



**Omani Teachers' Professional Identity and
Continuous Professional Development (CPD)
Opportunities**

Submitted by

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Abstract

The overall aim of this study is to investigate the nature of Omani teachers' professional identity. Of particular interest, was teachers' conceptualisations of their sense of professional identity, the evolution process of this sense and the role of CPD opportunities provided by the Human Resources Development (HRD) Directorate in the Ministry of Education in the development of this identity. The ultimate aim of these investigations is to develop a better understanding of the implications the findings may have for our understanding of teacher professional identity and development and how this affects teaching and learning.

To address this issue, an interpretive study of fourteen teachers at varying stages in their career, working within a variety of school contexts was undertaken. Three data collection tools were utilised during the study. First, the participants completed 'drawing and text' sheets followed by individual semi-structured interviews to obtain teachers' perceptions of themselves in relation to their work. Second, a combination of 'graphic story-line' and follow-up semi-structured interviews were utilised to elicit teachers' experiences in relation to the evolution process of their professional identity. Lastly, semi-structured interviews were the tool used to examine teachers' perspectives and experiences pertinent to the CPD opportunities provided in order to unpack their role in the development of these teachers' sense of professional identity.

The findings reveal four different professional self-images of teachers: their care for their students' well-being, concerns about their own well-being, a willingness to learn and develop professionally and their value of subject matter knowledge. This

study also shows that becoming and being a teacher in Oman is affected by culture, the nature of the education system and the political environment within which teachers work. In addition, teachers' career stories reveal two key dynamic aspects, which teachers perceived as evolving in their sense of professional identity: professional self-efficacy and job-satisfaction. Moreover, this study indicates that the potential success of INSET offerings in the development of teacher professional identity was blocked due to tradition, culture and structure. Based on these findings, implications for policy-makers and practitioners in both the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Higher Education are drawn.

Dedication

O' Allah! All praise and gratitude be to You.

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Abbreviations and Acronyms

| | |
|--------------|---|
| TIMSS | Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study |
| PIRLS | Progress in International Reading Literacy Study |
| GCC | Gulf Cooperation Council |
| HRD | Human Resources Development |
| CPD | Continuous Professional Development |
| INSET | In-Service Education and Training |
| NCSI | National Centre for Statistics and Information |
| UAE | United Arab Emirates |
| MOE | Ministry of Education |
| C1 | Cycle One= the term used in Oman to refer to primary schools (Grades 1-4) |
| C2 | Cycle Two= the term used in Oman to refer to preparatory schools (Grades 5-10) |

| | |
|--------------|---|
| PBE | Post Basic Education= the term used in Oman to refer to secondary/high schools (Grades 11-12) |
| TTI | Teacher Training Institutes |
| ITTC | Intermediate Teacher Training Colleges |
| SQU | Sultan Qaboos University |
| TESOL | Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages |
| MOHE | Ministry of Higher Education |
| ST | Senior Teacher |
| PD | Professional Development |
| SCPTT | Specialised Centre for the Professional Training of Teachers |
| ELT | English language Teaching |
| SIT | Social Identity Theory |
| CIC | Construction Industry Council |
| DfEE | Department for Education and Employment |

1. Setting the scene

1.1 The research focus

“The importance of developing a professional identity within a (professional) sphere or field has been recognised as vital for professional salience and effectiveness” (Baxter, 2011, p.16). This suggests that the sense of professional identity plays a key role in an individual’s motivation and retention, and can be strongly linked to that individual’s performance and effectiveness. This also means that lower levels of motivation and passion for developing individuals’ professional practices may be attributed to weakened professional identities. Regardless of the practitioner’s level of experience and training in his/her concerned profession, it has been argued that every practitioner has some degree of professional identity (Scott and Black, 1999). In addition, not being able to understand the nature of individuals’ professional identities in a certain professional field can lead to wasting years of investment in professional training and development (Baxter, 2011).

I think this applies equally well to the educational field and the teaching profession. Cheung (2008) reported that understanding teacher professional identity is a way of understanding teacher success and effectiveness. This is because, he added, teacher professional identity is strongly linked with how teachers view themselves and the roles they are expected to fulfil. In other words, it is associated with the beliefs and views teachers have about their rights and responsibilities, which are often constructed in contexts with competing interests and conceptions. Therefore, I believe that much of the hitherto unexplained ineffectiveness in teacher classroom practices resulting in low levels of student learning attainment, might be

attributed to the lack in our understanding of the nature and the development process of teacher professional identity in a certain context. Mockler (2011a) argued that teachers' work or professional practices both short- and long-term, are largely framed by and constituted through teachers' understanding and positioning of themselves, which is a product of their professional identity. This is because teacher professional identity is known to greatly affect the pedagogical choices and decisions teachers make in their teaching (Agee, 2004). This suggests that teacher professional identity is a key factor in the way teachers develop and in their attitudes towards educational changes and policies (Beijaard, Meijer & Verloop, 2004).

This view of teachers, which goes beyond the technical dimension of their work and practices, requires a more reflexive perspective and approach into understanding what it means to be a teacher and why teachers, in a certain context, act in a certain way (Mockler, 2011a). In other words, understanding teachers' learning and attempting to develop their work and practices necessitates another perspective, which does not only cater for "what works" for teachers, but also highlights the complexity of the educational enterprise in general and the teachers' work in particular. Conceiving teachers and their work from a humanistic perspective rather than from a technical one might provide us with answers to questions, which we might otherwise be impossible to answer.

1.2 Significance of the study

Investigating teacher professional identity in Oman is a very new arena and is therefore still at its very early stages. Indeed, so far, I have come across only one research study, which aimed at comparing three subject teachers' levels of

professional identity features based upon the perspectives of these teachers' supervisors (Ambusaidi, Alhashmi, Al-Rawahi, 2014). This comparison study used questionnaires comprising of a list of professional identity features divided into four domains: 'school development', 'teaching and learning', 'student development', and 'personal and professional growth'. It can be argued that this study is very limited in terms of scope and depth. It investigated four predetermined professional domains or sets of features, which indicate the kind of perceptions the researchers, were interested in. It was limited to the supervisors of the teachers without considering the teachers' perspectives.

Beijaard et al. (2004), in his review of recent studies on teacher professional identity, argued that it is not possible for quantitative studies investigating the features of teacher professional identity to indicate which specific feature shapes teacher professional identity. In addition, taking into account the general understanding of the concept of 'professional identity' as dynamic, fluid and ever-changing does not fit with the purpose of quantifying it and its features, which assumes that professional identity is static and fixed. In this vein, Beijaard et al. (2004) suggested that such research studies need to be placed under another field, namely 'professional characteristics' rather than 'professional identity' (p.123). Thus, there is no evidence so far which shows how Omani teachers view themselves as teachers and the nature of the evolution process of this professional identity. Nor has there been an investigation of the relationship between these teachers' professional identity and the reported unsatisfactory impact of the CPD opportunities provided by the Human Resources Development (HRD) Departments on teachers' work and practices.

The literature on education and teacher learning and development worldwide shows a general sentiment amongst educators and researchers that interventions implemented to develop teachers professionally and therefore impact their professional learning positively do not necessarily result in the outcomes that are planned or hoped for (Hargreaves, 1998; Wedell, 2009; Borg, 2011; Elyas, 2011). This was attributed to a number of factors, which were found to interactively influence the extent to which teachers tend to implement what they have been trained for. Among these factors, Wedell (2009) and Borg (2011) reported on the failure of some professional development interventions to support teachers in exploring their fundamental beliefs, which are essential in forming, and orienting teachers' classroom practices. In addition, Elyas (2011) attributed this phenomenon to the structural elements of teachers' work settings, such as resources available, school norms and externally mandated policies. He added that issues of teacher professional identity might also play a key role in this phenomenon, but such issues have been consistently ignored in educational reform policies and professional development interventions. This highlights the need to unpack and understand such a phenomenon in the Omani context from the angle of teacher professional identity. In line with this argument, Beijaard, Verloop and Vermunt (2000) stressed the importance of carefully considering teachers' definitions of themselves as professionals as a starting point for the elevation of teacher professional learning and development.

Therefore, this investigation will hopefully help to understand the relationship between teacher professional identity, classroom practices and professional development and learning. In addition, it will attempt to identify some of the factors,

which interactively constitute teacher professional identity. In practical terms, this investigation will ultimately provide the Ministry of Education in Oman with information regarding how Omani teachers perceive themselves as professionals and the factors, which have contributed to such perceptions. Such information, I believe, can be useful in assisting the Ministry to rethink and evaluate the nature, standards and quality of its CPD interventions, which are geared towards developing teachers professionally.

1.3 The nature of the research problem

Teacher learning and development and the crucial role this should play in the process of student learning and academic attainment is a major issue of concern in Oman. This concern increased after the dissemination of the international exam results TIMSS (Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study), which assesses the mathematics and the science knowledge of students around the world and PIRLS (Progress in International Reading Literacy Study), which measures students' achievement in reading literacy. The results were published in December 2012 and indicated that Omani pupils' academic attainment and achievement was way below the average. Oman came in the last place among the six GCC countries (Gulf Cooperation Council) and the seventy-third place among the seventy-six countries from all over the world which were part of this evaluation (Oman Ministry of Education, 2014).

This urged the Ministry of Education in Oman to rethink and examine its educational policies and practices against a globally-defined benchmark. In a report jointly prepared by the Ministry of Education and the World Bank based upon a comprehensive study of the educational system in Oman (Education in

Oman: The drive for quality), the research team outlined many findings and recommendations and confirmed that the key challenge facing the education sector in Oman is to improve the quality of the students' learning outcomes (2012, p. 23). To achieve this, one of the endeavours suggested by the report was to develop strong pedagogical skills. It has been reported that

“Of all the factors affecting student learning that can potentially be influenced by public policy, teaching quality is the single most important one. An effective teaching force with strong pedagogical skills is the key to increasing education quality” (p.25).

To do so, the report stressed the importance of providing teachers with in-service professional development programmes which are more practical and responsive to teachers' needs. Thus, the Ministry invested an enormous amount of financial resource on training programmes, courses and workshops which targeted teachers in an attempt to promote their knowledge, skills and competences. However, the impact of this investment does not seem to be satisfactory. This is clearly stated in the National Report on Quality Education in Oman (2014), which noted that the existing professional development interventions and practices were not resulting in the desired outcomes as intended. The report added that a comprehensive and systematic review should be carried out to find the reasons for this situation. Therefore, the Ministry of Education is very interested in finding out the reasons behind the unsatisfactory outcomes of its investment in its teachers.

1.4 Research aims and questions

The aim of this study is to understand the nature of Omani teachers' sense of professional identity, the process by which this sense evolves and the extent to which CPD opportunities provided by the Human Resources Development (HRD)

Directorate have an impact on this sense and its process of evolution. This understanding, I believe, will enable me to provide suggestions and recommendations which will assist in making CPD opportunities provided more compatible with Omani teachers' professional identity and therefore, result in better learning outcomes for students. Thus, in response to the aim of this investigation, fourteen Omani teachers were researched to find answers for the following three research questions:

1. How do Omani teachers view themselves and the work they do as teachers?
2. How has this view evolved over the career path of Omani teachers?
3. To what extent have the CPD opportunities provided by the Human Resources Development (HRD) Directorate in the Ministry of Education contributed to the development of Omani teachers' professional identity?

1.5 Thesis structure and outline

This thesis is organised into ten chapters including the current introductory chapter. The second chapter presents some background information about the educational context in the Sultanate of Oman where this study took place. It involves accounts of the progressive nature of the educational system in general since 1970 and teacher education in particular, including pre-service teacher preparation and in-service teacher support and development. This chapter ends with the key tensions in the education system, which I believe have greatly affected Omani teachers and the teaching profession in Oman.

The third chapter presents a review of relevant literature in an attempt to provide a conceptual and a theoretical background to the study reported in this thesis. This review focuses on both the concept of teacher professional identity and continuous

professional development (CPD) particularly in relation to the impact of CPD on the development of teacher professional identity. In this chapter, I argue that understanding teacher professional identity is essential if we are to develop them professionally and support their on-going professionalism. This is based on the premise that a teacher's professional learning and development is to a large extent influenced by who the teacher is. This chapter consists of three main sections. The first section discusses the concept of teacher professional identity by contextualising it within the broader literature related to 'identity' generally and 'personal and social identity' in particular. It then moves to highlighting the various differences in the conceptualisation of this notion to draw the key main conceptualisations. This section also presents a discussion of the two main theoretical lenses through which this field was investigated, which enabled me to develop a claim that a multi-faceted approach is a better response to the nature of teacher professional identity. This chapter later provides a discussion of Mockler's (2011a) theoretical framework, which was found to be in line with the claim that the evolution process of teacher professional identity is a career-long project. The third and final section of this chapter focuses on the concepts of continuous professional development (CPD) and INSET, and considers the impact of different CPD systems on teacher professional identity.

The fourth chapter examines the methodology adopted for this study by presenting an account of the research paradigm, which guided the design of this research. It then moves to describing and discussing the chosen research methods and sample. It also presents the piloting process of the data collection methods and considers the actual data collection. Additionally, this chapter presents a detailed

account of the implemented data analysis process, which produced the findings of this research. Finally, this chapter concludes by pointing out how ethical considerations and issues related to research quality assurance and trustworthiness were addressed.

The fifth, sixth, seventh and eighth chapters present the findings of this study and interpretations of these findings in relation to the research questions it set out to address. The fifth and sixth chapters provide findings relevant to the participant teachers' conceptualisations of themselves as teachers, as the former outlines their perceived professional self-images and the latter presents these in more depth. The seventh chapter presents an account of the findings relevant to the evolution process of the participant teachers' sense of professional identity over their career path. Finally, chapter eight considers the participant teachers' perceptions and experiences in relation to the CPD opportunities provided by the Ministry of Education to show their impact on these teachers' sense of professional identity.

Guided by the research questions, the ninth chapter presents an in-depth discussion of the key findings of this study in the light of the reviewed literature and the study context. The tenth and final chapter of this thesis presents the implications of the study. It provides recommendations for educational policy-makers and practitioners in the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Higher Education in order to improve practice and policy in regard to teaching, teacher education and development. In this chapter, I also suggest areas for future research and provide personal reflections on my research journey.

2. Overview of the Study Context

Introduction

This chapter attempts to contextualise this research by providing key background information about the education system in the Sultanate of Oman where this study took place. This chapter begins by providing some general background information about Oman. It then presents an account of the progressive nature of the Omani education system. This account is important for our understanding of the shifts that have happened in both pre-service teacher preparation and in-service professional support and development, which are also provided in this chapter. The chapter ends by outlining the key outstanding tensions in the Omani education system which I believe have direct influence on the sense of professional identity of Omani teachers.

2.1 The Sultanate of Oman

The Sultanate of Oman is an Asian country situated in the south-eastern quarter of the Arabian Peninsula with a total land area of 309,500 square kilometres, according to the recent population statistics published by the Omani National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI, 2019). It is one of six Arabian Gulf countries and is bordered by the United Arab Emirates (UAE), the Kingdom of the Saudi Arabia, Yemen and Iran. It is an Islamic, Arabic-speaking and oil-producing country with a total population of 4,552,688, according to recent population statistics (NCSI, 2019). Historically, Oman's past and empire are very well-known. However, it is a relatively young and developing country as its renaissance began in the year 1970 with the ascension to the throne of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said. Administratively, Oman constitutes of eleven governorates including the

capital area Muscat. There are many governmental civil service ministries in Oman, of which the Ministry of Education is one. It is responsible for all issues of schooling and education, both governmental and private. Like all other ministers in the country, the Minister of Education is appointed by His Majesty the Sultan.

2.2 School education in Oman

School education in Oman, like other aspects of life in the country, has witnessed a rapid development and undergone many stages since the year 1970. While not mutually exclusive, the development of the school education system in Oman can be classified into three distinct stages. Between 1970 and 1998, the first stage aimed at the expansion of the educational provision to all parts of the country and to all sections of society. The second stage, from 1998 onwards, shifted attention towards the improvement of the quality of school education system by the introduction of reforms. The third stage, which is the current stage, involves a review of the school education system to determine future directions.

2.2.1 Stage one: Education for all

When His Majesty the Sultan ascended to the throne in 1970, the education in nearly all states in Oman was limited to Islamic Quran schools called 'kuttabs', which provided very basic education, including basic literacy and memorisation of Quran verses. There were only three formal state schools in the whole of Oman teaching 900 students, who were all male and at primary level. Consequently, in that year a huge portion of Omanis were illiterate. As a well-educated person strongly believing in the importance of education for the social and economic progress, developing a public education system was one of His Majesty's top priorities and one of His government's first commitments. This was achieved by the

establishment of the Ministry of Education, which adopted three key strategies to define the prospect of education in Oman. These included universal education, diversification of education and the introduction of female education (MOE, 2001). Thus, it had as its first task the organisation of campaigns to raise people's awareness of the importance of state formal education. Access to school education was encouraged by providing free education for all, although not compulsory, free textbooks, free transport and even free boarding facilities for students from rural areas.

Once the demand for education had been aroused, the government committed itself to a prodigious investment to provide the required infrastructure and staffing. By the year 1971, there were 42 schools and 15,000 students (MOE, 2001). Twenty years later, the school education was catering for 300,000 students in 780 schools with a teaching staff of over 15,000 (MOE, 2001). In the year 2016, there were over 540,000 students enrolled in public schools with almost equal numbers of boys and girls (268501 girls and 271567 boys) (MOE, 2016). School education at this stage was referred to locally as General Education which consisted of three phases; primary from grades 1-6, preparatory from grades 7-9 and secondary from 10-12. The Ministry of Education's success in expanding access to its services as quickly as possible was recognised in a report from the World Bank in 2001. This report described the developments occurring in the Omani school education system as 'unprecedented' and 'massive' (World Bank, 2001).

After this success in the expansion of the educational infrastructure and provision, new priorities were emerging and attention had to be shifted towards creating quality of education, which is capable of developing citizens able to effectively

function in an era of knowledge economy. This suggested that reforming the education system was vital and a new approach to education was required.

2.2.2 Stage two: Reforming education

Stage two was initiated following the 'Vision 2020' conference on Oman's economic future in 1995. This vision called for improved quality in public education in order to prepare citizens with the critical thinking skills required by the demands of the 21st century. One of this conference's recommendations was to establish 'a strong foundation of basic education nationwide' (MOE, 2001, p.11). The Ministry of Education responded to this call by the introduction of an ambitious reform in the form of the Basic Education system, which was meant to gradually phase out the General Education system. The Basic Education was introduced in the academic year 1998/1999 and defined as:

"a unified State-provided education to all the Sultanate's children who are at school age, a 10 year long period works on the provision of the basic educational needs of information and knowledge, skills, and the development of attitudes and values that enable learners to continue education, training orientation and their willingness and capacity and that their education aims to meet the challenges and circumstances of the present and future aspirations, in the framework of comprehensive community development". (MOE, 2001,p.14)

The main guiding principle behind the ten year period of the Basic Education was to provide the relevant and required knowledge, skills and qualities needed for the preparation of young Omanis to be able to live and work productively under the emergent conditions of the global economy (MOE, 2001). This guiding principle required substantial efforts and investments in restructuring the whole educational system, including the structure of the school system,

curriculum and textbook development, student assessment procedures and teacher training and development.

2.2.2.1 Structure of the school system

The school system under the Basic Education encompasses of two stages, Cycle One (C1) from grades 1 to 4 and Cycle Two (C2) from grades 5 to 10. This ten year period is followed by two years of Post Basic Education (PBE), being grades 11 and 12 in which students decide their learning demands based on their future aspirations. In Oman, grade 1 children are expected to be at the age of six.

Table 2.1: Structure of General and Basic Education systems

| General Education | Grade level | Basic Education | |
|-------------------|-------------|-----------------|----------------|
| Secondary | 12 | Post Basic (PB) | |
| | 11 | | |
| | 10 | Cycle Two (C2) | |
| Preparatory | 9 | | |
| | 8 | | |
| | 7 | | |
| Elementary | 6 | | Cycle One (C1) |
| | 5 | | |
| | 4 | | |
| | 3 | | |
| | 2 | | |
| | 1 | | |

Prior to the Basic Education, with the exceptions of some rural schools, there were separate boys and girls schools at all grade levels staffed by teachers of the same gender. Following the reforms, Cycle One schools' classes were composed of both boys and girls taught by only female teachers, who were believed to be more suitable for teaching children of this age.

“The feminisation of administrative and teaching personnel in the first cycle of Basic Education (Grades 1-4) is now complete. The rationale here is to make the learners feel secure psychologically at this early age, and to motivate them to learn in an appropriate climate that meets their needs and supports their progress in further development, especially during this critical period of transition from home to school.” (MOE, 2001, p17)

In addition, the reform provided students with access to learning resource centres with computers and other learning resources as new subjects were introduced, such as information technology and life skills. The teaching of science, maths and English were emphasised as English was introduced from grade 1 rather than grade 4. These reforms entailed longer academic school year and days, bigger classrooms and smaller class sizes.

After the first four years of schooling in Cycle One schools, boys progress to boys' Cycle Two schools taught and led by male teachers and girls go to girls' Cycle Two schools taught and led by female teachers. They then progress to Post Basic education for two years, which presents core and elective subjects preparing students for their future aspirations. At the end of these two years, students sit for a national exam for all subjects to be awarded the Diploma in Secondary Education to enable them to apply for national and international higher education institutions.

2.2.2.2 Curriculum and textbook development

Within the Ministry of Education, the Directorate General of Curriculum is responsible for the development, evaluation and production of curricular and instructional materials which are used in all public schools. It comprises departments for the different school subjects which are responsible for forming curriculum subject committees which review, write and amend the curriculum objectives and teaching and learning materials. These committees include subject specialists as well as school educational supervisors and teachers. All students in Oman are provided with textbooks from grade 1 at no charge. The concept of curriculum in the Basic Education is distinguished by two key characteristics:

- a. It is learner-centred with the expectation that students will be active learners who construct knowledge based on prior knowledge, experiences and attitudes.
- b. It is comprehensive in nature, is not limited to textbook knowledge, and encompasses experiences relevant to the learner. (MOE, 2004, p.55).

This suggests that rather than merely remembering information, students are provided with learning materials which enhance their skills of finding and using the information. This requires the development of learning materials which are *'based on practical and real-life contexts and applications and provide students with opportunities for experiential learning'*, rather than being overloaded with theory and abstract concepts (MOE, 2005, p.102). It was hoped that the emphasis under the Basic Education is on the acquisition of transferrable skills. Thus, the emphasis on these two characteristics has shifted the system from

being dominated by teacher-centred to learner-centred teaching and learning. In line with this shift, teachers were trained to implement teaching and learning strategies which aim to develop autonomous and cooperative learners equipped with skills in communication, critical thinking, problem solving and research and investigation techniques (MOE, 2001). Therefore, the overall aim of the Basic Education system's curriculum was to provide students with the required skills for being life-long learners.

2.2.2.3 Student assessment

In response to reforms in curriculum, there was a need to change the assessment procedures of students. These procedures need to reflect the de-emphasis on rote memorisation and encourage the acquisition of attitudes and skills appropriate for life-long learning. In this regard, the Ministry of Education represented by the Directorate General of Education Evaluation, which is responsible for assessing students' achievement, has set two main guidelines for its assessment procedures:

- 'to avoid complete dependence on examinations as the basic measurement tool to evaluate students' school achievements.
- to abolish promotion examinations in cycle one of basic education and instead adopt a continuous formative assessment system'. (MOE, 2001, p.22).

