that researchers that they have used the challenging job assignments to develop and manage their employees because this was the same type that was used by their own managers to develop and manage them previously.

C. Culture: Since this research is in the Middle East, it is necessary to try to understand SDL from a cultural point of view or to see if there are any useful researches related to culture and SDL. Hofstede (1980, 1991) conducted studies of employees 40 countries spanning more than two decades, asserts that the culture of a nation explains over half of the differences in the behaviour and attitude of employees, more than can be explained by differences in gender, race, age, or professional roles. Hofstede (1980) derived four dimensions of culture and later added a fifth one based on that approach that examines the national sample rather than the individual unit of analysis.

Guglielmino & Guglielmino (2011) implemented a study that included samples from 17 countries to explore Hofstede's (2011) cultural dimensions scores for Power Distance and Individualism and the economic indices of gross national income per capita (GNIPC) as possible indicators of SDL readiness in these countries. The results showed that there are significant predictive relationships between the cultural dimensions of Individualism and Power distance and readiness for SDL. The researchers concluded that it is logical to predict that countries which have higher scores for Individualism have higher mean scores for self-directed learning readiness, and it is natural that when individuals take the responsibility for providing for themselves and do not have a strong expectation that a larger reference group will aid and protect them, i.e. they are more likely to exhibit the characteristics associated with a high level of self-directed learning readiness. This means that they would be motivated to recognise their learning needs and take the initiative to seek out new knowledge, adapt to change, and solve problems in order to meet their needs. The researchers also concluded that culture may affect productivity and, consequently, income by encouraging or suppressing self-directed learning activity of its citizens. In addition to that, there is some indication that as countries move to adopt more Westernised management practices, the mean of the SDL readiness scores of samples of managers and employees rise. There is a three-phase study conducted in China during the initiative to incorporate U.S. management practices that revealed successive increases in SDL readiness scores of samples drawn in 1992, 1994 and 1996 (Guglielmino & Guglielmino,

1998). Moreover, they stated that further studies need to be conducted to explore these relationships as they have many implications for human resource development practice to determine if the relationship of culture and SDL readiness is supported in countries other than the ones which are sampled in their study.

However, the government does not give any assistance to the poor and unemployed people and there are no larger reference groups to aim and protect them. Based on that, we have to take into consideration that there would be a high percentage of the participants who exhibit the characteristics which are associated with a high level of SDL readiness. But, if we take another perspective on cultural differences, we have to notice that Hofstede's cultural dimensions do not cover all the cultural factors or aspects which have influence on individuals. For example, there are other religious, political, traditional and social values and factors that have influence on individuals. Therefore, I need to take into consideration that I may discover or conclude some cultural factors that have influence on managerial SDL in Syria.

Having explained some aspects of the Syrian culture, we can now present some researches that explained the relationship between culture and learning as this topic is very important for this research since it is related to examining the Syrian managers' SDL within the Syrian context. Vygotsky's sociocultural theory regarding learning suggests that social interactions lead to continuous step-by-step changes in children's thought and behaviour that can vary severely from one culture to another (Woolfolk, 1998). His theory combines the social environment and cognition as it suggests that children acquire the ways of thinking and behaving that make up a culture by interacting with a more knowledgeable person. This social interaction will lead to continuous changes in a child's thought and behaviour and these thoughts and behaviour vary between cultures (Berk, 1994).

This theory suggests that development depends on interaction with people and the tools which are provided by their culture to help them to form their own view of the world. However, there are three methods that a cultural tool can be passed from one individual to another. The first one is called imitative learning

(i.e. when someone tries to imitate someone else). The second method is applied by instructed learning which requires remembering the instructions of the teacher to apply practically self-regulation. The final method is done through collaborative learning which requires a group of peers who strive to understand each other and work together to learn a specific skill (Tomasello, et al., 1993). Moreover, Vygotsky's sociocultural theory of development contains four core principles: (1) children construct their own knowledge, (2) development cannot be separated from its social context, (3) learning can lead to development, and (4) language plays a central role in development.

According to this theory, everything is learned on two levels: (1) through interaction with others, and then integrated into the individuals' mental structure, and (2) at the 'zone of proximal development (ZPD). This 'zone' is the area of exploration for which the student is cognitively prepared, but requires help and social interaction to fully develop (Moll, 1994). The teacher is able to provide the learner with 'scaffolding' to support the student's evolving understanding of knowledge domains or development of complex skills. Collaborative learning, discourse, modelling and scaffolding are strategies for supporting the intellectual knowledge and skills of learners and facilitating intentional learning. Berk and Winsler (1995) believe that children differ substantially in the ZPDs as one child may do his/her best on their own, while others need some assistance. This makes the ZPD crucial for identifying each child's readiness to benefit from instruction.

However, Vygotsky's theory does not highlight the influence of the learners on the environment at all. This influence was studied by Lave and Wenger (1991) who presented the situated learning theory which includes the importance of context for learning. They argued that learning can be viewed as an ongoing social process that is based on the notion of participation embedded in the social-cultural school of learning which considers that managers can shape and transform themselves and their environment. According to this theory, the outcome of learning is not determined solely by the learner, but by the learner in interaction with the environment (i.e. the learner uses the context to learn). So, the manager has to construct social structures and collaborative processes

to create and develop knowledge. Therefore, this theory takes into consideration the influence of learners and the environment on the learning process and this makes it distinguished from the other theories. According to this theory, though the learners aim at controlling the context, the context itself would have a direct influence on the learning process as it either supports or hinders it, and the manager (i.e. the learner) will construct a shared meaning through collaboration and interaction with others (Sadler-smith, 2006).

Bruner (1960) built on Vygotsky's work as examined and stressed the importance of the social environment for learning as he believes that adults should play an active role in assisting the child's learning. He explained how that can be done through the spiral curriculum which involves structuring information so that complex ideas can be taught at a simplified level first, and then re-visited at more complex levels later on till the children can solve their problems by themselves. Bruner (1961) suggested that learners should construct their own knowledge through organising and categorising information using a coding system and the best method to do that is to discover it rather than being learning it from a teacher. This is the concept of discovery learning or the constructivist approach which implies that students construct their own knowledge for themselves.

D. Analysis of the researches: What is written about SDL does not cover sufficiently nor properly many important aspects related to detailed studies regarding what motivates (or de-motivate) managers to practice SDL, the influence of leaders on managerial SDL and the influence of the Internet in non-western countries. Moreover, there are only few studies that examine the influence of certain cultural factors like politics (i.e. the influence of the government's decisions, politics and actions on managerial SDL). It is necessary to examine each one of these topics to explain how I consider it a visible gap in the field of research on SDL. Moreover, I will explain the topics that I find suitable to investigate in my research about the Syrian managers' SDL.

I did not find studies that explain in detail the influence of rewards (including promotions and rewards) on managerial SDL. A detailed study like this can help us to understand and evaluate the influence of rewards on managerial SDL in

Syria within a qualitative frame. Moreover, it is very useful to know the factors that de-motivate managers when they think about practicing SDL. The importance of these findings can help the managers to take these factors into consideration when they want to practice SDL.

People identify with visionary leaders how they behave and what they expect (Armstrong, 2005). There are only a few researches that study the influence of leaders within organisations in the West on SDL. This gap exists and I think it is important to study in detail the influence of leaders on SDL within organisations because this may give useful information about the influence of leaders in the field of SDL and learning within organisations in general. I believe that it is useful to study this factor on the Syrian managers' SDL because it is a new useful field of study for managers.

The influence of the Internet on managers' SDL in the non-western countries is still almost unknown. I could not find sufficient researches that cover this topic properly and I think it is an important topic because the Internet has a great influence on businesses and learning and when we study this influence in non-western countries, we will take the influence of culture into consideration. Studying this factor may reveal to us the opinions of the managers in non-western countries about the Internet when they want to use it for SDL.

I could find only few researches about the influence of corporate culture on SDL. Corporate culture is an important factor that has influence on the behaviour of the employees and managers of an organisation (Armstrong, 2005). There are various definitions of culture. For example, Furnham and Gunter (1993) consider culture as the commonly held beliefs, values and attitudes within an organisation and it is the way we do things, but those researchers also believe that it is difficult to define for different reasons including the notion of the multi-dimensional notion of culture and its ever changing entity. It will be useful to study the influence of corporate culture on SDL to know how and why certain organisations promote SDL and direct their employees to become self-directed learners.

Syria has a different culture from the western culture. It is possible to investigate about the influence of some cultural elements on the managers'

SDL in Syria. This topic is completely new and there are no researches about up till now and I expect to find important findings related to it because Syria has its own distinguished politics, traditions, educational system and economy. Therefore, it is possible to discover through this research that the roots of some elements which have influence on managers' SDL in Syria are connected to certain cultural factors.

I believe that it will be useful to investigate the influence of the Internet on the SDL of the managers in Syria and the influence of rewards and promotions on SDL of the managers in Syria. Studying the influence of the Internet on the SDL of the managers in Syria would give useful findings that might be similar to or different from the findings which are concluded from the researches in the West.

The analysis of the current research in the field of SDL revealed that there are gaps related to the influence of rewards, leaders, corporate culture, culture and the Internet on non-western countries on managers' SDL. This made me decide that it is suitable for my research to study the influence of these factors on the managers' SDL in Syria.

2.10 Conclusion

This chapter defined the borders, contents of the subject and the topics which I need to concentrate on throughout my research in the field of SDL. It is related to 'What' is to be examined. The topics which I identified as 'gaps' in the previous and current researches need to be examined thoroughly in order to formulate suitable research questions that cover them and yield the proper data that I need. This leads to the following questions: How can I obtain the required data about these topics? This could be done through preparing specific questions to ask them to the participants later and it requires deciding which method I should use to obtain this data. Therefore, the methodology of the research should be explained in detail to indicate how to obtain the required data.

Chapter Three: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter explains the methodology of the research and the reasons which led to selecting it. The aim of the adopted methodology itself is to achieve the aims and objectives of the research which are listed in the beginning of this chapter to show my starting point. The process of selecting the adopted methodology is done after presenting and explaining the methodological approaches, in addition to their epistemological and ontological principles, which were available to me to implement this research. Moreover, the form of the research questions will be presented and they will be aimed at covering the research topic from different sides to obtain all the necessary data which is related to it. Moreover, this chapter will include an explanation of the research designs and approaches to the process of data analysis and the ethical principles which were applied throughout the entire research process.

3.2 Research aims, purposes and objectives

Much research has been undertaken on managers' SDL in Europe and America by researchers such as Knowles (1975), Guglielmino & Guglielmino (2001), Megginson & Pedler, (1992), but less is known about this issue in other regions including the Middle East. This research aimed at expanding our understanding of the concept of SDL in Syria and that may contrast with the Anglo-American setting in which this concept was originally developed. This allowed me to prepare a critique of these concepts and developing a model that is applicable in Syria.

My starting point was that there is no data available to me about the subject so that I am looking for the meaning of SDL from the Syrian managers' views. The reason for this assumption is the non-existence of researches or data regarding this topic (as explained in the Literature Review). In designing the research I (the observer) was not separated from the sense-making process and was reflecting on my own experience of SDL and the data gathered from managers. Regarding my technique, I have paid attention to the language used by the managers as they described their own understanding and ideas (conversation during the interviews). During the stage of analysis and interpretation I made sense of the

data I have obtained through conversations and observations. I was sense-making and hoping for an outcome that produces an understanding the managers' point of view and practice of SDL.

The overall aim of this research is to examine how the managers in Syria engage in SDL. This aim has subsidiary aims that can facilitate achieving the overall aim which are understanding and examining:

- 5- Why the Syrian managers practice SDL.
- 6- The influence of organisational culture on the Syrian managers' SDL.
- 7- The influence of the leaders, rewards and internet on the Syrian managers' SDL.
- 8- The influence of Syrian context on the Syrian managers' SDL.

3.3 Research Ontology & epistemology

I derived the philosophy of the research from its aims and objectives (Easterby-Smith et al., 2002) which are related to studying the Syrian managers' opinions and practices of SDL. Since these opinions and practices are not observable, unseen and immeasurable (Saunders et al., 2009; Johnson & Duberley, 2006), I adopted interpretivism, not positivism, because it is suitable to achieve the aims and objectives of my research. Interpretivism is an epistemology that is adopted by a research who is interested in understanding differences between humans, not objects. Unlike objects, humans have different feelings, ideas, beliefs, behaviours and actions. Regarding my research, I was seeking data from humans, not objects, and this data was opinions, ideas, experiences and points of views; it was not countable, visible, measurable nor tangible. On the other hand, positivism demands generating a hypothesis that can be tested and allows explanations of laws to be assessed, and positivism also assumes that only knowledge confirmed by the sense can be warranted as knowledge (Bryman, 2004). Due to the lack of data and researches regarding the Syrian managers' SDL and my inability to examine the studied issue (i.e. the Syrian managers' SDL) with my senses, it is not possible for me to apply positivism in my research because I cannot formulate a hypothesis related to the Syrian managers' SDL. Moreover, I cannot also examine the Syrian managers' SDL (i.e. the studied phenomenon or issue) with my senses. Therefore, based on these characteristics, I had to adopt interpretivism, not positivism. The latter is usually adopted by a researcher whose research is concerned with observable social reality and its outcomes will be

generalisations that are similar to the laws of physics (Saunders et al., 2009; Johnson & Duberley, 2006). On the other hand, interpretivism suits my research because my research demands exploring, interpreting and analysing data that would be taken from the participants' experiences, opinions and narrations in order to achieve the research aim which is examining and understanding how the Syrian managers engage in SDL (i.e. I will be examining the reality of the Syrian managers' engagement in SDL through the Syrian managers' senses). This means that I will be attempting to understand a phenomenon through the meanings that people assign to them, the events or actions will be understood through the mental processes of interpretation that is influenced by interaction with social contexts, the inquirer and the inquired-into are interlocked in an interactive process or talking and listening (i.e. interviews) and the mode of data collection is more personal and interactive. All these characteristics lie within the interpretivism paradigm and they make it suitable, applicable and useful for my research to achieve its aims (Saunders et al., 2009; Karr & Kemmis, 2004).

Ontology is related to the nature of reality and the assumptions that the researcher has about how the world works. It has two aspects: objectivism and subjectivism. Objectivism refers to a position where social entities exist in reality external to social actors. However, if the subjectivism approach is applied in a research, the study will include examining objects or issues that are not related to personal issues like motivation or points of views (Saunders et al., 2007). This makes subjectivism not suitable for my research as my research is related to examining personal issues and points of views and included studying the motivation and points of views of the managers regarding SDL. On the other hand, subjectivism means that social phenomena are established from the perceptions and consequent actions of the social actors. My research is related to the Syrian managers' perceptions and consequent actions which are related to their SDL. Therefore, I adopted subjectivism throughout my research.

Regarding the method of reasoning which I applied in my research, I adopted the inductive, not the deductive, approach because my research did not start from a specific theory as it started from observations, looked for patterns and built tentative hypothesis on them to develop final conclusions or hypotheses. The deductive approach was not applicable to my research because it starts from a theory that is related to the research topic and then it would be narrowed down to a more specific testable hypothesis. Then,

finally, the hypothesis/hypotheses would be tested with specific data to have a confirmation (or no confirmation) of the original theory/theories (Saunders et al., 2007; Robson, 2002).

3.4 Qualitative approach

My research demanded understanding the managers' points of view, ideas, beliefs, values about SDL, describing and analyzing experience, ideas, belief's and values, which are intangible primary data, and this required using the qualitative methodology to collect these data. The research did not demand collecting measurable variables, verifying existing theories or hypotheses nor questioning them to generate new hypotheses based on the results of the collected data. Therefore, it was not possible to use the quantitative methodology (Whisker, 2001; Saunders et al., 2007; Cooper & Schindler, 2003). This research is called 'exploratory' because I started it without a clear idea of the problems that I will encounter during the study (Cooper & Schindler, 2003).

The secondary data were collected from other sources such as the records of the participants' organisations. Some participants gave me data related to the number of managers who had training or education in their organisations within a certain year. They only gave me excerpts to show the number of participants, the dates, the type of courses etc, without the names or positions of the managers as I told them that I do not need any data that is considered confidential. This data was used later to understand the type of education and training that the managers seek in Syria. It helped me to support my findings regarding this issue.

Since this is a qualitative research, I believe that there might be other interpretations of the data I collected as Candy (1991) stated that qualitative research emphasises the unique construction of meanings and rejects imposing one interpretation of research data. Therefore, it is not possible for me to generalise the findings of this research, but I believe that these findings form important pillars that should be taken into consideration, though they cannot be generalised, when managerial SDL in Syria is studied. The importance of this research is related to its presentation of the participants' perspectives and experiences in the field of SDL. In other words, since I adopted interpretivism, this research presented deeper (not wider) and extensive views taken from the participants' descriptions (Candy, 1991). Myers (2000) believes that problems related to sampling and

generalisations may have little relevance to the goals of the study and the reality of the situation. A small sample may be, in many cases, more useful in examining a situation thoroughly from different perspectives, and, comparatively speaking, a large sample would be inconsequential. Therefore, I am confident that it would be very difficult, or even impossible due to the current military conflict in Syria, to take a large sample to do this research and to gain the same thorough understanding of the Syrian managers' points of view and experiences. This would require implementing a large number of interviews and in this case the data would be unmanageable.

3.5 The Research Questions

Having specified the research aims and decided which technique to apply and, I could formulate the research questions. However, the research questions themselves aim at collecting the required data to implement this research and achieve its overall aim. I could formulate these questions after reviewing the research aims and the literature review through which I could understand the factors which have influence on managers' SDL (i.e. the work environment, the external environment and the learners' characteristics and interests etc). The topics of the questions cover different fields that are related to the managers' SDL including the Syrian context, their interest in learning, the factors and persons that encouraged/discouraged their engagement in SDL and their definition of SDL. The research questions are:

- 1- Why/how do the managers in Syria engage in SDL?
- 2- Why and how do the managers in Syria choose certain methods to practice SDL?
- 3- How do the managers in Syria define or understand SDL?
- 4- Who and what encourage/discourage the Syrian managers' SDL?
- 5- What/who are the factors/elements/persons which are within the organisations that affect the Syrian managers' SDL?
- 6- What/who are the factors/elements/persons which are within Syria that affect the Syrian managers' SDL?

The first question aims at obtaining information about the Syrian managers' learning (why/what and how they learn) and their motivation and interests in learning. The second question aims at understanding the methods which the Syrian managers use to practice

SDL and why they select these methods. The third question aims at exploring and understanding the Syrian managers' definition and understanding of SDL. The fourth question aims at identifying the persons/factors which encourage and motivate the Syrian managers' SDL. The fifth question aims at identifying the persons/factors which discourage the Syrian managers' SDL. The sixth question aims at identifying the factors which discouraged or hindered the Syrian managers' SDL. The seventh question aims at identifying the factors which exist within the Syrian context that have influence on the Syrian managers' SDL. Questions 4, 5 and 6 are broad enough to cover all the personal and organisational factors which encourage, support or motivate the Syrian managers' SDL. However, these questions are derived from the research aims and they would give me the required data to achieve these aims.

Answering these questions required finding persons who know:

- thoroughly how managers learn in Syria;
- how management development is practiced in Syria;
- about SDL;
- managers' opinions about SDL in Syria;
- the factors that have influence on SDL.

The best candidates who know about these issues are the Syrian managers who have several years of experience in management, management training and development and managerial learning in general. Their managerial experience would be useful because they should know the importance or the need for learning while they were practicing their managerial duties.

3.6 Approach to the interview questions

I made the questions of the interview clear and formulated in a way that reduces the scope for bias and increase the reliability of the obtained data and I avoided all the leading questions because they would cause bias in answering them (Saunders et al., 2007; Robson, 2002). I started the interviews by asking the participants about their education and SDL in general, and then gradually I asked the interviewees questions related to specific areas in addition to follow up questions when necessary. The questions of the interviews were strongly connected and related to the research questions to obtain the required data for the research. I designed the interview questions to cover all the

research topics and the participants were given the freedom to talk about each topic from their own perspective, experience and knowledge. The follow up questions helped me to ask the interviewees questions about certain aspects and topics when I felt that they have useful information about that. Some of them did not have sufficient information about certain topics and it was obvious that some of the participants were more educated and more interested in SDL than others.

3.7 Type of questions in the interviews

I had to prepare a list of the themes (i.e. SDL, factors which encourage/discourage the managers' SDL, the work environment etc) and questions which are relevant to the topic of the research and the research questions before the interviews. Semi-structured interviews demand this type of preparation and they allow the researcher to omit some of these questions or ask other follow up questions as the organisational circumstances may vary from one case to another. Moreover, the order of the questions may vary according to the circumstances of each case (King, 2004). I expected the answers to be useful for me to form a general focused idea regarding what the participants know about SDL and how they practice it because these themes are closely related to the researched topic. I used open questions as they were useful to obtain answers from the interviewees related to their definition of SDL, descriptions of some situations or incidents and facts or attitudes. They give the interviewee the freedom to answer as he/she wants and they usually start with: 'what', 'how' or 'why' (Grummitt, 1980). I used some open questions like: "What do you understand from the term SDL?" as probing questions. The probing questions were useful to explore the interviewees' significant responses to the research topic. I used them as open questions that require focus or direction, for demanding explanation when the meaning is not clear, and to 'reflect' a statement mentioned by the interviewee to ask about more information. They were useful to ask about specific issues, information or explanations.

3.8 Sampling method & technique

I needed to know which sampling method I should use according to its specifications and the initial information that we had regarding the population (i.e. the Syrian managers). The total or approximate number of managers in Syria was not officially registered or known (this might be the case in many countries). This made it impossible for me to

decide the suitable sample size, and, consequently, I had to use the non-probability sampling technique. This method of sampling allows researchers to select samples according to their subjective judgment and it may require focusing on one case thoroughly to find answers for the research questions. Probability sampling (or representative sampling) is used when researchers need to conclude inferences from their samples regarding a population in order to answer the research question(s). As it demands identifying a suitable sampling frame (according to the research questions), deciding the suitable sample size, selecting the best sampling technique and sample and checking that the selected sample is representative of the population (Saunders et al., 2009), it was not possible to apply it in my research.

There are different techniques within the non-probability sampling method such as convenience, self-selection, quota, purposive and snowball sampling techniques. I had to find the best technique to apply it to obtain the data. This demanded asking a series of questions to find the right sampling method which started with: Can data be collected from entire population? The answer was: No. This led me to the second question: Must statistical information made from the entire sample? The answer was: No. The next question is: Must it be likely that the sample is representative? The answer was: 'No'; this took me to the next question: Is the purpose just exploratory? The answer was: 'Yes' because the aim was to explore the opinions or points of views of the Syrian managers about SDL. This led me to the best sampling method for this research which is using self-selection sampling (Saunders et al., 2009, p234). However, self-selection sampling means that the researcher must allow each case to identify their desire to participate in the research. Therefore, I used my personal contacts to ask them to find participants for this research according to this method, but, however, I could not find a sufficient number of participants for my research, and this made me use snowball sampling. It is a suitable method for identifying members of the desired population, asking these members to identify more cases, and then asking the new cases to identify more new cases and so on. Using the snowball technique is good when there are difficulties in identifying cases to study by the researcher and the cases which are studied through this method will have the desired characteristics for the study. Moreover, though the costs of using the snowball sampling method are reasonable, it has some limitations as the control over the

sample content is quite low (Saunders et al., 2009), and there is no way of knowing whether the sample is representative of the population (Black, 1999).

3.9 Implementing the Interviews

I did 20 interviews through 2 sets of interviews. Each set of these interviews contained 10 interviews with 10 different managers who worked for 10 different organisations. I did the first set of interviews (the pilot interviews) in June/July 2012 and analysed them.

3.9.1 Pilot interviews

The first set of the interviews (i.e. the pilot interviews) was necessary for developing and testing the adequacy of the research instruments, designing a workable and realistic research protocol, establishing whether the sampling frame and technique are effective and identifying logistically problems which might occur during the usage of the proposed methods. Moreover, they were also necessary to collect the preliminary data, assess the proposed data analysis techniques to uncover potential problems, improve the internal validity of the interviews and develop the research questions and research plan (Polit et al., 2001).

Therefore, I asked my key informant, one of my colleagues and my supervisor to give me feedback regarding the pilot interviews and they gave me good feedback and suggestions to improve the interview protocol. They advised me that it is better to give the participants a brief definition of SDL to avoid any misunderstanding because it seemed that the participants had different ideas or definitions of SDL, and to introduce myself to them at the beginning of the interviews. Moreover, my supervisor suggested that it would be more useful to make each question focus on one certain factor that may have influence on the managers' SDL (i.e. the Syrian context, encouragement, support etc) and not to ask more than 6 or 7 questions during the interviews. Regarding Skype, my key informant told me that most of the participants use slow internet connections and it would be better to speak slowly to make voice clear to them.

Based on that, I prepared an introduction for the interviews (as cited in Appendix V) and amended the research questions according to their advice and feedback. This made the interview questions give better responses from the participants during the second set of the interviews. However, it also gave me good training and experience in the field of conduct interviews and preparing and improving the research protocol.

3.9.2 Outcome of the Pilot Interviews

The pilot interviews gave me good insight and data regarding the learners' characteristics, motivation for learning, the organisations support for managers' SDL and the applied SDL methods. I could conclude from them that the learners' interest in SDL varies to a considerable degree and there are varying degrees of support given to them through their organisations. But, I noticed that these pilot interviews did not give any data about the civil war or the influence of war on the managers' SDL. The participants did not mention that the civil war had influence on their SDL and their organisations because the economic situation was still steady or the influence of the civil war was not really visible on businesses at that time. Furthermore, they did not give sufficient data that would lead to constructing a model that can be considered a novel contribution to knowledge. The data which resulted from the interview was around 50 pages and I felt that I needed to collect more data after a few months.

The findings from the ten pilot interviews showed that all the participants who practiced SDL aimed at achieving a certain aim and this means that they consider SDL as an instrument they use to achieve an aim (i.e. SDL itself is not an aim). They used all the available learning methods and strategies for them (i.e. the internet, courses, private lessons etc), they encountered difficulties and obstacles like the lack of time, expensive tuition fees and the lack of support from management and organisations and they received support and encouragement from different persons like their families, managers, friends and co-workers. Furthermore, the main subjects which the participants of the pilot interviews learnt were English, IT and business courses. The themes which emerged from these findings were the differences in the participants' SDL readiness, the differences in the level and types of support that the participants received from their organisations and the interaction that happens between the participants and their organisations due to the various levels of participants' SDL readiness and level of support that the organisations offer.

However, there were no reliable signs or references to influences that come from the Syrian context that could be concluded from these findings. The model which I could construct from these findings and conclusions did not include any influence that comes from the Syrian context, and consequently that did not fulfil the required aims of the

research nor was it considered a novel contribution to knowledge. Therefore, I had to reformulate the research questions to seek data regarding the influence of the Syrian context. Having finished the second set of interviews, I noticed that the findings and conclusions from these interviews were similar to the findings and conclusions of the pilot interviews and the data which I had regarding the influence of the Syrian context was suitable and sufficient to conclude the role of the government from it. Then, I could construct the final model and add the new discovery to it (the influence of the Syrian government on managerial SDL in Syria). This gave me confidence that the conclusions which I obtained were correct as there were no contradictions or differences between what I concluded from the pilot interviews and the second set of interviews.

3.9.3 The second set of interviews

I contacted my key informant again and my other friends to implement the interviews, but in 2013 the situation in Syria changed dramatically and the violence escalated to an unanticipated degree. The economy started to suffer because of the insecurity, the civil war and the international embargo and boycott which were imposed on the Syrian government. This made me think of changing the questions of the first set of interviews to make them include questions that would give data related to the current situation. Therefore, in order to obtain more data about the themes which I considered useful and important for my research (i.e. the influence of the social context on the Syrian managers' SDL, the civil war and the other factors that have influence on that), I designed the second set of the interview to be more in-depth and open-ended to enable the participants of giving me more data about these themes. I changed the questions and implemented 10 more interviews in March 2014 (which are considered the second set of interviews).

However, the second set of interviews gave me good data that included sufficient references and explanations about the influence of the civil war on the managers' SDL as I expected though not all the participants mentioned the influence of the civil war on their SDL directly. The categories and themes which emerged from the first set of interviews were strengthened and supported by the data which came from the second set of interviews, and the data was sufficient as the second set of interviews gave me more than 100 pages. This enabled me of analysing them, reach useful conclusions and find the

categories which are required to construct a model that is considered a novel contribution to knowledge.

3.10 Finding the participants

Weiss (1994) recommends finding participants through reputable organisations as the organisation itself lends credibility in the eyes of prospective participants. Therefore, I thought that the best place to find participants who were likely to have the above-mentioned characteristics was where managers learn in Syria. The likelihood of finding managers who could answer these questions in these educational institutions was greater than finding managers who could answer these questions from organisations (it also saved time and efforts).

Having contacted my friends and relatives in Syria, I could find four participants and one of them was my friend Hayan who is a manager of an educational institute and he helped me to find most of the participants. Therefore, he was my key informant for this study because he was familiar with the context of my research and he knew many managers through his organisation. Hayan could identify many self-directed learners who were studying at his institute because the fees of their education were paid by them, not by their organisations (there were exceptions, but the majority of them paid by themselves as he told me). The snowball technique was applied as each one of the participants was asked to introduce another participant and each one of the latter also introduced another participant (if they could). This required making many phone calls and emails to the participants to agree with them on the date and time of the interview to ask them to give me the contact numbers of any probable participants they would recommend or introduce. The following figure explains how the snowball technique was applied to find 20 participants (10 for the first group of interviews and 10 for the second group of interviews):

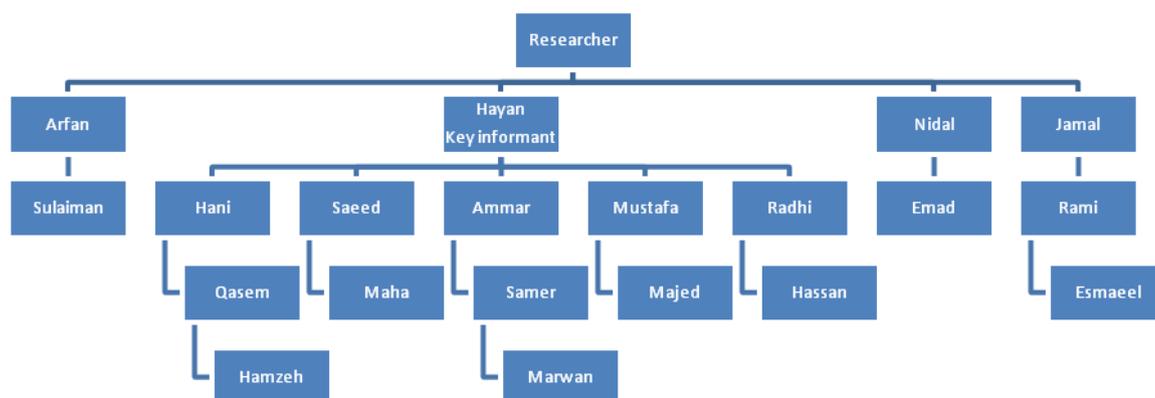


Figure 10: Application of the snowball technique within the research

However, it is important to discuss the possibility of bias that could be associated with this method of sampling. Hayan, the key informant, is one of my old friends who were studying with me at Damascus University in the end of the 1980s and I know him very well. He does not have any interest in affecting the results of this research in any way as the research will not give him any benefits whether the results or findings indicated or lead to certain conclusions or not. Moreover, Figure 10 shows that not all the participants were known to the key informant as they were recruited from across the participants' networks. In addition to that, analysis of the interview data revealed a range of different forms and levels of engagement with SDL. Thus, the 19 tables in Chapter Four (Table 3 - 21) show considerable variation among the participants' aims, learning methods, sources of support and encouragement, profiles, motivation and the difficulties they encountered as they practiced SDL. The diversity of the results which are reflected in these tables suggest that there was no inherent bias existing in the sample.