This suggests a shift from the General Education summative assessment, which merely focused on the factual content of the students' answers to formative assessment of different aspects of learning, such as knowledge, skills and attitudes. Thus, students' progress is measured in terms of stated criteria,

which are in tune with their individual abilities, rather than in comparison with others in the class (MOE, 2001).

In spite of the dramatic reforms and changes implemented by the Basic Education system, the participation in international studies, such as TIMSS and PIRLS, have revealed that there are still persistent issues concerning the quality of Omani students' achievement.

2.2.3 Stage three: Comprehensive Review

As part of a comprehensive evaluation framework, the Ministry of Education participated in some international studies in order to measure its progress in comparison with international standards. The unsatisfactory results of Omani students in TIMSS and PIRLS urged the Government of Oman to take serious steps in undertaking a comprehensive review of its educational system. The Government invited the World Bank to collaborate with the Ministry of Education in carrying out a review study of the school education in Oman. Based on this study, in 2012, a joint report was issued which presented the strengths and weaknesses of the Omani school education system and provided recommendations for future improvement. In addition, in coordination with a New Zealand consortium, the Ministry of Education has conducted another comprehensive review of the school education sector and the report was issued at the end of 2013.

These reviews resulted in finalising the first draft of a new School Education Act which is still a draft and has not been put into practice. Among other things, this Act is expected to focus on teachers' career paths, incentives and accountability

issues. In addition, another outcome of this review is the first draft of the Curriculum Standards, which has also not been put into practice. Instead, in the academic year 2018/2019, after the data collection phase of this study, the Ministry of Education implemented mathematics and science curricula in C1 schools developed by Cambridge University Printing House. These curricula are expected to gradually phase out the Basic Education mathematics and science curricula throughout C2 and PB schools.

2.3 Teacher Education in Oman

During the initial expansion of the education system, most school teachers were non-nationals, mainly from other Arab countries. By 1980, 92 percent of the teaching force were non-Omani (Chapman, Al-Barawani, Al Mawali & Green, 2012). At that time, most of the employed Omani school teachers held qualifications lower than the equivalent of a General Certificate of Secondary Education. With time, the education system witnessed the rapid inclusion of qualified Omani teachers as attention was paid to pre-service teacher education. Consequently, nowadays, Omani school teachers outnumber the non-nationals with a good number holding a post graduate degree.

2.3.1 Pre-service teacher preparation programmes

In line with the rapid changes and reforms in the Omani education system since 1970, teacher preparation programmes have also gone through similar on-going progress in response to the needs of each stage. During the initial expansion stage of the education system, there was a need to benefit from any Omani who could read and write and had some basic subject knowledge. Many interested literate Omanis were recruited and sent to teach in schools after a short

orientation process. Those were known as the '**need teachers**' because the Ministry of Education at that time was in an urgent need for Omani teachers (Al-Hinai, 2002, p.29). The first formal pre-service teacher preparation in Oman was in the mid-1970s with student-teachers being graduates of grade 7 (1st preparatory at that time) enrolled in a two-year programme called '**The First Programme**' (Issan, 1995, p.45). This programme did not last long, as in the year 1977 the government established two Teacher Training Institutes (TTI) one for males and another for females. These institutes enrolled holders of preparatory certificate level (after grade 9), who had trained for three years and been awarded the '**Teacher Secondary Certificate**' (Raziq, 1987, p.14). Later, these institutes started to enrol only secondary certificate holders (after grade 12) and trained for one year to become teachers (Al-Hinai, 2002).

In the academic year of 1984/1985, these institutes were transformed into Intermediate Teacher Training Colleges (ITTC) which offered a two-year teacher preparation programme to graduates of grade 12 and awarded a '**Diploma of Elementary Education**'. In addition, Sultan Qaboos University (SQU), the only state university in Oman, was opened in 1986; among its different colleges it includes the College of Education. This college offers a four-year teacher preparation programme and awards a '**Bachelor of Education**'. Graduates of this college are prepared to teach students of preparatory and secondary levels in General Education, Cycle 2 and Post Basic in the Basic Education system.

In line with the upcoming educational reforms in the mid-1990s, the Ministry of Higher Education decided that all prospective teachers need to go through a

four-year Bachelor Degree in Education. Consequently, all the ITTCs were transformed into Colleges of Education and offered a four-year degree of a 'Bachelor in Education' aiming at qualifying all Omani teachers to degree level. In addition, due to the demands for recruiting teachers during the initial phases of the reform, opportunities were provided to professionalise graduates from non-educational colleges who wanted to become teachers. These were enrolled into a one-year preparation programme which was offered by the government funded Institute for Professional Training. This institute was closed later as it was not cost-effective because it attracted only a small number of trainees. Existing diploma holder teachers were encouraged to upgrade their qualifications by enrolling onto different available teacher education programmes. This means that the only suppliers of teachers at that time were the six teacher training colleges and the College of Education at SQU.

Like all other limited government-funded higher education opportunities in the 1990s, the intake into these two routes for becoming an Omani teacher was highly competitive, especially for females. The entry requirements, which were mainly based on academic achievements were the second highest after the College of Medicine. Due to the high social status of the teaching profession in Oman at that time, the automatic recruitment and the view of teaching as the most socially acceptable form of employment for Omani women, mid- and low-achieving secondary graduates started looking for other routes for becoming teachers. These routes involved private institutions in Oman and institutions abroad, mainly in Jordan, Egypt and UAE.

In 2007, due to the increasing number of these graduates, there was a surplus supply of teacher in most subjects, which resulted in a decision to transform the Colleges of Education into Colleges of Applied Sciences. Among these six Colleges, there was only one college offering a teacher preparation programme that targeted English language teachers only. This left the country with only the College of Education in SQU and the local and foreign private institutes as suppliers of teachers.

In 2015, based on a report produced by the Ministry of Education on the educational needs of cadre during the coming period, the Education Council decided to transform one of the Colleges of Applied Sciences into a College of Education. This was the one which continued offering the TESOL teacher preparation programme. The transformed College of Education started functioning in 2017 and currently offers teacher preparation programmes in Mathematics, three sciences (Chemistry, Physics and Biology) and TESOL.

2.3.2 In-service teacher education and professional support

The in-service professional training and development in Oman echoes the changes and developments in the education system since 1970. Thus, it can be said that the in-service professional support for teachers has gone through four main stages. In all these stages, there were two main sources of professional support and development; the inspection/supervision system and in-service training.

2.3.2.1 Phase one: the 70s and early 80s

According to a study by Ibrahim Abdullah (1987) cited in Al-Hinai (2002), the in-service training at this phase involved three main components. The first was

concerned with the '*basic qualification*', which carried out training courses for teachers who did not have any formal teacher preparation. The second section provided '*continuous training*' to update teachers' knowledge about new pedagogy in education. The third component was concerned with providing specialised courses in leadership for head teachers and inspectors. These in-service training courses were provided centrally, which resulted in many teachers not getting the chance to attend many of these. Along with this in-service training, there existed a strict inspection system which was intended to provide direct professional support to teachers (Al-Hinai, 2002). This support was mainly achieved through sudden inspection visits to schools and observations of lessons followed by direct feedback to teachers about their performance given by the inspectors.

2.3.2.2 Phase two: mid-80s to mid-90s

According to a study by Issan (1995), the main focus of the Ministry at this period was on pre-service training. At that time, the Ministry of Education had managed and supervised all educational matters in the country including the tertiary Intermediate Teacher Training Colleges (ITTCs). Only in 1995 was the responsibility of these tertiary institutions passed to the newly-established Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) (El-Shibiny, 1997). Therefore, the primary concern of the Ministry of Education during this phase was to qualify as many Omanis as possible and send them into schools.

However, this does not mean that the quality of in-service teachers was compromised. What has been presented above about the role of in-service training and the inspection system applied equally well for this phase as illustrated below by Figure 2.1.

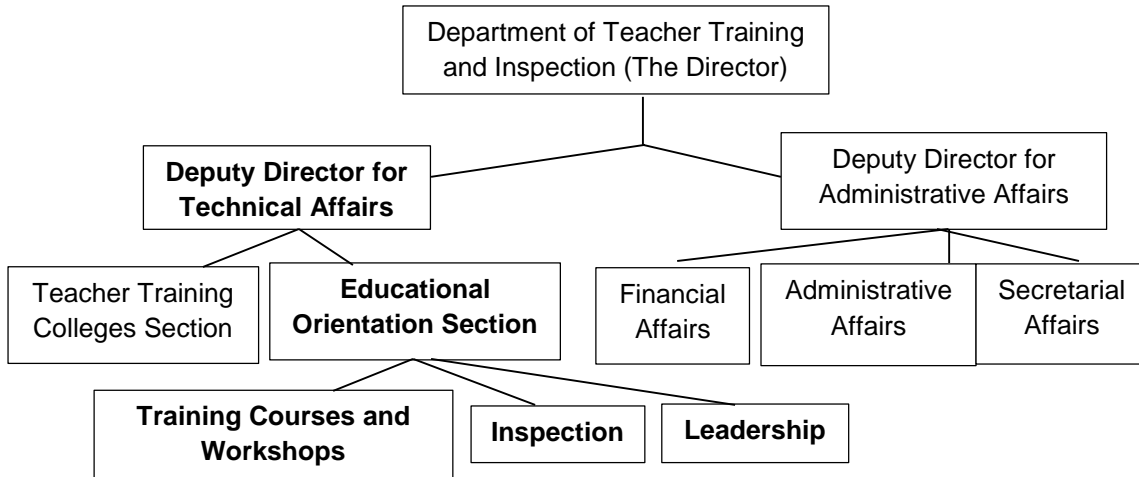


Figure 2.1: The structural position of in-service professional support during phase two (Issan, 1995, p.162)

In addition, this phase witnessed the beginning of the movement from exclusive central training in Muscat to providing some regional in-service training opportunities. With the existence of a number of subject inspectors in every region, this task was appointed to them and conducted in designated premises in different educational regions. The professional support and development of teachers at this phase is illustrated by Figure 2.2, which is adapted from Al-Lamki (2009, p.8).

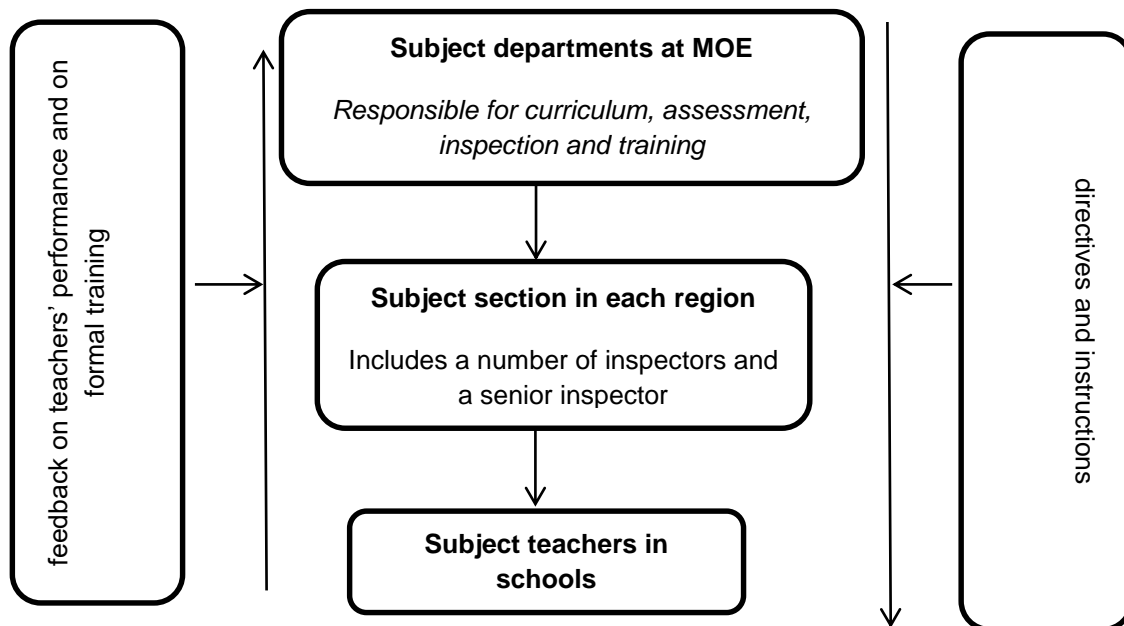


Figure 2.2: Professional support and development for teachers in General Education system

The above figure shows the MOE's vision of teacher professional development at this phase. It was basically a top-down policy which viewed teachers as passive recipients of the MOE's instructions and guidance on how to teach. Inspectors were assigned the role of inspecting and training teachers on the proper applications of the Ministry's prescribed instructions and guidance. These subject inspectors reported teachers' performances and training on a regular basis to the different subject departments at MOE. This means that inspectors were the only source of formal professional support and development that teachers has access to via inspection visits and training workshops.

2.3.2.3 Phase three: Reform period

The gradual shift of focus on the quality of education in general at this stage necessitated further reforms in the conception and practices of teachers' professional development. These reforms were reflected in the expansion of the in-service training infrastructure, opportunities and forms of professional support. One of the major aspects of the reform was the in-service training of the Ministry's personnel, including teachers all around the Sultanate to update them on its objectives, processes and requirements. This was based on the Ministry's belief that *"human development is the single factor contributing to the success of any organisation...and without creating a structure that provides continuous learning opportunities for human resources at various levels in the Ministry, local authorities and schools, educational change is not likely to occur"* (MOE, 2004, p.10). This resulted in the gradual opening of a training centre in each of the 11 educational regions and the creation of the Department of Training and Professional Development in the Ministry. In response to the increasing educational training

needs and responsibilities, this department has gradually been transformed into its current structure, which is illustrated in Figure 2.3 below.

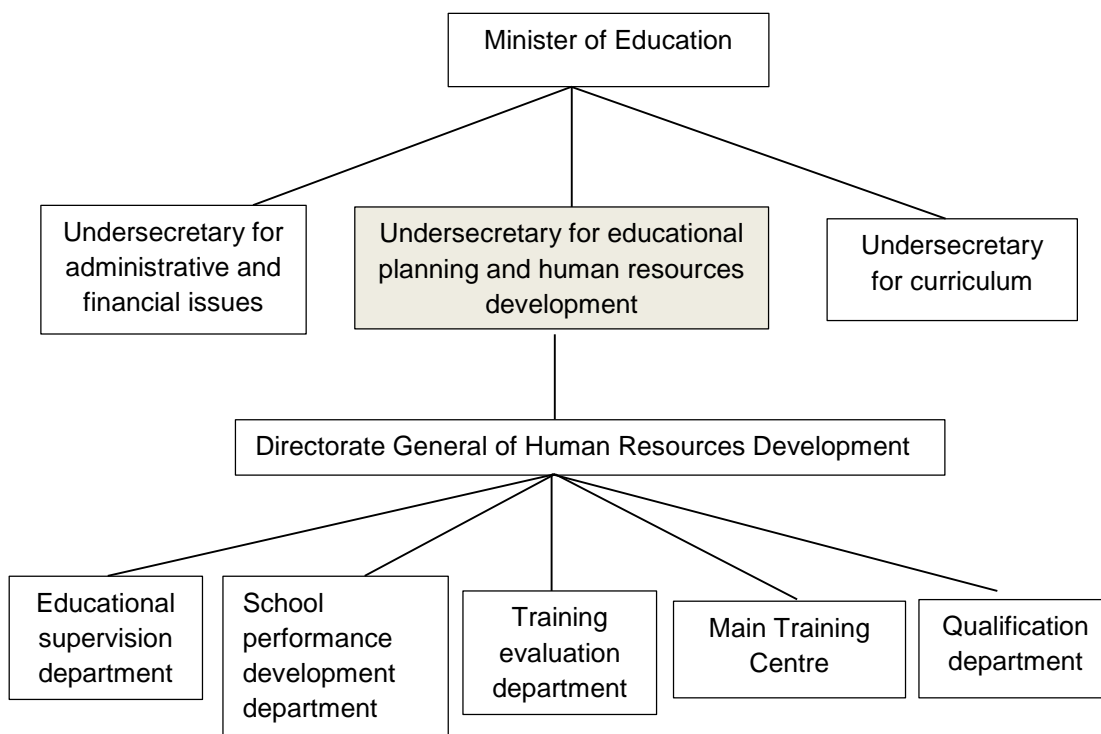


Figure 2.3: The structural position of in-service professional support in Basic Education system

There is a similar structure in every region represented by the human resources development departments, which include similar sections except for training evaluation, and qualification issues, which are assigned for the centres of training and professional development. The role of the training centres in the regions is merely administrative. It mainly includes the aggregation of the different subject section’s annual professional development plans into a regional one, organising and arranging venues, timings, resources, evaluating training sessions and managing qualification-related issues. The professional development and support of teachers at this phase can be illustrated by Figure 2.4, which is adapted from Al-

Lamki (2009), and a ministerial document entitled 'A proposal for the roles and responsibilities of the main training centre', (2018).

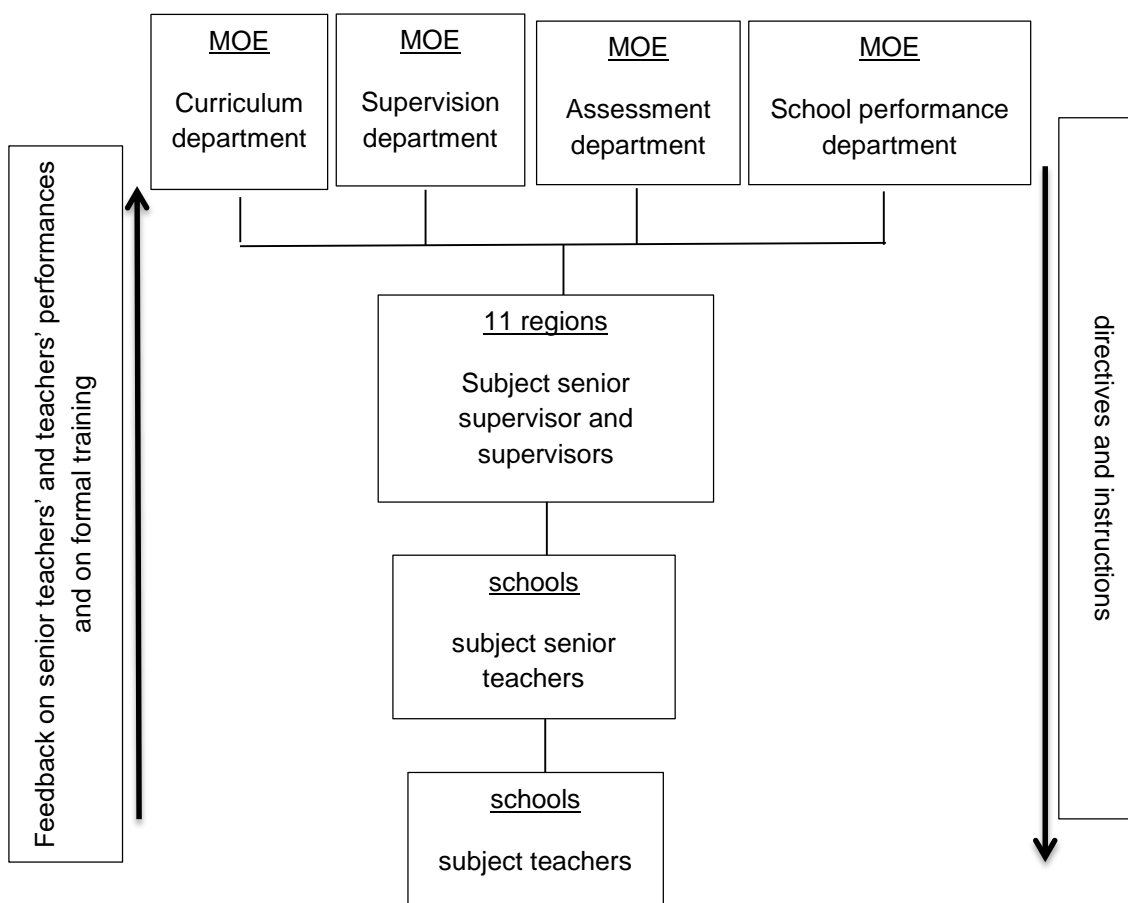


Figure 2.4: In-service professional support and development for teachers in Basic Education

Unlike, the pre-reform situation, teachers are supposed to be provided with professional development opportunities from four departments, namely the curriculum departments, the supervision departments, the assessment departments and the school performance department at the Ministry. As is clear from Figure 2.4 above, the job title of the inspectors has been changed to supervisors, which entailed the production of a new job description. In addition, a new post of Senior Teacher (ST), mainly most experienced subject teachers acting as heads of subject sections in schools, was introduced. Senior teachers were

intended to play an important role in the professional development of teachers. As resident supervisors, they were assigned the role of monitoring and developing the performance of individual teachers inside and outside the classroom. This was to be done through lesson observations, post-lesson discussions, meetings and discussion sessions and designing annual PD plans for teachers, which include school-based workshops, reading seminars and peer-observation events. This was intended to encourage a reflective teaching culture and a school-based model of supervision. It was intended to shift the supervisors' role from inspecting teachers' work to mainly guiding and supporting senior teachers.

Despite these changes, the in-service training and professional development activities, particularly the formal ones, are still being monitored and planned at Ministry level and designed and conducted by the supervisors in the regions. Therefore, it can be said that during the reform period the supervision and the in-service training could still be regarded as implementing a top-down approach (Al-Balushi, 2017; Al-Lamki, 2009).

2.3.2.4 Phase four: Reviewing reform period

In 2011, His Majesty the Sultan delivered a speech to the Annual Assembly of the Oman Council in which he stressed the importance of a comprehensive assessment of education in Oman. He also directed a threefold increase in the budget for the professional development of the Ministry of Education workforce. In response to this, the MOE implemented an ambitious project to improve the professional development of its workforce by establishing the Specialised Centre for the Professional Training of Teachers (SCPTT) in 2014. The centre aims at improving the performance of supervisors, head teachers, senior teachers and

teachers, developing their skills and evaluating their performances (MOE, 2014). It has a degree of administrative and financial independence, which enables it to conduct a number of in-service training programmes lasting two years as well as other short courses. The programmes target C1 Arabic teachers (Arabic Language Experts programme), C2 mathematics teachers (Mathematics Experts programme), C2 science teachers (Science Experts programme), English Language teachers (ELT experts), senior teachers (Centre Associates programme), supervisors (Supervision Experts programme), and head teachers (School Leadership programme). The short courses include a new teachers' course and raising awareness courses about TIMSS and PIRLS. The teacher educators in the centre are all Omanis with various educational backgrounds; teachers, senior teachers, head teachers and supervisors. For all its two-year programmes, the centre implements three modes of training: face-to-face, online and workplace tasks. The centre's programmes and courses are meant to complement the existing training provisions offered by the Directorate General of Human Resources Development. However, the fact that SCPTT is located in the capital city Muscat with no resembling structures or representatives as trainers in the regions makes access to its services and opportunities a problematic issue. From my experience of working at the centre as a trainer in the Centre Associates programme, I learnt that many teachers in the regions wishing to benefit from the SCPTT are reluctant to join because of its venue. In addition, the tertiary nature and structure of its different programmes which require on-going submission of work and assignments add to the existing work-load on teachers, which many teachers are not willing to shoulder.

2.4 Tensions in the Omani Education system

Throughout its rapid development and reforms, the education system in Oman has witnessed a number of various tensions, which have had their impact on students' academic attainment levels and teachers' sense of value and status. I will present here the key ones which have been proved to influence Omani teachers' sense of professional identity as revealed by this research findings.

2.4.1 Oversupply of teachers in most subjects

As mentioned in section 2.2 above, there was an acute shortage of teachers in the initial expansion phase up to 2004, and those trained in Oman were automatically recruited into the profession. In addition, in response to the government sponsored policy of Omanisation, that is- replacing expatriate workers with trained Omani personnel- all Omani teacher graduates from private institutions in Oman and other Arab countries were recruited. This resulted in the oversupply of newly-qualified teachers in most subjects although there remain shortages in some subjects and in certain geographical areas. In an effort to address this issue, the Ministry of Education created thousands of new administrative support positions in schools and ordered the placement of newly-qualified teachers to the remote areas. Newly-qualified teachers are often assigned to work in distant regions and most manage to obtain approval for transfer between their second and fourth year of teaching. As a result, a large proportion of inexperienced teachers are working in the remote regions. Beside the inevitable consequences of the high turnover of teachers on the academic attainments of students in these areas, this situation has a severely negative affect on the professional development of the newly-qualified teachers.

2.4.2 Teacher selection

In the first decade of the 21st century, there was huge pressure on the Ministry of Education to increase the Omanisation ratio by recruiting more Omanis into the teaching profession (Al-Balooshi, 2009). Consequently, teacher graduates from private institutes in Oman and in other Arab countries with lower entry requirements than SQU and TTCs were recruited. The teaching performance and competence of these teachers have been questioned and this has affected society's trust in the education system, particularly the professional competence of the Omani teachers along with other consequences.

In relation to tensions in teacher selection, history repeated itself in the second decade of the 21st century. The shift in teacher demand discussed above resulted in the Ministry being more selective in its appointment of teachers. Recruitment into the teaching profession was no longer automatic, as qualifying tests and interviews were implemented and only those who met the requirements were appointed to a teaching position. Consequently, a significant number of teacher graduates from private institutions were unable to satisfy the requirements and remained unemployed for several years. In February 2011, during the so-called "Omani Spring", thousands of unemployed young Omanis, including teacher graduates, protested in streets demanding solutions for unemployment. In response to these requests, a royal decree was issued directing the provision of 50,000 job vacancies in government and private sectors. Thus, all teacher graduates who did not manage to satisfy the teaching profession recruitment requirements were given employment.

2.4.3 Teacher protest and strike

The 'Arab Spring' in general and the Omani one in particular transformed the way employees react to long-existing and unsatisfying conditions in their workplaces. Various governmental and private sector employees staged protests in front of ministerial and company buildings demanding change and improvements. Among these protests and probably the most well-known because of the way it was treated was that of the teachers'. A number of teachers gathered outside the building of the Directorate General of Education in their region demanding certain amendments in the education system which they had been expressing for years. They set up a tent planning for a sit-in protest, but the security forces intervened and requested them to call off their protest. When the teachers insisted on carrying on their protest, the forces used tear-gas and batons to end the demonstration.

In October 2013, teachers in thousands of schools all around the Sultanate took part in strike action by stopping work and demanding the setting up of a Teachers Association, upgrading schools' facilities, reformulating the curriculum and assessment procedures, and implementing the Education Act. This strike paralysed many government schools, as students were sent home every day, which consequently led to upset parents calling upon teachers to resume their duties for the sake of students. The strike ended after an emergency meeting at the Ministry presided over by the Director General of the Education Council, which yielded a plan for the implementation of teachers' demands.

Conclusion

It is evident from the above contextual account of the education system in Oman that it has undergone rapid and progressive development in terms of both quantity

and quality, which applies equally well to the pre- and in-service teacher education if we look at it from a structural and financial angle. This aligns with the government's vision to focus on the importance of sustainable development and provide young Omanis with the appropriate skills to meet the national and the global requirements. The education sector has continuously received special attention from His Majesty and His government, which resulted in the Omanisation of the sector in a very short period and the regular increase in the budget for the professional development of the Ministry's workforce; the sponsorship of this research is one example. In line with this, concerns have been expressed about the academic effectiveness of the in-service training opportunities provided to teachers; that is, how far these are successful in improving schools, developing teachers professionally and improving students' learning, which is why they were introduced in the first place.

3. Literature Review

Introduction

This research specifically focuses on exploring Omani teachers' professional identity and the extent to which the CPD opportunities provided by the Ministry of Education in Oman have contributed to the development of this identity. Thus, in this chapter I attempt to position this study within the scholarly terrain of both teacher professional identity and continuous professional development (CPD) of teachers. This literature review critically discusses the available body of literature relevant to the concepts of teacher professional identity and continuous professional development (CPD), particularly in relation to the impact of CPD on the development of teacher professional identity. In this respect, I argue that understanding teacher professional identity is essential if we are to develop teachers professionally and support their professionalism. This is because professional development or, teacher learning, is to a large extent influenced by who a teacher is (Beijard, Meijer, Morine- Dersheimer & Tillema, 2005; Pillen, Beijaard, Brok, 2013).

This literature review consists of three main sections. Recognising the relative youth and brevity of the field of teacher professional identity, I chose to contextualise it within the broader literature related to 'identity' generally and 'personal and social identity' in particular. Thus, the first section begins with an examination of the concept of 'identity', its confluences and cleavages with the concept of 'self' and a brief overview of personal and social identity. I move then to a review of the primary literature in the field of teacher professional identity to highlight the various differences and draw the key conceptualisations of this

concept across empirical and theoretical work in the area. In order to place this research theoretically, this section also presents a discussion of the two main theoretical lenses through which this field was investigated. This enabled me to develop a claim that a multifaceted approach to understanding teacher professional identity better responds to the nature of this construct and that the deployment of one single theoretical view does not contribute to a comprehensive understanding of this identity.

In the second section, I argue that teacher professional identity is a career-long project. It is constructed and reconstructed through an on-going evolution process which is characterised by a complex and a reciprocal relationship between this identity and teachers' personal and professional lives. Teachers' perpetual and varied life experiences influence their professional identity, and their positions in these experiences are to a great extent an identity work. This argument was found to be in line with Mockler's (2011a) theoretical framework, which explains the role of the personal, professional and political domains in the construction and the evolution of teacher professional identity. Thus, a discussion of these three domains is presented in this section.

The third section focuses on CPD and INSET for teachers. It provides an overview of these two concepts and an account of their benefits and limitations. This section also considers the impact of different systems of CPD on teacher professional identity. It discusses teachers' role and involvement in their own CPD and the extent to which the presence or absence of this promotes a certain type of teacher professional identity.

3.1 Conceptualising and defining ‘teacher professional identity’

Teacher professional identity emerged as a separate research area in the late 80s (e.g. Knowles, 1992; Kompf, Bond, Dworet & Boak, 1996; Bullough, 1997; Connelly & Clandinin, 1999). In their attempts to explain what this concept means, educational researchers have drawn on the views of identity used in the social sciences and philosophy disciplines. Thus, in order to understand the vast range of conceptions of teacher professional identity, I think it is important to first explore the construct of ‘identity’.

3.1.1 Identity

Gaining an understanding of the concept of ‘identity’ requires a definition of what we mean by this specific construct. Resolving a definition for such a construct is challenging and complex, as a variety of issues surface in any attempt to compose and reach a definition. This might be attributed to the fact that ‘identity’ as a construct has been researched in a variety of disciplines, before being investigated in education, such as philosophy (e.g. Mead, 1934), psychology (e.g. Erickson, 1959-1968) and anthropology (e.g. Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner and Cain, 1998). The notions of the construct of ‘identity’ vary across these disciplines resulting in various meanings within the literature on teaching and teacher education (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). In addition, the lack of clarity in defining the concept of ‘identity’ which was noticed in the educational literature, and in other research fields, resulted in no agreement on a single definition in the field (Mockler, 2011b). Mockler (2011b) attributed this to the abstract and the somewhat intangible nature of the concept of identity. She also added that this can be because of the pervasive nature of identity in human beings’ lives, which made many researchers

overlook the need to provide a definition for something which is familiar and subject to common understanding (Mockler, 2011b).

This was echoed in Bullough's (2005) quest for identity, in which he commented that identity is a slippery and amorphous term and he expressed uncertainty whether it is real or imagined. A similar viewpoint was asserted by Brubaker and Cooper (2000) in their critique of identity scholarship and literature. They argued that the existing scholarly literature in this domain is hopelessly vague and that it has led to obscurity rather than clarity of the concept. They even advocated abandoning the concept altogether and introducing a different term with a clear meaning.

This lack of consistency and clarity in understanding and providing a unified meaning of the construct of 'identity' resulted in studies which tried to organise the various existing views on identity. One of the seminal studies in this vein is Abdelal, Herrera, Johnston and McDermott's (2006) study, which they described as an attempt to organise the "definitional anarchy" in the field of identity scholarly literature (p.3). This definitional anarchy was attributed by Day, Kington, Stobart and Sammons (2006) to the fact that concepts of 'self' and 'identity' are often used interchangeably in the identity research and literature. A similar concern was expressed by Beijaard et al. (2004) who noted that although both concepts seem to be different, they are used in the literature to indicate the same thing and it is not clear how these two concepts are related. This concern was also echoed by Beauchamp and Thomas (2009) in their review of issues revealed in the recent literature on identity. They noted that one of the complex issues which stands in the way of determining what identity is revolves around the notion of 'self' or 'self-

concept' and its relationship with the notion of 'identity'. Thus, I think that a discussion which highlights the distinctiveness of each concept and the ways in which they overlap is essential. This is because the understanding adopted for the notion of 'self' in this research will determine the working meaning adopted for the notion of 'identity' which will in turn assist in arriving at a clear understanding and conceptualisation of the construct of 'professional identity' which is the core of this research.

3.1.2 Self and identity

In fact, both 'self' and 'identity' are complex constructs because they draw on major and diverse theoretical and research areas, such as philosophy, psychology, sociology and psychotherapy. According to Day et al. (2006), the early writers, for example Cooley (1902), tended to view 'self' as an essence which is singular, unified and stable and which can be little affected by people's contexts and biographies. Likewise, 'identity', according to Benwell and Stokoe (2006), was originally viewed as absolute and being the same in nature and composition. They even argued that this meaning is still reflected in the everyday use of the word. These initial views of 'self' and 'identity' focused on the individual's ability to create for him/herself a defining system of meanings. These meanings remain constant and can only develop through a subjective individual's reasoning and cognition independent from external influences. However, these external influences were viewed later as inseparable from the individual's reasoning and cognition. Therefore, the construction of the self and identity was perceived to be highly influenced by the connections between the individual's reasoning and the perceived opinions of others around him/her.

This shift in the view of self and identity construction suggests that rather than being subjective, 'self' and 'identity' are constructed through a reflexive learning process, through which individuals accumulate their values, attitudes and behaviours. However, these initial and developmental views of both 'self' and 'identity' do not make the distinction and the relation between the two concepts clear. What these views actually suggest is that both constructs can be used interchangeably.

Nevertheless, it has been found that Mead's (1934) viewpoint of 'self' is much more helpful in understanding this distinction and intersection. Mead (1934) argued that the 'self' constitutes two important and distinctive components: 'I' and 'Me'. The 'I' can be viewed as the subject or the active component of the 'self' which through the process of reflection has the role of articulating the thoughts. The 'Me' is the object which is developed through the reflection process. In this sense, it can be understood that the 'Me' component of the 'self' is the 'identity' and it is the one which owns the thoughts and is developed according to them. This suggests that 'self' and 'identity' cannot exist without each other. In line with Mead's (1934) viewpoint and based on his work, Nias (1989) thought that 'self' is a wider concept than that of 'identity' and, according to her, 'identity' forms part of the 'self'. She believed that through reflection, an individual can inform his/her 'identity' which may affect the 'self'. This process of reflection, which both scholars regarded as important in constructing and developing 'identity' with the essential assistance of the 'self', suggests that the social interactions, experiences and opinions of others are valuable in the accumulation of 'identity'.

This also suggests that 'self' can be stable and at the same time take on different approaches to different social situations and experiences based upon the roles played by the individual in these social situations. These theoretical perspectives lead us to think that an individual's life is multifaceted and multidimensional and cannot be adequately researched without taking into account the various facets and their intersections and interrelations. This issue was addressed by Goffman (1959) when he presented the idea that each individual takes on a number of 'selves'. Each self, he argued, executes a specific role at a given time and situation which he considered to be essential for effective communication of social processes in different social situations. However, Day et al. (2006) argued that even in the light of Goffman's theoretical advance, his perspective does still not allow for the fact that 'self' continuously undergoes changes and development over time, which should not be neglected when researching such an issue. In fact, I think that Goffman's idea of individual's multiple selves is evident in our daily lives, in which these selves are manifested in the roles we have and those which are assigned to us by others.

However, his idea does not help much in making the distinction and the relation between the 'self' and 'identity' clear. This might be because, as mentioned earlier, we need to distinguish between what changes and what allows and assists this change. In this regard, I found that Ball's (1972) idea of separating the "situated" from the "substantive" identity a useful one. Ball (1972) viewed the situated identity of an individual as a malleable presentation of his/her 'self' which differs according to specific social interactions and situations. Unlike situated identity, substantive identity is more stable and is the core representation of 'self' which is fundamental

in the way an individual thinks about him/herself. Thus, in line with Ball's perspective and with the purpose of this study, it can be argued that understanding of the 'self' is crucial in understanding the shaping and the construction of 'identity'. This view suggests that researching the professional identity of teachers is in fact an investigation into a situated identity in a specific social setting and situation. This is not to say that it is possible to discern both constructs in this study, as they are by no means separable. However, I believe that the scope and the timeframe for this study can only allow an investigation into an aspect of the teachers' 'self' which is their 'identity' with an attempt to consider the influence of some of the other 'self' dimensions which have impacts on teacher identity.

Therefore, based on the above discussion, it can be said that regardless of the differing views provided in the literature for the concept of identity, they do have certain notions in common. The different views agreed that identity is not a fixed attribute of an individual, but a relational phenomenon which develops in a process which can be characterised as ongoing and intersubjective. This process enables the individual to interpret him/herself as '*a certain kind*' of person and to be recognised by others as such in a given social context (Gee, 2000). These notions were encapsulated in Flores and Day's (2006) definition of identity "*as an ongoing and dynamic process which entails the making sense and (re)interpretation of one's own values and experiences*" (p.220).

3.1.3 Personal and social identity

In their account of the historical phases through which the concept of identity has passed, Benwell and Stokoe (2006) illustrated very well how this concept moved

from a view of identity as 'a project of the self', in which personal thought and cognition is above all else, to viewing it as a 'product of the social', that is to say that external social factors prevent the conscious from being entirely autonomous (p.17). This distinction between personal and social identity or collective identity, which many scholars have drawn on in their attempts to provide a conceptualisation for the notion of identity, has evolved primarily from the work of the symbolic interactionist Mead (1934) and the psychologist Erikson (1968) (Beijaard et al. 2004).

As mentioned previously, Mead's (1934) understanding of the concept of 'identity' was strongly related to the concept of 'self'. He provided a detailed account of how the 'self' is developed through a continuous transaction with the environment. He believed that social communication, which only occurs in social settings, is essential for the development of the self. This suggests that through social communications we learn and construct our assumptions of our roles and actions in relation to other people's roles and behaviours. Thus, the 'self' which can be defined as "*an organised representation of our theories, attitudes and beliefs about ourselves*" (Beijaard et al., 2004, p.108), can be regarded by other people as hypothetical and subjective, but is in fact intersubjective and real. Like Mead (1934), Erikson's (1968) work focused on identity formation in social contexts.

However, unlike Mead, his understanding of the concept of identity was in relationship with biological and psychological stages and maturation, which an individual undergoes throughout his life. He argued that each biological and psychological stage has its own unique characteristics resulting in different

interactions with the individual's environment. This suggests that identity is not something which is inborn and which an individual can have, but is rather something which evolves and changes throughout an individual's entire life, depending on the individual's biological and psychological stage and the social contexts s/he interacts and communicates with. More recently, Deschamps and Devos (1998) proposed a fairly straightforward definition of what they think personal identity is. They stated that "*personal identity is what makes you similar to yourself and different from others*" (p.3). In this definition the social environment dimension is strongly present, as the term "*others*" suggests that other people are essential to the determination of the individual's peculiarity. Unlike Deschamps and Devos (1998), Doise's (1998) definition of personal identity seems to be more elaborate and explicitly incorporates the significance and the role of the social context in the construction of the individual's personal identity. He defined personal identity as "*a social representation, an organising principle of individual positioning in a field of symbolic relationships between individuals and groups*" (p.23).

In terms of investigating identity in social contexts and the interplay between the individual and the social world, it was found that the most influential theory in this respect is Tajfel and Turner's (1989) Social Identity Theory (SIT). This theory focuses on the influences of the intergroup relations on the individual's personal identity. In other words, Tajfel and Turner (1989) stated that the social categories or groups to which an individual perceives him/herself as belonging strongly influence some aspects of a person's self-image. Likewise, the social categories and groups an individual does not feel as if they belong contribute to this self-image as the perception of belonging to certain groups is only possible in relation

to the differing groups (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006). However, Hitlin (2003) stated that Tajafel & Turner's (1989) Social Identity Theory (SIT) viewed the personal and the social identities as the end points of a continuum or a hierarchy. He argued for the permeability of personal and social identity and regarded them as intertwined structures. This integration between the personal and the social identity was supported empirically by Reid and Deaux (1996). Their investigation aimed at re-examining Trafimow, Triandis and Goto's (1991) empirical findings which argued for the segregation between the personal and the social identities and asserted that each type of identity exists in a separate cognitive structure. Reid and Deaux (1996) found that an integration between the personal and the social identities is supported more strongly than a separation model.

Likewise, the interaction between the teacher as a person and as a professional has been widely recognised by current research on teaching and teacher education (Beauchamp, 2019). This interaction is strongly related to the above discussion on the integration and the mutual influence of the personal and the social identities. This also emerged from the current understanding of the complexity in which teachers and their work are constructed and developed, as opposed to a view of teachers as technicians recognised by particular behaviours and knowledge which are characterised by identifiable variables (Darling-Hammond & Snyder, 2000). It also emerged from the role of personal practical knowledge in learning to teach and improve as teachers (Beijaard, Verloop & Vermunt, 2000) and being a teacher in a professional landscape (Clandinin & Connelly, 1996). It is against this background that the concept of teacher professional identity has arisen in research on teacher and teacher education.

3.1.4 Teacher professional identity

Since identity has been conceptualised in various ways in different disciplines, as mentioned in section 3.1.1, it seems that professional identity has also been variously conceptualised. This lack of clarity is represented in the frequency of the review studies which attempted to classify and clarify the field, for instance the five seminal reviews by Brubaker and Cooper (2000), Beijaard et al. (2004), Day et al. (2006), Izadinia (2013) and Beauchamp (2019). In fact, Beijaard et al. (2004) found in their review of 22 studies on teacher professional identity from the period of 1988 to 2000, the period in which teacher professional identity emerged as a separate research area, that the concept of teacher professional identity was variously defined or not defined at all. Beijaard and his colleagues managed to identify three groups of definitions of teacher professional identity embedded in the reviewed studies. These included teachers' self-concept or image, teachers' roles and teachers' development of some capacities, such as self-reflection (p.108). This was also echoed in Izadinia's (2013) findings of a review of 29 empirical research studies on student teachers' professional identity from the USA, the UK and Australia. She reported that none of the 29 studies she reviewed explicitly explored and defined a construct called "teacher professional identity". Izadinia (2013) attributed this orientation in empirical research studies to the "elusive" nature of the construct of teacher professional identity, which meant that its development process might not be easily identifiable and defined (p.707). In addition, it has been argued by some educational researchers that the elusive and complex nature of professional identity can stand in opposition to the development of a definition (Mockler, 2011b). Thus, Mockler (2011b) proposed that in order to convey the true

sense of such a multifaceted and multifarious concept, describing how it can work is much better than defining it.

In fact, there are two main conceptualisations which seem to articulate the various contemporary definitions and perspectives among researchers and scholars in the field of teacher professional identity. There is an established stream of literature which conceptualises teacher professional identity as a **process** of continual being and becoming. This conceptualisation captures the duality of the 'individual' versus 'collective', the 'internal' and 'external', the 'personal' and the 'professional' dimensions of teacher professional identity. This modern perspective of identity in general and teacher professional identity in particular is in radical opposition to the pre-modern assumptions on the singularity and sameness of teacher professional identity (Akkerman and Meijer, 2011). To capture the dynamism and the shifting nature of teacher professional identity, Wenger (1998), one of the leading scholars in exploring the dimensions of teacher professional identity, proposed the notion of "*learning trajectory*". This notion captures the being (where we are at the moment) and the becoming (where we are going).

In addition, Beijaard et al (2004) emphasised the fluidity and the dynamically evolving nature of teacher professional identity. They stated that teacher professional identity is an ongoing process of interpretation and reinterpretation of experiences. They also argued that teacher professional identity is not only an answer to the recurrent "*question of 'who am I at this moment?'... but also an answer to the question 'who I want to become?'*" (p.122). A similar conceptualisation was echoed by Rodgers & Scott (2008), who argued that teacher

professional identity is “*shifting*” and “*unstable*” (p.733). They attributed this to the external forces of context and relationships teachers have within that context which, at least in part, shape teacher professional identity. Beauchamp & Thomas (2009) also stressed that their review revealed that teacher professional identity is “*dynamic and shifts over time under the influence of a range of factors both internal and external*”(p.177). Izadinia (2013) viewed teacher professional identity as being in “*a continual flux*” because “*it is dynamic and created and recreated during an active process of learning to teach*” (p.695). In the same vein, Day and Flores (2006) understood professional identity “*as an ongoing and dynamic process which entails the making sense and (re)interpretation of one’s own values and experiences*” (p.220). Mockler (2011a) agreed with the above view of professional identity and argued that teacher professional identity is shaped and reshaped through their experiences and the kinds of teacher they are becoming. Thus, she viewed professional identity as “*formed and reformed constantly over the course of a career and mediated by a complex interplay of personal, professional and political dimensions of teachers’ lives*” (p.518).

Another stream of literature views teacher professional identity as an **outcome** of a negotiation of multiple intersecting discourses (Wenger, 1998; Chappell, 2001; Sachs, 2001; Stronach et al., 2002; Alsup, 2006; Patrick, 2010). These multifaceted discourses were observed to be created by power, culture and ideology, embedded in policy and enacted in teachers' practices. These overlapping discourses mainly fall into two discrete camps. One is influenced by neo-liberal and neo-conservative discourses and therefore has at its heart performativity and instrumentalism within the teaching profession context. The

other camp is informed by critical discourses and thus emphasises the vital role of teachers and their professional responsibility in the pursuit of social justice and equality. Teachers' participation in this negotiation process by adopting or resisting these discourses plays a vital role in the construction of their professional identity. This conceptualisation of teacher professional identity emphasises the role of language and social practices in the professional identity negotiation process and argues for a view of teacher professional identity as a discursive practice. That is, words used to talk about and describe teachers and the teaching profession are not simply names and labels for teaching entities, rather they are themselves "*actions or ideological practices*" which serve specific purposes in the process of negotiating and constructing teacher professional identity (Zembylas, 2005, p.937). Therefore, this view of teacher professional identity emphasises the role language and culture play in the making of teachers professionally and the constitution of a specific teacher professional identity which is engaged in complex webs of power relations.