3.11 Research methods

It was not be possible to obtain accurate data from books, records or statistics in Syria as I have discovered that many managers (or almost all the participants) had been self-directed learners for many years without stating that in their organisations records of (this may happen in any country). Hayan and several other participants told me that even if such data is found in organisations, it would be insufficient for my research because it would record the dates, courses, addresses etc (i.e. what is usually recorded for

accounting and training purposes). The recorded data would not usually include many items which are important for my research such as the managers' opinions, goals, the difficulties they encounter and their expectations or perceptions. However, some participants gave me excerpts related to managers' training at their organisations that contain some useful, but insufficient, data. But, I needed to know and record the answers of the participants regarding their definition of SDL, the factors/persons who encourage/discourage them etc (as explained above in the research questions). Therefore, the best available source of data was the managers themselves and I needed to interact with them.

However, there were many practical constraints that made me unable to interview the participants face to face and I had to do the interviews through the internet (i.e. using Skype). My friends and acquaintances strongly advised me not to go to Syria to do the interviews because many areas were not safe when I started my pilot interviews in June 2012. There were many security checkpoints even inside the big cities and many people avoided going out after 7 p.m. Therefore, it was not possible to move freely to meet the participants. My friend Hayan, who was the manager of the educational institute through which I could contact the interviewees, informed me that it was difficult for the participants to meet me in the evening because of that situation. Moreover, he said that many participants do not like to have focus groups because some of them live far away from Damascus, the roads were not safe for them after 6 or 7 p.m., they did not like to participate in discussions about other managers' interests and activities (especially if they work in a different sectors or industries) and did not like to mix with nor discuss this topic with those who are not educated like them. Some of them also said that they did not like to speak about training issues, their career development, organisations issues, problems and/or education before strangers because they did not trust them. However, many managers agreed on doing the interviews with me through Skype because that seemed easy for them. They said that they feel more comfortable when they chat with someone through the internet because this would reduce the formalities between us, they do not have to go to a certain place at a certain time to do it, they liked the subject of the research and they trusted that I, as a researcher who is doing a research at a British university, can keep everything they would tell me as confidential.

Pretto and Pocknee (2008) encouraged researchers to use Skype in particular for online interviews because they found that it was the most reliable and preferred method of communication for their research project. Saumure & Given (unknown date) explained that conducting interviews through Skype has numerous advantages: (1) it is inexpensive; (2) it is geographically flexible; (3) it is user-friendly and easy to install and use; (4) Skype's instant messaging function is a useful tool for managing data collection problems and sharing information among participants; and, (5) easy to use audio-recording with it. Probably, as the case is with my research, there is another advantage that should be added which is 'providing both the interviewer and the interviewees with a safe environment to conduct the interviewees when it is not safe for them to meet due to civil wars or the lack of security'. However, they also explained a number of challenges that exist when using Skype: (1) there may be time lags in the conversation, (this can break the flow of an interview; (2) researchers must ensure when using Skype video that the interviewer and interviewee can readily see non-verbal cues; (3) non-verbal communication is lost in audio-only mode; and (4) the technology itself can fail, resulting in disconnection problems, loss of data, etc. Moreover, ethical and technical issues may need to be managed, to ensure that individuals' rights are respected and that everyone feels comfortable participating in the study.

Sullivan (2013) warned the researchers of the issues related to sound quality, microphones, webcam malfunctions and the probably lags in live feed. There were some technical problems that happened during the interviews as the sound was low sometimes and the internet connection was lost once or twice. I could overcome these problems by using speakers to make the sound loud enough later when I listened to the interviews to transcribe them and I could pause the recording when the internet connection was lost till we could restore it to continue the interviews.

Hanna (2012) also added another benefit to conducting interviews through Skype by explaining that the interviewee remains in the comfortable location of their home while being interviewed without the sense the researcher is encroaching on their personal space, and the researcher avoids the feeling of imposing themselves physically within the participant's personal space. Thus, there will be a neutral yet personal location is maintained for both parties throughout the process. This was really a good description of the situation while I conducted the interviews as I felt that I did not have to 'invade' the

interviewees' homes or offices to conduct the interviews, and I felt that they were comfortable in their homes and offices during the interviews.

However, using Skype was useful and it achieved what I wanted, but there were some challenges and difficulties that I had to overcome. Some of the participants did not know how to use Skype. I had to contact three of them and teach them how to use its basic functions within ten or fifteen minutes. Two participants told me that they would ask someone to install Skype for them and teach them how to use it, and my key informant allowed two other participants to do the interviews in his institute as they lived close to it. However, the participants who did not know about Skype liked it and said that they would use it for their communications with their friends and family in future and they may even try to use it for communicating with other companies. The second issue was related to the recording of the interviews. I had to look for good software to record the interviews, learn how to use it and test it in order to record the interviews. I also had to take into consideration the time differences when I made the appointments with the interviewees because Syria is 2 hours ahead of GMT. There were no complaints regarding Skype or the process of interviewing the participants through the internet. The participants told me that they feel that it was like a friendly, informal chat and they felt comfortable during the interviews.

Moreover, it was not possible to use the observational methods, except during the interviews, because it was not possible to watch all the interviewees while they were reading books, attending classes, using the internet to learn etc. Their learning methods varied and many of them were not attending courses or practicing SDL when I met them. Moreover, neither of them kept a diary to record his SDL activities. Interviewing the participants seemed more useful than asking them to answer questionnaires because the interviews were more appealing to them and gave me the chance to ask different types of questions and follow up questions to investigate about any issue they may mention promptly. Furthermore, interviews are more suitable than questionnaires for the interpretivist approach and most of the qualitative researches depend on response to interview questions (Simon, 2011). This required conducting interviews with several managers who have good experience to know their opinions and what they know about SDL.

3.12 Types of interviews

I had to select a suitable type of interview according to the type of questions which I have for the participants. The interview questions aimed at obtaining data from the participants that would achieve the research aims. I prepared the interview questions which were related to the participants' SDL, education, opinions, difficulties they encountered, how they learn etc. However, the topic areas which I covered in the interviews were derived and taken from the topic areas of the research questions. This means that the interview questions covered the participants' SDL practices, motivation, encouragement and discouragement for practicing SDL, their definition of SDL, the factors which influenced their engagement in SDL whether they are related to the work environment or the Syrian context (the guide to the interview questions is in Appendix II). I expected the participants' answers to vary because they would be practicing different methods of SDL, encountering different types of difficulties and to have different circumstances that might have positive or negative influence on their SDL. Therefore, semi-structured interviews were the most suitable type for this research because I needed to ask several questions to each interviewee, amend these questions according to his answers (if necessary) and ask follow up questions when necessary. Semi-structured interviews allow the researcher to use a list of themes and questions that may vary (amended or deleted) from one interview to another. The changes of the interview questions are related to the organisational context and its relationship with the search topic. This type of interviews is suitable for understanding the reasons of the attitudes, opinions and behaviour of the interviews (Saunders et al., 2007), and these characteristics are very suitable for my research aims and questions. The other two types of interviews (i.e. the unstructured and in-depth interviews) were not suitable for my research because unstructured interviews are considered 'informal' and used to explore thoroughly a specific field in general, and they are sometimes referred to as 'in-depth interviews'. Structured interviews are based on predetermined and standardised questionnaires (identical set of questions). They are used to collect quantifiable data and they are also called 'quantitative research interviews' (Saunders et al., 2007).

3.13 Advantages and disadvantages of interviews

Using interviews in my research gave me the flexibility to find the data I want because I could ask direct or indirect questions about SDL and all the issues I liked to know. It also gave me the opportunity to observe the spontaneous behaviour, actions and reactions of the interviews and analyse them (Robson, 2002; Cooper & Schindler, 2003). Moreover, I was able to use follow-up questions and ask for details or explanations if necessary (Cooper & Schindler, 2003). On the other hand, interviews are time consuming (Robson, 2002) as I had to search for the participants who were willing to be interviewed. I had to send many emails to them, speak to them over the phone, explain to them about my research and make appointments with them.

3.14 Number of interviews

Deciding the sample size in qualitative research is done through using a concept called 'theoretical saturation' (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This type of saturation occurs in data collection when:

- (a) regarding a category, no new or relevant data seem to emerge,
 - (b) we have a well-developed category in terms of its properties and dimensions demonstrating variation, and
 - (c) the relationships among categories become well-established and validated.
- (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 212).

Regarding interviews, there is no certain number at which theoretical saturation occurs (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Based on this, I implemented 10 interviews in June/July 2012 and analysed them. They did not give sufficient data that would lead to constructing a model that can be considered a 'novel contribution to knowledge'. The data which resulted from the interview was around 50 pages and I felt that I needed to collect more data after a few months. Therefore, I started to prepare to implement more interviews, but in 2013 the situation in Syria changed dramatically and the violence escalated to an anticipated degree. The economy started to suffer because of the insecurity, the civil war and the international embargo and boycott which were imposed on the Syrian government. I noticed that the set of interviews did not give any data about the civil war or the influence of war on the managers' SDL. The participants did not mention that the civil war had influence on their SDL and their organisations

because the economic situation was still steady or the influence of the civil war was not really visible on businesses at that time. This made me think of changing the questions of the first set of interviews to make them include questions that would give data related to the current situation. I changed the questions and implemented 10 more interviews in March 2014 (which are considered the second set of interviews). They gave me good data that included references and explanations about the influence of the civil war on the managers' SDL as I expected though not all the participants mentioned the influence of the civil war on their SDL directly.

However, the data was sufficient as the second set of interviews gave me more than 100 pages. This enabled me of analysing them, reach useful conclusions and find the basic information which is required to construct a model that is considered a novel contribution to knowledge. The first set of interviews was useful because I could understand many things related to the influence of organisations, managers, colleagues and preferences on the managers' SDL. I could also understand why and how the managers learn, their goals and expectations from practicing SDL in addition to the influence of other factors on their SDL like rewards and promotions. Therefore, I designed the questions of the second set of interviews to cover all the possible parties and elements that might have influence on the managers' SDL (i.e. family, managers, rewards, government etc).

3.15 Overcoming data quality issues of my research

Since I decided to use semi-structured interviews, I had to be aware of a number of data quality issues related to them regarding: reliability, validity, forms of bias and generalisability. In qualitative research, reliability is concerned with whether other researchers would reach similar conclusions if they use the means, and there are also various types of bias that are associated with these types of interviews (Robson, 2002). I used several methods to enhance the validity and reliability of this research because, as Merriam (1998) stated, validity and reliability are the main concern of any research regardless of its type. Merriam and Associates (2002) presented three methods for the qualitative researchers to ensure the consistency and dependency or reliability: triangulation, peer examination and audit trail. Therefore, I used the strategy of peer review for this purpose. I showed the chapters which I finished to one of my colleagues to

conduct a peer review and he gave me good feedback related to the organisation of the thesis, the clarity of the ideas and they also helped me to identify what was missing or vague and what needed to be deleted or amended. Their feedback was very useful to improve the thesis particularly the interpretation of the data and the data analysis.

Moreover, to gain more credibility, I asked one of my colleagues who studied a PhD that used qualitative analysis in his studies to review the coding of the data. The aim of this peer review process was to ensure that the data was coded without bias or mistakes in order to verify that the data was interpreted accurately and honestly. My colleague reviewed four coded interviews (two from the first set of interviews and two from the second set). He worked on coding the interviews which I transcribed into English and used the codes which I had applied, and he searched the data to find any concepts that I did not include in the codes I have used. We did not find any new concepts that were not included in the coding which I implemented and we both noticed that there were some codes that could be used in more than one category. However, we agreed that it is possible to use the same code in more than one category as it would be applicable to do that. I adjusted the codes accordingly and completed the coding process (samples of the coding process are shown in Appendix IV).

I also used three methods to assess the respondents' responses during the interviews. The first one was relying on restatement, elaboration and clarifications presented by the interviewees; the second was comparing the interviewees' responses with each other and the third method was the observations and interactions before and during the interviews. I also implemented an audit trail which included writing and maintaining a detailed description of how I collected the data and coded it and then derived the categories and generated the themes from them. On the other hand, I could gain access to the participants' deep knowledge, opinions and experiences. Moreover, the responsive interaction between me and the participants gave me the ability to probe the meanings, ask clear questions and cover the topic from different perspectives and all that gives this research a good degree of validity (Robson, 2002; Saunders et al., 2007).

Regarding the rigor in the study, Creswell (1998) stated that the researcher should collect multiple forms of data, adequately summarise and spend adequate time in the field to ensure that he applies rigorous data collection procedures and qualitative studies include usually information about the specific amount of time which is spent in the field.

Therefore, I used several verification procedures during the process of data collection, interpretation and presentation of the findings. I used member checks to ensure that the data which I have collected during the interviews in addition to my interpretations and observations were accurate.

My research demanded exploring complex and dynamic circumstances and factors because they are related to the 'self', the organisations, the ability and desire of the managers to be self-directed learners and their concepts and understanding about SDL. Therefore, it would be difficult for another researcher(s) to reveal similar information if he/they try to repeat the same research with the same methods I used. Some researchers suggest writing and retaining notes relating to the research design, the reasons of using the selected strategy and methods and the data obtained; the aim is to leave these notes to other researchers to understand the process which is used and the findings to enable them to reanalyze the data that is collected in the first research (Saunders et al., 2007). I wrote many notes while I was doing this research and I believe they would be useful for other researchers in future if they want to do a similar research.

Concerning the interviewer's bias, I had neither bias towards nor against any of the participants because I do not believe that any form of bias would be useful for my research. Moreover, I like SDL and those who practice it in general and since all the participants practiced SDL, I liked all of them and enjoyed learning about their experiences, practices and opinions. There is also 'interviewee bias'. This bias may happen due to perceptions about the interviewer or in relation to perceived interviewer bias. The interviewee might be sensitive to the unstructured exploration of certain themes and he/she might not reveal a certain aspect of the researched topic because they want to avoid any more probing questions that would intrude on sensitive information if they do not want or cannot, because they are not empowered, to reveal. This would give a 'partial picture' of the discussed topic. The interviewee(s) may also try to show himself/herself (or his/her organisation) as a 'socially desirable' or deform its reality (Saunders et al., 2007). I was aware of this type of bias and the participants were managers who had the authority and the desire to speak voluntarily about their own SDL. The questions I asked them were neither related to sensitive nor confidential information regarding their organisations, career or activities. I did not feel or notice that any of them was embarrassed or avoided answering certain questions. Moreover, I asked them about

the details of their learning activities (i.e. dates, duration, methods etc) to make sure that they were saying the truth without exaggeration (in case they wanted to be flattered, satisfy me or brag about something).

3.16 Level of information supplied to the interviewee

I decided to supply relevant, general information to the participants before the interview because this promotes validity and reliability as the interviewee(s) would have time to think about the requested information and they may use it to find some answers and supporting information from their organisation (Saunders et al., 2007). I applied this method because the interviewees liked to know in advance what I was interested in. When I contacted each interviewee, I informed him about the subject and topics of the interview to satisfy his curiosity and to give him time to think about the topic. Moreover, I told each interviewee in the beginning of each interview about SDL and what I am interested in to avoid any misunderstanding.

3.17 Ethics

I had to understand the meaning of 'research ethics' and the 'researcher's ethical behaviour' in order to know how to behave ethically throughout this research and especially during the interviews. Research ethics are related to "the appropriateness of the researcher's behaviour in relation to the rights of those who become subject of a research project, or who are affected by it" (Saunders et al., 2007, p610). According to this definition, I had to take into consideration the ethical behaviour from the preliminary stage of the research, i.e. planning, throughout the stages of designing the research, collecting data, process and storing the data, analyzing the data till the final stage which is writing and presenting the report. Therefore, I had to design the research to be: methodologically sound and morally defensible to all the involved parties. I also had to take into consideration that some researchers (Saunders et al., 2007; Robson, 2002) believe that the ethical issues of the research in general usually include giving the participants in the research, and all those whom are affected by it, the rights to: maintain their privacy and anonymity, take their consent and give the data voluntarily. They also like to be protected from: deception, embarrassment, stress, harm, discomfort and pain. During the stage of formulating the researcher topic, I mainly cared for a having quality research because all the participants have the right to have a quality research otherwise

they would lose their confidence and interest in it. This required posing a significant question that could be investigated and contributes to the knowledge base (Feuer & Towne, 2002).

During the stage of designing my research and gaining access I had to pay attention to the participants' right to privacy, being fully informed and to quality. Therefore, I had to do all what is necessary to maintain the participants' privacy (including saving the files and data in a secure place, protecting them with passwords and antivirus and firewall etc). These privacy procedures were implemented during the entire processes of the research and after I finished the research. I also had to inform the participants about the research and answer all their questions without concealing anything from them to gain their confidence and trust. I did that when I first contacted them over the phone and through the email and then I repeated this to them at the beginning of each interview to ensure that they understand it very well. Their right to quality research at this stage demanded linking the test questions to relevant theory, applying methods that best address the research questions of interest, basing research on clear chains of inferential reasoning which is supported by a complete coverage of the relevant literature, ensuring that the study design, methods and procedures are sufficiently transparent and having an independent, balanced and objective approach to the research (Feuer & Towne, 2002; Shavelson & Towne, 2002).

Throughout the stage of collecting the data, the proper ethical conduct demanded dealing with the participants' right to safety, the researchers' right to safety, the participants' right to have an informed consent, their right to withdraw and being not deceived in any way, their right to confidentiality/anonymity and their organisations' right to confidentiality and anonymity and quality research. I have informed the participants of all these rights and sought the best method to guaranty their safety as I chose with them the best method to interview them (i.e. via Skype because of the conflict in Syria). Having a quality research at this stage demanded providing sufficient description of the sample and the intervention (Feuer & Towne, 2002). Therefore, I had to describe the sample I studied and my intervention in detail to inform those who participated in my research about all what is related to these aspects because they have the right to know that.

When I reached the stage of processing and storing my data I realised that I need to care for the participants' rights as individuals to processing and storing their data. I processed

the data after I assessed the possible impact of bias and guaranteed the participants' rights of quality research at this stage. This required ensuring the transparency of the used methods and applying an objective approach to dealing with the data in addition to using appropriate and reliable conceptualization (Feuer & Towne, 2002; Shavelson & Towne, 2002).

Finally, the stage of analyzing the data and representing the findings required maintaining the organisations' rights and participants' rights to confidentiality and/ or anonymity and quality research. The latter demanded assessing the possible impact of bias, evaluating alternative explanation for any findings, submitting the research to peer-review and adhering to quality standards for reporting (i.e. make it clear, cogent and complete) (Saunders et al., 2007; Feuer & Towne, 2002; Shavelson & Towne, 2002).

3.18 Data analysis

It was expected in this research to have a large amount of qualitative data from the interviews and observations and this data had to be analysed to generate information from it. This required reducing the accumulated data to a manageable size, writing summaries, searching for patterns and frequencies. The analysis gave answers for the research questions and that achieved the research objectives. I had to analyse, compare and contrast the managers' answers carefully to find answers for the research questions in addition to any other useful conclusions that are related to the subject of the research (Cooper & Schindler, 2010). The data management should be the first step of the analysis process (Creswell, 1998). The collected data were more than six hundred and fifty pages which included the interviews which were approximately 150 pages (the pilot interviews and the final interviews), my notes, emails and journal articles. Dealing and managing such a large amount of data required using a computer to store, categorise, analyse and group the data thematically and efficiently. I had to create folders for each theme to store the related files in it and continuously backup all the data on a flash drive and online. Organising the data helped me to explore and analyse them systematically and rigorously. Dealing with the data required understanding and managing it. Therefore, I had to read what the interviewees said several times and organise them.

The aim of this research was to explore what the Syrian managers know about SDL and how they apply it. There was no hypothesis to start this research with because I only

intended to investigate about the Syrian managers' perceptions and applications of SDL. According to the grounded theory perspective, this process is used to generate or discover a theory as the researcher has to allow a 'substantive' theory to emerge. The theory focuses on how individuals interact in relation to the studied phenomenon and it asserts a plausible relation between concepts and sets of concepts since the theory is derived from the data which is collected from interviews, observations and documents. Having collected the data, the data analysis process begins and it includes identifying categories and finding relationships between them to connect them. Then, the data collection can stop when new conceptualisations emerge and this will be followed by the continuity of the data analysis from open coding (i.e. identifying categories, properties and dimensions) through axial coding (i.e. examining conditions, strategies and consequences) to reach selective coding around an emerging storyline. Finally, the resulting theory can be stated within a narrative framework or as a set of prepositions (Dey, 1999; Robson, 2002; Flick, 2009). 'Constant comparison' refers to the process of a continuous comparison of the instances of the data that are labelled as a particular category with other instances of data. Glaser (1992) believes that the focus of the research emerges from open coding, theoretical sampling and analysing through constant comparison.

A grounded theory approach is a form of social criticism and it offers judgements about identified patterns of social interaction, evolving out of data. Using the grounded theory approach is very useful for exploratory researches and if little is known about a topic and few adequate theories exist to explain or predict a group's behaviour (Nachmias & Nachmias, 1992). This is applicable to my research because little is known about managerial SDL in Syria and we do not have theories that explain how managers in Syria apply SDL.

The aim of the grounded theory is to generate a theory that explains what is central in the data. This requires focusing on finding a 'central core category' that is highly abstract and grounded in the collected and analysed data (Robson, 2002). This can be achieved through three stages:

- 1- Detect the conceptual categories in the data;
- 2- Discover the relationships between these categories;

3- Conceptualise and account for these relationships through finding core categories (Robson, 2002).

This is achieved through using three types of coding:

- Open coding in order to find the categories;
- Axial coding to interconnect these categories; and
- Selective coding to establish the categories or the core categories (Strauss and Corbin, 1998).

The aim is to examine these categories to know if they are workable and suitable for the process of discovering the theory. If they are, the instances accumulate and we reach 'theoretical saturation' (Strauss, 1987; Glaser, 1992). This process is a practical application of the grounded theory and this is described as "the notion of grounded theory is one of careful and exhaustive dialogue between category and data, inspected as carefully for misfits as for fit" (Bliss et al., 1983:198).

Therefore, my initial research questions were developed and changed gradually throughout this research as I proceeded with the data collection. Having finished the data collection process, I started the coding process. This process consisted of three stages:

- **Open coding:** This required splitting the data into discrete sections and each section was considered as a unit regardless of its size. Each 'meaningful' piece of data was given one (or more than one) code (like a label) and it fell within one or more than one conceptual category. The process continued till I arrived to the 'saturation' of categories where I obtained diminished returns in new categories and insights that were yielding (Robson, 2002; Flick, 2009).
- **Axial coding:** This demanded linking the categories which were developed through the process of open coding. Strauss and Corbin (1998) believe that axial coding should lead to understanding the central phenomenon in the data according to its context, the conditions which caused it, the action and interaction strategies which are used to deal with it and their consequences.
- **Selective coding:** Here I selected one aspect as the core category to focus on it. At this stage, the overall picture of what was studied was comprehended and this led to limiting the study to the major relationships which fit with the discovered conceptualisation. The core category remained the focus or the centrepiece of the analysis and when other categories appeared, they were integrated into a single one

at a higher degree of abstraction. Strauss and Corbin (1998) believe that the researcher has to move from the descriptive account to a conceptualisation of the story line and they called this the 'story line' approach.

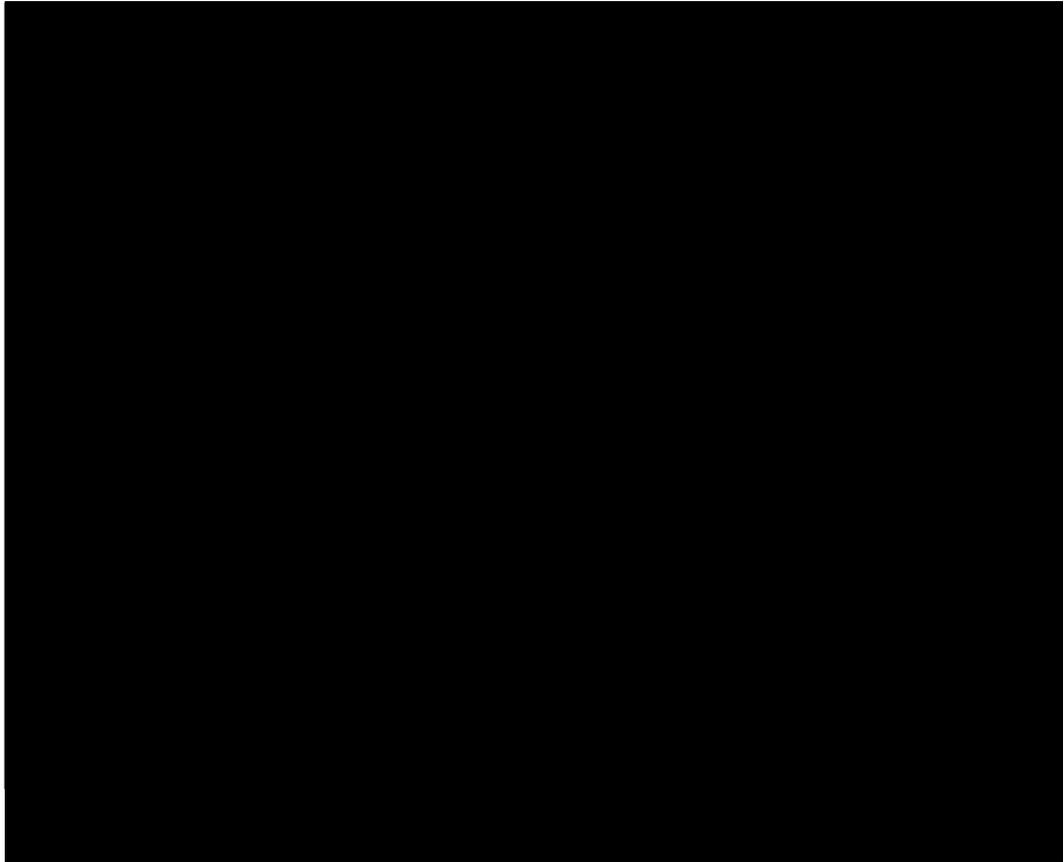
Therefore, having finished transcribing and translating the interviews, I started to read and organise the data and this required giving each interview a number. Then, I started the stage of open coding by dividing the data in each interview into 'chunks of meaning'. The chunks contained different sizes of sentences or phrases and each one of them expressed or contained one or more idea. I gave each chunk a code. As Strauss suggested, codes can be about: (1) conditions, (2) interactions, (3) strategies and tactics and (4) consequence and tactics. Successful coding should contain the collected data and express the studied phenomenon (Strauss, 1987).

Coding is an exploratory problem-solving technique that has no specific formulae to apply; it is considered as an initial step towards a more rigorous and evocative analysis and analysis. Moreover, coding is a process of 'linking', not only labelling. Its aim is to lead the researcher from the existing ideas to all the data which are related to that idea (Richards & Morse, 2007).

Bryman (2008) suggests reading the text as a whole and making notes at the end to understand what it is about and specify the major themes, unusual issues, events etc, and then the cases should be grouped into categories that may reflect the research question(s). Ryan & Bernard (2003) suggest noticing the following concepts to identify themes:

- Repetitions
- Indigenous typologies
- Metaphors and analogies
- Transitions (pauses, sections)
- Similarities and differences
 - Constant comparisons
- Linguistic connectors
 - Because, before, after, next etc
- Missing data (what is omitted)

The aim of the coding process is to reach a theory that is grounded in the data. The following figure shows the processes to be followed to reach the theory from coding:



I started with the first interview (of the first set of interviews) and itemised all its points. I used descriptive coding as it describes what is in the data to make it easier for me to quickly understand what is contained in the data when I read the codes (University of Huddersfield, 2012).

Patton (1990) recommends applying the constant comparative method to analyse all the responses of the respondents as a group. This means that each unit (or chunk) should be compared with the previous unit to enable me of developing a set of categories within which all the units fit. This should be followed by a review of the final categories to examine their overlap and relationships. Finally, a stable list of categories should be produced and each category will be 'saturated' with data and it will be possible to notice the emergent themes. I started to apply this and noticed that the first interview contained 62 codes. According to Bryman's (2008) suggestions, I reviewed these codes again and I discovered that these 62 codes fall into 7 broad categories: SDL, Learned subjects, Learning method, Motivation for SDL, SDL difficulties, Influence of leaders and

Corporate culture. These categories mostly reflect and are closely related to the research questions. Then, I decided to amend the initial codes to make the analysis easier. I gave the 7 broad categories new codes as follows: SDL (Self-directed learning), S (Subjects he learns), M (Method of learning), MO (Motivation), D (Difficulties), L (Leaders) and CC (Corporate Culture). This means that the same code was used for several chunks of data in this interview because they belong to the same category. This amendment reduced the number of codes from 62 to 7 (Appendix V shows samples of the coding process). I reviewed the codes again and I found that it is necessary to allocate numbers after each code to make it distinguished from the similar codes.

Then I noticed that it is possible to classify the main categories into subcategories according to the concepts or ideas which they express. This is called 'hierarchical coding' or 'tree coding' because it is like a tree which gives arranged branches of sub-codes. The codes of this tree are ideally related to their parent by being 'examples of...', 'contexts for...', 'causes of...', 'settings for ...' etc (University of Huddersfield, 2012). The categories and subcategories were as follows:

- Motivation
 - Feelings
 - Improve work
 - Influence of peers
- SDL
 - Not known
 - Meaning
- Difficulties
 - No time
 - Depends on employees
 - Attendance required

I used a new code for the subcategories. This was followed by the stage of producing concepts through combining Key Points into groups.

I continued applying the process of comparing the texts and reducing or changing the codes to the rest of the interviews. There were initial codes which were used and then amended or decreased and then different categories and subcategories emerged accordingly. The nine categories were applicable to all the interviews because they were

strongly related to the research questions. However, many subcategories emerged because other interviewees have given different reasons or explanations.

Having finished concluding the concepts, I started the axial coding process which includes linking the categories which are developed through the process of open coding. I combined some of them to generate 7 categories: Practicing SDL, The Needs for SDL, Managers' Learning Strategy, Applied Learning Methods, Motifs, Obstacles for SDL and Characteristics of Learners.

The stage of selective coding requires selecting one aspect to be the core category to focus on it after comprehending the overall picture of what is studied. I have concluded that the first category, Practicing SDL, is the most important category because if the other categories are 'related' or 'connected' to it, it will be possible to construct a theory that explains to us why the Syrian managers practice or comprehend SDL as they do in reality. This means that we can understand what makes the Syrian managers practice SDL through certain methods and to certain limits. As mentioned earlier, Strauss and Corbin (1998) called this step 'the story line' approach because the researcher moves from descriptive account to a conceptualisation of the story line. The six other categories participate in forming how SDL is practiced, i.e. lead to the seventh category. They are the factors which have influence on practicing SDL by the managers in Syria and related to their SDL.

These categories gave me only two themes and that was not enough to construct a model. I had to do the second set of the interviews to obtain more data. Then, I coded the second set of interviews and analysed them according to the previous method and I reached similar categories that included more data about the current situation and the influence of the civil war on the managers' SDL in Syria. Therefore, I organised the data according to them through looking for patterns, relationships and key themes. This made me capable of implementing the process of testing theories to reach conclusions because the patterns and relationships which I discovered within the data enabled me of developing hypotheses to test them. This test was followed by looking for alternative explanations to develop valid conclusions as the validity of the conclusions can be verified by their ability to withstand alternative explanations in addition to the nature of negative cases (Saunders et al., 2009).

Finally, I could conclude from the previous categories four themes that I used to construct a model (Saldana, 2009) that explains how the managers in Syria practice SDL and shows the factors that have influence on them. This model is considered the 'theory' that is grounded in the data which I obtained from the research through the interviews and observations.

3.19 Limitations

All research studies have their limitations and the aim of this section is to present the main implementation problems of this research that imposed certain limitations on it through an even-handed approach (Cooper & Schindler, 2014). The limitations included a few topics related to the generalisability of the results, avoiding bias and the issue of cultural differences.

The number of the interviewees is relatively small and this makes it impossible to generalise the results of the research because there are thousands of managers in Syria. It is also possible to say that this study is limited by the geographical location because the samples (i.e. interviewees) were not randomly selected to cover all, nor most, of the cities in Syria. The military conflict in Syria also imposed another unavoidable barrier during this research because it prevented me from going there as many people avoided visiting Syria at that time, and it also prevented many managers from coming to the location of the institute to do the interviews there. This deprived me of the ability to meet the interviewees face to face and conducting more useful field work like seeking secondary data from institutes and educational organisations.

I did my best to avoid bias but I have to state that I had been a self-directed learner in Syria and I like SDL and self-directed learners and I sympathise with them because I know their enthusiasm, motives and feelings. I did my best to be neutral, but my neutrality might be unacceptable or doubted by other researchers. Therefore, if another researcher who has bias against SDL and self-directed learners conducts a similar researcher, he/she may reach different conclusions or explanations.

This research does not cover the cultural differences between managerial SDL in Syria and the west. It was not possible for me to compare between the influence of culture on managerial SDL in Syria and managerial SDL in the west because this required explaining

about cultural issues and factors in the west and in Syria and that would make the research too broad and complicated.

3.20 Conclusion

This chapter stated and explained the aims, purposes, objectives, strategy, data collection methods, research questions and methods, ethics, data analysis and limitations of the research. The findings of the data will be presented in the next chapter to explain them in order to understand the data which I obtained from the participants. The data will be categorised and organised throughout various formats to facilitate the process of discussion and analysis which will follow that to reach useful conclusions that would achieve the research aims.

Chapter Four: The Findings

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings which were derived from the data which I collected from the ten interviews which I made with ten different participants who were working as managers at different organisations in Syria. We need to examine first the participants' profiles in details to understand their backgrounds and then their organisations will be presented to understand the internal (or direct) environment within which they work. They narrated their learning stories, but this should be analyzed to select what is considered SDL and what is cannot be considered SDL according to Knowles' definition. They mentioned several elements which encouraged and discouraged their SDL and this data which they gave me about that will help me to analyse the internal and external environments to understand their influence on the managers' SDL.

4.2 Participants' profiles

The following table shows the basic information about each participant and his or her organisation. Regarding the size of the participants' organisations, we can consider the number of their employees as a measure to divide them into medium or big organisations. If we consider the medium size organisation as the one which has between 50 and 249, and the big size organisations are the ones which have at least 250 employees (as indicated below).

Table 3: Participants' profiles

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Present role	Years of management experience	Educational qualifications	Industry	No. of subordinates	Organisation /sector	No. of employees at organisation (size)
Arfan	48	Male	Financial manager	7	MSc in Accounting and Finance	Cosmetics and herbal remedies	35	Ibn Alnafis	359 (big)
Hani	54	Male	General Manager	28	MSc in Mechanical Engineering	Selling, buying cars and car rental	103	Nissan	103 (medium)
Maha	53	Female	Manager of the design and printing department	14	MA in Journalism	Media	65	Tishreen Newspaper (private sector)	394 (big)
Ammar	59	Male	Sales Manager	9	BA in Business Administration	Selling air-condition and heating units	28	Almarkazi	88 (medium)
Sulaiman	54	Male	Manager of the export department	15	BA in Business Administration	Clothes manufacturer	42	400	3100 (big)
Hamzeh	46	Male	IT Department manager	6	BSc in IT	Transportation	52	Syrian Railways (public sector)	773 (big)
Qasem	49	Male	Public relations manager	17	Postgraduate diploma in Marketing	Insurance	45	Syrian Public Establishment for Insurance (public sector)	511 (big)
Samer	48	Male	Registration Manager	7	MA in Law	Private university	48	The Arab European University (private sector)	311 (big)
Saeed	55	Male	HR manager	18	Postgraduate diploma in Education	Public Education	277	Department of Education in Damascus (public sector)	7432 (big)
Marwan	47	Male	Marketing Manager	7	BSc in IT	Selling computers, laptops, scanners, printers etc	23	ITech	142 (medium)

4.3 Participants' learning stories

The first question of the interview made the participants narrate how they started their career and then how they started to learn. It is necessary to examine each participant's story individually to understand different issues like the reasons which made them learn, how did they learn, the support they received, the discouragement, the environment within which they were learning and their aims of learning.

4.3.1 Arfan: Financial Manager

Arfan had a BSc in accounting from Aleppo University in Syria in 1991; he had to do the national service for two years and then he started to work as an accountant at a company in 1993. That company was dealing in fruit in Damascus and it had several branches there. He started to work and gain experience gradually there. At that time there were no computers and there were many folders and files in his office that needed to be organised continuously. After one year, he started to suffer from some problems as the invoices came late from the other branches. This caused delays in his work when he wanted to prepare the monthly budgets as the invoices came by the mail which was not regular at that time. He said:

I have studied accounting at Aleppo University and finished my BSc in 1991. I had to do the army service for two years and then in 1993 I finished my national service and started to work as an accountant for a medium size company;...it was a company that used to buy and sell fruit in different parts in Damascus;...they had five or six branches in different locations in Damascus and its outskirts and they employed me as an accountant;...that was the beginning of my career and I gradually started to gain experience while I was working;...I learnt how to organise the files, ledgers and invoices for all the transactions of the company...the major problem was organizing the invoices...some invoices came late due to negligence and because the mail was not really reliable at that time.

One of his friends advised him to use fax machines to receive the invoices from the other branches quickly. He asked the owner of the company to buy fax machines to use them for that purpose and that solved the problem for him; this made him finish the preparing the monthly budget on time. Therefore, he started to believe in the importance of technology for work, but the paper files problem was not solved at that time. He said:

...then one of my friends suggested using fax machines to send and receive the invoices in the same day...I liked the idea and I asked the general manager to buy several fax machines to use them for sending these invoices. He agreed and I applied that idea immediately...it was like a magical solution for the problem...all the invoices came on time...that really made me finish preparing the monthly budgets on time and accelerated the accounting cycle for me...I also didn't have to wait for the paper invoices to come to by mail or with someone every week...I started to believe in the value of technology since that time...the problem of the paper files and folders remained...that was in 1994.

After a few months, his friends, who were working at other companies, told him how they use some computer programs like Excel to facilitate their work and he liked that. This drew his attention to the importance of computers at work and he realised that the computers will be widely used in future by many organisations. Therefore, he decided to learn how to use the computers and he went to a course and learnt how to use them. Then he had to struggle to convince his manager, the owner of the company, to buy a computer for him. His manager did not want to buy it because it was expensive at that time and he did not know its importance. Arfan explained to him some things about the computers and in the end the manager agreed and bought the computer for him. Arfan organised the files, scanned the documents and saved them in the computers and on disks within a few months. These months gave him good experience in using the computer and his belief in the importance of technology gradually increased. The paper files and folders decreased and he could find any document he wanted immediately as he wanted. He said:

...I heard from my friends that they were using Excel for their accounting processes and Word for typing documents...I could realise that the computers would be an indispensable instrument in the future for any industry...I attended classes in the evenings with my friends at an institute and I learnt how to use the necessary programs for my work...then I could convince the manager of the company to use the computers...in the beginning he didn't want to buy a computer for me because it was very expensive...in the end he bought the computer for me and after that I spent a few months organizing the files and scanning many invoices and reports to save them in the computer and on disks...and my belief in the value of technology gradually increased more and more...anyway...the result was amazing...the paper files and folders became less and I could find any document I wanted within seconds with the computer.

This gave him a feeling that he achieved something very important and great for the company. His manager and co-workers were amazed by what the computer could do; they

admired him and he was very happy and he became confident enough to ask for a salary increase. He said:

...I felt that I have achieved something unique for the company...I have transferred the company from the age of using paper to the age of using computers and disk...the owner of the company was amazed and he really liked me so much...when I saw how the other employees looked at me with admiration at that time, I felt so happy and I enjoyed that feeling...I had a strong confidence so I could ask my manager to give me a salary increase with confidence and I was sure that he wouldn't say no to me...he really accepted and gave me what I wanted.

Arfan felt that he would not have a better position at that company as it was a medium size company. He found a better job at a big transportation company where he believed that he would have better career as he could improve and be promoted later. He started to work as an accountant and he gradually gain experience from the other accountants. He said:

...after nearly two years I found another job as an accountant at a big transportation company in Damascus...I left the first company because it was a medium size company...not a big one and they had only limited chances for me to be promoted and to improve my career...I felt that the big company had more chances for me to improve myself and get better positions...that was correct as I discovered later because when I joined that company I was one of a team of accountants...I have learnt a lot from them within a few months or years.

When the government started to give internet connections in 2001, his company had internet connections and they started to use the internet. Arfan was eager to use the internet and he went to a course to learn how to use it before the company decided to give him internet connection. He had a computer at home and he started to use the internet to read the news, chat etc. His company also taught him how to use other programs later. He said:

...in 2001...the government started to give us internet connections...the company started immediately to use the internet and they sent a few employees and managers to courses to learn how to use the internet...they didn't give me an internet connection at work and they didn't send me to a course at that time because my work didn't require using the internet, but I heard from my friends many things about the benefits of the internet and I learnt how to use it with my friends...we went to a course to learn that and I was very happy to use it...and I could use the internet to see many useful websites...read the news...chat with my friends and other people abroad...and send and receive emails...then that company started to use some more computer programs like MS Access and Sage.

Arfan found his current job at a company that manufactures cosmetics and herbal remedies. He decided after two years to improve his skills to become a branch manager abroad and he studied English courses for nearly nine months. He said:

...in 2006...I found this job...they offered me the position of the financial manager and that is a very good position at this company...it is a big company that manufactures cosmetics and herbal remedies...after two years...I felt that I needed to develop myself and increase my knowledge in the field of accounting...I was thinking of going abroad to become a branch manager in another country because we have branches in other countries...so I started to learn English...I studied intermediate and advanced courses for nearly nine months...I attended classes in the evenings two or three times per week...

He wanted to become a tutor at a private university. Therefore, he studied a Masters degree in accounting and finance at a private university and finished it in 2012. Due to the military conflict in Syria, he could not find a job at that time, and he could not continue to study a PhD for the same reason. He said:

...then in 2010 I thought about becoming a tutor at a university...I studied that Masters degree for two years and I finished it in 2012...I couldn't find a job as a university tutor as I wanted because there is a military conflict in Syria now as you see...the situation changed dramatically and there is a high percentage of unemployment now...I was thinking about studying a PhD, but the situation is bad now as you see and it is not possible to do it now...

4.3.2 Hani: General Manager

Hani finished his BSc in mechanical Engineering and established a company for buying and selling cars in 1985. He could not import, let or sell new cars at that time because it was not allowed to do that by the government. He said:

I have studied mechanical engineering at Damascus University...after I graduated in 1985...I established this company immediately...it was not allowed to import new cars to Syria in the 1980s...and the taxes were very high for selling and buying cars;...and I had only to buy and sell second hand cars at that time;...it was not even possible to let the cars because the law didn't allow us to do it.

The government changed the law later and he could import cars and let them to tourists. He did not need to learn anything in the beginning because he was gaining experience and he had experts for everything. His company grew quickly and he had more employees later. He said:

...then in the 1990s...the government changed laws and they allowed people to import cars and let them with high taxes and other legal restrictions;...I started to import cars and let

them for tourists and that was a profitable job;...in the first few years, I didn't feel I needed to learn anything because I had experts in accounting, buying and marketing;...I was just learning from them how to do some operations and processes;...the company grew gradually because in the beginning I only had seven employees and then in the middle of the 1990s I had nearly 40 employees.

Hani learnt how to use the computers and then he bought computers for his company and he liked the computers because they were very useful for his work. He learnt how to connect the computers, how to save the data and maintain them. He said:

...in the middle of the 1990s, the computers started to spread in Syria and many persons and companies started to use them...I decided to get a computer and I learnt how to use it;...I liked the computers and after a few weeks, I bought five more computers for my company and I asked the managers and employees to learn how to use them...then, gradually we started to connect the computers together and we made a network within the company and I learnt how to protect the data and do the maintenance.

He wanted to manufacture a car and that made him realise that he needed more knowledge about car engines. Therefore, he studied an MSc in mechanical engineering and finished it in 1999. During that period, he started with two of his friends to make an engine and they could make a prototype and then they tried to test it and improve it. He said:

...I wanted to manufacture a car because I liked cars and as you know there were no car manufacturers in Syria at that time;...I decided to study a Masters degree to know more about designing engines,...I registered at Damascus University and I started to study that in 1997 and I finished in 1999;...these two years were very useful for me because my knowledge really increased about the engines of the cars and mechanics in general.

Hani started with two other engineers to design an engine and when they finished, they wanted to test the engine, but they could not test it as they wanted because they needed a licence from the government to drive the car on the roads. They believed the engine was good at tests, but they needed to have a licence to do further tests. He said:

...I started with two other engineers to do some experiments to design a car engine;...we could achieve good results and within two or three years we made a workshop in which we used to work together to design the engine;...we needed to do some more experiments to test the engine and the car for long...very long distances...and high speeds for a long time;...we couldn't do it because we didn't have authorization from the government to drive that car.

Hani and his partners contacted the prime minister himself and they asked for a licence to test the car and they offered partnership with the government. They only had unacceptable

excuses and could not get the licence because of the bureaucracy. They tried to get the licence from Lebanon, but they could not because of the corruption there. He said:

...we contacted the prime minister himself at that time;...we met one of his assistants and we told them that we are ready to give the government any guarantees or implement all their requirements and conditions;...despite that...we didn't get the licence;...they gave us silly excuses...they have put many administrative obstacles and imaginary crazy hurdles in our way until we really got desperate and we tried to go to Lebanon to try to produce the car there;...but there was corruption in the Lebanese government and some managers started to ask us to pay bribery to them to give us the licence; we didn't agree and that ended our project [he sighs];

Hani learnt how to use the internet in 2002 and it was very useful for his work. The government started the internet services in Syria at that time and it was late because other countries had it a few years ago. Hani noticed that most websites were in English and he realised that he needed to improve his English to be able to read them. He studied English at a course and that helped him for communicating with other companies later. He said:

...in 2002, the internet services started in Syria and many businesses started to use the internet;...I studied a course to learn how to use it;...the internet was very useful for me and my company because it facilitated our work and communications with the other companies and customers;...I also noticed after a few months that I need to improve my English to be able to use the internet more efficiently as many websites were in English;...in 2003 I decided to study English at an institute and English was also useful for me for communicating with the foreign companies through the emails and to speak to other people when I travel.

He visited Italy and Germany in 2005 for business and he communicated with the other managers in English. This made him realise that he needs to improve his English to be able to communicate better with them. Therefore, he studied two more English courses. He said:

...in 2005 I went to Italy and Germany to import cars and spare parts and English was the language of communication with the other managers and agents there;...I felt that I really needed to learn more English to be more fluent;...so when I came back to Syria I studied two more advanced courses;...that was really useful for me and then my communication skills increased quickly;...

Hani wanted to invest in other sectors because his company flourished and the revenues increased. He consulted his financial adviser and he advised him to study a diploma in finance and investment to know more about the subject. He did that and then he could understand more about the stock exchange market and other investments. He started to invest in property and when the market collapsed after the security incidents, he withdrew

from the market. However, Hani believed that he benefited from all what he learnt and that knowledge is power. He said:

...the revenue increased and I wanted to invest my capital in other sectors and industries;...I started to read articles about how to invest on the internet and I asked my financial adviser about that;...he told me that it is better to invest in three or four sectors at that time;...but he also advised me to study a diploma in finance and investment to be able to think thoroughly about it;...I followed his advice and studied a diploma in finance and investment in 2009 at a private institute;...the study lasted for nine months and that was very useful for me because I could understand many things about the stock exchange market...shares and investment;...I decided to invest in the property because I felt that it was a very profitable sector;...I started to buy and sell houses and property in the beginning of 2010 and then in 2011 the political incidents started and the property prices started to fall;...I gradually withdrew from that market;...I believe that knowledge gives you power and abilities; that's why I learnt.

4.3.3 Maha: Design and Printing Manager

Maha started to work as a proof-reader at Tishreen newspaper (public sector) and a private tutor in the evenings while she was still studying Arabic at Damascus University. She had her BA in 1985 and there was no vacancy for her to be promoted and she realised that she needed help from someone to be promoted later. She used to visit her colleagues at the design and printing department and she married one of them. After a few years, there was a vacancy at that department and they transferred her to it to work as an assistant and she was responsible for printing the supplement of the newspaper. She said:

...I found a job as a proof-reader at Tishreen newspaper in 1983 and I also used to give Arabic lessons to students in the evenings;...after two years, I graduated from the university and I asked my manager to find a suitable job for me at the newspaper with my BA;...he said that they don't have vacancies for me at that time, but he promised me to give me the priority when any vacancy occurs;...my husband told me that they have a vacancy at that department and he could transfer me to work there because I knew how to do many things;...I started to work as an assistant at that department and I also started to write some articles to publish them in our newspaper.

She was thinking of establishing a newspaper, but her husband told her that they need a capital and a licence for that and they could not do it. The computers came to her department in 1992 and she learnt how to use them through courses. She learnt how to use DOS, Windows, Photoshop and Quark Express in addition to all the machines which were in her department. She said:

...I started to like the newspaper work and I started to think about establishing my own newspaper;...I told my husband and he told me that it is very difficult because we need a capital and then we need a licence and approval from the government;...in 1992 the computers came to our Department and they sent some employees to learn how to use them;...they didn't give me a computer because it was not required from me to use the computers...I liked the computers and I started to learn how to use them from my colleagues and then they sent me to a course because it was better and they told me that I need it to learn the essential programs like DOS and Windows;...I went to a course in the evenings and I learnt how to use the essential programs as they told me...within a few years I learnt how to use several programs like Photoshop and Quark Express and I could learn how to use all the machines in our department they sent me to courses to learn how to use the different programs.

She learnt how to use the internet in 2002 and she became the manager of that department in 2005. She started to think again of her dream of establishing a newspaper as the government changed the laws and allowed some private newspapers to be established, but her husband told her that they need someone to finance them and become their partner. However, she wanted to improve her abilities and skills in the field of journalism. So, she studied a Masters degree in journalism and finished it in 2009. She said:

...in 2002, we had the internet and I also learnt how to use it;...I went to a course to learn that and it was very useful for our work;...in 2005...I became the manager of the design and printing department;...many employees were leaving our department because they used to find better jobs at other organisations;...after the year 2001...I started to think again about my dream of establishing my own newspaper because I saw that the government allowed several private sector newspapers to work in Syria;...and I decided to study a Masters degree in journalism because I liked to be a famous journalist and I thought that the degree would help me to establish my own newspaper later;...I registered at the college of journalism at Damascus university in 2007...I finished in 2009.

Maha started to write articles and publish them at different newspapers and magazines and she wanted to establish her newspaper at that time, but she and her husband did not have funds and they could not find a partner to do it. This made her frustrated and then the demonstration started in 2011 in Syria. She said:

...I started to write my articles and publish them in different newspapers and magazines;...I told my husband again about my dream to establish my own newspaper and he said that we need a capital;...we didn't have capital and we started to look for someone to be our partner;...the difficulty was to find someone who has a capital and agrees with our own views and orientation regarding what to publish in that newspapers;...we couldn't find any partner and that made me frustrated at that time;...in 2011, the demonstrations started in Syria and then the situation became very bad gradually after that.

4.3.4 Marwan: Marketing Manager

Marwan had his BSc in IT in 1991 and he started to teach IT at an institute. He could study English at that institute as his manager allowed him to attend the courses which he liked. He studied English for nearly one year and in 1992 or 1993 he learnt Windows 3.0, Word and Excel from a private tutor to teach them at his institute. He said:

I studied information technology at Damascus university and finished my BSc in 1991;...I started to work as a computer tutor after I graduated immediately at an institute;...I need to improve my English and my manager allowed me to attend English classes to learn as I wanted;...I attended classes for nearly a year and my English became very good;...in 1992 and 1993...Windows 3.0 and Office programs like Word and Excel started to come to Syria;...I quickly learnt how to use them from one of my friends who gave me private lessons;...I had to learn about all these updates so I could teach them to my students continuously.

In 1997, he found another job at a big company and he had more incentives and a better salary. They allowed him to study a course about networking for 3 months. He did not want to be a teacher all his life and he wanted to be transferred to work in the field of networking in that company because it was a better specialisation for him. He learnt how to use the internet in 2001 and 2002 and then he learnt about network security for a few months. He also studied a course about web design for a few months; he learnt 3 programming languages: HTML, PHP and Java. He said:

...in 1997, I found another job at a big transportation company;...I started to work for them as an IT expert and I told them after a few weeks that I need to study a course about networking to be capable of improving their network;...They allowed me to study a course about networks at an institute and within 3 months...I really didn't want to remain a teacher all my life because that was a job without any benefit to me as I wanted to learn more about computers;...I wanted to learn about networking and to work in that field because at that time all the companies started to use the computers and they needed network experts;...in 2001 and 2002 the internet service started in Syria and I immediately learnt how to use the internet;...I studied a course about network security...I studied a course about web design for nine months...I could learn three programming languages like the HTML PHP and Java.

In 2007 two of his friends established a company for selling computers and IT products and they offered him to become their marketing manager. He agreed and he studied 5 courses within 5 years till 2012 (one about the servers, Cisco, MSCE, Linux and Macintosh). He said:

...in 2007...two of my friends established this company and they offered me a job with them as a marketing manager;...since I became the marketing manager at this company in 2007

till now,...I studied five courses;...the first one was to learn about the servers;...the second one was Cisco...for networking;...the third one was the MCSE from Microsoft and the fourth was Linux and the fifth was about Macintosh;...and each one of these courses lasted for a few months and I had these certificates in the end of the course.

He has to read tens of catalogues and manuals every year to succeed in his work because he has to learn about the latest products and promote them to make his organisation succeed. As the technology is continuously changing, there are new products in the market all the time and they have to know about them and this makes the success of the company depend on his learning. He said:

I have to know about our products;...I also have to read tens of catalogues and manuals every year to understand the technical specifications of each product we sell to promote it and sell it efficiently;...you have to understand that our success and even the continuity of our work depend on our ability to learn continuously and updating our knowledge;...I hope you understand now why we learn continuously and we can never stop learning.

4.3.5 Saeed: HR Manager

Saeed had a BA in business in 1983 and then he started to teach business at schools. He also worked in the evenings as a seller at a shop because the salary was not enough. He did not like teaching and he wanted to be promoted to become an inspector. This made him study a postgraduate diploma in education because it was necessary for the promotion and he finished it in 1989. He said:

I started my career as a teacher at schools;...public schools after I graduated from the business college in 1983;...I found another job in the evenings at a shop as a salesman and these two jobs were giving me good income at that time;...I heard that it was possible to be promoted after a few years if I had that postgraduate diploma to become an inspector for the business subject at the Ministry of Education;...that depended on the vacancies and the need of the Ministry for inspectors;...I registered at the college of education at Damascus university and studied that postgraduate diploma and then I finished in 1989.

Then, one of his relatives told him that he can transfer him to the Department of Education if he learns how to use the computers. So, he went to a course for two or three months and learnt that and then his relative transferred him to that Department and he became the assistant of the registration department. He said:

...one of my relatives told me that if I learn how to use the computers, he can transfer me to work at the Department of Education of Damascus because they were planning to use the computers after a few months;...I went to a course and learnt how to use the essential computer programs and how to touch-type;...and the course lasted for nearly two or three months at that time;...in 1993, my relative could transfer me to the Department of

Education of Damascus because I had a postgraduate diploma in education,...they put me at the registration department as an assistant of the head of that department.

His department started a big project to enter the data of the employees, students etc into their system and he participated in it for two years. In 1995, they promoted him to become the manager of that department as a reward for his achievement. Then he was promoted to become the manager of the Personnel Department. He said:

...they started to use the computers and they wanted to start entering the students, employees, schools and other resources as data in their system;...I was responsible for a big project which lasted for nearly two years;...in 1995, we finished the project and we had a big celebration at that department;...I was promoted to become the manager of that department and I stayed there for four years;...then they promoted me to become the Personnel Department manager at the Department of Education of Damascus.

He learnt how to use the internet in 2002 at an institute and started to use it. They changed the name and functions of the department to become the HR department and they had experts who started to do more statistics and researches and he started to learn from the specialists about HR functions. He said:

...in 2002, the internet services started in Syria and I knew about it and I decided to learn how to use it because I had a computer at home and wanted to use the internet to send and receive emails, browse the internet and chat with my friends;... I went to learn how to use the internet at an institute;...in 2007, they decided to change the name of our Personnel Department to become the Human Resource Management Department;...we only had to employ a few human resource management specialists at our department and they started to put some strategic plans for training and development for the employees and we started to become more responsible for doing more statistics and researches about the employees' work, training and demands;...I started to learn from them about the statistics and researches they do in the past few years.

He thought about studying a Masters degree, but he did not study it because he cannot be promoted to higher positions because he is not a member of the ruling party. This was a hurdle that he could not pass to be promoted. He said:

...I was thinking about studying a Masters degree in business administration or a Masters degree in human resource management, but I think that it will not help me to be promoted at this Ministry because they will not make me the Manager of the Department of Education of Damascus or anything like that;...the higher positions all need support from the political leadership;...I mean Al-Baath party;...and I am not a member of the Party;...so this would be a problem for me that can prevent me from occupying these positions in the future.

4.3.6 Ammar: Sales Manager

He had his BA in business administration and he started to work as an assistant of the financial manager in 1981 and then he worked as an assistant of the financial manager at a company and worked there for three years. He gained experience during that period, he did not practice SDL and he was planning to improve his career, but they did not increase his salary. He said:

...I registered at the University at Beirut to study business administration and I graduated from that college in 1980; then I started to look for a job with my degree...in 1981, I found a job at a company which sells cheese and milk products in Homs...I was appointed as an administrative assistant of the financial manager...during that time, I didn't learn anything...I only gained experience and I was planning to improve my career and my situation...they didn't increase my salary as I wanted and I had to look for another job.

He found a better job in 1984 at a bigger company which gave him a better salary and he gained more experience from the other accountants. But, he could not be promoted even if he had a Masters degree because it was a family business and only members of that family could become managers. So, he decided to study a postgraduate diploma to find a better job. He did that and he finished his studies in 1988. Then, he found a job at a company in Saudi Arabia at a company. He said:

...then in 1984, I found a better job at another company...they gave me a better salary and I have to say that that company was bigger and they had more revenues and employees...the problem at that company was related to the fact that it was a 'family business'...the promotions were limited and my own manager was the son of the owner of the company;...that meant that I had to remain as an assistant forever in that company;...even if I had earned a Masters degree or a PhD in accounting;...I started to think that I need to study a postgraduate diploma³ at a university to gain more academic qualifications to find a better job at another company later;...I finished that postgraduate diploma in 1988.

He found a job at a company in Saudi Arabia after a few months and then in 1992 his company bought computers and sent them to courses to learn DOS, Windows, Word, Excel and Access. He studied English in 1996 for 6 months because he felt that English was necessary for using computers and it was very common in Saudi Arabia. In 1997 he decided

³ Many universities at that time in Syria required studying a postgraduate diploma after the Bachelor degree (one year) as a prerequisite for studying the Masters degree.

to go back to Syria because he had enough money to buy a house, and then he found a job at his current company as a manager of the accounting section. He said:

...after a few months a company in Saudi Arabia accepted my application and I went to work there;...in 1992...the company bought computers and we learnt how to use them within a few weeks;...they gave us a course to learn how to use the DOS and Windows operating systems, then later I learnt how to use the Excel program and Access;...in 1996 I decided to learn English;...I registered at a course and had classes for six months in the evenings;...in 1997, I decided to go back to Syria because I had enough money to buy a house here in Damascus;...I didn't want to stay in Saudi Arabia forever;...I came to live in Damascus with my family and started to look for a job again.