In other words, this conceptualisation views power as an integral part of all discourses about teachers and teaching because it believes that power relations shape and regulate what "*can, cannot and must be said about (teachers and teaching) and what is taken to be true or false about them*" (Zembylas, 2005, p.937). Zembylas (2005) argued that such an understanding of teacher professional identity leads to a more complex view of the shifting, multiple and contested meanings possible in the surrounding discourses. In addition, it is believed that discourses produce power. That is, according to Foucault (1983), power is dispersed, manifested and exercised in discursive practices which

continuously shape and constitute identity. Supporting the view that teacher professional identity is influenced by competing and complex discursive practices, Sachs (2001) argued that teacher professional identity needs to be re-conceptualised in light of the duality embedded in two opposing discourses. These are democratic discourse, which she sees as emerging from the profession itself, and managerial discourse, which emerges from the various educational systems and structures that focus on accountability and effectiveness. She asserted that these competing discourses frame and pervade teachers' practices, either individually or collectively, and therefore each gives rise to and fosters a certain type of teacher professional identity.

In the same vein, Stronach et al.'s (2002) work, which aimed at conceptualising the complex nature of professionalism while focusing on teachers and nurses, highlighted the dilemmas and tensions these professionals face in the process of negotiating their professional identity. These dilemmas result from an active interaction between structure (educational systems and structures) and agency (teachers themselves), which is essential in the construction of teacher professional identity. They proposed that teacher professional identity comes to be constructed through the process of experiencing and negotiating these tensions. They stated that teachers "*walk the tightrope of uncertain being...Thus, it is important to hold on to these notes of ambivalence and contradiction rather than try to reduce or resolve them*" (p.121).

This suggests that teacher professional identity is not a neat and unified entity, rather it is necessarily a product of a messy and multiple process of construction

and becoming. In other words, uncertainty, ambivalence and contradictions of teachers' practice, their ideologies and educational policies are necessary and they form the basis for the construction of teacher professional identity. In this sense, Stronach et al.'s, (2002) work provided a different meaning for the notion of 'becoming' which is essential for our understanding of teacher professional identity. They rejected the conventional understanding of 'becoming' which implies a prior unity and wholeness and proposed that tensions and movements are always there, either in the state of being or the state of becoming.

This view challenges the traditional view of teacher professional identity, which regarded such an identity as simply a set of qualities and characteristics which are imposed upon teachers either by outsiders or insiders from the teaching profession itself. It views teacher professional identity as an outcome of a process of synthesis and integration of the statuses and roles assigned to teachers as well as their diverse experiences. In this sense, it recognises the complex nature of teacher professional identity which is influenced by competing dimensions and complex circumstances. This discursive view of teacher professional identity enables us to perceive this identity as always becoming. That is, teacher professional identity is constructed through interaction, negotiation, discussion and argument between the individual teacher and the surrounding social, cultural and political discourses. In this sense, the discursive view of teacher professional identity enables us to view this identity as described by Clarke (2008): "*individual in society/ society in individual*". The key premise of such a view is the extent to which teachers are able to exercise agency in the face of particular discursive regimes. Therefore, teacher

identity needs to be understood in relation to these discursive practices and any attempts to examine this identity outside of them is likely to be of limited value.

The above discussion on the two main contemporary conceptions of the nature of professional identity which were built upon the assumptions that professional identity is a process of continuous being and becoming, and an outcome of a synthesis of competing and contradictory discourses leads us to an important notion of '*plurality*' and '*multiplicity*' in the nature of professional identity. This notion of '*multiplicity*' means that teacher professional identity consists of and emerges out of *sub-identities* which can contradict or harmonise with each other (Tran & Nguyen, 2015). Based on their review of the literature, Rodgers and Scott (2008) concluded that teacher sub-identities are attributed to teachers' different contexts and relationships. However, the coexistence of a number of identities which constitute teacher professional identity was perceived as both being fragmented and unified. This means that the sub-identities [fragmented] are organised around a '*primary identity*' or '*a core identity*' [unified] (Castells, 2000; Gee 2000-2001). That is, the '*primary identity*', which is more sustained across time and space works as the frame of reference for the other roles and identities assigned to and played by an individual (Mockler & Sachs, 2006). I think this notion is very useful in understanding teacher professional identity, especially in contexts where teachers face dilemmas and tensions in their work. It also seems beneficial in understanding the conflicting beliefs and practices teachers might have because of the various dimensions and sources of their professional identity construction.

To sum up, the above discussion highlighted the two main conceptualisations of teacher professional identity. These were built upon the assumptions that professional identity is a process of continuous being and becoming, and an outcome of a synthesis of competing and contradictory discourses. Both conceptualisations reveal that teacher professional identity is unanimously viewed as transforming and transitional, relational, negotiated and constructed. They also reveal the central role of discourse and the 'other' in the process of teacher professional identity construction.

In the light of the definitional discussion above, I have chosen Sachs' (2005) following statement as a starting working definition for the concept of teacher professional identity which is central to this study. Sachs (2005) stated that:

"Teachers' professional identity stands at the core of the teaching profession. It provides a framework for teachers to construct their own ideas of 'how to be', 'how to act' and 'how to understand' their work and their place in society. Importantly, teacher identity is not something that is fixed nor is it imposed; rather it is negotiated through experience and the sense that is made of that experience" (Sachs, 2005, p.15).

Following Beauchamp and Thomas (2009), this definition was chosen to be the operational definition for this study because it shows the centrality of the concept of teacher professional identity for the teaching profession and it indicates the dynamism inherent in this concept. In its inclusion of 'how to be', 'how to act' and 'how to understand' as components of attention, it also points to the multiple dimensions which need to be considered when investigating such a concept (Beauchamp and Thomas, 2009, p.178). In addition, this definition encompasses the professional '*their work*' and the personal '*place in society*' aspects of teacher identity, which cannot be separated when studying a complex terrain like the

profession of teaching. It also includes the importance of the experiences in the shaping and reshaping of teacher professional identity, which highlights the ongoing negotiation nature of this identity and the possibility for change and development.

3.2 Theorising ‘teacher professional identity’

This discussion of the two main contemporary conceptions of teacher professional identity highlights that this issue was investigated through two main theoretical lenses: the sociocultural/Vygotskian and post-structural perspectives. Although each of these differing theoretical perspectives has its distinctive analytical primacy and theoretical underpinnings, they do overlap and share some common features.

3.2.1 The socio-cultural perspective

The socio-cultural perspective on researching professional identity in general and teacher professional identity in particular is underpinned by a social theoretical view of identity construction. It gives special attention to teachers’ actions and their speeches which are mediated and mutually constructed by socio-cultural factors and processes. The ultimate goal of such a perspective is to unfold the circumstances which surround individuals and to describe how these individuals’ thoughts and behaviours are affected and constructed by the social and cultural factors. Vygotskian approaches seem to exert considerable influences on such a research perspective on teacher professional identity. This results in giving analytic primacy to socio-cultural factors and processes which are considered as primary and essential in the construction and the reconstruction of teacher professional identity.

At the same time, this theoretical perspective seeks to understand such an educational issue in terms of agency. Agency is understood to be the capacity of an individual for intentional actions and reflexive mediations, which strongly suggests that it is a property of the individual (Zembylas, 2003). Teacher agency is regarded as an essential factor in the construction of their professional identity and the performance of the different roles they play in their professional lives. According to the socio-cultural perspective, the agency factor is not understood as isolated or discerned from the surrounding socio-cultural factors. However, it is viewed as socio-culturally contingent and dependent upon a broad diversity of contextual factors. That is to say that such a perspective is more interested in the interplay between the socio-cultural structure and the individual teacher agency in the constitution of teacher professional identity (Lasky, 2005). Therefore, one of the essential tenets in the sociocultural perspective to researching professional identity is the belief that teachers have the ability to influence their personal and professional lives, while at the same time being shaped by individual, social and cultural factors (Giddens, 1984).

In other words, this perspective examines individual teacher actions and thoughts in a way that primacy is given to the social contexts and cultural tools which shape their professional beliefs, values and ways of acting (Lasky, 2005). Thus, it departs from a theoretical proposition which believes that human beings' development in general occurs on two interrelated spheres or domains: psychological and social. In fact, Vygotsky argued that the social sphere precedes the psychological; what is psychological is first social (Vygotsky, 1962). That is, individuals' beliefs, thoughts and actions are always shaped by historical, cultural and social structures and

resources surrounding the individuals. These structures and resources are manifested in mediational means or tools, such as literature, media, art, language and technology (Wertsch et al., 1993). In the case of teachers' day-to-day working lives, these historical, cultural and social structures and resources are reflected and mediated through educational policies, curriculum guidelines and mandated governmental reforms and standards. Although these tools and resources are pivotal and necessary in sustaining the teaching and the learning processes, they serve as an educational system which negatively or positively affects teacher professional identity. In other words, this perspective believes that the way teachers construct and carry out their professional identity is often a mixture between individuals' peculiarities and the features of the social and cultural context in which the educational system is embedded. That is to say, such a perspective to researching teacher professional identity stems from a view of identity which presents the concept of "*identity-in-practice*" (Varghese, et al. 2005, p.39).

According to this view, teacher professional identity is seen to be constructed by the teachers' practices in relation to certain social groups and the individual teacher's attempts at identification or nonidentification with these groups. Agency in such a perspective is viewed as action-oriented. That is, it is focused on concrete tasks and activities an individual teacher practices in relation to other social and professional groups. In addition, this sociocultural perspective views power as being situated in the material world surrounding the individual teacher and in the interrelations with the other people or stakeholders. It is also defined in terms of the access an individual teacher has to the surrounding social and professional groups (Varghese, et al. 2005).

Thus, there is no wonder that such a theoretical perspective employed methodological tools which enabled the research participants to construct their professional identity in a free manner. This resulted in producing an amalgamated identity which is made up of the different roles teachers play in both their professional and personal lives. This requires in-depth descriptions of local situations, which make large-scale research projects inappropriate for such purposes (Dillabough, 1999). Therefore, research projects implementing the sociocultural perspective to researching teacher professional identity mainly employed data collection methods, such as in-depth semi-structured and unstructured interviews, observations, portfolios, reflective journals, autobiographies, ethnographic investigations and life histories. In fact, life histories and story-telling seem to be a common and valuable data collection method in this theoretical perspective. It is believed that this method provides a good understanding of teachers' personal and professional lives, which is essential in facilitating the understanding of their professional identity (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). This is because giving teachers the opportunity to narrate the histories of their lives provides them the foundations needed to construe their professional identity. In addition, it is believed that through these stories, many aspects of teachers' experiential knowledge can be brought to the forefront and make the teachers' voice heard. These stories about teaching provide a counterbalance to the more powerful and dominant discourses of academics and policymakers in the field of education (Clandinin & Huber, 2010).

However, the socio-cultural theoretical perspective to researching teacher professional identity has paid little attention to issues of politics and power relations

in teacher professional life, which I believe are central and essential in understanding the various facets of such a complex phenomenon as teacher professional identity. This shortcoming in the socio-cultural perspective to researching teacher professional identity gave rise to the post-structural perspective, which places great importance on unfolding politics and power issues in teachers' professional lives.

3.2.2 The post-structural perspective

As in the socio-cultural perspective, the post-structural perspective to researching teacher professional identity views teacher identity as a product of socio-cultural and sociohistorical influences. However, what distinguishes this perspective from the socio-cultural one is its engagement with potential hindrances and obstacles to self-determination, which had not been adequately addressed in the socio-cultural perspective (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006). Therefore, it can be said that the post-structural perspective challenges two central ideas which are implied in the sociocultural perspective to researching teacher professional identity. First, the post-structural perspective rejects the proposition that teacher professional identity formation and construction is solely a social phenomenon unrelated to the political context in which teachers' actions and practices take place. Second, it discards the notion of a unified teacher identity. To explain this point, Foucault (1984), one of the key post-structural theorists, argued that identity construction needs to be investigated within a historical framework which assists our understanding of how meanings intersect with actions and experiences. This view challenges the homogeneity implicit in the notion of "*collective identities*" which was advocated by the sociocultural view to identity (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006, p.30). To do so,

Foucault (1984) suggested that researchers should view identity as both the subject and the object of actions and experiences teachers go through. That is, teacher identity is regarded as the effect of dominant discourses which are crucially tied to social arrangements and practices.

This means that the analytic primacy in this theoretical perspective is the *discourse* of the teachers' actions and experiences and not the teachers' experiences themselves. Post-structuralism disputes the view of experience as inherent and essential. Teachers' experiences in themselves do not solely constitute self-knowledge. Rather, it is the investigation and the unfolding of the historical and political aspects of a context and their influences on the teachers' practices and discourses that result in self-knowledge. This implies the notion of teacher identity as shifting and not unitary because such historical and political aspects shift and so does teacher identity (Britzman, 1993). This view of teacher identity opens up a space between teacher self-knowledge and the historical and political conditions of this claimed teacher identity (Bhaba, 1987). In this shifting space, narratives of teacher self-knowledge "subjectivity" and narratives of historical and political conditions "culture" intersect and form the teacher professional identity (Zembylas, 2003, p.221). This suggests that the post-structural perspective of identity formation is not concerned with the origin of the identity which implies a view of identity as fixed and unitary. However, it helps in understanding how identity is continuously becoming, or as Deleuze and Guattari (1987) termed it, how identity is constantly *re-defined*.

This highlights that such a perspective suggests the dynamic nature of teacher professional identity construction which requires a non-linear and unstable process that permits new features to constantly emerge within this process. These continuously emerging contextual features might lead teachers either to confirm or problematize who they are and who they are becoming. In other words, the post-structural perspective captures the integrated notion of identity and refuses the dichotomous view of identity as individual functioning and socio-cultural processes. Post-structuralists reject the singularity of the components which constitute teacher professional identity. Therefore, in deploying a post-structural lens to analysing teacher professional identity formation, researchers create spaces for teachers to construct a sense of agency and to develop strategies of power and resistance. In this vein, Trinh (1992) wrote that a post-structural approach to researching teacher professional identity does not only attempt to ask questions about *who* teachers are, but more importantly tries to examine questions of *when*, *where* and *how* teachers are becoming who they are.

The above discussion clearly shows that a post-structural approach to researching teacher professional identity aims at understanding and unpacking how power structures shape teacher identity and how teachers respond to such influences. Thus, this perspective creates space for teachers' voices and teachers are viewed as "*fluid actors and thinker*" (Gee, 2000-2001, p.104). Teachers are seen to be able to resist the power structures imposed on them, change and transform their reality and therefore reconstruct their identities. Thus, unlike the sociocultural perspective which views teacher agency as socially shared and emphasises the involvement of mediational tools, the post-structural perspective moves a step

further. It views agency as inseparable from the dynamics of power from which it is formed and thus it tries to understand this agency in its cultural and political contexts. Based on this view of agency, teacher identity is seen as a product of prior power relations and structures, as well as being in constant negotiation with the cultural and political discursive environments (Zembylas, 2003).

This can be achieved through what Gee (2000-2000, p.105) termed as an “*Affinity group*”. When talking about teachers, this can be understood as a group of teachers who may be dispersed across a large geographical area, possibly different countries, but share and participate in specific practices of their choice which provide them with the requisite experiences. Although teachers might be geographically far away from each other, having a purpose in common enables them to employ their knowledge and discourse as emancipatory tools which consequently empowers them to change and transform undesirable and problematizing teaching realities. In this vein, Britzman (1993) wrote “*as each of us struggles in the process of coming to know, we struggle not as autonomous beings we single-handedly perform singular fates, but as vulnerable social subjects who produce and are being produced by culture*” (p.28). This suggests that a post-structural perspective of teacher professional identity views identity as constantly contested and continually undergoing transforming shifts. Therefore, one of the main aims of using a post-structural lens in conducting professional identity research is to attempt to seek a critical understanding of how the existing power structures and relations influence the construction of teacher professional identity. In order to achieve such an aim, some post-structuralists might add a collaborative dimension to an existing educational culture to establish and maintain an

emancipatory educational culture. Establishing collaborative educational networks is believed to enable the teachers to work towards the resistance of the educational discourses and practices which attempt to implicitly or explicitly disempower teachers and their learners.

Furthermore, a post-structural perspective of researching teacher professional identity establishes a strong link between identity and learning. This is because in this theoretical perspective, identity is viewed as an ongoing process of identification (Watson, 2006). To illustrate, Hargreaves and Goodson (1996, p.12) argued that teachers are able and must be encouraged to deconstruct “*the intellectual pretensions of university-based, scientific knowledge as a basis for teacher professionalism*”. This can be done through dialogical exchanges which ultimately produce distinct types of professional learning. Therefore, teaching according to this perspective is not a set of standards and proved methods and strategies; rather, it is conceived as different ways of being and engaging with issues of teaching. This might explain why the post-structural perspective places as much importance and emphasis on local contexts and situations as the sociocultural perspective does.

The above discussion suggests that three main and basic principles can be drawn from a post-structural perspective of researching teacher professional identity. First, it gives great importance to the studying of the cultural and political contexts in which teachers are functioning, because it is believed that identity formation in such contexts is constantly at stake. Second, it captures a notion of identity as integrated and thus rejects the notion of the singularity of each component of

teacher identity formation, which views a dichotomy between teacher functioning and socio-cultural processes. Third, the use of a post-structural lens of identity formation establishes spaces for teachers to develop a sense of agency in their professional lives and to construct ways and strategies of power and resistance.

However, the post-structural perspective of researching teacher professional identity is criticised for the strong likelihood of falling into the exaggeration of its underpinning principles. That is, the strong emphasis on language and the discursive construction of reality makes it difficult for researchers to anchor their findings in actual reality (Varghese et al., 2005). In other words, to find a point of purchase other than the language with which researchers can analyse participants' accounts and to realise their practices. This kind of research, I believe, might leave teachers with highly complex educational discourse, which is of little meaning in their professional practices. Thus, the post-structural professional identity research may not achieve its paramount purpose which is empowering and emancipating teachers. This shortcoming is relevant to the methodological concerns often related to research methods used in post-structuralism, such as narratives and personal stories. Varghese et al. (2005) argued that by using participants' narratives and stories to claim greater authenticity, post-structuralists might fall into positioning participants in ways they do not claim for themselves. Bearing these criticisms in mind, however, it should be clear that in post-structural theories, researchers do not claim an objective truth. Truth for them is within the researchers or the interpreters and not outside them.

3.3 Dimensions shaping 'teacher professional identity'

Following Mockler's (2011a) model for representing the processes of the construction and the reconstruction of teacher professional identity, this section focuses on discussing three key dimensions which play a pivotal role in "*a career-long project*" of being and becoming a teacher (p.518). I strongly agree with Mockler (2011a) that teachers' work and professional practice is constituted across and out of three main domains: teachers' personal experiences, professional context and political environment. Since I believe in the complex and reciprocal relationship between teacher professional identity and professional actions, in that teacher professional actions and practices are to a great extent an identity work and what teachers do influences their professional identity, I find it justifiable to consider the same three key dimensions as those shaping and reshaping teacher professional identity. However, it should be clear that although each domain is discussed separately, they are conceived to share some overlap and to work reflexively. In addition, it is believed that the impact of each domain on an individual teacher changes in its significance and strengths according to circumstantial and contextual catalysts.

3.3.1 Personal experiences

The dimension of teachers' personal experiences is viewed as relating to the aspects of teachers' personal lives which are outside the professional realm. These aspects are framed by race, class, gender and teachers' experiences of schooling as students themselves. This domain was argued to be crucial to understanding teachers in their working lives (Nias, 1989). For instance, it was recognised that the way teachers see themselves and their work is strongly influenced by their

perceptions of schooling and education derived from their own experiences of being school students (Mockler, 2011a). Nias (1989) argued that teachers develop their sense of professional identity prior to their entry into the teaching profession. She stated that the image of the teacher starts to grow in the early years of school experiences. These experiences undeniably affect to a great extent teachers' subsequent practices and actions in the teaching profession. This is because such experiences are imprinted in teachers' minds in a profound way. In the same vein, Flores and Day's (2006) study of the construction, deconstruction and reconstruction of professional identity of 14 teachers in their first two years of teaching expressed a similar viewpoint. They found that prior experiences of being pupils, whether positive or negative, seemed to play a strong mediating role in the identities teachers bring to the school teaching experiences. Flores and Day (2006) stressed the importance of former teachers and their teaching which were regarded as '*a frame of reference*' for their study's participants' understanding of themselves as teachers (p.224). In addition, in her seminal review of research on student teachers' professional identity, Izadinia (2013) found that one of the four main focuses of such studies which plays a considerable role in shaping teachers' classroom practices and professional identity is student teachers' prior learning experiences which they bring with them to the teacher education programme. Thus, she argued for the importance of taking these prior learning experiences into account and for teacher education programmes to recognise such learning experiences. Olsen (2008) who investigated the impact of student teachers' reasons for entering a teacher education programme on their professional identity, agreed with this viewpoint. He maintained that "*a teacher's reasons for entry bridge*

prior learning events and experiences with the kind of teacher one is becoming”
(p.36)

Furthermore, this domain includes teachers' own interests, hobbies, roles and activities engaged in community groups and family context such as parenthood and child raising. This is because it is widely recognised that events experienced in the personal lives of teachers are intimately linked to teachers' professional roles and performances (Day et al., 2006). To illustrate, Sikes (1998) in her life history study which investigated the relationship between being a parent and the teachers' perceptions and experiences of their work, asserted that all teachers involved in her research stated that becoming a parent had made them quite different teachers. For instance, Sikes (1998) reported that these teachers' commitments could be said to have increased and they became more sensitive to the individual needs of students. In addition, she found that the major change teachers experienced was in their relationship with the students' parents. Thus, Sikes (1998) concluded that the practical and emotional experience of parenthood can help to have a positive influence on teachers' professional identity. However, it should be clear that Sikes' study does not claim that parent teachers are the best teachers. Rather, it highlighted that parental experiences and emotions can make a significant contribution to the construction and reconstruction of teacher professional identity.

3.3.2 Professional domain

As for the professional domain, it is related to the aspects of teachers' experiences which are framed within an educational context, such as career histories, school

system and context, professional learning and development experiences. In addition, this domain includes teachers' involvement in professional unions, associations and networks. Although these aspects of their experiences are external to the particular school system and context, they are considered to be an integral part of teachers' professional world. Another significant element within this domain is teachers' pre-service and in-service education, as these experiences are the processes through which teachers get their accreditation and recognition of professional competence.

As for the impact of the particular school system and context on teachers' construction and reconstruction of professional identity, researchers argued that teachers undergo positive and negative changes in their perceptions of and attitudes towards various aspects of the teaching profession as a result of their teaching experiences and their particular school environment. For instance, Lamote and Engels (2010) studied for three years the changes in some indicators of teacher professional identity, namely professional orientation, task orientation, self-efficacy and commitment. They reported significant changes in some of these indicators. They attributed these changes to the role of the school environment in developing new teaching values and insights and providing teachers with opportunities to collect information on their abilities and obligations. In this vein, Smagorinsky et al., (2004) in their case study with a female teacher observed that there was a conflict between the constructivist nature of the teacher education programme the teacher went through and the traditional school system she was teaching in. However, they maintained, that despite the tension the teacher

experienced, she developed resistance and a sense of agency which appeared to benefit positively the development of the teacher's professional identity.

In addition, besides the school environment and system, Nias (1989) found that teachers tend to distinguish themselves as compared with other referential groups in the school. The in-school reference group, according to Nias' (1989) study, includes pupils, colleagues and school management. This in-school reference group, Nias (1989) argued, plays an important role in developing teachers' consciousness of being teachers. This is because such a group provides teachers with a desirable or undesirable image and information which inform teacher professional identity. Flores and Day's (2006) findings lent support to Nias' findings. Flores and Day (2006) reported on the influence of pupils on the (trans) formation of the teacher professional identity. They stated that dealing with pupils in real classroom practices made the teachers in their study more aware of the nature of their job and of their new role, which in most cases was in tension with the views of teaching teachers brought from initial teacher education programme. In other words, teachers were constantly in conflict between "*how things ought to be*" and "*the world of is*" (p.228) and the resolution in most cases was in favour of *what it is* rather than *how it should be*. In regard to the influence of colleagues on the (trans) formation of teacher professional identity, Park, Oliver, Johnson, Graham and Oppong (2007) found that the collegial interaction and reflection in and around a school setting influenced teacher professional identity and professional development in the school settings they investigated. They reported that this was accomplished mainly through support which was the most salient form of interaction among teachers. This support was manifested in various forms,

such as collaboration, sharing, emotional support and tangible support. In addition, Cohen's (2010a) ethnographic research study stressed that colleagues are key factors in the processes of teacher professional identity constitution. Indeed, this study suggested that conversational exchanges with colleagues through daily practices constitute a key professional practice for the negotiation of local significances for professional identity.

The impact of school leadership and management on the construction of teacher professional identity was also one of the main focuses of research studies in this area. This impact was recognised to be extremely crucial for teachers' retention in the education service. For instance, Rhodes's study (2006) recommended school head teachers to consider their approaches to the professionalism of teachers if frustrated identity claims, poor morale and retention from the teaching profession is to be avoided. Rhodes (2006) found that the practices of school management can lead to the emergence of two differing types of teacher professional identity. Depending on the cultural norms of a school and the leadership and management style, teachers can construct an identity characterised as "*instrumental and technical*" or "*creative and professional*" (p.163). The former is characterised by strategic compliance and internalised adjustment to a given authority figure's determinism and position. Rhodes (2006) stated that such teachers were found to be uncertain about their role definition and boundaries. On the contrary, the latter is characterised by the active involvement of teachers in the creation of their professional identity and the overt espousal of close working relationships with other agents in the school context through active exploration and negotiation. Personal identity and personal attributes play an important role in the progress of

teachers to any one type of these professional identities. However, teachers in Rhodes' (2006) study tended to be keen to relate their perceptions of the construction of their professional identity directly to their day-to-day experiences of school culture as determined by school leadership and management.

Pre-service teacher education is another significant source of professional identity construction within the professional domain, even the first and perhaps the most important source within this domain. In fact, Van Huizen et al (2005) argued that *"the overall aim of a teacher education programme is best conceived as the development of professional identity"* (p.275). Korthagen (2004) stated that the changes within student teachers as a result of initial teacher education programmes occur at two different levels; the peripheral stratifications which include environment and behaviour, and the deeper level which involves competences, beliefs, professional identity and mission. The effect and the relationship between these two levels of change is reciprocal. Malderez, Hobson, Tracey and Kerr (2007) supported Korthagen suggesting that the development of professional identity is a core aspect in the experiences student teachers receive in initial teacher education programmes. In their empirical study with 45 student teachers in Estonia which aimed at investigating the impact of an initial teacher education programme at Tallin University on the development of student teachers' professional identity, Timostsuk and Ugaste (2010) found that the student teachers' personal experiences of teaching their own subject played the major role in the development of these students' professional identity. In the same vein, Schepens, Aelterman and Vlerick (2009) explored the influence of initial teacher education programmes on Flemish student teachers' professional identity development. They

reported that for such programmes to have an effect on student teachers' professional identity, they need to adopt a new pedagogy of realistic teacher education. This new pedagogy, they added, does not focus only on providing teachers with large amounts of knowledge about teaching, but it needs to help teachers understand themselves as teachers and to aim at personal and professional change in order to help them become good teachers. In-service education will be discussed in the next section, which will focus on CPD interventions and practices, among which in-service education is the most dominant in the context of this study.

3.3.3 Political environment domain

The external political environment domain is perceived to comprise the discourses, attitudes and understandings which surround the education system and which are external to the teaching profession. Teachers experience such discourses and attitudes mainly through the media and through government policy which reflects the political ideology and which is relevant to and impacts upon teachers' work. To illustrate, Sachs (2001) in her seminal article reported on the impact of the political changes and the associated government policy and educational restructuring on Australian teachers' professional identity. She argued that such changes and policy of devolution and decentralisation have given rise to a new understanding of professionalism among teachers. This understanding was manifested in two main discourses which Sachs (2001) termed as "*managerial professionalism*", which was the most dominant of the two discourses, and "*democratic professionalism*" (p.152). The former was developed and mandated by the government and its policies and the latter was advocated by the Teachers Unions. These multiple and

distinct understandings and discourses of professionalism which surrounded the education system in Australia resulted in incongruities between the defined professional identity of teachers proposed by the government and the system, the unions and the teachers themselves. In fact, Sachs (2001) suggested that the government policy of devolution and decentralisation gave rise to and reinforced '*entrepreneurial identities*' while the democratic discourse of Teachers Unions offered opportunity for '*activist identities*' to emerge and develop (p.155). Teachers with '*entrepreneurial identities*' are expected to demonstrate compliance to government policies and imperatives, whereas those with '*activist identities*' are expected to challenge exploitation and oppression and to overcome the illegitimate domination of some individuals and groups over teachers.

One of the powerful tools for influencing public debates on education and its policies and, therefore, teacher professional identity, is the mainstream media and, in particular, the news media. Hall (1997) stated that such media constitute "*heteroglossic discursive sites*" which are able to produce and reproduce the various ideological dimensions of the public discourse on education. In addition, Fairclough (2000) reported the impact of the print and video media on the mediation of certain education policy by shaping public opinion and directing the public to adopt particular education policies. Moreover, coverage of particular education stories and events in mainstream media plays an important role in manufacturing and influencing public support for particular governmental educational decisions and policies.

Cohen (2010b) critically investigated the way in which one mainstream American newspaper, the *Tribune*, constructed teacher professional identity over a period of two years. She found that the two dominant social discourses in the *Tribune* coverage of educational news and stories were accountability and caring. She argued that the two discourses were not operating equally, but rather accountability framed caring within debates on education policy. This authority of Accountability resulted in significant changes in the US public education system, such as emphasis on standardised testing. She also uncovered how these two discourses directed the readers to attribute situated identities to the teachers in the news stories. In particular, she noted that most of the news stories at that time projected teachers as lacking knowledge and authority and one of the main causes for student failure. As consumers and readers of these news stories and having direct contact with the reformed material conditions in schools, there is no doubt that such mainstream media news affects and impacts the construction of teacher professional identity, whether positively or negatively, and is recognised as a key site for the negotiation of this identity (Cohen, 2010b).

In the introduction of this chapter I argued that our understanding of teacher professional identity is essential if we are to develop teachers professionally and support their professionalism. In line with this argument, Coldron and Smith (1999) maintained that the conceptualisation of how individuals acquire and construct their professional identities as teachers holds major implications for the kind of support needed for professional development. In the same vein, Kelchtermans (1993) through his study of 10 Flemish experienced teachers' "*biographical perspectives*", or career stories, concluded that the reconstruction of teacher professional identity

gave content to the vague concept of 'professional development' (p.454). His study stressed the central role of teachers' self-representations for understanding their professional development and behaviours. This positions teacher professional identity as a potentially important conceptual framework for understanding, investigating and effectively facilitating teachers' professional learning in professional development (PD) settings (Garner & Kaplan, 2018). This suggests that it is incumbent upon those who lead and organise the professional development of teachers to be aware of the construction and evolution process of teacher professional identity. Thus, as the professional development of Omani teachers is led and organised by the human resources development (HRD) practitioners in the Ministry of Education, I believe the findings and implications of this study in relation to the nature of Omani teachers' professional identity and its evolution process is of a paramount value in this regard. This value increases in a context like the Omani educational context where, to the best of my knowledge, there is not a single study of this nature and focus.

In relation to this focus and closely connected to it is the investigation into the nature of the current professional development (PD) opportunities provided by Human Resources Development (HRD) Directorate in the Ministry of Education and the extent to which these are contributing to the construction and development process of Omani teachers' professional identity. The findings of this kind of investigation can outline the status of the current PD opportunities and their role in developing Omani teachers' professional identity. These findings along with the findings of the nature and evolution process of Omani teachers' professional identity would, I believe, enable me to sketch out some suggestions and

recommendations which might be of importance and benefit to the policies and practices of Omani teachers' PD which at their core are meant to develop Omani teachers professionally and support their professionalism.

3.4 Professional development (PD) of teachers

This field has been described using different names which often have similar or overlapping meanings (Wermke, 2013). Human resources development, staff development, professional development (PD), teacher development, lifelong learning, as well as in-service teacher training and education, are just some examples of the terms which are often used interchangeably with the term Continuing Professional Development (CPD) applied in this research project. In addition, there exist related areas which are sometimes difficult to distinguish from the area of CPD, such as teacher learning and initial teacher education, all of which examine teacher education and professional development. As shown in a number of documents, projects and conferences produced and organised by the Ministry of Education (MOE) in Oman, the term CPD along with the term PD have gained acceptance and are used interchangeably. They are used to refer to formal and informal professional development activities. Similarly, both terms will be used interchangeably in this thesis. In addition, formal professional development activities, such as courses, workshops and conferences are termed as in-service education and training (INSET) and training. Therefore, this usage will be applied in this research project.

3.4.1 Continuous professional development (CPD) of teachers

Friedman and Phillips (2004) stated that there is not a widely accepted single definition of CPD. It has been defined differently across different professions.

Some professions define it as an approach, others as a mode of education and/or learning and some as an activity in itself (Friedman & Phillips, 2004). In addition, some perceive it as the responsibility of individuals, while others view it as a means of measurement. Friedman & Woodhead (2008) stated that the commonly used definition of CPD in the UK is the one developed by the Construction Industry Council (CIC) in 1986. It defined CPD as *“the systematic maintenance, improvement and broadening of knowledge and skills, and the development of personal qualities necessary for execution of professional and technical duties throughout the individual’s working life”* (Construction Industry Council, 1986:3 cited by Friedman & Woodhead, 2008). This definition encompasses different functions of CPD. It highlights that CPD is not only about developing professional and technical competences, but also about developing personal qualities. From this definition, it can be seen that CPD has three main purposes. First, it is intended to keep individuals up-to-date and remain competent by maintaining their knowledge and skills. Second, by broadening knowledge and skills, CPD is concerned with supporting future professional development and providing the potential to expand the scope of practice. Third, it develops personal qualities essential for high quality job performance. These personal qualities might be needed to achieve the above two purposes as well. In this sense, the term CPD was used to embrace the diversity in the objectives of in-service professional development. In line with the CIC's definition of CPD, Villegas-Reimers (2003) considered CPD a planned and systematic process, the purpose of which is to facilitate growth and development. He defined CPD as *“a long-term process that includes regular opportunities and experiences planned systematically to promote*

growth and development in the profession” (p.13). However, unlike CIC's definition, Villegas-Reimers' definition perceived the benefits of the CPD as going beyond the individual teacher and extending to the whole teaching profession. However, it must be recognised that a substantial amount of literature and scholars did not define CPD as '*systematic*' or '*planned*'. In addition, they included other functions and characteristics of CPD in their definitions.

For instance, Day (1999) defined CPD as

“... all natural learning experiences and those conscious and planned activities which are intended to be of direct or indirect benefit to the individual, group or school, which contribute, through these, to the quality of education in the classroom. It is the process by which, alone and with others, teachers review, renew and extend their commitment as change agents to the moral purposes of teaching; and by which they acquire and develop critically the knowledge, skills and emotional thinking, planning and practice with children, young people and colleagues throughout each phase of their teaching lives” (p.4).

Unlike the CIC's and Villegas-Reimers' definition of CPD, Day's definition indicates that CPD encompasses planned and unplanned learning experiences and activities. In addition, besides benefiting the individual professional and the teaching profession, Day's definition suggests that CPD also benefits other stakeholders: the professional body. I think Day's definition is still applicable because it reflects the complexity of the professional development process. That is, it suggests that there is no single form of CPD which is appropriate to all teachers and that a mix of pedagogical approaches is required to suit different teachers at different stages of their professional development. Like Day (1999), the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) (2001) in the report '*Learning and Teaching: A Strategy for Professional Development*' adopted a definition of CPD which implies that CPD can be planned and unplanned activities which are

intended to increase the effectiveness of teachers by developing their skills, knowledge and understanding. It defined CPD as “*any activity that increases the skills, knowledge or understanding of teachers, and their effectiveness in schools and also promotes continuous reflection and re-examination of professional learning*”.

The aforementioned definitions show that the concept of CPD is broad and multifaceted, which reflects the complexity of the process of teachers' continuing professional development. It is both self-directed and other-directed and encompasses formal training activities, as well as less formal ways and experiences of learning which are practised individually or collectively. These activities and experiences are not limited to a particular venue (classroom, school and training centre), but rather they go beyond this to include virtual and online settings and home. The key element of CPD which distinguishes it from other concepts is the fact that it is a continuous process. This element of continuity is underpinned by the assumption that teachers' learning and development is ongoing and happens in stages over many years of attempts to continually adapt to change. This suggests that teachers' learning and development, whether short or long term, internally or externally oriented, can be viewed as parts of a continuum. In other words, to develop professionally, teachers need to engage in a continuous process of learning which comprises various long term and short term activities which are at times self-directed and at other times institution-directed. This leads to another element of CPD which is teachers' responsibility in identifying and addressing their own professional needs and requirements. In addition, this suggests that CPD is a flexible process in terms of the number of activities and the

frequency of activities teachers may undertake. Thus, I believe that Day & Sachs' (2004) definition is a useful working definition for this study. Day & Sachs (2004) defined CPD as “*all the activities in which teachers engage during the course of a career which are designed to enhance their work*” (p.3). I think this definition is a comprehensive one. In a short statement, it encompasses all the above discussed CPD aspects and elements.

Since INSET is the most dominant form of CPD interventions (Al-Hinai, 2002; Al Fahdi and Swailes, 2009, Al-Zeidi, 2016) and teachers' professional development in the Ministry of Education in Oman (Al-Lamki, 2009; Al-Balushi, 2016), the following section will present and discuss this issue with the aim of highlighting its characteristics, shortcomings and alternatives.

3.4.2 In-service education and training (INSET) of teachers

Generally speaking, INSET is widely used to refer to the formal training which is often provided and managed by an outside professional or expert. Craft (2000) distinguished between INSET and professional development on the basis that the former places a greater focus on the organisational demands and needs, whereas the latter focuses more on the individual's needs. In addition, it has been found that professional development is used in a broader sense than INSET. That is, the term professional development can include different forms of formal and informal learning activities and experiences which include formal training.

Many educational systems around the world rely heavily on INSET as a model for professional development (Craft, 2000; Kennedy, 2005; Harland & Kinder, 2014). These INSET courses are often decided upon and planned through a top-down

process in which policymakers and HRD practitioners are the key planners. These courses vary in length and venues; they can be a one-day workshop to a two-year programme and delivered on or off-site by an outside expert. In their monograph of five nations which are considered to be providing high quality professional development for teachers, Bautista and Ortega-Ruiz (2015) argued that the main purpose for INSET is to raise the quality of educational provision.

There is no doubt that INSET is an important form and source of professional development for teachers in different educational settings and necessary for the career development of any teacher. This is because it works as a valuable support for newly-appointed teachers and is vital for communicating newly-introduced policies and principles. In times of educational reform, it is considered essential in updating and promoting teachers' knowledge and skills which make them able to reflect upon their practices (Desimone, 2009). In addition, Al-Lamki (2009) stated that INSET is necessary in educational contexts where teachers lack the required skills for independent professional development activities. Furthermore, Pool (2015) noted that since INSET can target a large number of teachers in one place, it is considered a relatively cost-effective form of professional development.

These advantages and characteristics of INSET courses can be said to be behind the dominance of '*the training paradigm*' in the last decades (Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002, p.948). This dominance was noted by many researchers in the educational field. For instance, in an attempt to trace the development and growth of INSET in the UK, Lee (1997) analysed the content of articles published in the *British Journal of In-Service Education* for the last twenty-two years before his

article. He stated that INSET was an outstanding item on the agenda of educational issues and had a very high profile. In addition, Clarke and Hollingsworth (2002) asserted that for more than three decades, literature on teacher change and growth directly linked teachers' professional development with planned professional development activities which were based on a training paradigm. Furthermore, Kennedy (2005) identified nine models of CPD and the 'training model' was the first on his list; he considered it to be the most dominant model of the nine he identified.

This dominance of the training model as the main source of CPD was reflected in the process-product approach which characterised most of the empirical research on CPD (Opfer & Pedder, 2011). That is to say that evaluation of INSET has been the feature of most empirical research in this respect. These evaluations cover the perceptions, intentions and assumptions of INSET providers and the reactions of teachers receiving the INSET. However, Zepeda (2011) argued that these evaluations can provide information on the short-term effects of such INSET courses, but unable to do so for long-term effects of professional development. The above discussion does not only highlight the dominance of INSET as the main source of teachers' professional development, it also reflects that INSET courses are central to the evaluations of teachers' professional development.

Despite the dominance of INSET, its limitations and drawbacks have been widely recognised (Eraut, 1972; Fullan & Stiegelbauer, 1991; Dadds, 1997; Clarke and Hollingsworth, 2002). Early on in the seventies, Eraut (1972) stated that INSET courses were concerned with providing teachers with readymade solutions and

were not of any help in studying teachers' problems and challenges. This is because, he added, that these courses emphasised extending teachers' knowledge rather than enabling teachers to use this knowledge to solve problems which confront them. He also argued that most of these courses ignore the fact that teachers have much to contribute to the courses as they receive from them. In the same vein, Fullan and Stiegelbauer (1991) reported that such courses are frustrating and wasteful as most of them result in no significant changes in the teachers' classroom practices. In addition, Dadds (1997) regarded this form of professional development as ineffective because it is underpinned with the assumption that those outside school are better able to make decisions about the thinking of teachers who work closely with the children. Clarke and Hollingsworth (2002) agreed with this viewpoint and asserted that professional development activities which are based on the deficit training model are unlikely to lead to teachers' change and growth. INSET courses assume that there is a deficit in teachers' knowledge and skills and aim at teachers' mastery of prescribed knowledge and skills.

In line with this thinking, Riding (2001) argued that "*sit and get training sessions...and one-time-only workshops*" delivered by an outside expert have proved to be ineffective and described them as being "*too fragmented, unproductive, inefficient, unrelated to practice, and lacking in intensity and follow up*" (p.283). Similarly, Day (1991) asserted that professional development of teachers requires more than "*short bursts*" training courses (p.133). Whilst acknowledging their advantages and strengths, Day (1999) added that INSET courses provide fewer opportunities for teachers to extend learning and less choice

over what to learn and how to learn it. Craft (2000) provided a list of weaknesses of “*the course-led model of professional development*” (p.12):

- “being dominated by off-site courses, geared to individuals rather than to groups of staff;
- not being linked to the needs of departments or schools;
- being undertaken on a voluntary basis and, therefore, not necessarily undertaken by those with the greatest need;
- being random in terms of participation and content in relation to the needs of individual schools;
- having limited impact on practice with little or no dissemination or follow-up;
- often undertaken during the school day and, therefore, disruptive as teaching then has to be covered;
- being open to possible conflict between practising teachers as participants and theorists as deliverers;
- attempting to cater for people at different starting points and, therefore, not being able to satisfy all participants equally well.” (p.12).

In response to the well-recognised and documented shortcomings of traditional forms of INSET, researchers and practitioners have called for more effective forms of professional development (Hargreaves, 2011; Schleicher, 2012). In a recent international review, Schleicher (2012) argued for more teacher involvement in

making decisions about their professional development and concluded that teachers should be “*active agents of their own professional growth.*”(p.73). Hargreaves (2011) called for the abandonment of the traditional notions of INSET or dissemination and asked for a replacement which provides teachers with opportunities for sharing knowledge in real situations. He considered teachers as critical professionals who are capable of using their knowledge and experiences for the benefit of the students. Arguing for professional learning rather than professional development, Easton (2008) stated that INSET implies a '*factory model of education*' which views teachers as uncritical implementers of top-down strategies and policies. In a similar vein, Dadds (1997) argued that the 'Delivery Model', or training which is often designed to get teachers do the same thing, is unable to prepare teachers to meet their increasingly urgent needs. Therefore, Easton (2008) argued that teachers need to move from being trained or developed to “*becoming active learners*” (p.755). To do so, during INSET, teachers need to do more than simply learn new skills and techniques. Rather, INSET needs to provide input which encourages conceptual understanding of pedagogical principles and facilitates reflection on the value of particular information or strategy (Gibbs, Brigden & Hellenberg, 2004). These two interrelated facets of INSET enable teachers to adapt the provided input in a way which suits their particular contexts and learners and engage them in an on-going learning process.

The shortcomings of traditional forms of INSET have resulted in a shift in focus from conceptions of teacher professional development as something done to teachers who are viewed as passive participants to a conception of professional development as a complex process which involves learning. The key shift is one of

agency and autonomy. That is, attention started to be given to programmes which conceive teachers as active learners shaping their own professional change and growth rather than programmes which change teachers. This required teachers' reflective participation in professional development programmes as well as in their practice. Teachers have been encouraged and supported to take more responsibility for their learning and development. Therefore, more school-based and autonomous professional development has gained more attention and importance by both researchers and the practitioners. This shift was in line with shifts in models of teaching which have encouraged learners to be more autonomous and called for more student-centred classrooms. These changes inevitably required and directed teacher education to a more self-initiated professional development for teachers.

3.5 Teacher professional development and teacher professional identity

This section is intended to show how notions of teacher professional identity and professional development may inform each other. In particular, it attempts to explore how our understanding of teacher professional identity can contribute to designing and developing professional development activities which are able to have an impact on teachers' classroom practices and therefore students' learning. In other words, understanding teacher professional identity is central to understanding the professional learning and development needs of teachers and therefore works as a practical and political tool in helping teachers to develop professionally.

A large amount of literature has been written on the relationship and impact of certain professional development activities and their underlying perspectives on teacher professional identity. As discussed earlier, teacher professional identity is a reciprocal product of how teachers see themselves in response to the actions of others. That is, teacher professional identity is neither located entirely with the individual nor entirely a product of social settings and interactions. It is a constantly changing outcome of how teachers construct themselves as practitioners and how they are constructed by others in and away from the social situations. In accordance with this view, Wenger (1998) suggested that the construction of teacher professional identity takes place through their participation in social situations, either in or outside schools and through their reflection and interpretation of this participation. Based on this assumption, certain social situations offer certain ways of knowing and therefore they also privilege the construction of certain types of identities. Applying this viewpoint to the above-discussed professional development, INSET and CPD, it can be argued that each promotes different types of teacher professional identity.

INSET which is mainly based on top-down policies and strategies can be said to privilege a '*technocratic teacher identity*' (Stern, 2007). That is, teachers' roles are reduced to those of compliant technicians, whose job is largely to implement policies and strategies and carry out instructions. This overly narrow and technical view of teaching and teachers is reflected in an intensive regularity environment, where the emphasis is on technical competence. It is underpinned by a view that good teaching practice can be reduced to a set of predefined skills and competencies with little or no acknowledgment of teachers' prior knowledge and

their ability to integrate all aspects of this knowledge to act autonomously in a teaching situation. The outcome of this is that teachers' practical knowledge becomes subsumed by the managerialist structures which work to ensure the implementation of top-down and centrist policies and the compliance of the teaching profession (Sachs, 2003). Under such managerialist structures, teachers' sense of professionalism is threatened, which leads to the collapse of trust, perceived loss of autonomy, frustration, anxiety and loss of control (Skinner, Leavey & Rothi, 2019). This over-regulation of the teachers' professional development process might result in a misalignment between teachers' personal beliefs about teaching and their practical knowledge on one hand and the top-down beliefs and policies on the other hand. All this is detrimental to how teachers view themselves as practitioners and thus to the nature of the professional identity they construct in such a professional development context.