He found his current job and then he learnt how to use the internet in 2002. He wanted to study a Masters degree at a private university to teach at a university, but his company promoted him to become the sales manager. The salary was as good as the university tutors' salaries and he decided not to study the Masters degree. He believes that it is difficult for him to study now because of the unstable situation in Syria. He said:

...after a few months I found a job at this company as a manager of the accounting section;...in 2002, we had internet and I immediately learnt how to use the internet...in 2005...I was planning to study a Masters degree in accounting at a private university because I wanted to become a university tutor;...the company decided to promote me to become the sales manager;...the salary was very good and equivalent to the salary of the university tutors;...I said to myself that there is no need to do it and didn't do it;...since 2002 till now, I haven't really studied anything because I didn't feel there is a need to study any more;...I don't think I can study at college now or teach at a college because the colleges have been suffering from the civil war for nearly three years.

4.3.7 Hamzeh: IT Manager

Hamzeh had his BSc in IT in 1992 and he started to work as a teacher at an institute. He wanted to become a computer programmer and he studied two or three programming languages from books for nearly 18 months. After four years he found a better job at the Ministry of Defence as an IT expert. He said:

I have studied a BSc in IT...and I graduated in 1992;...I could find a job at an institute to teach the students how to use the computers;...the income was not enough and I had to give some students private lessons in the evenings and weekends;...I wanted to become a computer programmer and I was interested in programming languages;...I started to study some programming languages to become a computer programmer later;...I bought books and studied two or three programming languages for nearly 18 months;...after four years I found another job at the Ministry of Defence as an IT expert.

He did not feel comfortable at that job because the officers treated him like a soldier and they refused to let him go to courses to increase his knowledge and skills. So, he did not want to renew his contract with them and he had to ask one of his relatives to speak with his general to release him. He studied several programming languages during that period from books at his own expense in the evenings. Then one of his relatives found another job for him at the Syrian Railways. He said:

...the officers refused to let me study some courses I wanted and it was difficult to convince them;...I used to go to learn some programming languages at that time in the evening and I didn't tell them that I knew these programming languages because I paid to learn them and they refused to help me to pay for that;...I learnt how to use the internet with my friends at an institute;...I needed to study some programming languages which are useful for designing websites like Java, HTML, PHP and C;...when my contract finished in 2001, I didn't want to renew it with them,...then one of my relatives also helped me to work as an IT expert for the Syrian Railways.

After three years he was promoted to become the deputy of the IT manager of that department. He continued learning about the updates of the programs which he had learnt from the internet or from books. His organisation sent him to learn about network security in 2004 and about networks in 2005. In 2007 he became the manager of the IT department and he could study three more courses about networking and programming within the past five years. Their budget is getting less and they have difficulties now in sending all the employees to courses. He said:

...after three years, I had good experience and they promoted me to become the deputy of manager of the IT department;...I had to learn about the updates of the programming languages which I had studied because there are updates every few months or years...I had to study that from the internet or from books;...they sent me to study a course about the network security in 2004 and then another course about networks in 2005;...in 2007 my manager resigned...and they promoted me to become the manager of the IT department;...I felt that I have more freedom to learn and do what I want;...for this reason I could study three computer courses that were necessary for my work about networking and programming in the past five years...the budget is getting less and less now after the security problems.

4.3.8 Qasem: Public Relations Manager

Qasem had a BA in business administration in 1988 and continued to study a postgraduate diploma in marketing. He finished the diploma in 1989 and then he found a job as an

employee at the Establishment of Insurance (public sector). He became an employee at the contracts department where he was responsible for checking and amending contracts, and in 1993 his brother bought a computer and he liked it and went to a course to learn how to use it. He said:

I had my BA in business administration in 1988 and then I registered to study a postgraduate diploma in marketing;...I finished the postgraduate diploma in 1989;...in 1991 I started to work as an employee at this establishment;...I was responsible for checking and amending the contracts and reviewing them to see if they are abiding by the regulations;...in 1993...I had a course and learnt how to use the DOS program and then Windows and Word. I enjoyed learning how to use these programs.

He realised that there were fears of using computers at the public sector, but he liked the computers because they make work easier. He became the manager of that department in 1997 and in 2002 he learnt how to use the internet and how to protect the computer from viruses through courses. After four years he was promoted to become the deputy of the public relations manager. He said:

...Many employees and managers were afraid that if the computers are used in their departments, they would lose their jobs,...After that I was promoted to become the manager of that department in 1997;...In 2002, the government started to give the people internet connections and we had internet at our department;...then I learnt how to use the internet as they sent us to course to learn how to use the internet;...after a few months they also gave us a course about how to protect the computers from viruses and how to use the new programs...after four years I was promoted to become the deputy of the public relations manager.

His establishment sent him to study English courses in 2007 and 2008, and then in 2010 he became the manager of the public relations department. His organisation takes into consideration only the university degrees for promotions and they sometimes send them to study certain courses as needed. He does not think that he needs more learning now and it is not safe to learn at colleges in Syria because of the security problems. He said:

...they decided to send us to a course to study English in 2007 and 2008;...in 2010 they promoted me and I became the manager of this department;...the ministry will only take into consideration university degrees like Masters or PhDs for promotion;...there are no financial rewards for learning things like computer programs or languages usually...sometimes our establishment decides that certain employees or managers should study a certain course.

He feels that he does not need to learn anything now to be promoted and there is insecurity now in the country. His organisation has lost a lot during the war and now they have many

difficulties because of it and they are learning how to deal with a new situation and type of work. He said:

...I don't need to learn anything now to be promoted and I don't think it's safe anyway to learn anything at colleges now because of the war now...our establishment has lost a lot because of the war and now we have many cases in courts and we refuse to give insurance to many parties now because of the war;...we are learning now how to amend the insurance contracts to be suitable and executable during the civil war and that's very difficult because it's very difficult to explain to the clients about all the details which we cover or don't cover;...I am learning now how to avoid these predicaments and this really causes headache to us in our department.

4.3.9 Sulaiman: Export Manager

Sulaiman started to work as a salesman at a company that sold clothes and then he had his BA in business administration in 1987. He had to look for another job because it was not possible for him to be promoted at that company. He found a job at the Ministry of Industry. He became the assistant of the manager of the Personnel Department. He did not like that job because the salary was not enough and there were no incentives. He said:

...I was studying business administration at Damascus university,...in 1981...I was still at the second year, I started to work as a salesman at a company that used to sell clothes;...when I graduated in 1987 I knew that I wouldn't have any promotion or incentives for the degree I had because that company was not giving us anything for earning degrees,...I had to look for another job and after a few months I found a job at the ministry of industry;...I became the assistant of the manager of Personnel Department and I stayed in that job for four and a half years;...till 1993...I didn't like that job because the salary was not enough and there were no incentives.

He could not study a Masters degree to be promoted because his BA average was not enough to study at a public university and there were no private universities in Syria at that time. One of his friends told him that he could find a better job for him if he could learn how to use the computers. He did it and then his friend helped him to work at his current company as an assistant of the sales manager. He said:

...it was not possible for me to study a Masters degree because I didn't have the required average when I got my BA;...and there were no private universities to study at one of them;...then a friend of mine told me that it is possible for him to find a good job for me at this company if I learnt how to use the computer;...I had a course and learnt how to use the computer within a few weeks and he found a job for me at this company;...I started to work for this company as an assistant of the sales manager.

After four years, they promoted him to become the sales manager. In 2002, he learnt how to use the internet before his company used it. In 2005, they promoted him to become a manager of a branch. He did not like that position and he tried to find another job or establish his own company, but he could not. He studied English for a few months because he wanted to become export manager and the board of directors appointed him in the position because his English was good. He said:

...then they promoted me because I had sufficient experience to become the sales manager;...that was in 1998...in 2002 the internet services started in Syria;...I learnt how to use it before the company give us internet connections;...I went to a course and learnt how to use the internet...in 2005 I was promoted to become the general manager of that branch;...I started to think about finding another job or starting my own business;...there were two or three other positions that I could ask the board of directors to appoint me at one of them;...the first one was this position which is the export manager;...the first position required good writing and reading skills in English;...I decided to learn English and I registered at a course in the evenings.

He used the internet to look up words in dictionaries and he also studied English from books to learn the commercial vocabularies. The board of directors promoted him to that job because he had good qualifications later. Since 2008 or 2009, he has not learnt anything because he has not felt that he needed to learn anything more. He said:

...I also started to use the internet to look up words in dictionaries and I bought some books which have commercial English/Arabic texts and sales contracts to learn the commercial vocabulary;...after a few months I had certificates;...after nearly six months I finished two advanced courses and my English improved;...I could understand the commercial texts and terminology of the contracts;...then I produced my certificates to the board of directors and I told them that I like to become the export manager as the export manager was about to be promoted at that time;...the board of directors accepted that and they appointed me in his position in 2009;...I haven't learnt anything since the end of 2008 or 2009...I am not thinking of learning anything now because I don't feel I need to learn any other skills.

4.3.10 Samer: Registration Manager

Samer had his BA in law in 1998 and he found a job later at the Ministry of Justice as an assistant of the manager of the registry of the Ministry. The salary was low and he had to accept it because he could not find another job. He did not like that job and he could not learn anything while he was there and not possible to be promoted whatever he learnt. He said:

I have studied a BA in Law at the Arab university in Lebanon and graduated in 1988;...in 1990...I finished the army service and found a job at the Ministry of Justice as an assistant of

the manager of the registry in Damascus;...that was a job at the public sector and the salary was not good at all at that time;...I had to accept it because I didn't find another job anywhere else;...I was responsible for registering the complaints and received mail and referring them for the concerned department or party;...it was not possible anyway to be promoted even if I studied English or earned a diploma,...and it was not possible for me to study a Masters degree at that time because the Masters degree demanded attendance and studying for nearly two years at college.

After 3 years, he learnt how to use the computers and found a better job at a company that manufactured and sold desserts. He was responsible for preparing and signing contracts with other parties and the legal cases of that company. In 2002, the company sent him to a course to learn how to use the internet. He said:

...after more than 3 years someone advised me to learn how to use computers;...I had a course and learnt how to use Windows and Word and then I found a job at a company that manufactured and sold desserts;...I was responsible for preparing and signing contracts with the other companies and employment contracts;...and I was responsible for dealing with the lawyers too;...the salary was better and I felt happy because it was related to my specialization that;...I liked the Word program because it was better than using the typewriter to write the contracts and the other documents;...After a few years, in 2002...they sent us to a course to learn how to use it.

In 2007, he found his current job (a registration manager at a private university). He is responsible for 48 employees and he has to check the documents for all the students who register at the university and register them on time. Though it is a routine job, but many problems may arise if it is not done properly and timely. He said:

...I found a better job at this university as the registration manager;...in 2007;...I have 48 employees in my department and we are responsible for registering the new students at the university and processing their applications and controlling their attendance and checking their documents...It seems like a routine, but many problems may happen because many documents may arrive late or may not be sealed properly from the competent authorities.

In 2012, the Dean told him that if he studies a Masters degree, he can teach at the university. This would increase his salary by 50% and he can keep his position and teach at the same time. He accepted the offer and he will finish his studies this year. He said:

...the Dean told me that I can register at the Law College and attend classes if I wanted and they would give that study as free of charge because I have served them well and because they would accept me as a lecturer at the college when I graduate. It was a very good offer and I accepted it. I registered last year and I will finish the Masters degree next year;...my salary will increase in this case maybe 50%.

4.4 Participants' definition of SDL

I asked the interviewees about their definitions of SDL to see what they know about it or how do they describe or define it. Three of the interviewees gave very short definition which does not really add much to the words of the term itself. Qasem said: "it means that I learn something by myself." Sulaiman said: "it means that I will be directing my learning...managing it;" Arfan said: "it means learning something by yourself...you direct yourself to learn something that you want as you want." It seems that these definitions were taken or derived from the term itself (i.e. self-directed learning) without adding anything to it. Three other interviewees added the element of 'selection' to the previous explanation. They believe that the self-directed learner can only select what he likes to learn by himself. Hani said: "it means that the person will be responsible for his own studies...he will select what is suitable for him to learn." Maha said: "self-directed learning means that the person will be managing his own learning;...he decides what to learn and how." Marwan said: "it means that...the learner can decide and select what he wants to learn." The other four participants added the element of 'studying alone' or 'learning without a teacher'. Hamzeh said: "I should learn what I need or want by myself...I will be responsible for learning what I need or want without any help from others." Saeed said: "the person should be learning by himself, without someone else to teach him or give him directions about when or what to learn." Ammar said: "he will be learning alone without a teacher...yes...he will be learning something he wants by himself without going to schools or courses." Samer said: "it means that the person learns by himself;...without a teacher nor schools or universities." It is not clear to me why they had this idea from; it could be their own understanding of the term. However, it is noticed that none of them gave a detailed definition that is similar to Knowles' definition. Therefore, I gave them Knowles' definition and told them that it is the definition which I adopted for this research.

4.5 Participants' SDL

The interviewees have mentioned several methods they apply to learn and it is necessary to think about them and classify them to know if they are considered SDL or not. Therefore, I need criteria to decide what is considered SDL and what is not.

4.5.1 Criteria for identifying SDL

This requires applying Knowles' definition of SDL and measuring these methods accordingly and it helps me to explain my understanding of SDL. Knowles' definition mentions a process that contains 6 steps:

- I. The initiative to diagnose the learning needs (with or without help of others)
- II. Formulating learning goals
- III. Identifying human and material resources for learning
- IV. Choosing the appropriate learning strategy
- V. Implementing the learning strategy
- VI. Evaluating the learning outcomes

Knowles' definition seems comprehensive and many other definitions agree with him on the same steps regardless of the details. Therefore, I will mention the methods or cases which the interviewees have mentioned and explain why they are considered SDL or not:

- When an organisation decided to send its managers to a course or to teach them a certain skill, do we consider this managerial SDL? This is not considered SDL because, according to Knowles' definition, the learner should decide by himself/herself what he/she wants to learn.
- When an interviewee mentioned that he/she reads sometimes about certain subjects on the internet, do we consider this managerial SDL? I do not consider this SDL because this could be done randomly while they are browsing the internet (i.e. without planning) and because it might be just adding some information to what they already know about certain subjects. For example, if someone reads the news about political or economic incidents, we cannot consider this SDL because in this case all those who watch or read the daily news will be SDL.
- When an interviewee said that someone has helped him/her to decide to learn or to know what to learn (i.e. a friend, manager, colleague etc), do we consider this managerial SDL? This is considered learning if they do all the rest

of the steps because Knowles' definition (step 1) states that the initiative can be done with or without help from others.

- When an interviewee said that he/she decided to learn about a certain subject and they obtain books and information about it from the internet, or they learned it by themselves while they are working, do we consider this managerial SDL? This is considered SDL because it is a planned form of learning (initiative, formulation, identification of resources, selection and implementation), the evaluation is done by the learner himself. However, Knowles' definition does not specify how the evaluation is done and as long as the learner is satisfied by the outcome, it means that he did the evaluation and it was satisfactory. For example, Maha said that she learnt how to use the machines which are in her department (probably through practicing that with her co-workers' supervision), this will be considered SDL because it seems that using machines does not need evaluation done by others.
- When an interviewee mentioned that he/she studied a subject while they were employees, not managers, do we consider this managerial SDL? This will not be considered as managerial SDL because they were not managers.

This is a brief explanation about the cases of learning which different interviewees mentioned. Knowles' definition has helped me to identify the forms which are considered SDL and the cases which cannot be considered SDL.

4.5.2 Examining the participants' SDL

It is possible now to re-examine what each interviewee learnt to decide what is considered SDL and what is not considered SDL according to the previous criteria. Table 4 shows the participants' learning and SDL according to the previous criteria.

Table 4: The participants' learning and SDL

Participant	His/her learning	What is considered managerial SDL
Arfan	a. he went to a course to learn how to use the basic programs (as an employee)	I consider only d and e as managerial SDL because

	<p>b. in 2001 he went to a course to learn how to use the internet (as an employee)</p> <p>c. the company sent him to courses to learn MS Access and Sage (as an employee)</p> <p>d. he (as a manager) went to courses to study English courses for nine months</p> <p>e. he (as a manager) studied a Masters in accounting and finished in 2012</p>	when he studied a, b and c , he was not a manager yet.
Hani	<p>a. In 1993 he learnt how to use the basic computer programs</p> <p>b. In 1999 he had a Masters degree in mechanical engineering</p> <p>c. In 2002 he learnt how to use the internet</p> <p>d. In 2003 he studied a course to learn English</p> <p>e. In 2005 he studied 2 more English courses</p> <p>f. In 2009 he studied a diploma about finance and investment for 9 months</p> <p>g. He learnt for his financial manager (private lessons) and garage manager</p>	All what he studied is considered SDL because it meets all the criteria for SDL.
Maha	<p>a. She learnt from her colleagues how to use the computers</p> <p>b. Her organisation sent her to learn DOS and Windows</p> <p>c. She went to a course and learnt how to use the internet</p> <p>d. She learnt how to use Photoshop, Quark Express and all the machines which were in her department</p> <p>e. She studied a Masters degree in journalism</p>	Only e is considered SDL because she learnt a, b, c and d while she was an employee.
Hamzeh	<p>a. He studied programming languages from books within 18 months</p> <p>b. He learnt programming languages by himself and he paid for it</p> <p>c. He studied a course to learn how to design websites including programming languages PHP, C and HTML</p> <p>d. In 2004 and 2005 they sent him to study a course about network security and networks</p> <p>e. He studied 3 computer courses about networking and programming in the past 5 years</p>	Only e is considered SDL because he was not a manager when he studied a, b, c and d .
Sulaiman	<p>a. He learnt how to use the computers by himself (as an employee)</p> <p>b. In 2002 he went to a course to learn how to use the internet</p> <p>c. He studied English courses to be promoted (an intermediate course + 2 advanced courses for six months)</p>	Only b and c are considered SDL because he was a manager at that time.
Marwan	<p>a. He studied English at the institute for a year</p> <p>b. In 1992 he learnt the basic programs</p> <p>c. He studied a course about networking for 3 months</p> <p>d. In 2001 he learnt how to use the Internet then a course about web design; he learnt 3 programming languages</p> <p>e. He studied 5 courses between 2007 and 2012 (Servers + Cisco + MCSE + Linux + Macintosh)</p>	Only e is considered SDL because he was not a manager before that.
Saeed	<p>a. In 1989 he had a postgraduate diploma in education</p> <p>b. In 1992 he learnt how to use the computer</p> <p>c. In 2002 he learnt how to use the internet</p>	Only c is considered SDL because he was not a manager before that.
Qasem	<p>a. In 1989 he had a postgraduate diploma in marketing</p> <p>b. In 1993 he learnt how to use the computer (DOS +</p>	None of these is considered SDL because

	Windows Excel) c. In 2002 his organisation sent him to a course to learn how to use the internet d. They sent him to a course about protecting the computer from viruses (security) e. They sent him to courses about international relations or protocol f. 2007 and 2008 his organisation sent him to a course to learn English	he was not a manager when he learnt a & b , and his organisation sent him to study the courses in c and d .
Samer	a. In 2002, his organisation sent him to learn how to use the internet b. In 2012 he started to study a Masters degree in the International Law (not finished yet) at his university	Only b is considered SDL because he was a manager at that time.
Ammar	a. In 1988 he studied a postgraduate diploma in accounting b. In 1992 the company sent him to learn how to use the computers (DOS + Windows + Excel) c. In 1996 he studied a course for six months to learn English d. In 2002 he learnt how to use the internet	None of these is not considered SDL because he was not a manager when he learnt it.

Table 4 shows that Qasem and Ammar did not practice SDL as managers. This seems strange and we need to explain some issues that are related to it. We can notice that they both practiced SDL before becoming managers (they both had postgraduate diplomas and studied other courses as shown in Table 4), but they did not practice SDL after they became managers. However, Qasem's organisation sent him to study some courses as they needed and Ammar only how to use the internet after he became a manager (as his organisation wanted). Probably Qasem relied completely on his organisation to decide the courses he should study to be promoted and successful at his work or probably he felt so comfortable at his work so he did not want to find another job and made him decide not to practice SDL as he did not need it. Regarding Ammar, it is not really clear why he did not practice SDL. Probably he also felt comfortable at his work and did not want to find another job.

Moreover, if we look at this issue from a different perspective, it is not known whether the individual's SDL readiness is subject to changes (i.e. increase or decrease) or whether there are certain factors that have influence on it. Therefore, it is not clear whether Qasem and Ammar's SDL readiness decreased gradually within a few years or suddenly after they became managers. Probably there are certain factors that make some individuals have 'inertia' regarding practicing SDL. It is not possible to know the exact reasons that made them stop practicing SDL after becoming managers and, unfortunately, it was not possible to ask them during the interviews about the reasons that made them stop practicing SDL.

I asked my key informant about this issue and he told me that some managers may never like to find another job because they might feel so comfortable at their work for different reasons. For example, some managers may have certain ‘informal privileges’ like take ‘commissions’⁴ (publically or secretly) from some transactions, permissions to take many days off, excellent relationships with many other managers or VIPs and the ability to use their organisations’ resources as they want⁵. This may make them decide to stay in their positions and refuse to find other jobs elsewhere even if these jobs have ‘apparently’ excellent benefits. In other words, some managers may find that SDL is not useful for them as it may not achieve their aims and this may make them stop practicing SDL. This idea is also in accordance with what I concluded from this research regarding considering SDL as an instrument to achieve aims by the Syrian managers (as explained in Chapter 5).

4.5.3 SDL audit

In order to understand the participants’ SDL from a ‘quantitative’ point of view which will enable us of comparing their levels of engagement in SDL, it will be useful to use a certain type of quantitative criterion. The best method to understand that is to calculate the months which each participant spent in SDL while he was a manager. This will help me to know who studied more than the others and how many months each one spent learning a certain subject. Table 5 shows how many months each participant spent in learning.

Table 5: SDL audit

Name	Subject and number of months	Total (months)
Arfan	English courses for 9 months	9
Sulaiman	Course to use the internet + English courses for 9 months	9
Hani	Courses about using the basic computer programs ⁶ + Masters + a course to learn how to use the internet + 3 course to learn English (9) months + Diploma in investment for 9 months	(3 + 24 + 1 + 9 + 9) = 46

⁴ This may include bribery.

⁵ This may include using the organisation’s cars, reputation and other resources for their own personal usage.

⁶ The duration of each course to learn one computer program like Word, DOS or Excel will be considered 1 month only.

Marwan	5 courses between 2007 and 2012 (Servers + Cisco + MCSE + Linux + Macintosh) ⁷	15
Ammar	Nothing	0
Samer	Masters (will finish in September 2014)	18
Qasem	Nothing	0
Saeed	A course to learn how to use the internet	1
Maha	Masters (2 years)	24
Hamzeh	3 computer courses about networks and programming (9 months)	9

4.5.4 SDL subjects

Table 6 shows the subjects which the participants have studied through SDL.

Table 6: The participants' SDL subjects

Name	Computers	Investment	Law	Journalism	English
Arfan	X	X	X	X	9 months
Sulaiman	1 month	X	X	X	9 months
Hani	4 months	9 months	X	X	9 months
Marwan	15	X	X	X	X
Ammar	X	X	X	X	X
Samer	X	X	18	X	X
Qasem	X	X	X	X	X
Saeed	1 month	X	X	X	X
Maha	X	X	X	24	X
Hamzeh	9 months	X	X	X	X
Total	30	9	18	24	27

4.6 Participants' Methods

The third question aimed at understanding the participants' methods and experiences that they consider to be SDL or not to be SDL. The participants used different methods to learn what they wanted and some of them explained in details why he selected these methods

⁷ The duration of each one of these courses will be considered 3 months though it is not clear exactly how long he studied because it is possible to study them within longer or shorter periods.

and did not use the other methods. We need to examine these methods to see why they selected them and their opinions about them.

4.6.1 Classes

Most of the participants mentioned that they studied different subjects through attending classes like English and computer programs. The importance and characteristics of classes were mainly presented by the participants from two perspectives: the reasons for preferring classes and the advantages of classes when compared with other methods. Understanding these issues will help us to know the participant's views regarding classes advantages. Though attending classes seems a common method of learning, each one of the participants who practiced it had his or her own point of view about it.

a- The reasons for preferring classes: Arfan, Hani, Maha and Sulaiman explained in detail why they prefer classes and each one of them had different reasons for that. Table 7 shows the reasons which these participants mentioned for preferring attending classes.

Table 7: Reasons for preferring classes

Participant	Reasons for preferring classes
Arfan	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1- He was convinced that classes have many benefits for him than any other method 2- He can communicate directly with the tutor and the other students 3- He can learn from the tutor and from the student's mistakes. 4- He knows that when the tutor explains something on the board, he will not forget it quickly and he will have better interaction with the tutor. 5- He will be committed to attend them at certain hours and days and this is like a method of time management which might be difficult for him if he studies alone. 6- He needs certificates to show his employer(s) what he studied.
Hani	He studied the Masters degree because he believed that it was the best method to gain more knowledge about car engines.
Maha	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1-Maha studied her Masters degree because she felt that she needed to improve her skills in writing articles as she had an aim to establish her own newspaper. 2-There were no other methods that could teach her how to write better articles and manage your own newspaper except this method. 3-She believes that this method really helped her to write better articles though she could not achieve her aim later (i.e. to establish her newspaper). 4-While she was studying, she met some colleagues who taught her many things about how to manage a newspaper.
Sulaiman	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1-Sulaiman attended classes to improve his English and learn how to use the computers and the internet. 2- The course was necessary to remember the grammar and basic vocabulary, to communicate directly with the tutor and ask him about pronunciation and grammar whenever he needed. 3- He needed to obtain the certificate to present them to his company to be promoted later.

b- **Comparing classes with other methods:** Hani, Marwan and Samer compared attending classes with other methods like distance learning, reading books and learning through the net. Table 8 shows how each one of these participants compared classes with the other methods of learning.

Table 8: Comparing classes with other methods of learning

Participant	Comparing classes with other methods of learning
Hani	1- He could not use distance learning because the government did not allow any university at that time to apply this method in Syria. 2- He also did not want to learn English through the internet because he wanted to practice listening and speaking with a qualified tutor who could interact directly with him, correct his mistakes and give him advice.
Marwan	1- He believes that each subject or program requires selecting a certain method or the best, easiest or cheapest method for him. 2- Regarding the cost, he considers that reading books or learning through the internet is the cheapest and easiest method. If he cannot apply this method, he has to go to a class or ask a friend to teach him. 3- It is necessary for him to have a tutor to learn programming languages because he needs a tutor to correct his mistakes and give him continuous advice.
Samer	1- He prefers the 'classical' method of learning (i.e. attending classes) because he used to apply it since he was in school, it seems a good method for him and he does not like to change it. 2- He does not like using the internet for learning or the distance learning methods because it is difficult or impossible for him to organise his time to study a few hours every week. 3- He does not like sitting for long hours at the computer to read e-books or websites.

4.6.2 The internet

Some participants mentioned that they used the internet to learn. However, we can explain the role of the internet in the participants' SDL into four categories: (a) using the internet directly to learn, (b) using the internet as a supplement for other learning methods, (c) using the internet as a method of communication with their tutors and colleagues, and (d) the internet instigated the participants to learn English. Understanding these methods will enable us of examining thoroughly the participants' usage of the internet in the process of their SDL.

- a- **Using the internet directly to learn:** Six participants mentioned that they used the internet to learn directly from websites and to read articles and books. Table 9 shows what each one of these participants learned through the internet.

Table 9: What the participants have learnt through the internet

Participant	Method of learning through the internet
Arfan	1- Learn from different useful websites. 2- Send and receive emails. 3- Download files and programs.
Hani	1- He used the internet to read articles about how to invest as he wanted to invest in other sectors. 2- He also used the internet to download articles and e-books.
Hamzeh	He had to learn about the updates of the programming languages via the internet.
Maha	1- She used the internet to communicate with her tutor and colleagues continuously. 2- She used to read many different articles and that was useful for her studies.
Marwan	1- He used the internet to update his knowledge and skills. 2- It was not possible for him to learn everything he wanted from one source because sometimes he has to learn about the new software versions quickly and the internet is the only available method for that. 3- Since he is a marketing manager, he has to learn about the products and services very quickly before his company competitors know about that and promote them in the market before him. 4- The internet is the fastest method for him to learn about that. 5- Reading books and learning via the internet are considered the best, easiest and cheapest methods and he prefers to use them first and when he cannot learn what he wants through them, he uses other methods.
Sulaiman	1- He used the internet to watch the stock exchange market, see the investments, get the information from websites. 2- He also used it to look up words in dictionaries, study English and study books which contained commercial texts.

- b- **Using the internet as a supplement for other learning methods:** Hani mentioned that he used the internet while he was studying English at a course to find the meanings of the new words. He said:

...The internet was useful for me to communicate with my colleagues and tutors when I was studying English and to find the meaning of new words from good English/Arabic dictionaries.

- c- **Using the internet for communication:** three participants used the internet to communicate with their colleagues and friends while they were learning (it seems that most of these communications were for learning purposes).

Table 10: How the participants have used the internet for communication

Participant	Method of using the internet for communication
Samer	He mainly uses the internet to send and receive emails.
Hani	He used the internet for communicating with his tutor and colleagues while he was studying English.
Maha	She used it to communicate with her tutor and colleagues continuously.

d- The internet instigated the participants to learn English: When Hani started to use the internet, he realised that he needed to improve his English because he found that there were many sites in English; for this reason, he decided to improve his English and went to study a course. He said:

...I also noticed after a few months that I need to improve my English to be able to use the internet more efficiently as many websites were in English;...so...in 2003 I decided to study English at an institute.

4.6.3 Other methods

Three participants mentioned that they used private tutors, read some books to learn about certain subjects and they also learnt from their friends and colleagues. Table 11 shows the other methods which they used for practicing SDL:

Table 11: Other methods for practicing SDL.