On the other hand, a professional development context which is mainly based on intentional and empowered teacher participation in the process of professional development produces an '*authentic teacher identity*' (Stern, 2007). The relational nature of both professional learning and professional identity construction, requires the engagement of teachers and their ownership of the content, process and products of professional learning and development opportunities and interventions. It is underpinned by the perspective that a teacher is a well-rounded person who can act autonomously to integrate all aspects of his/her prior knowledge and skills and gain satisfaction from working actively and collaboratively to develop professionally. It emphasises the importance of trust-building collaborative practices among teachers and encourages them to contribute actively to their

professional learning and development. This leads to enhancing teacher status and professional satisfaction because it allows teachers to make things happen rather than letting things happen to them. However, Locke and Goodwyn (2004) maintained that to enhance the construction of such an identity in a professional development context, teachers' professional expertise alone is not enough. It also requires a 'strategic' knowledge which enables teachers to critically reflect on their professional expertise to develop avenues for learning and development.

To summarise, different professional development systems and their underlying perspectives play a vital role in how teachers perceive themselves and how others see them. That is, such systems contribute largely to the type of identity teachers construct for themselves. However, it is worth noting here that teacher agency is key to such construction. Woods and Jeffrey (2002) asserted that teachers do not simply adopt the kind of identity their educational system assigns to them. When such identities conflict with their existing identities as teachers and their personal identities in other areas of their lives, teachers experience considerable dissatisfaction, which might lead them to reject the identities assigned to them. This confrontation between teacher identity and an assigned one might lead, they added, to some teachers leaving the profession.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have extensively examined the notion of teacher professional identity as represented in the literature. This examination considered the broader field of 'identity', its overlap with the notion of 'self' and its contemporary conceptualisation as individually-driven and socially-directed notion. I have also discussed the two main theoretical perspectives through which the notion of

professional identity has been investigated and the three main domains which reflexively contribute to the construction and the evolution process of teacher professional identity.

In addition, in this chapter I have reviewed the notion of professional development (PD). An account on the conceptualisations and practices of CPD and INSET were provided highlighting their advantages and shortcomings. This review demonstrated the main theoretical shift in the field of CPD which was related to teacher autonomy and agency. This involves viewing teachers as active learners rather than passive recipients in the process of their CPD. Consequently, a discussion on the impact of different theoretical underpinnings of CPD systems on teacher professional identity was presented.

This review has demonstrated that teacher professional identity is a highly complex, abstract and intangible construct; it is therefore challenging to be observed and empirically investigated. There is the danger of being lost in abstraction, which might cause frustrations for many novice researchers (Kelchtermans, 2004) and lead others to call for the abandonment of the concept altogether and start using a term with a clear meaning (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000). This research fills a gap in the scholarly field of teacher professional identity by empirically investigating ideas about collective identity formation and construction, as explored by scholars such as Sachs (1999, 2003, 2005). Based on Sachs' conceptual understanding of the notion of teacher professional identity, three components were extracted which provided theoretical insights through which the construct of teacher professional identity can be investigated. These components included 'how to be', 'how to act' and 'how to understand their work

and their place in the society' and are intended to aid researchers in further study of teacher professional identity (see Figure 3.1). This thesis aims to use these three components as the guiding framework for constructing and composing the interview prompts. My aim is to enable the linking of the ideas about collective identity formation and construction presented in the scholarly field of teacher professional identity with an understanding of teachers' own perspectives upon what it is to be a teacher. Thus, one of the aims of this thesis is to unpack these three components of teachers' lives which provide lenses through which we can understand the 'conceptual frameworks' (Beijaard et al., 2000) that guide teachers' actions in practice. This is intended to be achieved by shedding light on the process of identity formation and evolution in one of the less researched contexts, the Arab World. By doing so, this study responds to calls by researchers to conduct more research on teacher work and identity in contexts other than Western and developed countries (GUR, 2014; Cheung, 2015).

Moreover, this review has revealed that the complex and dynamic teacher professional learning and development processes are intertwined with their professional identities. Teachers' practices and decisions on both a short and long-term basis about approaches to curriculum, pedagogy and assessment are framed by their understanding and positioning of themselves-who teachers are, believe they are and want to be in the future (Mockler, 2011a). This review also highlighted the conceptual and methodological challenges that are being faced by the growing literature on teacher professional identity due to the diverse and often vague treatment of the concept of teacher professional identity, and the dearth of attempts to integrate findings across the diverse methods used to investigate such

a concept (Garner & Kaplan, 2018). Notwithstanding recent attempts in providing the scholarly field of teacher professional identity with integrative perspectives (e.g. Schutz, Cross, Hong & Osborn, 2007; Olsen, 2008; Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Garner & Kaplan, 2018), the literature would benefit from conceptual frameworks of teacher professional identity that synthesise ideas and understandings across perspectives which integrate teacher professional identity and professional learning and development.

Accordingly, the conceptual framework that is adopted in this thesis is an alternate model for understanding the nature, the formation and the reformation (evolution) of professional identity across the career path of teachers. It stresses the argument which this thesis is built upon which is the vital importance of understanding teacher professional identity in order to develop teachers professionally and support their professionalism. This is because professional development or teacher learning is largely influenced by who a teacher is. This argument positions teacher professional identity as a potentially useful conceptual lens for conceptualising and effectively facilitating teachers' learning and their professional development. On the other hand, the formation and evolution of teacher professional identity is conceptualised as a learning process. This conceptualisation bolsters the recognition that teacher professional learning and development is an identity learning/making (Beijaard, 2019). This mutual influence and impact of both concepts on each other is illustrated in Figure 3.1 below.

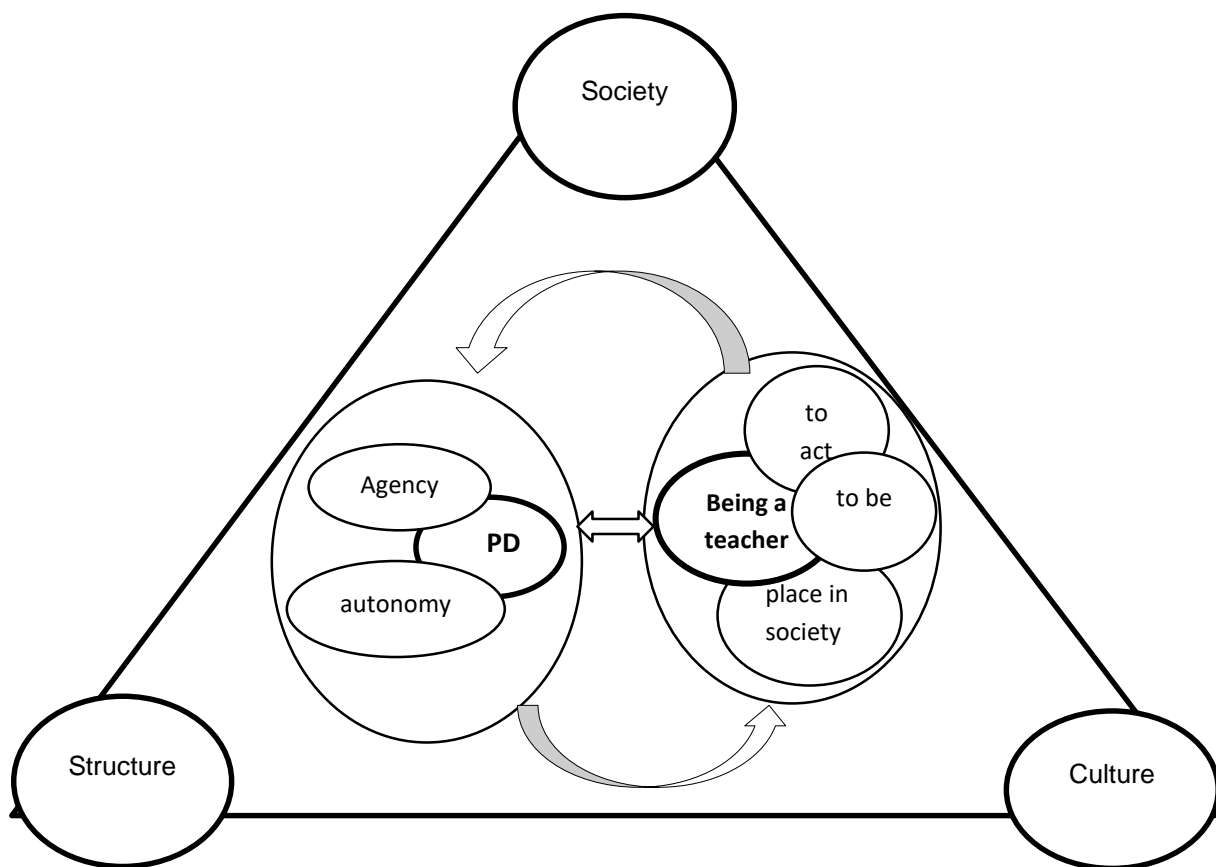


Figure 3.1: Conceptual framework of this thesis

In the above model, both teacher professional identity and PD are conceptualised as complex and dynamic. The complexity of professional identity- the interdependence of its components- and the influences of the surrounding environment manifest in on-going, non-linear and not fully predictable emergent patterns. Each individual teacher goes through a unique evolution process of his/her professional identity through his/her career path. Teacher professional identity has a tendency towards coherence; but it continuously encounters internal and external influences that cause its formation and reformation.

Similarly, the above model captures the complexity and dynamicity of teacher professional learning in PD settings, which is perceived as personal, yet

contextualised. Notwithstanding the agentic and the subjective capacities of teachers to challenge and resist the demands and requirements imposed on them, both concepts are conceptualised as greatly influenced by three main resources: culture, society and power structures. Through ongoing reflection and action, teachers actively engage in professional learning and construct their identities. In the end, every teacher is a unique project of an identity in the making (Mockler, 2011b).

4. Methodology

Introduction

The main aim of this study is to develop an understanding of the nature of Omani teachers' professional identity, the evolution process of this identity and the role of CPD opportunities in the development of such an identity. This is achieved through exploring the perceptions of fourteen teachers themselves in an attempt to understand how Omani teachers view themselves as teachers and how they view the role of the provided CPD opportunities in the development of their professional identity. Bearing this goal in mind, an interpretive methodology is required because this enables in-depth investigation into these teachers' thoughts, feelings and beliefs. In addition, as discussed in the literature review above, teacher professional identity can be conceptualised as a discursive and social construction and is therefore created through language, words and symbols, of which discourses are a part (Zembylas, 2005). Accepting this assumption, this study emphasises the discursive nature of reality and the social construction of teacher professional identity.

This chapter situates the approach followed in this study within an epistemological and methodological framework. It also provides an explanation and justification of the research methods used in the design of this study. Thus, it moves from a general discussion of the philosophical stance to then describe the specific research methods used to analyse the data gathered.

4.1 Research philosophical stance

The philosophical stance of a research was defined by Denzin and Lincoln (2000) as *“the net that contains the researcher's epistemological, ontological, and*

methodological premises” (p.19). This definition highlights the significance of identifying the researcher’s philosophical stance for the subsequent research process. Indeed, the researcher’s philosophical position determines all the different aspects of the research process starting from the philosophical assumptions underpinning the research to the selection of research methods, participants, and tools of data collection and analysis. The research stance or ‘paradigm’, as many scholars term it, is therefore the overall guiding framework based on which all decisions about the research are taken. Thus, it provides consistency and unity between the various aspects of the research process.

Based on this conceptualisation of a research stance or paradigm, Denzin and Lincoln (2000) identified two main research stances/paradigms; “*positivist/post-positivist*” and “*constructivist-interpretive*” (p.22). The nature of each stance/paradigm and the differences between the two were subject to extensive discussions and debates in the literature (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Robson, 2002a; Ponterotto, 2005; Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007; Richards, 2009). This discussion can be briefly summarised in the varying assumptions each stance/paradigm has in regards to:

- The nature of reality (ontology)
- The nature of knowing (epistemology)
- The relationship between the knower and the would-be knower (participant and researcher)

The positivist/post-positivist stance believes that reality is “*out there to be studied, captured, and understood*” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p.9). This suggests that reality

is objective and value-free and therefore it can be obtained through direct experience or observation. Consequently, advocates of this school of thought argue for the generalizability of findings attained from a representative sample to the population from which the sample was taken. This argument was echoed by Cohen et al (2007) when they maintained that in this stance “*the end-product of investigations by social sciences can be formulated in terms parallel to those of natural sciences. This means that their analyses must be expressed in laws or law-like generalisations*” (p.10). In addition, since reality is believed to be external to the participant, the researcher’s role and responsibility is to discover this objective reality through the use of experimental and quasi-experimental methods.

On the other hand, the constructivist-interpretive paradigm believes in the notion of the interdependence of the social and affective dimensions in the construction of people’s realities (Mason, 2002). Advocates of this paradigm argue that reality is a subjective and socially-constructed phenomenon. In other words, this research tradition is driven by the notion of multiple realities, that is, multiple interpretations of the truth generated from people’s different perspectives and experiences, and rejects the notion of the existence of a single ‘truth’ which can be generalised to other contexts (Creswell, 2009). In order to understand these multiple constructions of knowledge, researchers working within this school of thought tend to use methods such as interviews and observations. The researcher’s role in this research tradition is to unfold and reveal the ‘insider view’ of the research participants, whose responsibility is to help the researcher to construct the subjective reality (Mason, 2002, p.56).

For this research project, a constructivist-interpretive paradigm is adopted as the underpinning research stance. Mason (2005) maintained that working within this paradigm requires looking at how a social phenomenon is '*interpreted, understood, experienced, produced or constituted*' based on "*methods of analysis, explanation and argument building which involve understanding of complexity, detail and context*" (p.3). This position of investigation and analysis meets the socio-cultural framework, which is the main theoretical perspective underpinning this study.

In addition, Denzin and Lincoln (2005) stated that an interpretive research attempts to make sense of a phenomenon in terms of the meanings people bring to them. This understanding seems to fit the purpose of exploring and understanding teachers' views of their own professional identity development and their perceptions of the extent to which CPD opportunities have contributed to the development of this identity. The existence of multiple realities of this social phenomenon is recognised through an attempt at understanding the teachers' meanings of their personal and professional experiences through the exploration of their own perspectives. In other words, reality can be different for each participant teacher based on their individualised and unique experiences and understandings. Each participant teacher is viewed as '*a sense maker*' who understands and makes sense of the teaching profession and context as s/he experiences it (Rubin & Rubin, 2012, p.56). This highlights the subjectivity and multiplicity of teachers' views and experiences. It is generally agreed that this constructivist/interpretive paradigm is more congruent with a research design which employs a qualitative approach to research, as will be discussed in the subsequent sections.

4.2 Conception of ‘teacher professional identity’ in this research project

The analysis of the two main contemporary perspectives on researching teacher professional identity presented in chapter 3 clearly highlights that any attempt to research such a topic can become a highly complex task. Therefore, it is necessary to provide an account of my own understanding of professional identity and outline its theoretical implications for this research project. A closer examination at the socio-cultural and the post-structural perspectives discussed above shows that there is some overlap among these distinctive, though not divergent, theoretical perspectives. To illustrate, the socio-cultural perspective contends that culturally mediated actions are of paramount importance to the construction of identity. In the same vein, the post-structural perspective does not deny this view. However, it argues for challenging the power structures which are mainly cultural and historical and which attempt to limit the possibilities of identity. This can be done by the deconstruction of identity. In addition, it can be argued that the crucial role of social interaction and discourse are present in both theoretical perspectives. That is, the socio-cultural perspective argues that social and dialogical interaction enable people to construct biographical narratives which constitute their identities. Similarly, post-structuralism contends that in order to challenge power structures, people need to deconstruct and construct their identities through discourse and inter-subjectivity.

Following Varghese et al., (2005) I strongly believe that an openness to multiple theoretical perspectives allows us to keep in mind the complexity of the issue we are attempting to research. This is because deploying one theoretical strand limits the researcher’s perspective on teacher professional identity. Thus, the search for

common ground among these theoretical perspectives, rather than focusing on the divergent ideas, results in more beneficial educational and empowerment outcomes. Deploying different theoretical perspectives helps the researcher to understand the various facets of the nature and processes of complex researched issues, such as teacher professional identity. Therefore, it is not possible to claim that the view of identity deployed in this research project forms a single and coherent theoretical approach. This is because it is found that there is a considerable overlap in the central assumptions of identity between socio-culturalism and post-structuralism. In fact, it is constituted of a set of features common to different theoretical perspectives and frameworks.

My understanding of how teacher professional identity is shaped and constructed is that culture and society have powerful influences on crafting different and important aspects of this identity. However, I strongly believe that teachers, as human beings, cannot be perceived merely as passive recipients of these cultural and social influences. In fact, teachers have the agentive and the subjective capacities to challenge and resist the demands and requirements imposed on them by different power environments surrounding them. Thus, my understanding of teacher professional identity is as the result of these four resources. To explain more fully, teachers' every day social experiences play a pivotal role in constructing their professional identities. In the same vein, the ways in which society and culture interact with these everyday actions and experiences delineate to a great extent how this identity is constructed. In addition, it is undeniable that the power environments and structures surrounding teachers can indeed influence the construction of teacher professional identity. However, through ongoing

reflection and action, teachers actively construct their identities. In the end, every teacher is a unique project of an identity in the making (Mockler, 2011b).

I think that both socio-culturalism and post-structuralism are right to claim that the development and construction of teacher professional identity is culturally-dependent, experience-contingent and individually-chosen. Bearing in mind the technological advancements which have changed what the world is and what place, time and distance mean, identity can no longer be viewed as unitary and static. Rather, it should be considered as fragmented and multiple. This means that identity is constantly constructed and reconstructed through discursive environments and practices. Thus, for educational researchers to understand who teachers are, where they have come from and the future directions in which they want to move, they need to deploy analysis of discourse. This is because, I believe, that teacher professional identity, which is one of the main focuses of this research project, emerges in the moments when the interviews take place. Teachers' narrations will be filled with various and important stories in regard to teacher professional identity. Thus, teacher professional identity is basically the co-created discourse and articulation between the researcher and the participants, which emerges from the interviews. Following Mockler (2011a), I expect this discourse to include references to teachers' personal, professional and political resources in their lives.

4.3 Qualitative approach to research

As explicitly stated in previous sections, the aim of this study is to explore the nature of teacher professional identity, its evolution process and the impact of CPD opportunities on this identity by obtaining an understanding of the views of

teachers regarding this topic. Such an understanding can only be gained through the use of a qualitative approach, which enables the participants to freely express and discuss their thoughts. ‘*Fitness for purpose*’ is a term used by Cohen et al (2007) to stress the importance of the compatibility between the research design and the type of data needed to answer the research questions. The compatibility of the qualitative approach with the purpose of exploring teachers’ perceptions and experiences was very well stated by Denzin and Lincoln (2000). They maintained that:

‘Qualitative researchers stress the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relation between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry. Such researchers emphasise the value-laden nature of inquiry. They seek answers to questions that stress how social experience is created and given meaning’ (p.10).

4.3.1 Characteristics of a qualitative approach to research

Creswell (2009) identified some characteristics of a qualitative approach to research (see Table 4.1). This section will attempt to establish the alignment of these characteristics with the present study with the aim of highlighting the appropriateness of the qualitative approach design to investigate the topic of the teacher professional identity. It is worth mentioning that these characteristics are not presented here in any specific order of importance.

Table 4.1: Characteristics of qualitative research (Creswell, 2009, p.175-176)

| | |
|------------------------------|---|
| Natural setting | Qualitative researchers tend to collect data in the field at the site where participants experience the issue or the problem under study. |
| Researcher as key instrument | Qualitative researchers collect data themselves through examining documents, observing behaviour, or interviewing participants. |
| Multiple sources of | Qualitative researchers typically gather multiple forms of data, such as interviews, observations, and documents, rather than rely on a single data |

| | |
|-------------------------|--|
| data | source. |
| Inductive data analysis | Qualitative researchers build their own patterns, categories and themes from the bottom up, by organising the data into increasingly more abstract units of information. |
| Participants' meaning | In the entire qualitative research process, the researcher remains focused on learning the meaning that the participants hold about the problem or the issue, not the meaning that the researchers bring to the research or writers express in the literature. |
| Theoretical lens | Qualitative researchers often use a lens to view their studies. Sometimes the study may be organised around identifying the social, political or historical context of the problem under study. |
| Interpretive | Qualitative research is a form of inquiry in which researchers make an interpretation of what they see, hear and understand |
| Holistic account | Qualitative researchers try to develop a complex picture of the problem or issue under study. This involves reporting multiple perspectives, identifying the many factors involved in a situation, and generally sketching the larger picture that emerges |

According to the characteristics listed above, qualitative research tends to take place in a *natural setting* as this approach to research studies “*things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense, or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them*” (Denzin & Lincoln,1998, p.3). This current research takes place in the schools of the Ministry of Education in Oman, where the topic of teacher professional identity is investigated in its natural context.

In qualitative studies, rather than depending on specialist tools and instruments, such as standardised tests or scales, the *researcher is the key instrument of data collection*. The present study involves the researcher as the main data collection instrument through the use of *multiple sources of data* collection, such as participant-generated drawings and texts, graphic story-line and semi-structured interviews.

Inductive data analysis requires the researcher to build themes and categories based on patterns identified across the sets of data by establishing a coding system in order to organise the data into “*increasingly more abstract units of information*” (Creswell, 2009, p.175). After transcribing the interviews, the researcher builds the themes by going through the transcripts and assigning codes to the different segments of the data. These codes are classified and merged to represent the general themes emerging from the data, which will then be the base for the discussion of the research findings.

Qualitative researchers try to generate qualitative data by using data collection methods, which enable them to probe into people’s thoughts, feelings and actions in order to capture *participants’ meanings*. This is because, as Garrick (1999) highlighted, this endeavour to understand participants’ meanings of lived experiences is very peculiar to interpretive research. Cohen et al. (2007) also stated that qualitative research aims to understand the subjective world of the human experience. Interpretive researchers believe that people’s perspectives are meaningful, knowable, and can be made explicit through verbal interaction (Patton, 2002). By privileging teachers’ views and perceptions in the investigation of teachers’ professional identity, this study seeks to capture teachers’ subjective meanings of the topic and sees the world through their lenses.

Another characteristic of the qualitative approach to research is the use of a theoretical lens to view the study. In regard to this study, a multifaceted theoretical approach was implemented consisting of a set of features common to different

theoretical perspectives and frameworks. This has been presented above in section 4.2.

Creswell (2009) labelled the qualitative design as *interpretive* due to the fact that researchers employing such a design tend to interpret the data and assign subjective meanings to it. Based on their background and understanding, researchers generate interpretive themes that capture the key and the significant meanings found in the gathered data. Finally, the focus of the current study is *holistic* because it attempts to paint a picture of the complexities surrounding the development of teacher professional identity taking into account the perspectives of different subject teachers (Arabic, Science and Mathematics) with different experiences, taught levels, genders and from a variety of different contexts.

4.3.2 Limitations of qualitative approach to research

The use of a qualitative approach to research has been associated with a number of limitations. The main limitation that is consistently attributed to this approach is the subjectivity of its generated data, which raises questions about the validity and the reliability of such data. In fact, there are two main sources of subjectivity in a qualitative approach to research. First, data collection methods used in this approach are concerned with capturing the subjective and personal opinions and views of the research participants on a particular topic. Second, as mentioned above, the researcher is often the key instrument of data collection and analysis, which makes the gathered data and the reported findings prone to reflect the researcher's bias.

In fact, subjectivity is not exclusive to a qualitative approach to research; it can also affect statistical approaches to research. This is because '*statisticians typically*

choose their procedures on the basis of non-statistical criteria, and philosophical traditions and even the labels attached to particular concepts can affect real world practice' (Gelman and Hennig ,2017, p.968). Contrary to what is advertised in most statistical literature, this suggests that statistical methods require some tuning decisions from their users which make them prone to subjectivity.

This was echoed by Steegen, et al. (2016) who stated that the data analysis software packages which claim that a default analysis is only one click away require the user's choices and decisions on data coding and data exclusion. Such inputs, they added, can greatly influence the end results such as p -values and confidence intervals. Thus, both notions of 'objectivity' and 'subjectivity' are relevant to decisions taken during the statistical analysis process. This led Gelman and Hennig (2017) to argue that the pursuit of 'objectivity' in statistical research can be an obstacle to good practice in data analysis and communication. Consequently, they proposed some attributes to replace the concepts of 'objectivity' and 'subjectivity' in statistical research discourse. They suggested the use of *transparency, consensus, impartiality and correspondence to observable reality* instead of 'objectivity' and 'subjectivity' to be replaced by *awareness of multiple perspectives and context dependence* (p.1). This collection of virtues, they added, is more beneficial in our discussions of statistical research practices and gives more guidance about what statistical researchers strive to achieve. They further explained that instead of debating the relative qualities of 'objectivity' and 'subjectivity' as opposing each other, these reformulations make us recognise the attributes of these virtues as complementary in achieving statistical research aims and goals. Thus, subjectivity of data is not specific to qualitative approach to

research and it is not an issue interpretive researchers need to be concerned with. This is precisely what interpretive research entails, as discussed in previous sections.

However, some interpretive researchers advocate the use of triangulation, i.e. using multiple sources of data collection, as a strategy to strengthen the trustworthiness of their research findings (Flowerdew, 2002). This strategy is believed to allow the researchers to corroborate findings and test for validity. However, this advocacy is controversial. The underpinning assumption for this advocacy is that the weaknesses in one method can be compensated for by the use of another method (Malderez, 2003). It is also assumed that it is always possible for the researchers to make sense of different data generated from different methods.

In fact, rather than conceptualising triangulation as a strategy for validation and verification, most interpretive researchers use this method to ensure that their research accounts are rich, comprehensive, robust and well-developed. Arguing for enhancing the quality and the credibility of interpretive research, Patton (2002) identified four types of triangulation:

- 1) triangulation of methods- the use of multiple methods to study a single issue or phenomenon
- 2) triangulation of data sources- the use of a different data sources from the same method
- 3) analyst triangulation- the use of several different researchers or analysts

4) theory triangulation- the use of multiple perspectives to examine and interpret a single set of data

In this study, triangulation was employed at two different levels: data methods and data sources. To illustrate, the data collection methods included participant-generated drawing and text, graphic story line and semi-structured interviewing. The data sources for the research came from three different subject teachers (Arabic, Science and Mathematics) at different schooling levels (Cycle 1, Cycle 2 and Post Basic).

In sum, it can be concluded that the appropriateness and the advantages of the qualitative approach to research in answering this study's research questions prevail over the limitations often associated with this type of research approach. In order to attain an understanding of teachers' views of their professional identity development, the use of qualitative methods, such as elicitation tasks and interviewing, was essential in getting information of different teachers' perceptions and practices in regard to this issue. The achievement of such a study aim would not be feasible by employing quantitative tools such as surveys or questionnaires.

4.4 The purpose of the study

The purposes of research in the field of social sciences have been classified into four main categories: exploratory, descriptive, explanatory and emancipatory (Robson, 2002, p.58; Marshall & Rossman,1999, p.33). Exploratory research is concerned with investigating a little-understood phenomenon or situation in order to gain insight or to generate hypotheses. In a descriptive study the focus is on documenting and portraying a profile of a topic or a situation. Explaining causal

relationships between different aspects of a phenomenon is the aim of the explanatory study. In emancipatory research the main goal is the creation of opportunities for empowerment and engagement in social action.

Accordingly, this study can be considered as an exploratory study as it seeks to explore the topic of teacher professional identity from the participants' subjective points of view. As Silverman (2004) suggested, this type of research is suitable and useful for investigating research problems where very little is known. He added that such research is also concerned with identifying important themes of meaning from the participants and highlighting how these themes are related to each other. Thus, this approach is appropriate in illuminating the ontological situation of the Omani teachers' professional identity and portraying some areas for future recommendations, as only one study has been done so far on this issue, which targeted Omani EFL teachers. This is achieved by exploring teachers' subjective perceptions of their professional identity and the impact of different contextual factors on the development of this identity.

4.5 Research questions

Based on the insights provided in the literature review chapter (chapter 3) and the description of the context of the study (chapter 2), this study is guided by the following research questions:

4. How do Omani teachers view themselves and the work they do as teachers?
5. How has this view evolved over the career path of Omani teachers?

6. To what extent have the CPD opportunities provided by the Human Resources Development (HRD) Directorate in the Ministry of Education contributed to the development of Omani teachers' professional identity?

Answering such research questions requires a systematic and disciplined research plan or strategy which is able to provide the data or the evidences required for generating trustworthy knowledge claims or findings. This research plan will be provided in the following section.

4.6 Research design

An appropriate research design is a fundamental phase in the investigation of any research problem and it should precede the collection of the required data. This research design involves the overall strategy, which needs to include planning for the different phases of the investigation (Bryman, 2012). It also needs to address the research questions and ensure that the strategies employed achieve the objectives set for the study (Oppenheim, 2003). This suggests that a research design is a guideline and a framework for the researchers and it directs them in the research process to finally arrive at a pre-set aim or target. The decision about which design to adopt depends mainly on the nature of the researched topic and the research questions addressed.

Therefore, in an attempt to explore and understand the contextualised and multiple realities about Omani teachers' professional identity, the following research design (Table 4.2) was adopted.

Table 4.2: Design of the study

| Research Question | Data Collection | Instrument | Sample Size | Sample Type | Data Analysis |
|--|--|------------------------------------|--|-------------------|---------------|
| How do Omani teachers view themselves and the work they do as teachers? | Participant-generated drawing and text | Drawing and explanatory text sheet | 14 drawing and explanatory text sheets (one per teacher) | Maximun variation | Qualitative |
| | Follow-up interviews with teachers | Semi-structured interview schedule | 14 teachers | | |
| How has this view evolved over the career path of Omani teachers? | Graphic story-line | Graphic story-line sheet | 14 graphic story-line sheets (one per teacher) | Maximun variation | Qualitative |
| | Follow-up interviews with teachers | Semi-structured interview schedule | 14 teachers | | |
| To what extent have the CPD opportunities contributed to the development of Omani teachers' professional identity? | Interviews with teachers | Semi-structured interview schedule | 14 teachers | Maximun variation | Qualitative |

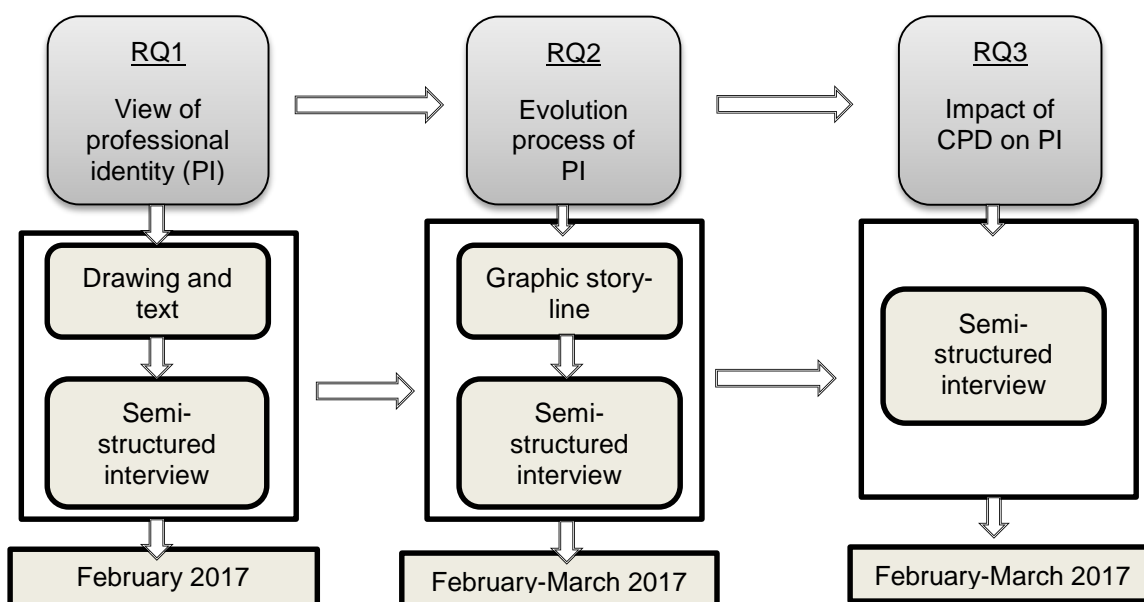


Figure 4.1: Research methods and time-frame

Detailed accounts of the different components of the above research design are provided in the following sections.

4.7 Sampling and gaining access

Mason (2002) defined sampling as “*principles and procedures used to identify, choose, and gain access to relevant data sources from which you will generate data using your chosen methods*” (p.120). She stressed that the process of sampling has significant implications for the trustworthiness of the research findings. She also suggested that researchers’ decisions about which sampling technique to employ is mainly guided by two sets of reasons. The first set is concerned with the focus of the research and the second is related to practical and resource based issues.

Driven towards a depth of understanding as opposed to breadth of application, the scope and the scale of qualitative research dictates that sample size is more limited than in quantitative studies. Thus, random sampling was neither possible nor desirable for the present study. Maximum variation sampling (Robson, 2002) was adopted as a strategy to identify the prospective participants for the study. In this type of sampling, the researcher recruits the available sample which best meets the purpose of the study and provides rich data to answer the research questions. This is in accordance with Mason’s (2002) first set of reasons for selecting a research sample, i.e., the research focus. The practical set of reasons was met by recruiting teachers from three different governorates (districts) which are the nearest to where I live.

In a qualitative approach to research, there are two main important aspects which need to be considered in the sampling process. First, the recruitment of participants who show various perspectives on the studied problem or issue has been perceived to be of paramount importance (Creswell, 2007). Thus, the recruitment process for this research sought to get some diversity and representativeness in the sample. Given that the study focus is on teachers' views of their professional identity, it seemed important to attempt, as possible, to recruit teachers across subject areas, genders, schooling levels and career stages. This was to gain different perspectives on the research problem from the people who are mostly concerned with the issue under investigation. It is worth mentioning here that all the recruited participants are from the Government sector schools because Omani teachers only work in this sector. The exclusion of the non-Government (private) sector schools was due to the fact that all teachers in these schools are non-Omanis.

Second, the willingness of the participants to 'open up' to a relatively unknown person was also viewed to be significant in a qualitative approach to research (Goodson & Sikes, 2001). To identify teachers willing to participate in this study, a combination of opportunistic and snowball recruitment strategies were employed. In the first place, I contacted teachers, supervisors and teacher trainers from the three different governorates within my own extended network and explained the purpose and the processes of the present study, asking them to think and nominate teachers who might be interested in participating.

The first to agree was an Arabic teacher who was herself a member of my network. Thankfully, this Arabic teacher suggested one more Arabic teacher from another governorate, whom she got to know in a national conference and had had contact with since then. An Arabic supervisor-friend suggested two Arabic teachers with whom she worked in a curriculum development committee, which was still in progress at the time of the data collection phase of this study. Next were three Science teachers from the three different governorates suggested by a Science teacher trainer in my network. This Science trainer works in the Specialised Centre for Professional Teacher Training (SCPTT) in Oman who trains Cycle two and post basic Science teachers from all over the Sultanate. One of the Science teachers suggested another Science teacher who had been a friend of her since college and the fifth was suggested by a Science supervisor-friend. A Mathematics trainer from my network who has the opportunity to work with Mathematics teachers at (SCPTT) from all over Oman suggested three Mathematics teachers from the three different governorates. One of these teachers enabled me to contact her colleague from the same school who agreed to participate too. The fifth Mathematics teacher to participate was suggested by his head teacher who was from my network.

Table 4.3: Participants' matrix

| | Arabic | | Mathematics | | Science | | |
|---------------------------|--------|--------|-------------|--------|---------|--------|-----------|
| | Male | Female | Male | Female | Male | Female | |
| Beginning (1-5 years) | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | |
| Mid-career (6-10 years) | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 2 | |
| Experienced (11-20 years) | 0 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 2 | |
| Total | 4 | | 5 | | 5 | | 14 |

The prospective participants were approached either by the teacher trainers, the supervisors, the head teacher or the teacher-friends to ensure initial agreement to participate in the study. Contact was then made with all prospective participants (see Table 4.3) via email which included participant information sheet and consent form (see Appendix 1). The difficulties associated with this initial contact in a qualitative approach to research are well-documented (Goodson & Sikes, 2001). The building of trust in such initial contact is considered to be vital. Thus, no attempt was made from the researcher to underestimate the kind and the amount of work and time required from the participants. Participants were informed that the study would involve them in three different conversations, two of which are based on participant-generated tasks, and each conversation would be of approximately 30 to 60 minutes in duration. They were also informed of the probability of some follow-up contact at the end of the data collection phase which would be negotiated.

Table 4.4: Participants' profiles

| no | participant | qualification | Years of experience | Subject taught | levels taught |
|----|-------------|---------------|---------------------|----------------|----------------|
| 1. | Ameena | Bachelor | 8 | Arabic | C2 |
| 2. | Asya | Bachelor | 13 | Arabic | C2+ Post Basic |
| 3. | Azza | Bachelor | 15 | Arabic | C2+ Post Basic |
| 4. | Amal | Bachelor | 9 | Arabic | C2 |

| | | | | | |
|-----|--------|----------|----|---------|---------------|
| 5. | Noor | Bachelor | 19 | Maths | C2 |
| 6. | Ghafir | Bachelor | 8 | Maths | C2 |
| 7. | Rahima | Bachelor | 17 | Maths | Post Basic |
| 8. | Khawla | Bachelor | 13 | Maths | C2 |
| 9. | Israa' | Bachelor | 9 | Maths | C1+C2 |
| 10. | Salma | Master | 18 | Science | C2 |
| 11. | Manaar | Master | 13 | Science | Post Basic |
| 12. | Ataa' | Bachelor | 3 | Science | C1+C2 |
| 13. | Umnia | Bachelor | 18 | Science | Post Basic |
| 14. | Habiba | Master | 6 | Science | C2+Post Basic |

4.8 Methods of data collection

The main methods of data collection used in this study are: participant- generated drawing and text, graphic story-line and semi-structured interview. The choice of the research tools employed in this research project was informed largely by the discussion of the philosophical stance underpinning this study and the research questions as described in previous sections of this chapter. In the next sections, a detailed account of each of the methods implemented and the rationale for their implementation in this study is provided.

4.8.1 Drawing and text

Reason and Hawkins (1998) observed that meaning can be created and communicated via many and different languages. They mentioned languages of words which lead to poetry and stories, the language of action which leads to gesture, mime and drama, and the languages of shape and colour which lead to painting and sculpture. These languages do not necessarily give meaning directly, but they can be considered as symbolic demonstrations of meaning. They are expressions which carry out explanations and thus explanations can clarify these expressions. Both expressions and explanations are needed to help give meaning to the notions and concepts arising from this research. Therefore, to help participants in this research to express and explain their perceptions of being teachers, this research used drawing with an accompanying text and follow-up interview as one of its research methods.

In examining teacher professional identity most researchers working in this area have primarily employed the mainstream research methods, such as interviews, narratives and textual analysis. Although these are useful techniques, I felt that they limit the extent to which as a researcher I can explore the multiple ways in which being a teacher can be understood and enacted. In an attempt to broaden this methodological terrain, I decided to use a visual method with a particular interest in drawing. My interest in using drawings to understand teacher professional identity was triggered by the work of Guillemin (1999, 2004a, 2004b). In these studies, Guillemin used participant-generated drawings to explore the ways in which people understand illness conditions and experiences. Although the examples Guillemin presented in her work are limited to illness conditions, her

work revealed that drawings have the potential to be a rich and insightful research method to explore how people make sense of their world. The flexibility and the adaptability of this method makes it applicable to other research issues and situations. Although drawings have a reflexive quality (Leitch, 2006), using them on their own provides limited data as they are open to various interpretations. Therefore, Guillemin (2004a) argued that participant-generated drawings as a research method is best suited as an adjunct to other research methods.

In this study, drawing was used together with an accompanying text (see Appendix 2) and individual semi-structured interviews. My aim of using drawings in studying teacher professional identity was to allow the opportunity for local and diverse understandings of being a teacher to be explored, which ranged beyond the dominant Anglo-American understandings. Unlike in Guillemin's studies in which participants were asked to draw as the interview drew to a close, in this study I decided to allow the participants a reasonable period of time to do their drawings to ensure well-considered and thoughtful responses. Therefore, I adapted a worksheet used by Mattock (2010) and provided the participants with this worksheet which consisted of a rubric guiding the participants on what to do as well as two blank boxes. In the first box on the right, participants were individually asked to draw what a teacher means to them. In the other box on the left, they were required to individually write about the drawings they produced, commenting on their choice of that particular drawing, its representations and its meaning to them.

For participants to comment in writing on their drawings necessitates a reflection not only on the drawing, but also on the relationship of what they have drawn to their particular experiences of being a teacher in Oman. This worksheet was emailed to each participant with at least a week to complete it before the follow-up interview. This was to allow the participants time and space to think and reflect on their understandings and representations of being a teacher. In addition, if participants' reluctance to draw was an issue, I needed to consider and develop strategies for as many people do not like drawing and they think they do not have drawing skills (Clarke, 2004; Guillemin & Drew, 2010). Thus, to avoid this, I decided that allowing participants time and freedom to produce the drawings in their own time would be helpful. Without me being present, the pressure on the participants on what to draw and how to draw is much less. This decision proved to be right, as all the 14 participants came to the individual follow-up interview with their worksheets completed and provided insightful ideas and understandings of the task at hand.

In the past, the use of visual methods in research has been criticized (Silverman, 1993). Although this criticism has been for the use and the interpretation of photographs and films, I think it is helpful to address these in relation to the use and interpretation of drawings. One of the common critiques is the issue of validity. It is argued that the interpretation of visual methods is highly subjective and "*riddled with ambiguity*" (Guillemin, 2004b, p.286). In other words, different people looking at the same image can produce very different interpretations. In addition, a person's interpretation of an image today can be quite different from his/her interpretation ten years later. Which of these interpretations is more valid than the

others? Is there one single true interpretation? Working from a theoretical stance which argues against the existence of one single truth and questions the pre-existence of meanings, I do not perceive the issue of ambiguity as problematic. Rather, I believe that the use of drawings as a research method in this current study is able to expand my interpretations as a researcher of the multiple and diverse ways in which being a teacher can be understood and experienced. Therefore, I would argue that the use of drawing in this research is a valid research method on two different grounds. First, participants were asked to discuss and explain the drawings they produced in the follow-up interview; thus, participants' interpretations, in combination with the drawings, were the primary data which were then subject to analysis. Second, this method was not the only method used in this research; it was used in conjunction with other research methods. This enabled the comparison of the data collected using this method and the analysis of this data against data collected from other methods.

4.8.2 Graphic story-line

Graphic story-line as a research method has emerged primarily from the work of Mary M. Gergen presented in her paper; '*Narrative structures in social explanations*' (Gergen, 1988). She used this method to investigate college students' feelings of general well-being. She described this method as a research method that can be used to reveal perceived critical incidents, experiences and relevant others in people's lives and their relevant impact on the narrator. She also stated that it is useful for conducting conversations and dialogues with narrators about different aspects of their lives. This method enables participants to evaluate, over time, the significant events and experiences within their stories and present

them on a graph. Its main idea is based on representing experiences on a two-dimensional space (see Figure 4.2). The story-line drawn on the graph represents the participant's evaluation of a series of events and experiences on the vertical line. These evaluations are plotted in time on the horizontal axis.

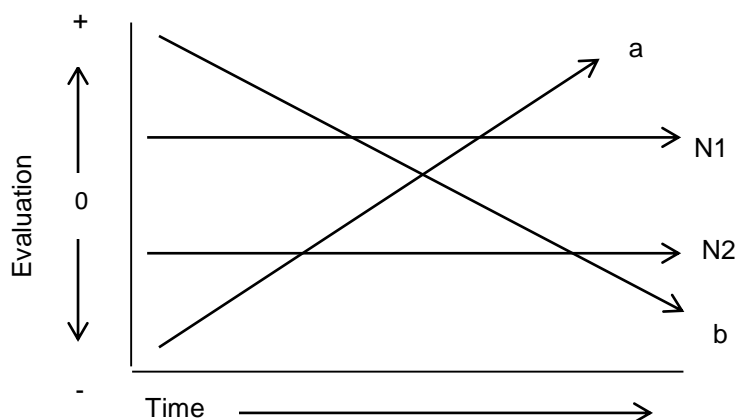


Figure 4.2: Combined (N) stability, (a) progressive and (b) regressive narrative forms adapted from Gergen (1988, p.99-100).

The above figure illustrates how Gergen (1988) initially used this method in her study. The stability form (N1) indicates the story of a positive and successful experiences within a specified time frame. The stability form (N2) represents a reverse story, in which negative and unsuccessful experiences occurred within a specified time frame. In contrast, the progressive form (a) represents a story which is constructed in a way which indicates that things get continuously better. Unlike the progressive form (a), regressive form (b) represents a reverse story in which experiences and events get increasingly worse. These three patterns; stability, progressive and regressive are the basic prototypes from which more complex story variations can be constructed. Therefore, higher and lower points on a graphic story-line represent positive and negative evaluations of experiences and events in relation to a valued endpoint (Hadar and Brody, 2016). In addition, participants in Gergen's (1988) study were asked to provide a brief written

description of the highest and lowest points in the graph. The inclusion of such questions in the story-line protocol was to draw the participants' attention to certain critical events in their lives as perceived at the time of the research (Gergen, 1988).

The idea of the story-line method was developed by Beijaard et al., (1995) who claimed to be the pioneers of its use in the field of teaching and teacher education.

The graph below (see Figure 4.3) from Beijaard, (1999, p.286) illustrates the possible variations of story-lines that can be produced by participants.