Participant	Other methods for practicing SDL
Hani	Private tutor (his financial manager)
Marwan	1- Friends. 2- Books. 3- Private tutors.
Maha	1- Her colleagues started to teach her how to use the computer at work and then she went to a course to continue that. 2- She also learnt while she was studying at college from her colleagues many things about managing work at private sector newspapers and how to establish an online newspaper. 3- Her colleagues helped her to learn almost everything in the department, answered her questions and gave her advice.

4.7 Encouragement

The participants mentioned encouragement and support from different parties like the family, friends, colleagues, managers and tutors. We can examine what the participants said about those who encouraged and supported them to understand how and why they encouraged and supported them.

4.7.1 Family

Six participants mentioned that they received encouragement and support from their families and what they said shows us that the family plays an important role in Syria in supporting and encouraging its members to learn. However, the support and encouragement from the participants' families had three forms as shown in Table 12.

Table 12: Type of encouragement and support received from the participants' families to practice SDL.

Participants	Type of encouragement and support from family
Arfan, Hani and Hamzeh	Encouragement (verbally) to have a better career and success.
Maha and Sulaiman	Support through teaching the participant directly.
Sulaiman, Qasem	Support through helping the participant indirectly to learn (i.e. taking care of the children or allowing them to use the computer etc).

4.7.2 Managers

Six participants said that their managers encouraged and supported them to learn in different ways. Having examined what the participants mentioned about how their managers encouraged and supported their SDL, I concluded that the participants received four types of encouragement and support for their SDL from their managers as shown in table 13.

Table 13: Methods of encouragement and support by the managers.

Participant	Method of encouragement and support by the manager
Arfan	Giving him days off and time to study
Hamzeh, Sulaiman and	Giving him advice, guidance, encouragement and sympathy

Ammar	
Marwan	Sharing knowledge with the participants
Arfan	Promising the participants of rewards if they study

4.7.3 Colleagues

Six participants said that they received help and encouragement from co-workers. The co-workers form part of the work environment and they surround the participants all the time while they are working and we need to see how they support, help and encourage them. The participants' co-workers gave them four types of encouragement and support as shown in table 14.

Table 14: Type of encouragement and support by co-workers.

Participant	Method of encouragement by colleagues
Arfan	Verbal and emotional encouragement
Maha	Teaching her
Marwan	Shared knowledge with him
Hamzeh, Samer and Ammar	Gave them guidance and advice

4.7.4 Tutors

Two participants mentioned that their tutors supported and encouraged them to learn. The form of this support and help is different in the two cases. Hani said that when he was studying his Masters degree, he became desperate because the government did not give him the licence to manufacture the car and he wanted to stop his studies. One of his tutors convinced him that he should continue his studies and encouraged him. He said:

....I felt that it was impossible to get that licence from the government and that made me think that I should stop my study because I would never be able to manufacture that car...but...one of my doctors...convinced me that the rest of the study will be easier than the courses which we had finished and there is no need to waste all what I had studied at that time.

Saeed mentioned that he had a computer teacher who told him stories and explained about the future and importance of the computers. This encouraged him to learn more about computers. He said:

...that teacher really told us many stories and explanations about the future of the computers that made us have more desire and encouragement to learn more about the computers.

4.7.5 Friends

Four participants mentioned that their friends encouraged, supported and helped them. Most of them mentioned that their friends gave them guidance, advice and support to study certain courses. Some of them mentioned that their friends encouraged, supported or helped them without explaining how. Table 15 shows the type of support and encouragement they received from their friends.

Table 15: type of encouragement and support from friends.

Participant	Type of encouragement and support from friends
Arfan	They gave him guidance about his studies, the colleges and institutes.
Hani	Helped him in different ways and one of them was his university tutor who became his partner in manufacturing the car.
Hamzeh	His friends encouraged him to study some courses.
Samer	His friends encouraged and supported him and explained to him the benefits of learning and degrees.

4.7.6 Subordinates

Hani is the only one who mentioned that he sought his subordinates' help. He is a general manager of a company and he asked to of his subordinates (i.e. managers) to teach him some things. He used his financial manager to teach him about finance and investments and the garage manager to teach him about car mechanics and the electricity and engines of the cars. He said:

...the ones who work for me;...the financial manager has taught me about financial matters and investments and the garage manager also helped me to learn many things especially about the electricity of the cars and some tips about engines.

4.7.7 Understanding the participants' encouragement

We can present the data which we had about the encouragement and support which the participants had from different parties in a table to understand it from a different perspective.

Table 16: Sources of the participants' encouragement and Support

Source of support	Number of participants who received it
Family	6
Managers	6
Colleagues	6
Tutors	2
Friends	4
Subordinates	1

4.8 Participants' aims & motivation

The participants also mentioned that they have aims to achieve from their SDL and there are elements which motivated them to practice SDL in different ways. We need to examine their aims and motivation to understand what makes them learn and why they learn to understand their behaviour thoroughly.

Table 17: The participants' aims and motivations.

Participants	Aims & motivation
Arfan, Hamzeh, Saeed, Sulaiman and Samer	Promotion
Arfan, Hamzeh, Sulaiman and Saeed	Improve career
Hani and Hamzeh	Gain more income
Arfan, Hamzeh and Sulaiman	Self-development
Arfan	Fear of ignorance
Arfan	Solving work problems
Arfan	Facilitate work
Hani and Maha	Achieve dreams
Hani	Communication
Maha	For fame
Hamzeh and Marwan	Update knowledge
Marwan	Defeat competitors
Marwan	Serve the customers
Hamzeh, Marwan and Saeed	Work requirements
Arfan and Saeed	Find a better job
Maha and Marwan	To be successful
Hani	Use the Internet

Table 18 shows the previous results regarding the participants' aims & motivation with the number of participants who had the same aims and motivations to understand how many participants had each one of them.

Table 18: The number of participants for each aim & motivations

Aim & motivation	Number of participants
Promotion	4
Improve career	4
More income	2
Self-development	3
Fear of ignorance	1
Solving problems	1
Facilitating work	1
Achieve dreams	2
Communication	1
For fame	1
Update Knowledge	2
Serving customers	1
Defeat competitors	1
Work requirement	3
Find a better job	2
To be successful	2
Use the internet	1

4.9 Discouragement & Difficulties

The participants mentioned that there were many factors that discouraged them from practicing SDL and they also encountered different types of difficulties. We can examine these factors and difficulties to understand them thoroughly to know their influence on the participants' SDL.

Table 19: The discouragement & difficulties that the participants encountered

Participants	Type of discouragement & difficulties
Arfan, Hani, Maha, Samer, Sulaiman, Saeed, Ammar and Qasem	Time management
Arfan, Saeed, Qasem, Sulaiman and Ammar	Expensive tuition fees
Saeed and Qasem	Low salaries
Hamzeh and Samer	No sufficient funds
Samer, Maha and Ammar	Difficulties in planning
Maha	Unexpected incidents
Ammar	No distance learning
Marwan	Slow internet
Marwan	Security checks
Saeed	Restricted positions
Qasem and Samer	Length of the study periods
Samer	Disturbing the balance
Sulaiman	No private universities
Hamzeh	Lack of support from upper management
Saeed and Sulaiman	No confidence of getting promotions
Qasem	No need for learning
Hani	Not possible to get references (books)
Hani and Samer	Family
Marwan	No foreign companies
Qasem	No incentives
Hani	Achieving other aims

We can present the above-mentioned factors which had negative influence on the participants' learning in a table to show how many participants were influenced by each factor to understand the severity of each factor as follows:

Table 20: The number of discouragement and difficulties that each participant encountered

Factor	No. of participants influenced by it
Time management	8
Expensive tuition fees	5
Low salaries	2
No sufficient funds	2
Difficult to plan	3
Unexpected incidents	1
No distance learning	1
Influence of war	5
Slow internet	1
Security checks	1
Restricted positions	1
Long study periods	2
Disturbing the balance	1
No private universities	1
Lack of support from upper management	1
Difficult to attend classes	1
No confidence of getting promotions	2
No need for learning	1
Not possible to get references	1
Family	2
No foreign companies	1
No incentives	1
Achieving other aims	1

4.10 Organisational support

Each one of the ten participants had a different organisation and these organisations had different forms and levels of support for their learning. Examining how these organisations support the managers' learning can help us to understand the interaction between the managers and their work environments regarding their learning.

4.10.1 Arfan's organisation: The Clever Policy

Arfan works for a big company that manufactures cosmetics and herbal remedies. He believes that his company encourages managers' learning continuously and those who study are respected. The types and forms of support include giving loans for the managers who want to study to pay the tuition fees, allow them to use the internet at work and give them technical support if needed and showing good confidence in them and their learning in addition to giving them warm emotions and treating them in what Arfan called a 'clever policy' to attract them and retain them. He said:

...the managers and the owner of this organisation do encourage the managers to learn all the time...the employees and managers respect those who study and help them to study for the exams when necessary and they can also ask for a loan if they need to pay the fees for themselves or their sons too. They even let me use the internet in my office to download big files and programs when I want because we have a high internet speed...I feel that they have good confidence in me and what I am learning and even if I want to study a PhD, they will be happy for me because they are my friends and maybe they will just feel sorry because they may lose me later if I go to teach at a university;...this is a good policy adopted at our organisation and I think that the big managers are clever because they let everyone learn whatever he wants, and then if they notice that his learning is useful for the organisation in anyway, they may decide to give him incentives to keep him,...It is a clever policy as I see it and it gives the managers the freedom to learn and choose what is the best thing to do for themselves.

4.10.2 Hani's organisation: All Resources at His Command

Hani is the owner and the general manager of his company. This makes him have a full control of the company's resources and employees. No body can stop him from learning or cause any difficulties for him and he can seek assistance from any manager or employee if he needs at any time he likes. He believes that he has great capabilities and resources for learning and he should have learnt more, but he was during a certain period busy with achieving another aim which is making his company the biggest and best company in the market. He said:

...you know I don't have a manager who is superior to me to prevent me from studying anything...I have asked the financial manager about investments and the garage manager about car mechanics, engine and electricity...I can develop myself and learn whatever I want, but I have first to find the aims that suit me and make me work hard to achieve them; I have great capabilities and resources and maybe I should have learnt more previously, but...tell you what stopped me from learning more sometimes;...I had an aim in the 1990s which was to make my company the biggest and best company for letting and selling cars;...I had to give my attention to that aim and this made me pay attention to all what is inside my

company;...then when I started to work in the field of property, my interest in the first aim deviated and became less because I didn't have time to work on achieving both aims.

4.10.3 Maha's organisation: Order Gives Freedom

Maha described her department as an organised department because their work is very organised according to a specific strict order to produce the newspaper every day on time. This order was established many years ago when the newspaper started and no one can change it. She believes that this order gives her the freedom to plan her own learning as she wants because she could organise her time accurately to attend classes and study effectively. Moreover, her newspaper gives her the opportunity to have access to all the news that happen all over the world and there are many qualified, professional journalists and expert at her newspaper and she could ask them to help her whenever she wanted. Therefore, she believes that she is very educated and qualified because she had the chance to read the news every day for many years. Her organisation is well-known and they have relationships with many other organisations and institutes, and this gives her the opportunity to go to good institutes to learn anything she wants whenever she wants and she can get discounts. Her organisation gives its employees and managers the freedom to learn what they like and to have access to good resources. But, since the salaries are low, many employees gain experience and knowledge at this organisation and then they find better jobs at other organisations. She said:

...our work is organised because we have to issue the newspaper on time every day;...this order and strict organisation made me capable of organizing my time too;...our newspaper also has many qualified journalists, accountants, computer experts, editors and managers;...I had the opportunity to ask them whatever I wanted and learn from them what I needed;...I read what's in the newspaper every day;...I am well-educated now about politics, [etc];...you know we have reports and articles which are not sometimes published because the censorship prevents publishing things related to certain political and economical issues;...I have the chance to read them and to know the secrets which are not published about many accidents and incidents in this world;...it is a big organisation and it is well-known;...this means that we have many relationships with other organisations and institutes and I had the opportunity to go to learn at different institutes whatever I liked;...we have discounts because we send many employees and managers to learn at different institutes;...there is freedom to learn what I want or what I need at my newspaper...many employees work for our newspaper for a short period, learn what they want, gain experience and then they go to find other jobs at other organisations;...that's because the salaries are not good at our organisation because it's a public sector newspaper.

4.10.4 Hamzeh's organisation: Minimum Amount of IT

Hamzeh believes that his organisation is an old organisation which has not been updated yet. Furthermore, he could not update and modernise his organisation because the whole infrastructure of the country is old and it is difficult or impossible for him to do anything about it. He could make a good website for his organisation, but it is not possible for him to make a modern one like the ones which are in the west where the customers can buy train tickets via the internet because there are no credit cards in Syria and the majority of people do not have access to the internet yet. He believes that he can, within the available resources and funds he has, only learn the minimum amount of IT skills which are only sufficient to sustain the organisation and enable it of using the basic IT services like using the computers and the internet to a limited degree. He feels sorry because he cannot update and modernise his organisation. He said:

...the railway Establishment in Syria is an old department which was originally established by the Ottoman Empire during the Ottoman colonization of Syria in the 19th century;...the infrastructure of the railway is still almost the same;...the people don't like to use the trains in Syria for many reasons;...there is no need to update the site as long as the customers don't have Visa cards and Master cards here in Syria and they can't even use the bank cards to pay;...[most of them] don't have access to the internet or they don't use it;...whatever I do to improve the website or the IT services, my abilities are limited and whatever I learn,...I feel that I have only to learn the minimum amount of IT which is enough to sustain this Establishment and enable it of doing some primitive services like sending and receiving emails, storing their data and files and training their employees to use the computers;...I don't feel that I have to learn anything more than that;...there are no sufficient funds to update this establishment anyway;...I feel sorry because I can't learn everything I want and need here and I can't do anything more to make my Establishment modern and more effective.

4.10.5 Marwan's organisation: All Depends on My Learning

Marwan feels that he is given the freedom to learn all what is necessary to serve the customers and to achieve the maximum amount of profit and success for the company. He has to search for updates, the best products and all what the customers need and promote it to be successful. He has to learn all what is necessary to achieve his company's aims and he can never stop learning or succeed without it. He said:

My company gives me a wide space of freedom to learn what I want because I am the marketing manager; I am responsible for my own learning and I have to make my learning beneficial for me and the company from different perspectives. The company expects from me to get more sales and profits from them and the customers expect and want to have the

best products and prices. I have to watch the websites of famous IT companies to know about their updates and products very quickly;...I have to learn something useful for the company and the customers about the products;...My work demands learning continuously as you see because I can't market products that I don't know about in details;...even if I want to study a Masters degree or an MBA, I can do that if I want because that's also something useful for the company and the customers. It depends on me; I can choose what I want to learn and how according to my time, aims and preferences.

4.10.6 Saeed's organisation: Freedom on a Sinking Ship

Saeed is practically responsible for the learning and development of the employees and he can learn what he wants. His organisation (the Department of Education in Damascus) has good relationship with many institutes and learning organisations and he can learn at any one of them. He also has the freedom to go to learn for several hours per week if he likes. Moreover, his organisation has many teachers and specialists and he can seek their support and help if he wants to learn anything. Due to the current instable situation in Syria, his organisation is losing its resources quickly and they have to reorganise their resources and put practical plans for the next semester. He said:

...I am responsible for training and developing the employees and the other managers at this organisation and I know what is the best method to learn if I want to;...I know all the institutes and colleges which our employees go to learn at;...I know many teachers and if I want to learn anything, I can ask them to teach me any subject I want;...our department has many connections with many teachers and institutes and we can easily learn anything if we want;...now in this bad security situation, we have many problems because we are losing our resources gradually;...many schools are destroyed and many teachers and employees died, migrated, in prison or missing;...we can't really put any future plans because the resources are getting less and less gradually;...I feel that we are in a sinking ship and we can't rescue it.

4.10.7 Samer's organisation: Learning Organisation

Samer seems to be working at a 'learning organisation' as he is a manager at a private university that is very active in the field of motivating its managers and students. They have a motto which is 'knowledge is power' and they understand it thoroughly and apply it widely. They support their students and encourage them to learn in different ways, solve their problems and communicate with them through their website to facilitate the process of communication and cooperation effectively. He said:

...my university is a very good and active university in the field of education and learning in different ways;...we have a motto which is 'knowledge is power' and we all believe that we will have more power if we have more knowledge;...we all need power in our life to do things and this power should be sought through knowledge and learning, not through

things like money or physical strength;...this university is very active in the field of encouraging others to learn and we have programs and meetings to solve the students problems in different ways;...we have programs to support the students who are suffering from psychological, social, physical or economical problems and it is possible to access these programs through the website.

4.10.8 Sulaiman's organisation: No Promotions Guaranteed

Sulaiman works for a company which manufactures clothes in Syria and the managers at this company have to learn about the fashions continuously because they have to know about the latest products of their company. They have the freedom to learn any subjects they like and they can take loans if they need. The current civil war makes the managers now uncertain that they will be promoted if they learn more and this makes the managers responsible for their own learning outcomes. He said:

...the managers at our company have to learn about the fashion which comes from France;...it's not a normal or classical study, but it has to be continuous and we have the managers of the production sector...the managers can learn anything they want at this company;...we have freedom and the company may give them loans to pay for their tuition fees and for children's expenses if they want to study at colleges too;...but most managers don't like to take a loan to study especially now because they are not certain that they will get a better position if they learn more;...as the situation in Syria is like this now, the company can't give anyone any guarantees that he will be promoted if he learns anything now.

4.10.9 Qasem's organisation: Learn and Leave

Qasem works for a public sector organisation that have formally regular promotions every four years, but that depends on the vacancies. It is possible to be promoted if someone earns university degrees, but Qasem believes that university degrees demand studying for a long period and this may discourage the managers from learning. The system does not encourage the managers to learn because if they earn a high degree, they would go to work for the private sector. The managers may not also be transferred to work according to their new qualifications and the salary increase is too low after the deterioration of the value of the Syrian pound. Some managers and employees practice SDL at this organisation, but when they leave it, other organisations will get the benefits of that learning. He said:

...the promotions happen every four years officially...but in practice we may not get a higher position if there are no vacancies;...it is also possible to get a promotion if we get a university degree, but the university degrees take between one and four years and that's a long period too;...if I get a higher degree, I may like to find a better job at the private sector;...they may not transfer me to a department where I will be using what I learnt there;...the salary increase

if I get a degree might be only three or four thousand Syrian pounds⁸, and now, with the decrease of the value of the Syrian pounds because of the war, this is nothing;...the public sector can't compete with the private sector because the salaries at the private sector are higher than the public sector;...there is self-directed learning at our Establishment, but the fruit of that learning is not guaranteed to be for the benefit of the public sector; that's a problem for the public sector;...the public sector provides good jobs for students because the workload in it is less than the workload in the private sector;...here the working hours are less, the workload is less and the responsibility is relatively less.

4.10.10 Ammar's organisation: Freedom without Promotions

Ammar believes that his organisation gives him the required freedom and good income to learn, but he needs to think of an aim for learning. The subject he would learn should improve his position or situation otherwise it would not be useful for him. It seems that learning is not usually well-rewarded or useful for managers at his organisation and now, within the current civil war in Syria, his organisation is suffering like the majority of the other organisations. If he learns more now, he will not be promoted and he has to find another job. That requires studying a Masters degree or a PhD. This would need a long period to complete and it is not possible for him now within the current circumstances in Syria to plan for that. He said:

...being a manager at this company gives me good income and freedom to study what I like, but before I study something I have to think about the aim of it;...if the subject I want to study will not improve my situation or position, why should I study it? The company is now suffering from financial problems and the sales are less than before, but this is something common in Syria and almost all the companies are suffering from financial difficulties or losses,...except maybe the hospitals and pharmacies because they are getting good profit from treating the wounded persons;...there are no positions at this company that I can occupy if I learn anything...the only way to be promoted now is to find another job at another company and maybe I need more than a Masters degree...maybe a doctoral...to become a university doctor...because of the conditions which we have in Syria now, I don't think it is possible for anyone to plan for that long period.

4.11 The Syrian environment

Each one of the participants described the environment in Syria in a different way which shows his own point of view which he formed through his life while he was working as a manager. This gives us a broad and detailed perspective that presents the environment within which those Syrian managers work and practice their SDL. There are several factors within Syria that have influence on the managers' SDL and their organisations and the

⁸ This equals approximately £14-19 (when the interview was done; i.e. March 2014).

participants mentioned these factors and described them and it is possible to present their description and analyse it to understand the elements which have influence on managers' SDL in Syria. It is worth noting that there are two or more participants who mentioned certain elements which have influence on SDL, but they did not have a 'consensus' on one certain element. This reflects their differences in understanding and analysing the external environment. These differences could be related to their field of specialisation or their own interests and points of views. For example, we can see that the IT managers describing the Syrian environment according to their interest in IT and how they practice their work (i.e. their own experiences or interests), and their description is completely different from how Maha, who is a journalist, describes the situation in Syria now. She is a journalist who is used to showing interest in the public good and describing the situation from a humanistic point of view.

To make it easy to understand the Syrian environment according to the participants' description, we can divide their description into two main parts. The first part describes how the situation was before the civil war in Syria (i.e. before March 2011), and the second part describes how the situation became during the civil war till now (i.e. since March 2011 till May 2014). This is necessary because many participants referred to the current circumstances (what is happening during the civil war and the outcome of that war), and the previous situation (how it was before the war). Furthermore, this division helps us to take into consideration that studying how managers work during war time which is supposed to be like exceptional circumstances which are not usually taught at colleges. These exceptional circumstances should not make this research neglect how the situation was before the exceptional circumstances occur. If we examine how the situation was before the civil war, we may understand why this war happened as many interviewees expressed their dissatisfaction about the government's decisions and how the government was governing Syria before the civil war. This is not a study about the reasons of the civil war in Syria, but since many interviewees mentioned many elements which are related to the civil war and what they consider as the 'government's mistakes', it is necessary to take their points of views into consideration to understand what the managers (i.e. the interviewees) consider

right or wrong regarding the government's decisions which had influence on managers SDL in Syria. Maybe this research would reveal some important elements which highlight, though it will be to a limited extent because it is neither the focal point of this research nor the aim of this research, the managers' points of views of the causes of civil war and its influence on the managers' SDL.

4.11.1 The situation before the civil war

Several participants explained how the situation was during the past ten or twenty years while they were managers or employees practicing their SDL. They mentioned that the government's decisions had negative influence on their learning and SDL in different ways. Though any government takes normally decisions which have influence on the economy and education of the state, the decisions which the Syrian government had taken seem to have a very strong negative effect on the managers' SDL. This severity is visible if we compare the decisions which the Syrian government took with the decisions which other governments took in the past regarding similar issues. Moreover, the influence of these decisions seems negative because many participants criticised these decisions and they explained their negative effects on their learning. However, many of these decisions are still prevalent in Syria now and they can be grouped into main categories to understand them more thoroughly. We can examine the sectors or fields which the government's decisions had influence on managers' SDL in Syria.

4.11.1.1 The private sector: The Syrian government took many decisions which seem to be 'against' the private sector. These decisions included not allowing private universities, private banks, private companies which give internet connections, the stock exchange market, and private newspapers to be established in Syria before 2001 or 2002. The government also did not accept any degrees which were earned through distance learning for many years.

I- Private Universities: Three participants stated their opinions about the private universities in Syria and each one had a different perspective regarding that. The first one was Arfan who mentioned that he was one of those who studied at

private universities after the government decided to allow them to be established. This shows us that some managers really benefited from the decision to allow private universities to be established in Syria. He said:

...it [the government] also decided to allow the private universities to be established in Syria...this enabled many managers of studying at these universities because they couldn't study at the public universities...I was one of them too.

Samer was the second participant who explained some issues regarding the private universities in Syria. He works at a private university which was established after the government issued that decision (and he is studying at it too). He stated that many businessmen were waiting for the government to issue a decision to accept distance learning degrees in Syria. The changes in the educational system in Syria made many managers learn more because they were motivated to have more degrees to become lecturers at the new universities. He said:

...our university was established after a decision from the government;...many businessmen were waiting for a decision from the government to accept the degrees of the distance learning colleges in Syria...many managers at this university are now studying at it or at distance learning colleges to earn more degrees,...the new private universities needed many lecturers who have Masters degree and PhDs;...many managers were encouraged to study to earn these degrees.

Finally, Sulaiman stated that the entry requirements for studying at the public universities were difficult twenty years ago when he was studying and there were no private universities at that time in Syria. He compared the situation in Syria with the situation in Lebanon and he concluded that the Lebanese managers had more chances to study at private universities there because there were private universities in Lebanon. He said:

I told you about my generation of managers;...I mean the managers who started their career maybe twenty years ago;...it was very difficult for them to study at the public universities because the entry conditions were difficult and there were no private universities in the 1990s;...they [Lebanese managers] had private universities since the 1960s, and even during the civil war in Lebanon which lasted for nearly 15 years, many managers from Lebanon and Syria were studying at these universities.

II- Private Banks: The government allowed the private banks to work in Syria a few years ago and this had influence on many managers' SDL because they decided to study courses about banks and the new banking laws in Syria. Arfan mentioned that when the government allowed the private banks to be established in Syria, many of his friends studied courses to understand the new banking laws. He said:

...a few years ago the government decided to allow private banks to work in Syria...many private banks were opened and many managers had to learn about the laws of investment and finance...or the banks laws and procedures...it was something new in Syria...some of my friends had to study special courses to understand these laws and how they are applied.

III- Stock Exchange Market: The government's decision to allow the stock exchange market to be established in Syria had also an influence on many managers' SDL as they decided to learn about it in order to work in that sector. Arfan mentioned that when the government decided to establish a stock exchange market in Syria, many managers learnt how to buy and sell shares. He said:

...there is another decision which was taken five or six years ago and it made many managers practice learning...the government decided to establish a stock exchange market in Syria...that really made many financial managers interested in learning how to buy and sell shares in the stock exchange market...some of my friends did it...they started to buy and sell shares and it was not really profitable for some of them

IV- Private Companies: The government had different legal restrictions on the private companies in Syria. These restrictions included preventing them from importing certain goods. For example, when Hani started his own company in the 1980s, it was not allowed to import foreign cars to Syria and he only had to buy and sell second hand cars. He believes that he is 'sailing against the current' because the government issued many laws and legislations against the private companies. He said:

...it was not allowed to import new cars to Syria in the 1980s...and the taxes were very high for selling and buying cars;...it was not even possible to let the cars because the law didn't allow us to do it;...then in the 1990s...the government changed laws and they allowed people to import cars and let them with high taxes

and other legal restrictions;...I feel I am sailing against the current because there are many laws and legislations against private businesses in different ways and many sectors.

The government's decisions annoyed many managers and some of them did not believe that what the government did was right as they believed in giving the private sector more freedom to practice a more constructive role Syria like the neighbouring countries. For example, Sulaiman compared the private sector in Lebanon with the private sector in Syria. He found that the private sector in Lebanon was more active than the private sector in Syria and during the civil war in Lebanon that private sector sustained the country as the public sector almost collapsed. In Syria, it is not allowed to establish big companies which give fundamental services to the citizens⁹. He said:

...the private sector in Lebanon is very active and it is the sector which sustained the country, not the public sector because during the civil war, the public sector almost collapsed and the government was unable to provide the companies with electricity in many parts of Lebanon;...the private sector companies bought electricity generators and they started to sell the electricity to the companies and the citizens;...here in Syria the private companies are not allowed to give electricity [etc].

V- The Foreign Companies: The Syrian government did not allow many foreign companies to work in Syria and this had its negative influence on the managers' SDL. Hani said that he was upset because the government did not allow the foreign companies to work in Syria as he was a student and could not buy the references he needed from abroad because the government did not allow the foreign credit cards companies to work in Syria. He thinks that the government had thought only about the economy to take that decision and they had not thought about the other aspects. He said:

...the government's decisions can bother you and they have influence on your study;...the government didn't want the foreign companies to work in Syria and dominate the national economy;...that seems a good economic decision, but did that government at that time think about the students who need to buy

⁹ This is related to the social principles of the ruling party in Syria which do not allow big companies to dominate, control or occupy a large share of the market at a certain sector.

references via the internet? I don't think so...they just thought about the economy.

Moreover, Hamzeh explained that he could design a basic website for his organisation (the Syrian Railways), but he could not make it like the websites of the foreign organisations in the west because there are no credit cards in Syria as the government did not allow the foreign credit card companies to work in Syria. Moreover, the majority of the citizens do not have internet connections and this makes it difficult for them to book tickets online. He believes that the infrastructure of the country is old and needs updating and this is the government's responsibility. This makes him unable to use all his abilities and skills to serve the citizens and discourage him from developing himself and learning more. He said:

...there is no need to update the site as long as the customers don't have Visa cards and Master cards here in Syria and they can't even use the bank cards to pay;...[most of them] don't have access to the internet or they don't use it;...whatever I do to improve the website or the IT services, my abilities are limited and whatever I learn, I feel that I am tied and can't make a noticeable progress;...I feel that I have only to learn the minimum amount of IT which is enough to sustain this Establishment and enable it of doing some primitive services like sending and receiving emails, [etc];...the whole Establishment is old and not updated.

4.11.2.2 The IT: the Syrian government had taken many decisions which had negative influence on the usage of IT in Syria. These decisions can be studied from three perspectives to show the influence of the government on the managers' SDL:

a- The Syrian government was very late in giving the citizens internet connections: The Syrian government started to give the citizens internet connections in 2001. This had negative influence on the Syrian managers' SDL as they became 'less developed' than the managers of the other countries. Marwan explained that since the government did not give the people internet connections in Syria till 2001, there was a gap between their knowledge and usage of the internet and the all the other countries which started to use the internet a few years before them. Though the government takes sometimes

positive decisions regarding the managers' learning, these decisions come very late. He and his friends believe that the government in Syria is the enemy of IT because of the strict legislations which the government imposed that made their work very difficult. He said:

...the government didn't give business internet connections till 2001 and that caused a big gap between us and the other countries which had internet six or seven years before us;...and sometimes the government acts in a positive way towards managers' learning,...but, usually that positive step would be very late;...this 'late positive' step made many managers learn how to use the computers within a few weeks;...we, as IT experts and managers, feel that the government is an enemy of IT in general because of all the delays, laws and procedures which make it very difficult for us to learn and work in Syria.

b- The Syrian government prevented the private IT companies from giving

people internet connections: The Syrian government did not give the citizens internet connections and it did not also allow the private companies to give them that. This decision increased the Syrian managers' isolation from the rest of the world through the internet. Arfan said that the government may prevent the private companies from working in certain sectors like giving internet connections or establishing private universities. He said: "...the government may prevent the private companies from practicing certain works like giving internet connections and establishing private universities." Moreover, Hani explained that the government had more influence on his SDL than the IT because the government can prevent any technology and IT inventions or updates from entering Syria for many years without a valid reason. He said:

...they say that technology and IT have influence on companies and learning, but you know that the government can prevent any technology and IT inventions or updates in Syria for many years without a valid reason;...you can say that the government has more influence than the IT and technology on my SDL.

c- The Syrian government does not give sufficient funds to improve or update the

public organisations' IT systems: As the government does not allocate sufficient funds for implementing new IT projects at the public sector organisations, some

managers feel that they cannot learn anything more to practice their duties properly. For example, Hamzeh mentioned that he can learn more to implement IT projects to improve his organisation, but the government does not give them the required funds for these projects. They have a very old system that the government had not updated and they struggle with it. He said:

...I can learn about using the latest updates and programming languages within a few weeks or months and use them, but this is not useful in many cases as we can't implement the projects which we want;...the Ministry and government will not give us the required funds to do many projects and we have to struggle with an old system which was inherited from the 1960s or the 19th century.

4.11.1.3 The legal system: Six participants (namely Samer, Sulaiman, Qasem, Ammar, Arfan and Hani) mentioned that the government changed the laws and procedures in the past and this initiated managers' learning because the managers had to learn about the new laws and procedures. The legal changes are related to two issues:

a- The restrictions on importing foreign goods: Arfan said that when the government changes the laws and procedures which are related to the restrictions on importing or exporting goods, many managers have to learn about the new laws and procedures. He said:

...when the government changes the laws or procedures for import and export...this may encourage or discourage business to do more or less work...if the businesses find that the new legislations and procedures help them to work better, they would usually like to do more work and this motivates the managers to learn more about how to apply these procedures and work according to them;...these changes create a huge movement in the field of management learning and managers' SDL as I have noticed.

b- The restrictions on establishing private sector companies or foreign companies in Syria: Qasem explained that the government used to change the laws and these changes motivated some managers to learn more. He gave an example about these changes related to the government's decision to allow the private insurance companies to work in Syria. This change motivated many managers to learn and earn more degrees to work for the new companies. He said:

...sometimes there will be some changes in the regulations and laws...and these things make some managers learn some things to improve their careers;...in

2005...the government opened the market for private insurance companies to be established in Syria...that was something new...within a few weeks or months...there were several insurance companies in the market...and many managers and qualified employees resigned from our establishment and went to work for these company...some of these managers knew that these companies require studying a postgraduate diploma in management...and Masters degrees or good English;...they immediately started to study these subjects to get a better job.

4.11.1.4 The administrative system:

It seems that the administrative system of the public sector in Syria was bad and it caused many problems for the managers who wanted to practice SDL. Three participants explained different problems which they encountered while they were learning and these problems are all related to the public administrative system in Syria. These problems are related to:

- a- **Bureaucracy:** Hani wanted to manufacture a car and he started to study a Masters degree in mechanical engineering while he was working on designing the engine and trying to get the licence from the government. He encountered a strict bureaucracy and he was given silly, unconvincing excuses for not giving him the licence. He was trying to do something that is considered unique and innovative in Syria, but when the government refused to give him the licence, he became angry and wanted to stop his studies. One of his tutors convinced him to finish his studies and he listened to him. I noticed that he was very upset when he talked about this subject, he made funny gestures when he talked about the government and he was sarcastic when he spoke about the government or why they refused to give him the licence. Though this story happened more than twenty-five years ago, he is still upset when he remembers it probably because the government destroyed his life-dream. He said:

...we tried very hard to get the licence and we contacted the prime minister himself at that time;...we didn't get the licence;...they gave us silly excuses...I felt that it was impossible to get that licence from the government and that made me think that I should stop my study because I would never be able to manufacture that car;...the government's stubbornness and routine made me really angry and that really had influence on my motivation to study that degree;...one of my doctors at the university told me that I almost finished all the theoretical courses and I just had to submit my thesis to him to get the degree;...he convinced me that the rest of the

study will be easier than the courses which we had finished and there is no need to waste all what I had studied at that time.

- b- **Slow procedures:** Hamzeh explained that the administrative system is slow and undeveloped. There is a strong bureaucracy which was inherited from the past centuries and it is not possible to use the technology to facilitate the administrative processes. The administrative system makes the financial processes and applications so slow and that would delay many learning projects (as money is the life-blood of organisations). He feels helpless regarding this situation and he cannot do anything to change it. He said:

...the administrative system is very slow and not developed;...it's a bureaucracy which refuses to use the emails or the internet for applications;...if they want to apply for more funds or additional support from the Ministry, they have to wait for a long time or they have to make many phone calls and arguments and this may not be useful in many cases if the funds are not available;...it is difficult to apply to get more [funding] during that year.

- c- **Not encouraging managers' learning:** Qasem believes that the current regulations are not sufficient to encourage the managers to learn and the government should change them so those who earn degrees would take more incentives or promotions. This would encourage many managers to learn more. He said:

...if the government also changes the regulations to give good incentives for those who earn degrees...maybe if they promote them if they have postgraduate diplomas and Masters degrees, I am sure that many managers will decide to learn.

4.11.1.5 The economy: Three participants (namely Saeed, Ammar and Qasem) mentioned that the low salaries (at the public sector) have influence on the managers' learning. For example, Saeed said that the government should increase the salaries according to the inflation rate in Syria. The salary of the managers now is not sufficient to pay for their children's education and their own learn. He believes that the government should solve the financial problems which exist in the public sector and this would solve the financial problems which the managers encounter when they want to

learn. This problem exists only in the public sector, not the private sector, and this makes the government completely responsible for it. He said:

...the government should make the salaries suitable and increase them in accordance with the inflation rate in the country;...if I am a manager and my salary is 40,000 Syria pounds,...how can I pay the tuition fees for two or three children if they want to study and how can I at the same time I have to pay my own tuition fees?...if the problems of the economy are solved in this country, many other problems will be solved including the learning problems for most people;...I am talking now mostly about the managers' of the public sector.

4.11.1.6 The education

There were some 'weaknesses' or issues related to the educational system in Syria that caused some problems and difficulties for several participants. Some of them explained these issues and though it seems that the conditions changed now (i.e. the government allowed the distance learning programs and private universities to work in Syria), we like to be aware of these problems and difficulties because they had influence on the participants' education in the past.

I- **No distance learning:** the government did not accept any certificate from any university or college that uses the distance learning programs in the past. Therefore, the only method to earn degrees for managers a few years ago was to study at the public universities (private universities were not allowed in Syria too). Ammar mentioned that he wished that he could study through the distance learning programs in the past; he could not because the government did not allow them. He said:

...it was not possible to study via distance learning programs;...these programs were not accredited in Syria at that time;...I wish that we have had them here in Syria to study while I was at home...but it was not possible to do it.

II- **Public universities:** The public universities have strict conditions for entry and this made some managers unable to continue their studies to earn more degrees. Sulaiman mentioned that he wanted to continue his studies at a public university, but he could not do it because his BA average was not sufficient. He said:

...it was not possible for me to study a Masters degree because I didn't have the required average when I got my BA;...and there were no private universities to study at one of them.

III-Private universities: The government allowed the private universities to work in Syria (as explained earlier in 12-1-1-I), but some participants mentioned that the fees of the private universities are high (as explained earlier in 10-2).

IV-No certification from foreign companies: The government did not allow the foreign IT companies to work in Syria and this caused a problem for the managers and IT experts who wanted to have certificates from these companies (as Marwan explained earlier in 12-12-2).

4.11.2 The situation after the civil war

Six participants mentioned issues and factors which are related to the current civil war which has been in Syria since 2011. These issues and factors have in general a strong influence on the managers' SDL from different perspectives. Each one of these participants explained the situation from his own point of view and if we take all these views together, we can form a comprehensive point of view regarding this topic. However, it seems that the civil war has four negative effects on the Syrian managers' SDL as follows:

- a- **Difficulties for students:** Ammar explained that the civil war in Syria now makes it impossible for him to plan to study anything, and the colleges themselves are suffering from this war as many students and tutors cannot attend classes regularly. Moreover, he has not studied anything about how to work or act in war, and now he feels that he has to learn only how to survive. He said:

...because of the conditions which we have in Syria now, I don't think it is possible for anyone to plan for that long period;...the colleges have been suffering from the civil war for nearly three years...many university students and tutors can't attend regularly...we haven't studied at college how to work during wars [he sighs deeply]...even if we have studied something like that, do you think that all the wars are the same all over the world?...This war is teaching us how to survive only now, but it does not teach us how to gain anything.

- b- **Impossible to foresee or anticipate:** Qasem believes that the managers do not know now what will happen tomorrow because of the war and this makes them hesitate to learn anything. He said:

...see now there is a civil war in the country and this makes me and many other managers hesitate to learn anything because we don't know what will happen tomorrow or even after one hour to us.

Sulaiman feels that there is a strong uncertainty regarding the future and the benefits of studying anything now. He cannot plan to study anything because of the civil war, and many managers feel insecure. He said:

...and now in this situation,...there is also a situation of uncertainty for me if I want to study anything;...when there is uncertainty, you can't decide or plan what to learn or do easily...if we want to talk about the situation now, the managers as I have just told you feel insecure.

- c- **The managers work under severe pressure:** Maha believes that managers in Syria now are working under severe pressure and there is neither stability nor security now.

She said:

...being a manager in Syria now means you will be under severe psychological and emotional pressure every day because of the civil war;...there is no stability and no security now.

- d- **The influence of insecurity on managers' learning:** Hamzeh referred to the effect of the insecurity on his organisation. Many trains cannot work now because of he insecurity in the country and this is causing financial losses to his organisation. This caused a decrease in the budget and he has to train and supervise the employees regarding how to save the consumables. He is working in the evening for a private company and he could implement good project for them because they pay him well and support him to learn or implement new project. However, he cannot implement new projects at the Railways Establishment where he works in the days because they do not give him a good salary and they do not pay for his learning. Therefore, the war has influence on his learning because of the decrease of the budget. He said:

...many trains are not working because of the insecurity which we have in many parts of the country and the budget is very limited and the salaries are not enough to do anything;...I am working on training the employees to save the toner, paper, electricity and all the other consumables because the budget is getting less and less every year;...I also have to supervise them to make sure that they apply my instructions about saving the consumables every day;...I have to work in the evenings because my salary is not enough;...that company is a private sector

company and I could do many projects for them because they have given me the money;...not like this Establishment where I have to work and I can't implement new projects because they don't want to pay or they can't pay for that.

Moreover, Saeed believes that the civil war now in Syria makes the managers feel insecure with their families and they have many personal problems. This insecurity makes it difficult for any manager to plan to study for a long time. He said:

...the situation now is different as you see because of the security problems which we have in Syria;...the managers now feel insecure and they have many personal problems and their families are also insecure;...it is difficult for any manager now to study safely or to plan to study for a long time.

4.12 Conclusion

This chapter explained how the ten participants practiced SDL throughout their career, discussed their learning motivation, learning methods, the difficulties they encountered and the factors and persons who supported them. It also presented their own definitions and understanding of SDL and a brief discussion of how I would apply Knowles' definition to examine their SDL. Furthermore, this was followed by a presentation to explain how their organisations supported their SDL to understand the types and degrees of support they had within their work environment. Their explanation about the Syrian context was explained, examined and assessed to show the relationship between the Syrian context and their SDL. These findings were grouped within certain patterns that show the relationships between the members of each pattern to enable us of understanding them more thoroughly.

However, there are four major conclusions or themes that emerged from this analysis. I concluded that they are important themes because they are strongly related to the research questions and they need to be analysed thoroughly in order to develop a theory or a model from them later. The first one is related to the participants' aims of SDL as the participants practiced SDL only when they wanted to achieve certain aims. These aims vary and they indicate that the participants regard and use SDL as a means to an end. The second theme is related to the participants' interest in SDL. I classified them into three groups to understand their varying interest in SDL and each group has its distinguished characteristics. The third theme is related to the levels of encouragement and support that the participants' organisations offer for the managers' SDL. I also classified these organisations into three

groups to understand this point in detail. Finally, the last theme is regarding the influence of the external factors on the participants' SDL. These factors come from two sources: the Western countries (international source) and the Syrian society (the Syrian context).

I will analyse and discuss these themes to reach useful conclusions which will help me later to construct a model or a theory that explains important aspects about the managers' SDL in Syria. Moreover, their importance and relevance to the aim of this research will appear more clearly when they are examined and analysed through the theories and researches when were mentioned earlier in the Literature Review.

Chapter Five: Discussion & analysis

5.1 Introduction

The aim of the research is to explore the factors that affect the form and extent of Syrian managers' engagement with SDL. This overall aim demands achieving subsidiary aims which are examining and understanding the following four topics: (1) the reasons for the Syrian managers' engagement with SDL, (2) the influence of organisational factors on the Syrian managers' SDL, (3) the influence of developments in technology on the Syrian managers' SDL, and (4) the influence of the Syrian context on the Syrian managers' SDL.

Therefore, in order to achieve these aims, I conducted twenty interviews within two sets that contained ten interviews each. The first set of interviews did not yield sufficient data that could lead to achieving the research aims, but, however, it helped me to form better questions that I used in the second set of interviews. The second set of the interviews gave me the required data that enabled me of finding suitable answers for the research questions and to achieve the research aims.

This chapter aims at discussing and analysing the findings of the data which was collected from the participants through the second set of interviews and presented in the previous chapter. These findings were summarised and listed in different formats to show the participants' understandings and definitions of SDL, how they engaged in SDL throughout their career, the difficulties they encountered, their aims and motivations and what or who encouraged them to practice SDL in addition to the influence of their work environment and the Syrian context on their SDL. However, we need to discuss and analyse these findings to understand the patterns or categories which they can be grouped within in order to reach certain conclusions that could be used to construct a model for their SDL.

Moreover, this would help us to understand the participants' SDL and examine it according to the theories, models and researchers' points of views which were presented in the Literature Review chapter. Having done that, I could achieve the research aims and find the

answers that I sought for the research questions, and this made me capable of constructing a model that explains how the Syrian managers engage in practicing SDL.

5.2 Examining the findings

The starting point for analysing the findings was examining the findings (i.e. the previous chapter) according to the aim of the research. Therefore, I started to review, analyse, compare and contrast the findings where were presented in the previous chapter to understand thoroughly the factors which have influence on the Syrian managers' SDL or related to it. I started with the first research question (i.e. why/how do the managers in Syria engage in SDL?) to understand their aims from learning from different perspectives and the factors which have influence on their SDL. Then, gradually, many ideas flowed from that and enabled me of formulating important conclusions that could be integrated together to construct the model. I will explain these ideas in this chapter in detail to show their importance and relevance to the research aim.

5.3 Participants' aims of SDL

It seems that when one of the participants felt he wanted or needed to do something (i.e. achieve a certain goal), he practiced SDL. Therefore, it is possible to say that SDL is considered as a means, not a goal, to achieve goals. Table 21 shows all what the 8 participants learnt through SDL with the aim(s) which he or she sought from it.

Table 21: Participants' aims of SDL

Participant	The subject he/she learnt through SDL	Aim(s)
Arfan	English	Promotion (to be a branch manager abroad)
Sulaiman	Using the internet + English	Benefit from the internet + Promotion
Hani	MSc + English+ use computers + diploma in finance and investment	Manufacture a car + communication + benefit from computers + investment
Marwan	5 computer courses	Succeed at his work + work requirements
Samer	Masters in Law	Become a university tutor
Saeed	Using the internet	Benefit from the internet
Maha	MA in Journalism	Establish her own newspaper + fame
Hamzeh	3 Computer courses	Succeed at his work + work requirements

This supports the idea that all the participants consider SDL 'instrumental' because all of them had certain aims to achieve and they used SDL as a means to achieve these aims; when there is no goal, there is no SDL (the aims of the participants were explained and analysed in the previous chapter). We need to examine this according to what the participants mentioned and to apply what the researchers' discovered about the goals of SDL to understand the participants' goals and how they are related to their SDL.

I mentioned in the Literature review chapter that some researchers studied the goals of SDL and Caffarella (2000) grouped them into four categories: (a) the desire of the learners to learn a specific content or acquire knowledge or skill; (b) to enhance the learners' abilities to be self-directed in their learning; (c) to advocate the transformational learning and knowledge that is critical reflection by the learner is central to the process; (d) to achieve some social or political expectations or aims (Collins, 1995, 1996; Mezirow, 1985; Brookfield, 1985b; Hammond & Collins, 1991). However, it seems that all the participants' goals of SDL fall into group (d) because they wanted to achieve some social or political expectations or aims. None of them practiced SDL for goals which fall in groups (a), (b) or (c).

This also indicates that all the participants belong to the first type of learners according to their perception of their reasons for continuing their learning as Houle (1961, 1984) stated. He called the first type of learners 'goal-oriented' as they seek specific goals when they are faced with a need, interest or particular problem. The second type of learners is the 'activity-oriented' because they found meaning in the pursuit of new knowledge without having a direct connection to a specific content or a reason for the activity. The reasons for continuing their learning might be escaping from loneliness or personal problems or searching for a mate. The third type of learners was called the 'learning-oriented learners' because they sought knowledge for its own sake because they believe in the intrinsic value of learning, seek fun, seek the benefits that might accrue from learning or for the value of learning itself. Therefore, none of the participants belong to the second or the third types. This conclusion is also consistent with Malcolm Knowles' (1970) first assumption about adult learning which is 'adults need to know why they must learn something'. Moreover, it seems

also consistent with the fourth assumption which is 'Adult learners are ready to learn when immediacy for knowing is created by circumstances' because the participants resorted to learning when their circumstances indicated to them that they need to learn to achieve their goals.

However, if we look at the sociocultural aspects of the participants' SDL to apply Vygotsky's sociocultural theory of learning, we find that the research identified several social, cultural and situational factors that shape the Syrian managers' SDL. The interviewees used different resources to practice SDL including family members, colleagues, co-workers, subordinates, friends and tutors (as explained in 4.6, 4.7 and 4.10). Therefore, their SDL seems to be relational and situational rather than a purely individual process and they are using these resources as 'scaffolding' to practice SDL. Vygotsky's theory is applicable in this case as the participants' development cannot be separated from its social context.

Regarding Leave and Wenger's situated learning theory (1991), we can clearly see that the interviewees who practiced SDL (i.e. the majority of the interviewees) have a strong interaction with their social context as they shape and transform themselves and their environment. The interviewees who practice SDL realise the importance of learning for themselves and their organisations and they gain more skills and knowledge through SDL to improve their situation and the work within their organisations. These interviewees constructed social structures and collaborative processes to create and develop knowledge as they used their colleagues, friends, social contacts etc as resources to practice SDL. This is very clear when we review how Maha, Hani and Marwan practiced SDL. Moreover, we can understand the influence of the social context on the interviewees' SDL when we review thoroughly the difficulties that they encountered, how they sought help from their friends, colleagues and families and in the influence of the government on the Syrian managers' SDL (as it will be explained in 5.6.2).

5.4 Classification of participants

The previous conclusion made me think about the participants' level of engagement in SDL and its relationship with their aims. There are sharp differences between the participants' levels of engagement in SDL. For example, if we compare what Hani studied with what Saeed

studied, we can see that difference as Hani studied an MSc, courses to learn how to use the computers, a diploma about finance and investment and English, and Saeed only studied one course to learn how to use the internet. Consequently, this made me ask myself: why do these differences exist?

I had to reexamine what the participants mentioned about the reasons of their engagement in SDL and I found that there are influences from the industries they work within, their own motivations to improve their career and positions, the internal environment (i.e. their organisations) and the external environment (i.e. the Syrian context). Moreover, it seems that their own SDL readiness has an influence on their engagement in SDL because some of them did not practice SDL though they had the chance to do it. For example, Saeed works for the Ministry of Education; he has connections with many institutes and colleges and he can select a suitable one of them to learn whatever he wants with good discounts. He also has the opportunity to take several hours off per week to learn and his department has good connections with many teachers and institutes. He said:

...I know all the institutes and colleges which our employees go to learn at;...if I want to learn anything, I can go to an institute which I know and they will really help me and give me discounts;...and the other things include my ability to take several hours off per week if I want to learn;...our department has many connections with many teachers and institutes and we can easily learn anything if we want.

Despite that, he, as a manager, only learnt how to use the internet. He did not study, for example, a Masters degree nor a PhD to find a better job elsewhere.

Moreover, if we examine Samer's SDL, we notice that he required a strong encouragement from his manager to study his Masters degree. He did not believe that he could have done it without encouragement and support from his manager. This means that he did not feel that he had a strong motivation to practice SDL (i.e. no inner motivation or strong personal desire). He said:

...I really was afraid to study the Masters because I thought I will not have time to study and it will be hard for me to do it, but my manager encouraged me and told me that he will give me a few days off to study for the exams when I needed...without his support and encouragement, I would have never been able to find the required time and effort to do it.

Comparatively speaking, Maha studied the Masters degree though she was in a similar organisation that had good resources and support for learning. When I compared several participants with each other, I concluded that their SDL readiness has an influence on their learning because some of them seem eager to learn and they learnt though they encountered many difficulties, and others do not seem interested in learning though they have the abilities and resources to learn.

To show two examples about this idea, we can examine two participants¹⁰. Hamzeh started to work for the army and his managers (i.e. the officers) did not allow him to learn what he needed and there was a strict form of routine to obtain the approval from the management to learn. Despite these difficulties he encountered, he insisted on learning and he paid for the courses he studied in the evenings. He said:

...the officers refused to let me study some courses I wanted and it was difficult to convince them;...I didn't like that routine and all these signatures;...I used to go to learn some programming languages at that time in the evening...I didn't tell them that I knew these programming languages because I paid to learn them and they refused to help me to pay for that.

On the other hand, Ammar has not studied anything since he became a manager in 2002 though there is nothing that causes difficulties for him if he wants to learn. He said that he did not feel that he needed to learn anything for more than 10 years as he is satisfied with his position and work. He said: "since 2002 till now, I haven't really studied anything because I didn't feel there is a need to study any more".

Moreover, all the differences between the participants will be clearer when we understand the characteristics of the three groups (below) that I identified as these categories explain to us the variation in range of learning experience, the depth of understanding, the range of methods applied and the level of enthusiasm and awareness of the participants.

However, it was not possible for me to measure the participants' SDL readiness with a scale like Guglielmino's SDL readiness scale (which is considered an acceptable and reliable method by some researchers)¹¹, during or after the interviews. But, to make that easier, I

¹⁰ To understand the differences between these types of participants who have different levels of SDL readiness, it is possible to read their learning profiles and see what they learnt.

¹¹ This scale was explained in the Literature Review.

could classify them into three groups to examine their SDL through this classification. The aim of this classification is to understand and explain their varying levels of engagement in SDL. Each group seems to have distinguished characteristics (as explained below) that are related to their SDL readiness and interest in SDL in general. Moreover, this classification will help us later to understand the how each group interacts with the organisations they work for (the organisations themselves will also be classified into three groups later to understand their support for their managers' SDL).

However, the importance and benefits of this classification will be shown later when we examine how each group of the participants act and react within their organisation. I noticed that each group has its own characteristics and reactions that are related to SDL and this classification enables us of understanding their actions and reactions because if we consider that they all have the same SDL readiness and interest in SDL, we will never be able to understand their activities and reactions clearly as the factor of SDL readiness and interest in SDL will be invisible to us.

I classified the participants into three groups according to their interest in SDL and their SDL readiness (as concluded from what they learnt) as follows: (a) Those who are very interested in SDL, (b) those who have moderate interest in SDL, and (c) those who showed no interest (or low level of interest) in SDL between them through using a simple classification scale which contains three groups and to use the groups of the classification later to construct a model of managerial SDL in Syria. Therefore, I will explain the characteristics of each one of these groups and give examples from what the interviewees said and my notes to explain what that made me put each interviewee into a certain group.

The first group includes four interviewees: Hani, Maha, Marwan and Hamzeh. Those four interviewees show a high interest in learning, they, in general, have following characteristics:

- They studied or learnt many things before and after becoming managers. For example, Hani studied an MSc in mechanical engineering, English courses, a diploma in finance and courses to learn how to use the computers, Maha studied an MA in journalism and Marwan and Hamzeh studied many computer courses.

- They understand deeply the importance of learning and knowledge for their careers, their development and organisations. For example, Marwan and Hamzeh said that they know that they have to learn continuously to update their knowledge about IT and Maha learnt how to use the machines in her department and studied a Masters degree because she realised that this would help her to establish her newspaper. Hani realised that he needs more knowledge about cars to design the engine and that made him study a Masters degree.
- They apply different methods to learn according to their needs and the available resources and they think about the pros and cons of each method. For example, Hani used all the available resources for him to learn (i.e. his subordinates, the internet, his university tutors), Maha studied at college, learnt from her friends and went to courses, Marwan and Hamzeh studied many computer courses, learnt through the internet and read books.
- They have strong awareness, enthusiasm and will-power to achieve what they want and learn. For example, Hani said that his desire, enthusiasm and eagerness to achieve his aims were the first thing that helped him to practice SDL. He said: "The first thing that really made me practice SDL is my desire to achieve my aims, my enthusiasm and eagerness to do what I want". Hamzeh said that he knew from the beginning of his career that he should learn many things to succeed and he didn't need anyone to encourage him. He said: "...in the beginning, I didn't need anyone to encourage me to study and learn because I knew since I was at college that I need to learn many things to succeed..." Marwan showed his awareness and enthusiasm to learning by explaining that he is responsible for his own learning and he should learn useful things for him, his company and his customers to succeed. He said:

I am responsible for my own learning and I have to make my learning beneficial for me and the company from different perspectives. The company expects from me to get more sales and profits from them and the customers expect and want to have the best products and prices.

Maha explained that she believes that she has to know everything in her department and that made her learn how to use the computer programs and the machines. She was

interested in that since she was an employee and then she felt she could establish her own newspaper and she decided to study a Masters degree to achieve that aim. She said:

...I, as a manager, have to know everything in my department;...I used to learn how the different computer programs work and how the machines work;...I was really interested in that since I came to my department;...after a few years of working at my department, I felt that I know everything in it and I could really have my own newspaper and manage it if I could;...I thought that I needed to have a Masters degree to improve my ability to write articles and that's why I studied the Masters degree.

The second group includes two managers: Arfan and Sulaiman. Those two managers show less interest in learning than the previous group. It is possible to say that they show 'moderate or reasonable' interest in learning. They have the following characteristics in general with some examples taken from the interviews to explain and prove them:

- What they have learnt is less¹² than what the members of the previous group have learnt.
- Their interest in the available learning resources for them seems to be restricted to one, or few, learning methods and they do not use several methods or strategies for learning like the members of the first group. We can see that Arfan only studied English at formal courses and he studied a Masters degree at college, and Sulaiman studied a course to learn how to use the internet and English courses.
- Their motivations for learning, in general, are limited when compared with the first group. Both participants (i.e. Arfan and Sulaiman) do not show that they consider learning necessary for their work or career at all (unlike the first group).

The third group includes four interviewees: Saeed, Samer, Qasem and Ammar. The members of this group show a very weak desire or readiness to learn and some of them show no desire at all. They have the following characteristics:

- The members of this group have in general a low profile of learning when compared with the previous groups. Qasem and Ammar did not practice SDL while they were managers at all and Saeed only learnt how to use the internet in 2002. Regarding

¹² "Less" here means that the number of months they have spent in learning (and the number of courses they have studied) is less than the number of months that the members of the first group have spent in learning.

Samer, though he is studying a Masters degree now, but he only did it due to his manager's encouragement and good offer (free of charge and it is guaranteed for him to become a tutor at the university when he finishes it), he was too hesitant to take that decision, he found it difficult for him to disrupt the 'balance' or routine of his life and he did not have the sufficient confidence to do it. He said:

...the Dean told me that I can register at the Law College and attend classes if I wanted and they would give that study as free of charge because I have served them well and because they would accept me as a lecturer at the college when I graduate...I really was afraid to study the Masters because I thought I will not have time to study and it will be hard for me to do it, but my manager encouraged me and told me that he will give me a few days off to study for the exams when I needed...without his support and encouragement, I would have never been able to find the required time and effort to do it.

- Their motivation for learning seems lower than the other two groups. Samer did not have the sufficient desire to learn (as explained in the previous paragraph), Qasem and Ammar did not practice SDL and Saeed practiced it only to learn how to use the internet within 18 years of being a manager and he did not seem enthusiastic to learn anything in future.
- They seem to have good 'environment' and resources to learn, but they do not use them probably they do not feel they need to learn anything as they are satisfied with their positions. Ammar said that his company gives him good income and freedom to learn; he said: "...being a manager at this company gives me good income and freedom to study what I like". Saeed mentioned that he can learn anything he wants at the best institutes because he is responsible for training and developing the employees and he knows many institutes and deals with them and he can take a few hours every week to attend classes, but despite that, he did not practice SDL as a manager except to learn how to use the internet. He said:

...I know what is the best method to learn if I want to;...I know all the institutes and colleges which our employees go to learn at;...if I want to learn anything, I can go to an institute which I know and they will really help me and give me discounts;...and the other things include my ability to take several hours off per week if I want to learn because my manager knows that I am learning something useful for the organisation and I am highly trusted.

Qasem mentioned that there are employees who practice SDL at his organisation, but when they earn good degrees, they find other jobs at the private sector; it means that it is possible for him to learn, but he does not want to do it. He said: "...there is self-directed learning at our Establishment, but the fruit of that learning is not guaranteed to be for the benefit of the public sector".

Samer mentioned that his organisation is a very good university that encourages and supports the students and others to learn in different ways (and he believes that it is the perfect environment for learning), but, despite that, he needed great encouragement and support from his manager to study (as mentioned earlier). He said:

...my university is a very good and active university in the field of education and learning in different ways;...we encourage people to study and we try very hard to overcome all the difficulties which the students encounter even if we have to pay considerable amounts of money to facilitate their learning;...this university is very active in the field of encouraging others to learn and we have programs and meetings to solve the students problems in different ways;...I think that this university is the perfect environment for learning.

However, it is necessary to explore the interviewees' SDL according to the findings and conclusions which the researchers have reached from their researchers to understand it from their perspectives. Megginson & Pedler¹³ (1992) consider the desire to learn the first factor, or the initiator, of self-development. If we take this into consideration and examine the interviewees' desire to learn, we can understand their desire to learn through what I understood from them regarding their attitude towards learning, their interest in learning and their motivation to learn. Moreover, Guglielmino's (1977) SDL Readiness Scale (SDLRS) proved that the self-directed learners have varying degrees of readiness to learn. This can also be taken into consideration here to understand the participants' SDL readiness. This information about the interviewees will be sought from what they have said during the interviews and my observations about them which are written in my notes.

We can apply Oddi's (1984) perspective (i.e. Oddi Continuing Learning Inventory (OCLI)) on SDL to examine the personality characteristics of the participants. Her framework identifies three personality dimensions which Oddi considered essential to self-directed learners: (a) a

¹³ This conclusion and all the researchers' opinions which are mentioned here were stated earlier in the Literature Review.

proactive drive that makes the learners start and continue their learning by themselves regardless of the existence of support from others, (b) a cognitive openness that makes the learner open to new ideas and opportunities, adapts to changes and tolerates ambiguity (if any), and (c) a commitment to learning that makes the learner enjoys learning for its own sake. Therefore, the three groups of participants which I identified have varying degrees of each one of these personality dimensions as the members of the first group have high degrees of (a), (b) and (c), the members of the second group have medium degrees of (a), (b) and (c) and the members of the third group have low degrees of (a), (b) and (c) (as explained earlier in this paragraph).

However, it seems that Oddi's perspective attributes all the SDL to individual personality factors and neglects the external factors. The findings of this research show that there are external factors that have influence on the participants' engagement with SDL and they are related to their organisations' support to SDL and the Syrian context in addition to the international factors (as explained in this chapter and the previous chapter).

These three groups of participants also show varying degrees of the 8 factors which Guglielmino¹⁴ concluded after applying Delphi's technique to analyse these factors (Ellinger, 2004). This means that the members of the first group have a high level of each one of these 8 factors, the members of the second group have moderate level (or less than the first group) and the members of the third group have the least level of these factors.

We can examine the participants' learning from Clardy's (2000) perspective which divides the learning projects into three types: (1) projects triggered by work requirements, (2) voluntarily projects, and (3) "synergistic" projects which were projects stimulated by organisational climate factors. According to this perspective, only type (1) is applicable to some of the participants' learning. This includes what the two IT experts Marwan and Hamzeh learnt because their field of work demands learning continuously about the updates and the new products, part of what Hani learnt because he learnt English for communication with the foreign managers and he studied a diploma in investment to invest his money, the Masters degree which Maha studied (because she wanted to improve her skills as a

¹⁴ These factors were explained in the Literature Review.

journalist) and the English courses which some participants studied in order to be able to work better (not to find another job). These three types do not include the SDL which some participants practiced to find better jobs elsewhere.

5.5 Classification of the participants' organisations

Having finished examining and analysing the participants' SDL readiness and interest in SDL, I started to examine their organisations regarding their support and encouragement for the managers' SDL. I could conclude that these 10 organisations have varying degrees and forms of support and encouragement for managers' SDL. However, there are three factors which seem to play a vital role in giving support to the managers' SDL.

It is possible to classify the participants' ten organisations into four categories according to three factors which are considered important forms of support and encouragement for learning. These factors are: (a) financial support, (b) different forms of support (resources, days off to study etc), (c) rewards for learning (i.e. promotions, incentives, salary increase etc which lead to retention). These factors were concluded from the participants' descriptions of their organisations. However, we need first to take into consideration that all these ten organisations give their managers the freedom to learn whatever they like as they stated (i.e. they do not prevent them from learning).

The importance of this classification is related to the fact that we can use it to understand specifically the type of support that each organisation presents for its managers' SDL. Moreover, this classification will be also useful to see how the different types of participants (as classified above) interact with their organisations as I will explain how the interaction between the participants and their organisations later.

The classification of these organisations is as follows:

- a- Organisations that have high level of support for SDL: These organisations give all the three factors (i.e. a, b and c). Arfan, Samer, Marwan and Hani work for organisations of the type.
- b- Organisations that have medium level of support for SDL: These organisations have only factors a & b. Sulaiman works for an organisation of this type.

- c- Organisations that have a low level of support for SDL: These organisations have factor b. Maha, Saeed, Ammar work for organisations of the type.
- d- Organisations that have no support for SDL: These organisations do not have any support of any type for learning. Hamzeh and Qasem work for organisations of this type.

Many researchers (Ellinger, Yang, & Howton, 2002; Marsick & Watkins, 1999; Pfeffer & Veiga, 1999) stated that the environment that is conducive to learning and development can enhance the individual and organisational performance and this makes the environment within organisations and important factor that should be examined carefully this research. The classification of the participants' organisations which I made shows that there are varying degrees or certain forms of support for learning as they mentioned during the interviews. This classification takes into consideration if the participants have access to the resources of learning within their organisations according to what Brookfield (2000) explained regarding the issues of power, control and access to the resources since this lies at the heart of SDL. It also takes into consideration what Spear and Mocker (1984) stated regarding the importance of the available resources within the learner's environment.

The ten participants work for ten different organisations and these organisations have different levels and methods of support to learning. The participants explained how their organisations support their learning and this helps us to understand their internal learning environment (the detailed description of how the participants' organisations support their learning is mentioned in the previous chapter). However, we like here to concentrate on some aspects of the support which the participants received from their organisations to examine later the interaction between them regarding SDL. This requires examining how each one of the participants' organisations is conducive to learning or supports learning to understand this topic thoroughly.

Different researchers (Guglielmino & Guglielmino, 2001; Guglielmino & Murdick, 1997; Zemke, 1998) believe that organisations are under different types of pressure including the escalating pace of technology, growing emphasis on cost efficiency and effectiveness and global competition, but it seems that in Syria the organisations are also under severe

pressure from the government because the government controls the usage of IT in different ways. For example, the Syrian government did not give the people internet connections and it did not allow any private sector or a foreign company to give the people internet connections for many years. The government started to give the people internet connections in 2001 and 2002 whereas many other countries had the internet services nearly six or seven years before that date; this made the managers in Syria (and all the country) late in benefiting from the internet (as explained by Marwan during the interview with him). It seems that the government's influence on the managers' SDL in Syria is very negative and many managers and organisations are suffering from that (as explained in the previous chapter in 12-1).

Regarding the situation now during the civil war, it seems very dramatic and unfortunately it seems that the government did not take any decisions which help the managers to practice SDL during the civil war. For example, the government did not allow the foreign companies to work in Syria till now, and they did not remove the strong legal restrictions on the economy or changed anything that has negative influence on the managers' SDL. Some managers explained that it is difficult for them now to plan to study because there are many obstacles during the civil war in addition to insecurity and uncertainty (as explained in the previous chapter).

5.6 The influence of the external environment

The previous section introduced the factors that are related to the participants' organisations (i.e. work environment or internal environment) and which have influence on the participants' SDL. However, we need to examine the external factors that have influence on the participant's SDL in order to have a comprehensive view of all the factors which have influence on their SDL.

It is obvious from what the participants said during the interviews (as explained in the previous chapter) that there are factors that exist outside their organisations which have influence on their SDL. These factors exist mostly in Syria and some of them come from abroad. Therefore, we can divide these factors into two types:

5.6.1 The factors which come from outside Syria (international factors):

These factors include two elements:

- a- English:** Three participants mentioned that they studied English courses because they felt that it is necessary for their work, communication with foreigners and to use the internet. English is the international language of business and commerce now and it has influence on those participants' SDL as they had to learn it.
- b- IT:** All the participants know how to use the internet and the basic computers programs and some of them know how to use more programs. Two of them are specialised in IT (Hamzeh and Marwan) and they know that they have to learn about the updates of the software they are using and about the new IT inventions to continue working in this profession. All the IT products (i.e. updates, inventions, software and hardware) come from outside Syria, mainly from the USA and Western Europe, and some products come from South East Asia. This shows us that IT has a strong influence on the participants' SDL.

5.6.2 The factors which are inside Syria (national or contextual factors):

I could conclude from the interviews that the government in Syria plays a vital role in the managers' SDL. It seems that the government of Syria has been playing the role of a very strict controller of any products which come from abroad and this includes in particular the IT products. Hani and Marwan did not like the strong grip which the government has on IT and they stated many examples about that (as explained in the previous chapter). Hani and Marwan seemed very upset when they talked about the government's decisions which are related to the IT. Moreover, it seems that the Syrian government also has a very strong grip on the economy in general as there are many decisions related to preventing different private sector and foreign companies from working in Syria, and taking decisions that make the legal, educational and administrative systems cause difficulties for the managers who practice SDL (all that is explained in the previous chapter).

However, it is well-known that the two external factors which come from outside Syria (i.e. English and IT) have influence on many countries in the world and in this case Syria is not an exception or unique when compared with them from this point of view. But, regarding the

influence of the government on the managers' SDL in Syria (which is a factor within Syria), this can be compared with many other countries to understand its severity and influence. Therefore, when we compare the influence of the Syrian government on the Syrian managers' SDL with, for example, the EU countries or the USA, we can realise that the Syrian government has a very negative influence on the Syrian managers' SDL because the governments of the EU and the USA do not have legislations or procedures which are similar to the applicable legislations and procedures in Syria. For example, the EU countries do not impose heavy security checks on CDs and DVDs and they do not prevent the IT companies or private banks and universities from working within the EU.

Furthermore, the influence of the governments on the managers' SDL does not appear in any research, theory or model that I have reviewed. This research might be the first one that shows this influence, and, however, if it is not the first one internationally, it is definitely the first one that shows the influence of the Syrian government on the Syrian managers' SDL as I have could not find any research related to this topic. I am confident that no similar researches were ever done inside Syria that would reveal a similar conclusion because the researchers and the participants would be afraid to criticise the government and even if they do that, the research can never be published or authorised by the university. Some of the participants felt free to criticise the government during the interviews probably because the situation changed in Syria in the past few months as people started to talk about politics more especially through the internet where they feel more secure when they want to relieve the pressure they suffer from during the civil war. Moreover, some participants trusted me because I approached them through their friends and they were confident that their names will not be revealed to anyone as I promised them.

5.7 Other findings & implications

There are some issues and conclusions which appeared after analyzing the data and the previous conclusions which have some connections with the topic of managers' SDL in Syria. These issues and conclusions were not anticipated to be found within the frame of this research when I started it, and we can examine them to understand their importance and relatedness to the topic carefully.

5.7.1 Private sector versus public sector

The four managers who work at the public sector (Maha, Hamzeh, Saeed and Qasem) have a low level of support or no support at all for managers' SDL (as explained earlier in this chapter in 4-3 & 4-4). If we add this conclusion to what was also concluded and explained earlier about the negative role of the Syrian government towards managers' SDL (in this chapter in 5-2), we can have a deeper understanding about the severe negative influence of the Syrian government on the managers' SDL from different perspectives. It will also show us the Syrian managers' reaction towards the negative aspects (some of these aspects are related to their SDL) of the public sector.

However, it seems that the issue regarding the public sector is not related only to the low level of support to the managers' SDL because there were several other indications that show other administrative problems that exist in the public sector. These problems can be summarised as follows:

- a- **Nepotism:** Six interviewees mentioned that there is a strong form of nepotism within the public sector. Hamzeh mentioned that he needed support from one of his relatives to ask the general to agree on releasing him from his contract with the army, and then another relative helped him to find his current job. He said:

I didn't want to renew it [work contract] with them, but they wanted me to renew it...I felt upset and I had to talk to one of my relatives who was an officer in the army to help me and he talked with the general to release me;...the general agreed and I finished my work with them;...then one of my relatives also helped me to work as an IT expert for the Syrian Railways.

Samer also mentioned that one of his relatives helped him to find a good job at a company. He said: "...the manager of the company was one of my father's relatives and he really helped me to get that job". Moreover, Ammar mentioned that he thinks that the only way to become a general manager is through a relative. Though he said it like a joke and he laughed, it shows us that this method of thinking might be common in Syria. He said: "...maybe the only way to become a general manager of a company here is to have a strong relationship with someone...or through a relative

[he laughs]”. Saeed also relied on one of his relatives to transfer him to the Ministry of Education. He said:

...one of my relatives told me that if I learn how to use the computers, he can transfer me to work at the Department of Education of Damascus...my relative was a manager at the Ministry of Education and he knew many things about the needs of the Ministry for employees and their plans and projects;...he also knew many other managers at the Ministry...in 1993, my relative could transfer me to the Department of Education of Damascus.

Marwan said that one of his relatives recommended him to work for a company. He said: “...one of my relatives recommended me to work for them and he really helped me at that company because he knew one of the big managers there”. Furthermore, Maha mentioned that after she had her degree, she wanted to be promoted to a better job, her manager told her that they do not have vacancies and promised her to promote her when they have a vacancy, and she did not believe him because she knew that she needs ‘support’ from ‘someone’; she believes that she has to try ‘other ways’ to be promoted. The terms ‘support’ and ‘other ways’ refers to different illegal methods including using a relative for promotions or finding a job¹⁵. She said:

...I graduated from the university and I asked my manager to find a suitable job for me at the newspaper with my BA;...he said that they don’t have vacancies for me at that time, but he promised me to give me the priority when any vacancy occurs;...I didn’t believe him because I knew that when there would be a vacancy, I would need ‘support’ from ‘somebody’ to occupy that position;...I had to try other ways to find a better job or positions otherwise they would have let me in that position forever.

b- Complicated administrative procedures: Hani explained how he suffered a lot to get a licence to manufacture a car and he could not get it. He tried very hard to negotiate with one of the assistants of the prime minister, but he only encountered unreasonable excuses, delays and many administrative obstacles until he became desperate. He said:

...we tried very hard to get the licence and we contacted the prime minister himself at that time;...we met one of his assistants and we told them that we are ready to give the government any guarantees or implement all their requirements and conditions;...despite that...we didn’t get the licence;...they gave us silly excuses,...all

¹⁵ In colloquial Syrian Arabic, the terms ‘support’ and ‘other ways’ refer to using different illegal methods including using a relative or bribery to get promotions or finding a job.

these excuses didn't convince us and we were desperate and hopeless;...they have put many administrative obstacles and imaginary crazy hurdles in our way until we really got desperate.

Moreover, Marwan explained how he and his friends suffered from the strict security checks when they received CDs and DVDs by post (as mentioned earlier). He said:

...when I went to receive it [the CD] from the post office, they told me that they had to send it to the IT security department at the intelligence administration to be checked and approved by them;...that took between four to eight weeks to be done.

- c- **Low salaries:** The managers of the public sector are not taking good salaries and this makes many of them leave their jobs to find jobs at the private sector (Saeed and Qasem mentioned and explained that as stated in the previous chapter).

These negative aspects which are attributed to the public sector organisations are not found at the private sector.

5.7.2 Managers' reaction

The previous conclusion makes us think about the managers' reaction towards these negative aspects which exist in the public sector. Several participants mentioned that they left the public sector to find jobs at the private sector for different reasons. Therefore, it seems that many managers leave the public sector to the private sector after gaining experience and good qualifications because it seems that some public sector organisations enable their managers to use their resources to learn and gain good experience.

Qasem mentioned that if the managers at his organisation earn high degrees, they would find jobs at the private sector because the salaries are too low after the deterioration of the value of the Syrian pound. It seems that if some managers and employees practice SDL at his organisation, they leave it and other organisations will get the benefits of that learning. The workload at the public sector is less than the private sector and this makes some employees read books and study easily while they are working. He said:

...the salary increase if I get a degree might be only three or four thousand Syrian pounds¹⁶, and now, with the decrease of the value of the Syrian pounds because of the war, this is nothing;...there is self-directed learning at our Establishment, but the fruit of that learning is

¹⁶ This is approximately £14-19 (when the interview was done in March 2014).

not guaranteed to be for the benefit of the public sector; that's a problem for the public sector;...you can see at the public sector some employees reading books or newspapers, if they are students, they can study even during the work hours in many cases;...but that is very difficult to be seen at the private sector; here the working hours are less, the workload is less and the responsibility is relatively less.

Maha mentioned that her husband and her ex-manager left their jobs because they found jobs at private sector organisations. She did not want to leave because she liked her job as she knew everybody and she felt comfortable (i.e. emotional and psychological reasons). Her organisation gives its employees and managers the freedom to learn what they like and to have access to good resources. Therefore, many employees gain experience and knowledge at this organisation and then they find better jobs at other organisations. She said:

...my husband found another job, but I didn't want to find another job because I felt comfortable at my work;...there is freedom to learn what I want or what I need at my newspaper and for this reason you can see that many employees work for our newspaper for a short period, learn what they want, gain experience and then they go to find other jobs at other organisations.

Therefore, regarding managers' SDL at the public sector, it seems that there is a big problem at the public sector organisations because these organisations have good resources for learning and low salaries. Many managers or employees use these resources to learn and gain good qualifications and experience and then they find other jobs at the private sector. Maha said a joke about that, but it seems that it is not a joke as this study shows that it is a reality and a big problem for the public sector because the availability of the resources, support and freedom to learn is working 'against' the public sector organisations (i.e. it backfires). She said:

...the salaries are not good at our organisation because it's a public sector newspaper;...many employees look for other jobs with higher salaries elsewhere;...see, too much freedom for the employees can make you lose them quickly [she laughs].

There is another reaction against the negative aspects of the public sector which was mentioned by two participants. When Hamzeh was working for the ministry of defence, he did not like how the officers treated him, and he did not like the routine which they applied to get approvals for his learning. Therefore, he started to withhold any information or suggestions he had and did not inform them about the programming languages he learnt in

the evening. He felt that they do not deserve that knowledge as long as they do not want to pay for it. He said:

...it was very difficult to convince the financial manager to pay for a course unless my manager who was a colonel signed a document...and that also required a signature from the general and another major who was the head of the personnel department;...I didn't like that routine and all these signatures;...as a result of this treatment, I didn't like to sever them as they wanted;...I didn't like to give them any suggestions or remarks that would help them in any way because they made my morale so low;...I didn't tell them that I knew these programming languages because I paid to learn them and they refused to help me to pay for that.

Regarding his current job at another public sector organisation, Hamzeh feels that he cannot reform all the administrative system which is very old and slow. He feels that there is no need to learn anything new to improve the current system because there are no funds to pay the learning fees. He has another job at a private sector company in the evenings and they pay for his learning; this made him implement many projects for them. This shows us that if some public sector organisations do not support managers' SDL, the managers may feel that there is no need for any more learning or improvements. He said:

...I have many aims and projects that I can perform for my Establishment, but they all seem useless because there are factors or issues [related to the administrative system] that I can't control or solve;...this means that we don't need to learn how to make websites which enable the customers of paying with the credit cards and no need to connect them to the database and the banking system;...this makes us cancel the idea of learning anything more in this route;...that company [I work for in the evenings] is a private sector company and I could do many projects for them because they have given me the money.

Therefore, this explains how the public sector organisations are not actually getting real benefits from the managers' SDL for many reasons. To compare that with the situation at the private sector organisations, we can examine what the participants who work for the private sector organisations to understand the difference between them and the public sector organisations.

Hamzeh works for a public sector organisation in the morning and a private sector organisation in the evenings because the salary which he gets from the public sector organisation is not sufficient. He can implement many projects for the private sector organisation because they pay him well, whereas he cannot implement many projects for the

public sector organisation because they do not pay for that. This clearly shows us that the public sector organisation is not getting all the possible benefits (i.e. no optimization) from the experts and capabilities that they have. He said:

...I have to work in the evenings because my salary is not enough;...there are many IT managers who work for more than one company now in Syria because the salaries are not enough for anyone;...that company is a private sector company and I could do many projects for them because they have given me the money;...not like this Establishment where I have to work and I can't implement new projects because they don't want to pay or they can't pay for that.

Samer's manager encouraged him to study a Masters degree and the Dean promised him that if he gets that Masters degree, he will become a lecturer at that university. They found that he was a hardworking manager and they told him that they need university lecturers like him. This shows us that his organisation knows how to benefit from its good managers and motivate them to learn and work more. He said:

...now I am convinced and I have assurances from the Dean that I will be a lecturer at the university when I finish my Masters degree;...I am studying hard to get the degree;...my manager now is encouraging me to study hard to finish the Masters degree so I can become a lecturer at this university...he believes that the lecturers of the university should be people like me with good experience and hardworking.

Moreover, Marwan uses the freedom and the resources which his organisation gave him to achieve his organisation's aims. They gave him the freedom to learn whatever he needs to succeed at his work as a marketing manager and he realises the importance of this freedom to succeed. The organisation's success depends on his selection of what he needs to learn and this shows us the importance of his role for his organisation. He said:

My company gives me a wide space of freedom to learn what I want because I am the marketing manager;...I am responsible for my own learning and I have to make my learning beneficial for me and the company from different perspectives...I have to learn something useful for the company and the customers about the products;...It depends on me; I can choose what I want to learn and how according to my time, aims and preferences.

This comparison shows us the difference between the roles of the managers at the private sector organisations and the public sector organisations. It shows that the managers at the private sectors have in general more support, benefits and freedom to learn than those who

work for the public sector. It also suggests that the private sector organisations have more 'utilisation' of their managers than the public sector organisations.

5.7.3 No Leaders

I noticed that none of the participants used the word 'leader' to refer to any other manager at his or her organisation. I believe that the reason for this is that the word 'leader' itself is not commonly used in the Arab world except in the political, military and social contexts. The studies about leadership in the west have reached the academics in the Arab universities and they use it in their researches, lectures and presentations, but the term itself is not common yet within organisations. My key informant told me that if you ask a participant to distinguish between 'leaders' and 'managers' at his or her organisations, he or she may not be able to do so. He explained to me that the word 'leader' is used sometimes to refer to a manager who has 'new ideas' or implements big changes at work, a manager who achieves great success at his organisation or a manager who has a strong charisma and loved by his employees. However, there is no widely acceptable definition or even specific connotations related to the word 'leader' within the field of business in Syria. This makes it impossible to examine carefully the role of leaders on managers' SDL within the frame of this research.

However, the participants referred to their managers who supported, helped or encouraged them with the word 'manager'. It seems that they refer to the top management and we cannot judge that to say that their manager is a leader or not. Unfortunately, it was not possible to ask the participants about their definition and understanding of the term 'leader' and even if I had asked them about it, they might have given me different definitions for that. This research is not about the influence of leaders on SDL and it is possible to accept that we can understand the role of the top management on SDL through it without focusing on leaders in particular.

5.8 Conclusion

This chapter presented the discussion and analysis of the findings which were explained in the previous chapter. It highlighted the factors which have influence on the Syrian managers' SDL and how they were extracted and concluded from the pervious chapter to understand their effect and importance on the Syrian managers' SDL. These factors form, when we

understand their roles and importance, a comprehensive view that explains why the Syrian managers practice SDL, how they interact with their organisations according to the support they receive from them and how the external factors (which come from the Syrian context and the West) influence their engagement in SDL.

It was necessary for me to classify the participants into three categories according to their SDL readiness and interest in SDL because we cannot understand their engagement in SDL and their interaction with their organisations without this classification. It was also necessary to classify the participants' organisations into three categories to explain the level and types of support and encouragement they present to their managers' SDL.

Moreover, these findings were examined according to the theories and models which many other researchers have constructed to understand them from different perspectives. This helps us to understand what this research added to the previous researches and how we can see the differences and similarities that exist between the findings of this research and the previous researches.

However, the chapter presented important conclusions that show us different factors that have influence on the Syrian managers' SDL. These conclusions will be used to construct a model that shows the relationship between them and explains how the Syrian managers practice SDL. Moreover, my recommendations for further researches within this topic will be also stated in the next chapter with the limitations of the research.

Chapter Six: CONCLUSIONS & IMPLICATIONS

6.1 Introduction

The previous chapter presented the four conclusions which I drew after analysing the data that I had from the interviews and my observations. While I was examining the data, I focused mainly on the factors that have influence on the Syrian managers' SDL and these factors are related to the reasons for learning (i.e. what instigates the participants' SDL), the participants' SDL readiness and interest in SDL (the learners' characteristics), the type and level of support that their organisations gave them and the external factors (the factors which are related to the Syrian context and the international factors).

However, these factors are related to the research aims as they do explain to us why the Syrian managers' learn, the influence of the participants' SDL readiness and interest on their SDL, the influence of their organisations' support for their SDL and the influence of the external factors on their SDL. The research aims sought these factors in order to understand why the Syrian managers' engage in SDL and the factors which have influence on that.

This chapter explains how I used the four conclusions which I could reach (as explained in the previous chapter) after I examined and analysed the previous findings of the research data to construct a model for the Syrian managers' SDL. Some of these conclusions will be combined together to reach a deeper analysis of the examined topic from different perspectives to enrich the research with more thorough findings and useful information. The research recommendations and limitations will also be explained to cover these important topics within this research.

6.2 SDL Model for Managerial Learning in Syria

I used the previous analysis and conclusions of the data which resulted from the interviews and my observations as building blocks to construct a model that explains the factors which have influence on the Syrian managers' SDL. This is the last step of the application of the grounded theory which I used in this research.

This is the model:

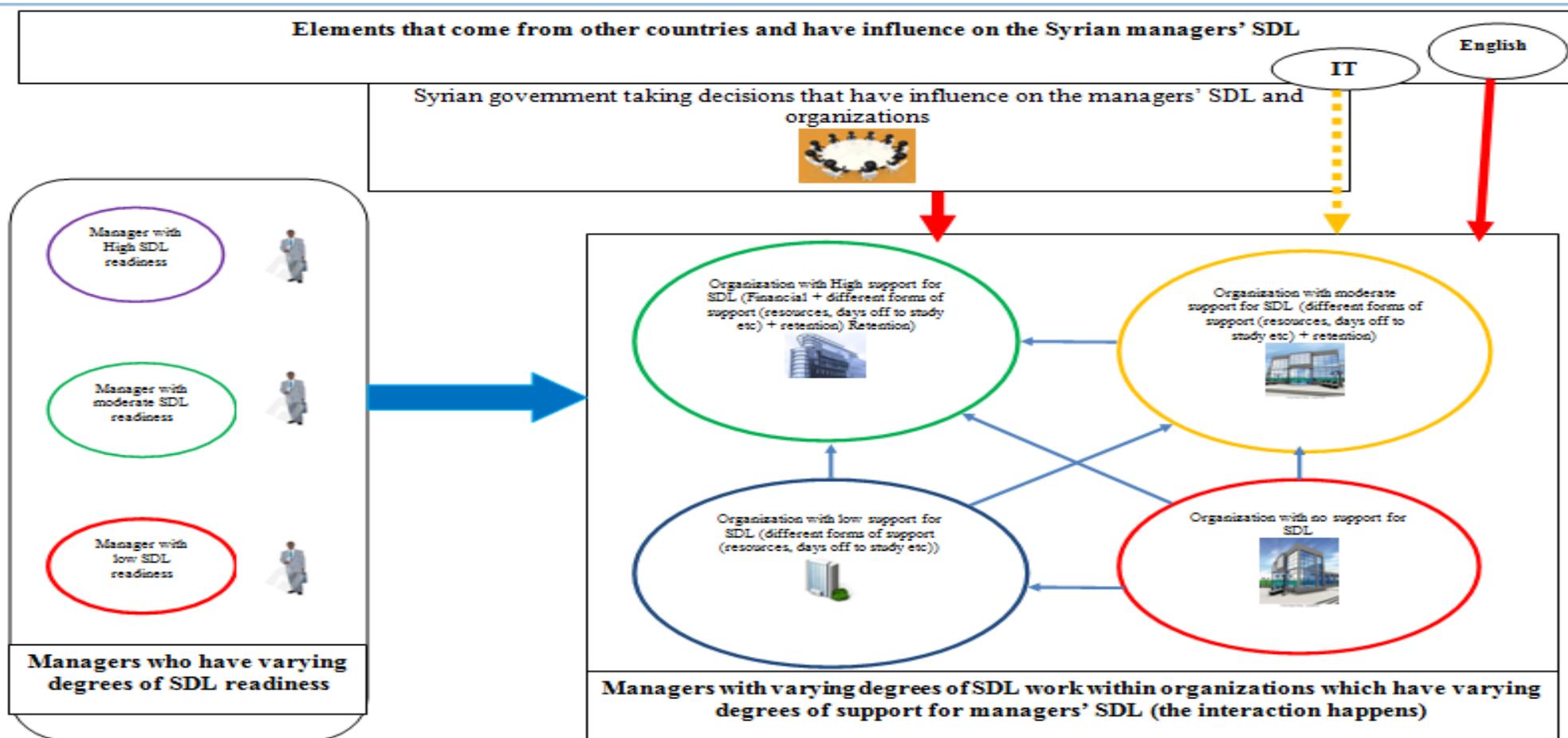


Figure 12: The Model

6.3 The components of the model

On the left side, we can see that there are managers who have varying degrees of SDL readiness. They usually find work at different organisations that have varying degrees of support for managers' SDL. There is no rule to explain which managers will go to which organisations (random distribution as none of the participants mentioned that there is a rule for finding jobs). Thus, it is represented in the model as a separate factor from what is happening within the organisation (on the left). This also takes into consideration the influence of personality on learning (as studied by Oddi (1984)).

On the right side, there are the organisations which the managers started working at. These organisations have four varying levels of support for managers' SDL. The managers start working for these organisations and the interaction starts here as some managers might have a high SDL readiness and their organisations might have low support for managers' SDL or vice versa. If a manager who has a high SDL readiness works for an organisation that has low or no support for managers' SDL, he would not like to stay at this organisation and he may practice SDL alone (maybe he will pay for his own learning as Hamzeh did when he was working for the army), and then he would find a better job at another organisation. If a manager who has low SDL readiness works for an organisation that has high support for managers' SDL, the organisation may encourage him to practice SDL (this happened to Samer as his organisation encouraged him to study a Masters degree). If a manager who has moderate SDL readiness works for an organisation that also has a moderate support for managers' SDL, he may stay there (like Arfan) or he may try to practice SDL to find a better job later. Some managers who have high SDL readiness may continue their work at organisations which have low or moderate support for managers' SDL (like Maha) because they have other reasons to stay (she said she likes her job for other reasons). The interaction happens and it is not really possible to put a formula to anticipate what will exactly happen throughout this interaction as there are many factors that may interfere in it (the salaries, the none availability of other jobs, if the manager prefers to moonlight like Hamzeh etc). As the arrows indicate (between these organisations), the managers tend to move from the

organisations that have lower levels (or no support at all) of support for managers' SDL towards the organisations which have higher levels of support for managers' SDL. However, their aim from working for the organisations that have higher levels of support for managers' SDL is not practicing SDL there; they usually aim at getting better salaries and benefits because those organisations give them that.

On the top of the model, there are the factors which come into Syria from other countries (mainly from the west) and they include English and IT. English can go into Syria without interference from the Syrian government (as the participants did not mention that the Syrian government took any decisions that have influence on English). The Syrian government (which is below these in the model) takes decisions that have influence on the flow or spread of IT within Syria and this has influence on the organisations and the managers' SDL (the IT's influence is represented with a dashed arrow to show that it does not flow smoothly like English as the government interferes here). The Syrian government also has influence on the organisations and the managers SDL through the decisions which they take regarding the private companies, foreign companies etc.

6.4 The importance of the model

The model shows all the factors which have influence on the Syrian managers' SDL within the Syrian context. This includes the influence of the managers' SDL readiness, the level of the support which the organisations give to the managers to practice SDL (work environment), the influence of the Syrian context (represented by the Syrian government's decisions) and the influence of the international factors (factors which come from other countries into Syria). It is a comprehensive model that takes all the factors that have influence on the Syrian managers' SDL. Therefore, all the previous researches which are related to SDL are taken into consideration to present this model and this includes the individual characteristics of the managers (individual characteristics), the influence of the work environment, the influence of the external environment (or context) and the international factors. I have not found researches that explain the influence of the international factors (which come from other countries) on the managers' SDL. Most of the researches take only the IT into consideration to study the influence of the internet on SDL and distance learning. This research revealed

this influence in addition to the influence of the Syrian government's decisions on the Syrian managers' SDL.

6.5 Developing and testing the model

The model can be tested and developed in order to gain more benefits from it in future. The tests can include doing more researches within Syria regarding the influence of the Syrian government in particular on managerial SDL or to explore if there are any other factors that have influence within the Syrian context on the managers' SDL. This may include any parties and/or economic, political, social and educational changes within Syria in addition to developments or changes within certain industries or economic sectors. Moreover, this model can be tested in other countries to see if they have similar factors that have influence on managerial SDL in that country. Other governments may have different types or levels of influence or control on managerial SDL as the rules, laws and regulations are not the same in all the countries. Furthermore, other countries (like the Western countries) may have other parties that influence on the governments' decisions like the trade unions, the media and the political parties. These parties may have a 'positive' influence on the governments' decisions that can make them take decisions that encourage or support managerial SDL (in Syria, these independent parties do not exist and probably this made all or most of the government's decisions have 'negative influence' on the managers' SDL). Testing or developing the model requires implementing more similar or different researches to explore the influence of the government(s) on managerial SDL in Syria or other countries. The influence of the political factors on managerial SDL is yet not explored probably in all the countries and this research highlights this role in Syria.

6.6 Recommendations for further research

This research studied the Syrian managers' SDL and there are several researches that could be implemented later to examine the same topic from different perspectives. However, the findings and the model of this research revealed that there are some subjects that could be investigated in future to gain more knowledge about SDL. These are the recommendations that I could present regarding the possible researches that are related to this topic:

6.6.1 Recommendation 1

There is currently a civil war in Syria. It is possible to implement researches to study the influence of the civil war on managers' SDL. Though this study covers this topic partially, it is not considered a specialised research to cover this topic thoroughly. This topic could be also examined from a different perspective like 'the influence of the government's negligence of managers' SDL on the development (or current situation) of the country'.

6.6.2 Recommendation 2

Although only one woman manager (Maha) was included in this research, her responses reflected some of the factors highlighted in the literature review chapter concerning women managers' engagement with SDL. Thus, Maha explained how she used her relationships with her colleagues, family, co-workers and managers to learn and obtain support. This echoes claims of researchers as Bryans & Mavi 2003, and Catalyst 2004, 2005 that women's methods of learning are unique because they gain their managerial advancement through placing greater emphasis on networks, mentors and social interactions. Therefore, it would be useful to conduct more research involving a wider range of women managers in Syria in order to study different aspects that are related to the female managers' methods of learning and to establish the extent to which there are differences between female and male managers' SDL in Syria.

6.6.3 Recommendation 3

Some participants mentioned that there were some reforms in Syria that happened a few years ago. The government allowed the many private sector organisations to work in Syria including private universities, banks and distance learning colleges. More researches are needed in this field to explain the influence of the reforms or changes that the government implemented on the Syrian managers' SDL because currently there are no researches that show that influence.

6.7 Limitations

This research has some limitations that were imposed by different elements and factors. First, there were neither data nor researches about this topic (or even similar topics). This

made it difficult for me to benefit from any previous researches or data that could be very useful for this research. However, I believe that this gives my research a special importance as it is the first research in this field.

Second, this research relied on self-reported data (i.e. managers who told their stories and opinions) and my observations. This makes it limited by the fact that it cannot be independently verified. Self-reported data contain several potential sources of bias like: (1) selective memory (i.e. remembering or not remembering experiences or incidents that happened in the past); (2) telescoping (recalling incidents that happened at one time as if they happened at another time); (3) attribution (attributing positive events and outcomes to one's own agency but attributing negative events and outcomes to external forces); and (4) exaggeration (representing outcomes or embellishing events as more significant than is suggested from other data) (University of Southern California Library, 2014). Therefore, some of what the participants said might be subject to any (or all) of these forms of bias. However, I noticed that there are no contradictions in their stories, and what they told me about the Syrian government's decisions seems identical and not contradictory to what I know or what is already known by many Syrians.

The literature review contained some researches about the women managers and SDL and this research examined only one woman manager out of ten participants. If we take into consideration the sociocultural dimension of learning and the importance of a manager's interaction with the social context to practice SDL, we can notice that there is an important topic that should be studied within this field which is related to 'how women managers practice SDL in Syria'. Women's interaction and relationships within a certain social context are different from other women's interaction and relationships in other social contexts as there are influences from religion, traditions, families and laws. This makes us expect women managers' methods of practicing SDL in a certain context to be different from how other women managers practice learning in other contexts. This research does not cover this topic and it is worth studying by other researchers (as proposed in Recommendation 2 above).

Finally, I applied Malcolm Knowles' definition of SDL in this research¹⁷. It would be interesting to see whether, if another researcher applied a different definition of SDL, he or she would reach different conclusions. It was not possible to apply all the definitions and no researcher can present a definition that is acceptable by all the other researchers. Thus, the limitation here comes from the non-consensus on a certain definition of SDL.

6.8 Contribution to knowledge

This research is considered a novel contribution to knowledge because it is a study related to a topic that no other researcher has ever studied before. Moreover, the conclusions and model which this research presented are new in this field. The research led to conclusions related to the relationship between the Syrian managers' SDL and their SDL readiness, organisations and the Syrian context in addition to some international or global factors that have influence on their SDL.

It is worth mentioning that the issue of the relationship between the government decisions and SDL has never been examined before in any country as I have never found researches about this topic. Several participants mentioned that the Syrian government's decisions and procedures had a strong, direct and indirect influence on their SDL and this research examined this issue and explained how and why that happened. This conclusion and issue was not anticipated or known in the beginning of the research and it can help many other researchers to understand the nature and connection between the governments' decisions (i.e. the political factor) and the managers' SDL in different countries to have deeper understanding about it.

The model which I constructed is applicable to Syria only, but it could be used as a base for other researches that could be conducted in many other countries to construct similar models if possible. I believe that each country has its own model because the factors which have influence on managers' SDL can be different from one country to another. Furthermore, the strength and nature of these factors could be different because they may intertwine together to form a strong force that can influence on managers' SDL in a certain country.

¹⁷ The reasons for selecting, applying Malcolm Knowles' definition of SDL and why it is suitable for this research are explained in the Literature Review Chapter.

However, this study proves that SDL itself is not something that could be understood from a short definition like Knowles' definition (though it defines SDL with some details) because there are factors or forces that may interfere to make the learners take, or not take, certain decisions regarding what, how and why to learn. This study proves that there are forces or factors within the organisations, national context and which come from other countries (international) that have influence on the Syrian managers' SDL and this means that SDL is not merely an outcome of the learners' own free desire, ideas and will.

6.9 Reflections

This research gave me the opportunity to understand how researches are made through continuous reading, analysis, comparisons and thorough understanding of different subjects. Each chapter within this research made me focus on specific skills, topics and aspects that I had to combine together to complete this research. However, this showed me the importance of acquiring many skills in order to complete a research.

The Literature Review chapter made me look for many books, journals, websites and articles from different sources to collect all the required data, theories, opinions and researches that are related to SDL. Having spent almost a year to finish this chapter, I gained a wide perspective of the theories, opinions and perspectives that the researchers reached and used to study SDL. It was obvious to me that there is no one fixed standpoint that can show me all the dimensions of this topic and that a comprehensive view required using many different perspectives and theories.

The Methodology chapter made me focus on understanding 'how' a research is conducted according to specific logical and philosophical criteria that would make it acceptable academically. Though I made a research while I was studying my Masters degree, it cannot be compared with this research because this research demanded a few years of work in addition to applying different skills and analysis. Moreover, the aim of this research is also different as it demanded presenting a novel contribution to knowledge which was something new to me. This made me understand the sequence of the process of research from an academic point of view.

Doing the interviews was the most exciting task that I have done throughout this research as I had to care about the ethics and pay attention to the details, observe the interviewees and translate everything faithfully and accurately. I also had to make sure that the participants feel comfortable during the interviews and give them assurances that the data will be safely protected and confidential. I enjoyed this phase though it took a long time of preparation and implementation.

Writing the Findings chapter made me learn how to code the interviews and how to present the data through a specific concise and informative method that can achieve the goals of the research. I could understand from my supervisor's notes that the clarity of the presentation and the logical sequence of the narration were the most important required aspects for this chapter and I had to take care of that. Moreover, this process demanded paying attention to the details in order to guarantee that the reader would understand it accurately and properly. The process of analysis demands implementing several mental processes of comparison, contrast, conclusion and reflection whereas the process of presenting data demands organizing the explanation logically to make it clear and concise. However, it was not possible to explain or even remember all the processes that I thought about while my mind was busy with the analysis probably because many of these mental processes did not lead to useful conclusions, but I had to focus on the general path that I followed to reach the final conclusions.

The last two chapters that contained the discussion, analysis, categorization and the models were the most important chapters because they demanded exerting efforts to analyze the data logically to reach the required outcomes. The analysis process cannot be described accurately because it is impossible for me to remember or organise all the comparisons, contrasts, ideas and theories that occurred to me. But, however, I remember that the most important processes that I implemented were related to the 'why', 'what' and 'how' one or more of the participants did/ did not do something. I had to think about the reasons of their actions, reactions and behaviour continuously and compare them to try to reach useful conclusions. I learnt that though a research might be immersed with hundreds of 'chunks' of

data, he or she can find methods to organise them and reach good conclusions if he or she focuses on the aims of the research and applies logical thinking.

I feel happy because I used Skype to do the interviews as it is considered one of the modern instruments that could be used by researchers. However, I believe that technology will be more advanced in future and many researchers will increasingly use it to save their time and efforts.

6.10 Summary

This research explored the Syrian managers' SDL to understand how it happens and why they practice it. Its aim also included identifying and examining the factors which have influence on the Syrian managers' SDL from different perspectives. The research is considered a novel contribution to knowledge as there are only a few researches on SDL outside the western countries and it is the first research about the Syrian managers' SDL. The subsidiary aims of the research are exploring and identifying the Syrian managers' reasons for engaging with SDL, the influence of the organisational culture, the development in technology and the Syrian context on the Syrian managers' SDL.

The Literature Review of this research presented the researches which are related to the learners themselves, the process of learning with its stages and implications, the attempts of many researchers to define SDL and analyze it. Brookfield (2006) explained that the results of the studies about SDL are not generalisable in general due to their culture- and class-specific nature. However, the definitions also included defining the 'self' within the context of SDL and the relationship between SDL and the 'self', the definitions of 'learning' and the definitions of SDL in addition to the similar concepts.

Moreover, this included presenting the six approaches to understanding and examining SDL that are used by the researchers in addition to the models which some researches constructed to understand SDL. Further explanations were also introduced regarding general information about SDL, studies about the learners and how the process of learning through SDL happens. Having presented a summary of all these researches, the current research activities were presented in order to identify any existing gaps in the field of researches on SDL. This analysis showed that there were gaps related to the influence of rewards, leaders,

corporate culture, culture and the Internet in the non-western countries on managers' SDL. There were several fields of study that are considered important for my research and they include the interactions between the SDL and institutions and the application of SDL in the field of management learning.

The Methodology Chapter explained important topics and issues that are related to how the research was conducted. This included presenting the research aims, epistemology and ontology, questions, the interview questions, the sampling method, the interviews and how they were implemented, overcoming the quality issues of the research, the ethics and the data analysis process in addition to the limitations of the research. Regarding the epistemology and ontology of the research, interpretivism was adopted to achieve the aims of the research as it is related to examining data that is related to humans and this also required adopting subjectivism and inductive approach.

However, as the research demanded seeking data related to the Syrian managers' views and behaviour, it required adopting a qualitative approach to collect the primary data from them and the secondary data was collected from other sources like observation and some excerpts from the organisations that explain the managers' learning. This required implementing 20 interviews with 20 Syrian managers who worked for 20 different organisations. The interviews were semi-structured interviews and implemented through Skype because there was a civil war in Syria and it was not neither the researcher nor the participants to move or meet safely there, and the snowball sampling method was used. The research was designed to be methodologically sound and morally defensible to all the involved parties to guarantee a high standard of ethics.

The data which was obtained from the interviews was presented in the Findings chapter in different formats to explain them. This included mainly how the participants understood SDL, how they practiced it, why they practiced it, how they engaged in it, the difficulties they encountered, who and what encouraged them to do it and explained the work environment around them in addition to the influence of the external factors on their SDL.

The analysis of the findings gave four topics related to the subsidiary aims of the research:

(1) the reasons for the Syrian managers' engagement with SDL, (2) the influence of organisational culture on the Syrian managers' SDL, (3) the influence of developments in technology on the Syrian managers' SDL, and (4) the influence of the Syrian context on the Syrian managers' SDL. These findings and conclusions were discussed, analyzed and categorised in order to establish the basis for constructing a model that explains how the Syrian managers engage into SDL and what influences their SDL.

It was discovered that all the participants used SDL as an instrument to achieve their aims which might be promotion, financial gain or a better job. This means that the participants were 'goal-oriented' according to Houle's (1961, 1984) classification. Furthermore, the participants showed varying levels of engagement in SDL and this was related mainly to their varying levels of SDL readiness. Consequently, they were classified into three groups that have different levels of engagement in SDL readiness. This classification helped us to understand how each group acted within their organisation as each group has its own characteristics and reactions that are related to SDL.

Moreover, the participants' organisations were also classified into four categories according to their support and engagement for their managers' SDL. Regarding the influence of the external factors on the managers' SDL, there are two factors which come from outside Syria: English and IT, and one factor that comes from inside Syria which is the political factor (i.e. the Syrian government). The Syrian government imposed legislations that make the Syrian managers encounter many difficulties when they want to practice SDL.

Moreover, there are some other findings that are related to this topic. First, those who work for the public sector in Syrian seem to be suffering from several administrative problems like: nepotism, complicated administrative procedures and low salaries. Second, the public sector managers have certain reactions towards these problems as: leaving the public sector to work for the public sector. Finally, it seems that the word 'leader' is not commonly used in the field of business in Syria.

The Conclusions & Implications Chapter presented a model that is based on the four previous conclusions to show how the influencing factors on the Syrian managers' SDL work. It explains how the managers who have varying degrees of SDL readiness start working for

organisations that have varying degrees of support for managerial SDL, and how different reactions occur between the managers' SDL readiness and their organisations due to the varying degrees of support which they receive to practice SDL. As a result of these reactions, the managers may continue working for their organisations, find another job or practice SDL. The model also shows how the government has influence on the IT which comes from outside Syria. This model contains all the factors which have influence on the Syrian managers' SDL within the Syrian context and this shows its importance and relevance.

The recommendations for further research included implementing more research to study the civil war, the difference between male and female managers' SDL in Syria and the influence of the reforms which the Syrian government implemented on managerial SDL. The limitations included the difficulty to benefit from any previous research, the reliance on self-supported data that cannot be independently verified and applying only Knowles' definition of SDL. However, this research is considered a novel contribution to knowledge because no other research has ever studied this topic, and the model is new in this field. Moreover, my reflections explained how I benefited from writing each chapter of this research.

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Appendices

Appendix I

The interview questions and the expected data that each one of them would give:

No.	Question	Expected data from answers
1	Looking back on your career can you tell me how you have learned and developed?	Prompts giving reasons for pursuing particular courses of study etc, different methods of learning and data related to the manager's learning in general and his answer can show his personal characteristics, motivation and interests in learning.
2	Can you tell me what you understand by the term 'self-directed learning'?	Prompts giving a definition for SDL which might be different from the definitions we know. This helps us to understand his understanding and ideas about SDL, how it is practiced, why etc. This will also help us to compare the participant's definition with Knowles' definition which I adopted in this research.
3	To what extent has your learning and development as a manager involved you in SDL?	Prompts the participants to explain the methods and experiences that they consider to be SDL or not to be SDL. knowing the learning methods and strategies which the managers' apply to learn to understand their points of views regarding their importance and benefits to them in addition to the available resources to them
4	Who or what have been the main influences that have helped and encouraged you to practise SDL?	probe/prompt – managers/leaders; family/work colleagues; the internet. This helps us to identify the factors which stimulate the managers' SDL. Identifying the factors which supported or hindered the managers' learning whether they are related to personal reasons, his organization or whatsoever.
5	What/who has discouraged or	Probe/prompt – managers/leaders,

	made it difficult for you to practise SDL?	family/work colleagues. This will explain to us all the factors, persons and difficulties which made the manager's SDL difficult or impossible.
6	Is there anything about being a manager in your company/organisation (as opposed to other organisations) that affects how you are able to practise and develop your SDL?	This question is broad enough to give us data that can cover all the factors which are related to the managers' personality, preferences, organization or any other fields.
7	Is there anything about being a manager in Syria (as opposed to other countries) that affects how you are able to practise and develop your SDL?	Seeks identifying the external factors (i.e. factors which are related to the Syrian context or culture) which have influence on the managers' SDL.

Appendix II

My notes about the participants during interviews

Serial No.	Participant	Notes
1	Arfan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - He is proud of his achievements at the first company - It seems from his explanation about how learning should be at companies that he really likes to learn and be promoted according to this system. The idea is really attractive to him. - It seems that he can classify the ideas and organise them well with good examples. - He feels proud when he talks about his organization's policy
2	Hani	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - He is upset when he talks about the government's decisions - It is obvious that he hates the government - He likes to make fun of the government's decisions - He makes funny gestures and facial expressions when he talks about the government - He asked me about my university; he cares about learning and universities - He seems very educated and well-informed about many things about business and politics
3	Sulaiman	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - It seems that he likes to talk about positions and how to get them - His English is good - He seems interested in learning English - He seemed upset when he talked about the uncertainty
4	Samer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - He seems happy to talk about his organization and proud of it - He seemed astonished when I told him the definition of SDL - He really doesn't seem confident that he could study the Masters without his manager's encouragement and support
5	Qasem	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - It seems that he really hates his ex-manager who didn't like the computers - It seems that he really likes the computers - He seems upset when he talks about the difficulties which they have now at work

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - He seems upset when he talks about the low salaries of the public sector
6	Ammar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - He seems upset because he couldn't get a house when he was an employee earlier - It seems that he is puzzled by his ex-manager's behaviour when he was studying the postgraduate diploma - He seems upset and sad when he talks about the situation in Syria now
7	Maha	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - She is emotional and sympathetic - She enjoys talking about her dream - She is spontaneous and emotional - She likes to learn - She can express her feelings quite well
8	Hamzeh	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - He feels really upset when he talks about the army officers - He feels upset when he talks about his previous employer - It is obvious that he hates how they have treated him - He seems sarcastic when he speaks about the old infrastructure of the railways or the organization - He seems upset because he can't update the organization - He seems upset when he speaks about his limitations and abilities
9	Marwan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - He seems very enthusiastic for learning - He seems upset and frustrated when he talks about the slow internet they had - He seemed upset when he talked about the security checks and government's decisions - He seems happy and proud when he talks about his organization and work - He seems frustrated and upset when he talks about the government as if he hates it
10	Saeed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - It is obvious that he doesn't like teaching from his tone and expressions - He seems proud of his achievement at the Ministry - He feels upset when he speaks about the higher positions which are for the members of the Party - He seems sad because they can't have good future plans in this situation - He is also upset when he speaks about the low salaries and the government's decisions

Appendix III

Learning at the participants' organizations

Some participants provided the following excerpts from their organizations to show what the managers and employees have learnt in the past few months or years.

Participant	Position	Organization	Courses or learning
Arfan	Financial manager	Cosmetics and herbal remedies (private sector)	<u>Financial department:</u> 1 employee studying Sage started in March 2014.
Sulaiman	Manager of the export department	Clothes manufacturer (private sector)	<u>Export Department:</u> 1 employee studying an intermediate course to learn English; started in September 2013 1 assistant was studying a course to learn how to use PowerPoint started in January 2014 and finished in March 2014.
Hani	General Manager	Selling, buying and car rental cars (private sector)	<u>All the company:</u> 1 manager started to study English courses in January 2014 2 employees studying courses about using PowerPoint, and Photoshop started in March 2014 1 mechanic studying a course about car electricity started December 2013
Marwan	Marketing Manager	Selling computers, laptops, scanners, printers etc (private sector)	<u>Marketing department:</u> 1 employee studying Office 2013 started in March 2014. 1 assistant studying C++ course started in January 2014. 1 employee studying A+ course started in February 2014.
Ammar	Sales Manager	Selling air-condition and heating units (private sector)	<u>Sales department:</u> 1 employee studying business administration at Damascus university (BA).
Samer	Registration Manager	Private university Arab European University (private sector)	<u>Registration Department:</u> 4 employees studying through the distance learning system (BA in Arabic, Journalism and French). 6 employees studying at university (1 Masters degree in Economics, 1 Masters degree in English, 1 BA in English, 2 BA in Business administration, 2 BA in Law).

			<p>2 employees studying computer courses (PowerPoint and Quark Express, evening courses).</p> <p>1 assistant studying a Masters degree in Islamic studies.</p> <p>1 assistant studying a BA in Education.</p>
Qasem	Public relations manager	Syrian Public Establishment for Insurance (Public sector)	(No data provided by participant)
Saeed	HR manager	Department of Education in Damascus (which is a department at the Ministry of Education in Syria) (Public sector)	<p><u>HR Department:</u></p> <p>1 employee studying law at Damascus university (BA)</p> <p>1 employee studying English at Damascus University (BA)</p> <p>1 employee studying Science at Damascus university (BSc)</p> <p>1 employee studying English course at a private institute, started in January 2014.</p>
Maha	Manager of the design and printing department	Tishreen Newspaper (Public sector)	<p><u>Printing and publishing department:</u></p> <p>3 employees studying a course to learn how to use Quark Express, started in February 2014</p> <p>2 employees studying a course to learn how to use Photoshop, started in March 2014</p> <p>1 employee studying a course about calligraphy, started in February 2014</p>
Hamzeh	IT Department manager	Syrian Railways (Public sector)	<p><u>IT Department:</u></p> <p>1 employee studying a course to learn Java; started in February 2014</p> <p>1 assistant is studying a course to learn how to use C++; started in March 2014</p> <p>1 manager is studying a course to learn how to use Access; started in March 2014</p>

Appendix IV

Samples of the coding process

Coding of Emad's interview:

Sentence or phrase (Chunk)	Code
Yes. In 2001, the company started to use a special program for accounting and I felt it was necessary to learn how to use it.	1need for SDL
So, I had another course and learnt how to use it.	1course
In 2002 I also learnt how to use PowerPoint and Access.	1Learning using software
In 2003 I learnt how to use the Internet and send emails.	1Learning using internet & emails
It was my choice. The company only asked a few employees to learn how to use these programs because not all the employees had computers at that time.	1freedom to learn
Because I have heard many good things about the computers. They told me that the computers make things faster and easier and sooner or later everybody will have to use the computers even in his own house.	1why learn
I was convinced that it was necessary to learn how to use the computers and these programs because I saw my co-workers and employees using them every day.	1convincend
I felt it was shame to remain ignorant among them.	1feeling ashamed
But, I enjoyed learning how to use them and I felt I became more confident.	1feeling confident
Sometimes I thought about it.	1thinking about SDL
Because studying at colleges requires attendance and studying for many hours per week. I didn't have time to do it	1no time
the company didn't encourage me to do it anyway. It was not possible to do it	1no encouragement
and my position as a manager is good.	1good position

The codes were included in categories and the following figure shows how the same codes were used to different chunks of data as they belong to the same categories:

Category	Chunk of data	Code
Motivation	I felt it was shame to remain ignorant among them.	1AS
	Because I have heard many good things about the computers. They told me that the computers make things faster and easier and sooner or later everybody will have to use the computers even in his own house.	1GT

	I was convinced that it was necessary to learn how to use the computers and these programs because I saw my co-workers and employees using them every day.	1NL
SDL	I don't know the term... I have never heard of it; but,	1NK
	I understand that it means something like learning certain skills by yourself.	1M
Difficulties	The problem is, they may not have time to do it	1NT
	or they may think that it is better to rely on an employee to do something instead of learning how to do it.	1RE
	It will not be possible for the company to give him nearly two days per week to attend classes in college. This may not work.	1AR

The following table shows how I allocated numbers after each code of the previous sample to make it distinguished from the similar codes:

Category	Chunk of data	Code
Motivation	I felt it was shame to remain ignorant among them.	1AS1
	Because I have heard many good things about the computers. They told me that the computers make things faster and easier and sooner or later everybody will have to use the computers even in his own house.	1GT2
	I was convinced that it was necessary to learn how to use the computers and these programs because I saw my co-workers and employees using them every day.	1NT3
SDL	I don't know the term... I have never heard of it; but,	1NK1
	I understand that it means something like learning certain skills by yourself.	1M2
Difficulties	The problem is, they may not have time to do it	1NT1
	or they may think that it is better to rely on an employee to do something instead of learning how to do it.	1RE2
	It will not be possible for the company to give him nearly two days per week to attend classes in college. This may not work.	1AR3

Subcategories are shown in the following table and as follows:

Chunk of data	Category	Initial code	subcategories	New Code
I felt it was shame to remain ignorant among them.	Motivation	1AS1	feelings	1AS1F
Because I have heard many good things about the computers. They told me that the computers make things		1GT2	Improve work	1GT2IW

faster and easier and sooner or later everybody will have to use the computers even in his own house.				
I was convinced that it was necessary to learn how to use the computers and these programs because I saw my co-workers and employees using them every day.		1NL3	Influence of peers	1NL3IP
I don't know the term... I have never heard of it; but,	SDL	1NK1	SDL	1NK1SDL
I understand that it means something like learning certain skills by yourself.		1M2	SDL	1M2SDL
The problem is, they may not have time to do it	Difficulties	1NT1	SDL	1NT1SDL
or they may think that it is better to rely on an employee to do something instead of learning how to do it.		1DE2	Depends on Employees	1DE2SDL
It will not be possible for the company to give him nearly two days per week to attend classes in college. This may not work.		1AR3	Attendance Required	1AR3SDL

The following table shows how I concluded the categories from these concepts:

Codes	Concepts	Category
7SDL1P 6S1IT 10S2I 9SDL1P 2SDL2P 8SDL1P 1SDL3P 3M1R 4S1C	(SDL- Practiced) (Subject-IT) (Subject- Internet) (SDL- Practiced) (SDL-Practiced) (SDL-Practiced) (SDL- Practiced) (Method- Reading) (Subject- Computers)	Practicing SDL
7S1C 7S2I 6S1IT 6SDL1NFP 6MO2UK	(Subject- Computers) (Subject- Internet) (Subject- IT) (SDL-Necessary for Promotion) (Motivation – Update Knowledge)	The needs for SDL

10S2I 10S1C 10MO1IW 9S1C 9MO6IC 9MO4GBF 2MO2SD 8S2I 8S1C 8S3M 1S2I 1MO1IW	(Subject- Internet) (Subject – Computers) (Motivation- Improve Work) (Subject– Computers) (Motivation – Improve career) (Motivation – Get rid of Bad Feelings) (Motivation – Self-dependence) (Subject – Internet) (Subject – Computers) (Subject – Management) Subject – Internet) (Motivation – Improve Work)	
6M1C 6M2B 6M3TI 6M5TI 6M6EB 10M1LE 9S2MBA 9M1CO 9M2T 9M3SU 9M4CO 9M6TI 9M7EB 8M1C 8M2SU 8M3C 8D3DLA 8D8AR 8D9NT 8D10LTL 1M1C 1D2AR 1D3NT 1D6LTL 1D9TM 1D13DLA 3M1R 3M2TI 3D10MCM 4CC3SK	(Method- Classes) (Method-Books) (Method- Through Internet) (Method- Through Internet) (Method- Ebooks) (Method- Learn from Employees) (Subject – MBA) (Method- Course) (Method- Tutor) (Method- Study at University) (Method- Course) (Method – Through Internet) (Method- Ebooks) (Method- Classes) (Method-Study at University) (Method – Classes) (Difficulties- Distance Learning Accreditation) (Difficulties – Attendance Required) (Difficulties – No Time) (Difficulties- Learning Time is Long) (Method- Classes) (Difficulties- Attendance Required) (Difficulties- No Time) (Difficulties- Learning Time is Long) (Difficulties – Time Management) (Difficulties – Distance Learning Accreditation) (Method – Reading) (Method – Through Internet) (Method – Must Convince the Manager) (Corporate Culture- Sharing Knowledge)	Managers’ Learning Strategy

Appendix V

The introduction of the interviews

I like to inform you that I am a researcher at London Metropolitan University. I like to thank you for agreeing on doing this interview with you. It may last for more than an hour and a half. I am doing a research about managerial self-directed learning in Syria.

I like to inform you that this conversation will be recorded, but the voice file will be deleted immediately after I finish the PhD. All your answers will be used for doing academic research only and remain private. Your real name and any other personal information will not be revealed to any third party whoever it is nor written in any file whatsoever. I will maintain the highest level of confidentiality. The information you give me about your organization will also be protected in the same way. You have the right to refuse to answer any question or questions you may not like and you also have the right to stop the interview and cancel it any time you like. Is that clear?
Do you have any questions?