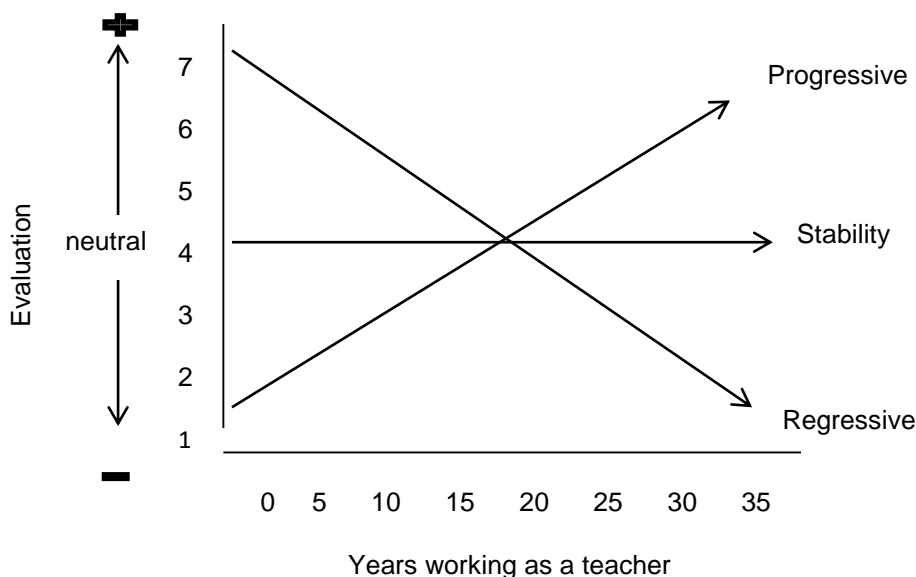


Figure 4.3: Ideal-typical story lines by Beijaard (1995, p.286)

Beijaard et al. (1995,1999) used this method in three different studies on teachers' practical knowledge in which they included some relevant features. The studies used a different number of points on the vertical line of the graph, different aspects of teaching in number and nature, and different ways of clarifying participants' current perceptions of the highest and the lowest points on the graph. This variation was in order to find how and under what conditions this method can best be used in researching current and prior experiences in teachers' professional

lives. For instance, in a study aimed at eliciting secondary schools' experienced teachers' practical knowledge, Beijaard (1995) formulated 14 different aspects of teaching (e.g. teaching in the classroom, bond with pupils, influence of personal norms and values, etc.) and participating teachers were asked to draw a story-line for each on a 7 point scale. As for their current perceptions of each teaching aspect and the highest and the lower points on the scale, the participating teachers were required to do this in writing. In general, Beijaard (1995) reported that participating teachers found the task of drawing and clarifying 14 story-lines very time-consuming and not motivating. Thus, they suggested dealing with fewer story-lines. In addition, they suggested that having a less extended scale on the vertical line could have made the evaluation of the aspects much easier. In addition, based on their study on *Teachers' motivation for their profession*, Beijaard et al. (1999) suggested that besides commenting on their experiences in writing, doing this in dialogue would enable the researcher to ask more in-depth questions and facilitate the participating teachers' expressions of their experiences. Thus, in their study on *Teachers' practical knowledge about students' learning*, Beijaard et al. (1999) used unstructured interviewing to facilitate participating teachers' clarifications of their current perceptions, the highest and the lowest points on the graph.

Since being introduced by Gergen (1988) and developed by Beijaard (1995) and Beijaard et al (1999), this method has been implemented by different researchers in different educational domains, providing evidence of its usefulness in revealing the way people make sense of experiences and events they encounter in their lives. For instance, Brody and Hadar (2018) used the story-line method among other research methods to investigate teacher educators' professional learning in

communities. At the end of a five-year course on thinking education, Brody and Hadar (2018) asked 6 teacher educators to evaluate and clarify the professional development experiences and events they had encountered on the five year course. Using this tool, Brody and Hadar (2018) aimed at getting the participating teacher educators to represent their trajectory of professional development over time. They reported that this method was able to reveal the teacher educators' tacit knowledge of their professional development and provided insights into teacher educators' responses to internal conflicts they faced in the professional learning situations. Specifically, Brody and Hadar (2018) reported that this method revealed factors promoting professional learning as well as barriers to this learning. It is in line with this purpose that I decided to use the story-line method in this current study. I thought that the use of the story-line combined with a follow-up interview would allow me to unveil the evolution process of the participant teachers' sense of professional identity during the course of their career.

As has been discussed above, professional identity construction and development is a process and not just a specific event. Therefore, I believe that the use of a graphic story-line method is appropriate for the investigation of the evolution process of this identity, which includes critical events and relevant others, that constitute the teachers' perceptions of who they are as teachers. This is because such story lines are a way of telling stories about teachers which reflect both the personal, social and political spheres which collaboratively influence and impact teachers' views of themselves as teachers (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999). Being a *"linguistic form in which human experience can be expressed"*, stories have the capacity to organise events and reveal the relevant others by means of a story-line

(Ricoeur, 1991, cited in Polkinghorne, 1995, p.7). Such a method offers the promise of allowing the participants to uncover and reveal over time the significant events and the actors within their stories (Gergen, 1988). To realise this promise, Melville and Pilot (2014) stressed that researchers using this method need to consider four salient points.

The first key point is concerned with the structure of the story-line. This structure needs to involve participants' perceptions of particular experiences and events plotted on a point scale vertical axis against a horizontal time axis. These experiences and events must be directed towards a "*valued end point or goal*" (Gergen, 1988, p.97). In this current study, following Beijaard et al. (1999), it was decided to use a seven point scale, 7 being a positive view of professional identity and 1 being a negative view of this identity (see Appendix 3). As for the second key point, researchers need to establish appropriate and clear endpoints, as the evaluation of the experiences and events are carried out with respect to the endpoints. In this regard, Beijaard et al. (1999) stressed the importance of deciding upon endpoints which teachers can identify in terms of relevant events and experiences. In the present study, the valued endpoint was considered to be teachers' views of their professional identity or how they see and have seen themselves as teachers. As discussed previously, such a view is constructed, ongoing, transforming and negotiated. This suggests that evaluating and clarifying teachers' views of their professional identity throughout their career can provide valuable insights and information about relevant events and experiences, and therefore shed the light on the factors (incidents or people) which constitute teachers' perceptions about who they are.

Furthermore, Beijaard et al. (1999) suggested that before drawing the story-lines, participants need to clarify their current perception of the valued end-point. This, they added, is vital in activating the participants' knowledge about the valued end-point and in setting the stage from the present to the past, which they found very important for the success of drawing the story-lines. In this current study, the first step in the research design, which is the drawing and accompanied text and the follow-up semi-structured interviewing, is believed to fulfil this role. This is because this step is wholly about revealing and eliciting participating teachers' current views of their professional identity, which I believe serve to activate participants' knowledge and information about this research valued end-point.

It also, in my opinion, plays an important role in establishing an "*acquaintanceship*" with the participants which Beijaard et al. (1999) believed to be important and should precede the data collection with this method. Another aspect which might influence the activation of current and prior experiences and events is the way the researcher chooses to get the participants to clarify their highest and lowest points on the graphs (Beijaard et al., 1999). This is linked to the limitation of this method, which Gergen (1988) herself reported on, namely the generality of the information collected and the absence of relevant details. Therefore, in addition to asking participants to briefly describe in writing the highest and the lowest points on the graph, follow-up semi-structured interviews were conducted to provide participants the opportunity to pay attention to all the declines and inclines in the graphs and explain in detail how and why these changes happened.

4.8.3 Interviews

Robson (2002) defined interviewing as having a conversation with a purpose which needs to be initiated and directed by the researcher to obtain research data relevant to the study aim or objective. In this sense, interviewing is concerned with gaining data on the research participants' experiences and perspectives. Kvale (1996) posited that qualitative research interviewing aims at understanding "*the world from the subjects' points of view, to unfold the meaning of peoples' experiences, to uncover their lived world prior to scientific explanations*" (p.1).

Interviews have been classified into several types based on three main dimensions. These dimensions are related to the degree of structure, the level of depth and the degree of standardisation across different respondents and situations (Punch, 1998). According to the standardisation dimension, interviews are commonly categorised into three types: fully-structured, semi-structured and unstructured (Robson, 2002).

- *fully-structured interview*: necessitates a predetermined and a pre-set order of standardised questions with fixed wording.
- *semi-structured interview*: has pre-determined themes and categories and is open to new ideas based on the interviewer's perception of what seems most appropriate.
- *unstructured interview*: has a pre-determined general topic of interest and concern, but the interviewer lets the conversation develop within this general area.

The advantages of interviewing as a data collection method in research have been discussed widely in the literature (Kvale, 1996; Patton, 2002; Robson, 2002; Cohen et al, 2007). Among the various advantages, I will focus on three which support the claim for the use of interviewing in this study. An important advantage of interviewing is its capacity to reveal information about the participants which cannot be observed directly, such as feelings, thoughts, experiences and intentions. Qualitative interviewing provides the participants with the opportunity to explain their personal perspectives on the issues of the research, which therefore gives useful insights into the ways these participants conceptualise and interpret their world. In addition, interviewing is considered to be a flexible and adaptable method of data collection since it gives the researcher the opportunity to explore unpredictable information that emerges from the process of interviewing and to follow up interesting information given by the respondents. Furthermore, the presence of the interviewer can prove to be very helpful in providing clarifications about questions or probes which might not be sufficiently clear.

Yet, there are some documented drawbacks to the use of interviewing (Robson, 2002; Mason 2002; Cohen et al 2007; Bryman, 2012). For instance, Bryman (2012) argued that interviewing is a time-consuming method as it requires the preparation of the interview guide, the actual interviewing, transcription and the analysis of the data. It can be argued that this drawback is unavoidable and the advantages mentioned above outweigh this limitation. Another drawback associated with interviewing as a data collection method is related to the quality of the gathered information. There is the risk of the interviewer's bias leading the respondents to certain answers and the participants' untruthfulness in answering the interview

questions. I believe that these concerns are legitimate and worthy of careful consideration by the researcher. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the use of triangulation of data sources and data collection methods was a procedure to enhance the quality of the gathered data. In addition, during the planning stage of the interview guide and during the interviews, the researcher's subjectivity was minimised. I made sure that the interview guide (see Appendix 4) does not include any leading questions and while interviewing I tried not to influence respondents' answers in any way. Using a digital audio-recording device to record the interviews enabled me to transcribe the whole interview, which guaranteed that participants' thoughts and opinions were retained as objectively as possible.

In this study, semi-structured interviews were used to collect the required data for the three research questions. For the first two research questions, they were used in accompany with trigger tasks, that is- drawing and text for the first and graphic story-line for the second. As for the third research question, semi-structured interviews were the only method used. The rationale behind the use of semi-structured interviewing in this present study is its combination of the features of structure and flexibility (Johnson, 2001). The structure of semi-structured interviewing is sufficiently flexible. Although guided by several probes which are focused on particular themes, semi-structured interviewing allows for the exploration of new and unexpected phenomenon (Kvale, 1996). Following up interesting topics in the participants' responses and giving explanations when needed, semi- structured interviewing gives the teachers more freedom to express their thoughts and feelings. As a result, this feature allows for the unfolding of

interesting information, which could provide useful insights into the issue of the study.

For the current study, I designed three different interview schedules. Based upon the purpose of each research question and a review of the relevant literature on teacher professional identity and CPD, I decided upon focus areas for each research question at the outset. Then, I developed a number of open-ended questions and prompts for each focus area. As for the first research question on teachers' views of themselves and their work as teachers, I divided the interview schedule into two main sections. The first section was designed to probe the participants to talk about and explain their drawings in an attempt to uncover how these drawings reveal the participants' professional identity. The second section was designed around the three components of Sachs' (2005) conceptual understanding of the notion of teacher professional identity. These components included 'how to be', 'how to act' and 'how to understand their work and their place in the society'. Based on these three components, the second section interview schedule was structured in such a way as to gather data from participants on focus areas, such as motivations for becoming a teacher, role as a teacher, perspectives on teaching and learning and perceptions on teachers' representations in the society.

Regarding the interview schedule which was meant to provide answers for the second research question on the evolution process of teacher professional identity, this was designed based on Gergen's (1988) and Beijaard's (1999) work. The whole schedule was built around facilitating the participants' accounts and

explanations of their story-line graphs. With reference to the third interview schedule which was designed to address the third research question on the contribution of the provided CPD opportunities to the development of Omani teachers' professional identity, the main focus area was the participants' experiences and perceptions of these offerings.

It is worth mentioning here that there are two main considerations which can explain the rationale behind the selection of the three techniques of participant-generated drawing and text, graphic story-line and semi-structured interviews. Firstly, following Wall and Higgins' (2006) model of interaction (see Figure 4.4), this study adopted the use of a 'semiotic tool' (Vygotsky, 1978; Wells, 1999), which formed the basis of a mediated semi-structured interview. Wall and Higgins (2006) formulated this model to illustrate the theoretical bases for the use of '*response templates*' as a research technique to investigate an aspect of metacognition which was pupils' thinking about their own learning. However, I believe that this model illustrates very well my rationale behind the use of participant-generated drawing and text and the graphic story-line techniques. The below model (see Figure 4.4) recommends the use of a stimulus to initiate and encourage the participants' talk in discussion settings such as interviews. In investigating teachers' perceptions of their professional identity, the participant-generated drawing and text and the graphic story-line were used to represent the stimulus in the below model of interaction.

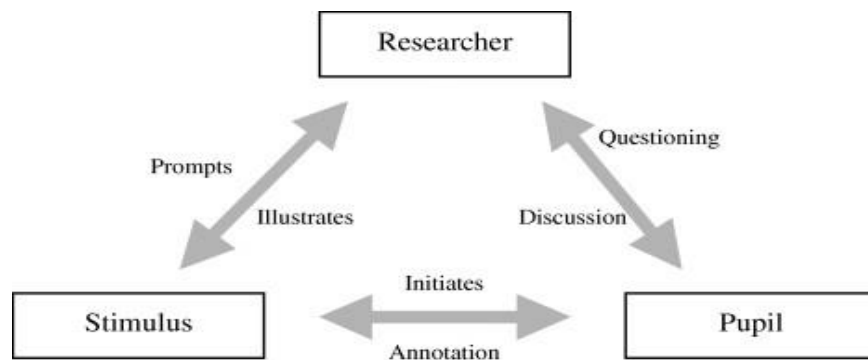


Figure 4.4: Model of interaction by Wall and Higgins (2006, p.42)

Secondly, the use of techniques which produce and integrate visual, written and spoken data was to externalise the internalised thoughts and feelings of the participants. Vygotsky (1986) argued that thoughts, to which I can add feelings, are not merely expressed in words, they come into existence through them. He described the relation between thoughts, (feelings) and words as “*a process, a continual movement back and forth from thought to word and from word to thought*” (p.218). Therefore, in a research situation, I thought that this movement needs to be scaffolded, stimulated and given time in order to provide me (the researcher) a lens into the individual participants’ internalisation. The participant-generated drawing and text task and the graphic story-line technique as stimuli for follow-up discussions have the potential to allow the participants time to think about the issues to be discussed and to express this thinking on paper before talking about it in the semi-structured interview.

4.9 Language of research instruments

Bearing in mind the fact that all research participants have very limited English, I considered the translation of the three research instruments into Arabic (drawing and text sheet, graphic story-line sheet and the three interview guides) as a must.

Vulliamy (1990) commented that the quality of translation in such cases depends on factors, such as the autobiography of the researcher-translator, the researcher's knowledge of the language and the culture of the participants, and the researcher's fluency in the language of the write-up. Being an Omani teacher trainer (I was a teacher, senior teacher and supervisor), having Arabic as my mother tongue and as a graduate of School of Education with a Master's degree in TESOL, I think these qualities enable me to carry out the translation of the research instruments myself and to some extent ensure a good quality translation. However, I am aware that this process is not free of potential translation-related problems, which can affect the trustworthiness of the research findings. The main problem in this respect is gaining conceptual equivalence (Birbili, 2000). Conceptual equivalence in research refers to comparability of meaning, which (Creswell, 2009) perceived as unsolvable problem. This is because, he argued, that any concept in any language carries with it a set of assumptions, feelings and values which are not necessarily attached to its direct lexical equivalence in another language. In such cases, researchers are recommended to direct their efforts toward obtaining conceptual equivalence without concern for lexical comparability (Mears, 2009). This suggests that researchers need not only to have a proficient understanding of the language, but also as Birbili (2000, n.p.) put it an "*intimate knowledge of the targeted participants' culture*". This enables researchers to pick up the full implications of a term and ensures that the cultural connotations are made explicit for them.

To eliminate such a translation-related problem, Roulston (2010) advised researchers to carry out a number of techniques, such as back translation,

consultation with other people during the translation process and pilot testing of the translated research instruments. Back translation is one of the most commonly used techniques in cross-cultural research studies. It involves translating the research instruments from the source language (English) to the target language (Arabic). Then, translating the Arabic versions into English and finally comparing both English versions for the purpose of identifying any discrepancies in meanings (Roulston, 2010). As for the consultation of other people during the translation process, I approached an Omani translation graduate friend who was given the Arabic versions of the instruments and asked to translate them into English, without having access to the original English version to ensure the absence of impact on his translation. Then, the two English versions, mine and the friend's, were compared and incongruities in meanings were discussed, which resulted in suggesting and using better alternatives. In addition, a pilot testing of the instruments was undertaken as discussed in detail in the next section.

4.10 The piloting stage

Before the actual implementation of the research instruments and embarking on any field research, piloting these instruments is one of the most important steps. Pilot studies were defined by Kim (2010) as "*small-scale versions of the planned study, trial runs of planned methods, or miniature versions of the anticipated research*" (p. 2). The importance of this stage stems from the fact that it can be used to identify flaws in the initial research design and to test the data collection instruments which compose this design (Beebe, 2007). In addition, its significance can be attributed to the fact that it can be used to identify ambiguities in the protocols of the research instruments and, most importantly, the feasibility of the

planned instruments (Van Teijlingen et al., 2001). Thus, this stage plays a vital role in familiarising the researcher with the field work realities before embarking on any actual data collection (Kim, 2010).

For the current study a piloting was conducted at the end of January 2017. This piloting aimed at testing the data collection instruments and identifying potential technical and contextual factors that might affect the actual collection of the data. Furthermore, it provided first-hand experience of conducting interviews and clarified the ambiguous and confusing interview questions, which helped in avoiding these in the actual interviewing. Two teachers from the Batinah South Educational Governorate were invited for the pilot study. These teachers, both females, are Omani teachers teaching in Government schools. One is teaching Maths in a C1 school with 3 years of experience and the other is teaching Science in a C2 school with a 12 years of experience. Thus, they belonged to the same target population of the main study. Both participants agreed to be involved in the piloting. Many lessons were learned from this critical stage which can be summarised as follows:

- Although both participants were given an information and consent sheet which outlined the aims of the research and what is required from them to do and for how long and which they signed, both were constantly asking questions about information already included in the information and consent form sheet. Thus, I learned that I need to make the participants well-informed about the procedure of the data collection by discussing with them the information included in the information and

consent form and giving them the chance to ask questions and raise queries before embarking on any collection of data.

- Sending the drawing and the accompanied text sheet to both participants by email made them assume that the drawing and the text should be done electronically using the computer, although this was not stated in the email sent to them. Thus, when sending this sheet to the actual participants, I made it very clear that they do not have to use the computer programs for this task and that hand-drawn picture and hand-written text are absolutely fine.
- Scanning and emailing the completed drawing and the accompanied text sheet and the graphic story-line sheet to me before the time of the interview proved to impact the quality of the interview data. Having enough time to explore the participants' responses in regards to these two sheets helped me in formulating participant-specific questions based on their responses, which provided more thoughtful insights and richer data.
- It gave me the opportunity to test the clarity of the instructions provided for participants at the top of each stimulus sheet which resulted in the modification to the original instructions based on the two participants' comments and feedback.
- Piloting also gave me the opportunity to test and modify the interview schedules and timings. Based on the participants' responses, some questions were deleted and others were paraphrased. As for the timings for the three interviews, I realised that the first interview required more

time than the other two. Thus, in the main study, the first interview was given 45 minutes to 1 hour time whereas the other two were given 30 to 45 minutes.

- The actual location chosen for the interviews proved to be crucial in the quality of the recordings. The first pilot interview was carried out in the Head teacher's office where different school staff kept coming and going; this disturbed the flow of the interview and caused it to last a long. Thus, in the main study, the location of the interview was discussed with the participating teacher prior to the visit ensuring that it would be vacant and quiet for the whole time of the interview, although some interruptions were unavoidable.
- Listening to the first participants' recorded interviews, I noticed that there were some areas where I could have used some probing strategies for more explanations and examples. Thus, I tried to be more vigilant to these while interviewing the second participant and in the main study's interviews.
- From the pilot study, I realised that the use of one recording device, no matter how good and advanced, is not sufficient. Although, I had familiarised myself with how to operate the recording device and had had more than one trial with it, after the second interview with the first participant, I realised that for some reason the device was not on and the interview had not been recorded. Thus, I decided to use two different devices with the second participant and for the main study.

- Based on the pilot study, I modified the graphic story-line sheet to suit participants of very different range of experience. The participant with three years' experience found the time horizontal axis very pressed and her graph was not clear enough. Thus, I designed two different sheets; one for those with 1-10 years of experience and another for teachers with 10+ years of experience.

4.11 The data collection process

The main data collection process was conducted from the end of January to the end of March 2017. It was carried out in three different steps, as illustrated in Figure 4.1 above. The decision about the order of these three steps was made on the basis of the order of the three research questions set for this study. Prior to embarking on any data collection, information and consent forms were sent via email to the 14 teachers who expressed initial willingness to participate in this research; these forms were then returned back to me via email or handed to me on my first visit to schools. All 14 teachers agreed to carry out interviews in their schools during the school day. The following represents a detailed description of the three steps of the data collection process.

4.11.1 Step one (drawing and accompanied text and follow-up interview)

Since the 14 teachers were from three different Educational Governorates, I thought that sending the drawing and the accompanied text sheet via email would be more practical. Besides the information included in the instructions of the task, which had proved to be clear and comprehensible in the piloting stage, guidelines on what is required from the participants and how to carry out the task was

included in the email sent to the 14 teachers. It was stated very clearly and explicitly that the picture can be hand-drawn and the text can be hand-written, unless the teachers themselves choose and decide to do them electronically. The teachers were given one week to do the task, scan the sheet and email it back to me. They were informed that they could contact me by email for any further clarification. This provided teachers enough time to think and do the task freely without my direct involvement. Unexpectedly, I received all the sent 14 sheets completed with drawings and accompanied texts. In fact, I was a bit worried that some of the participants would not carry out the drawing part of the task, as most of the studies using this tool had reported (e.g. Mattock, 2010; Guillemin, 2004b). When asked about their reactions to the drawing task, one participant teacher said, *“I found it weird at the beginning as I am not used to such research tool”*. Another commented,

“We are used to filling in questionnaires which does not take more than five minutes to do. This task was very thought provoking... many images were flashing in my mind until I was able to decide on the one I drew on the sheet...Something else, the instruction of the task was encouraging as it says “it does not have to be a perfect drawing, a simple sketch can do the work”, so I did what I could.”

Twelve of the sheets were hand-drawn and written and two were done electronically. It is worth mentioning here that I have no guarantee that the pictures and the texts were completed by the teachers themselves without assistance from others. However, I trusted the honesty of teachers' production and validated this with the follow-up interview. Having the completed sheet before the time of the follow-up interview provided me the opportunity to examine the participant's responses and to formulate participant-specific questions based on individual's

responses. To save time and act promptly, once I received a scanned completed sheet, I started contacting the participant to arrange a suitable time and a room in the school for the interview. For some days, I managed to arrange for three interviews with three different teachers from three different governorates. For others, it was not possible to arrange for more than one interview with one teacher due to teachers' scheduled timetables, which meant travelling by car for more than one hour and a half to do just one interview.

All the participant teachers had agreed to be recorded, so the follow-up interviews for the first step, which took about one hour, were digitally recorded on two different devices. At the beginning of the interviews, the contents of the pictures and the accompanied texts were explored, which gave an opening focus for the interviews initiated by the interviewees. It was observed that teachers were very engaged during this phase of the interview and were talking freely and excitedly. The design of the interview schedule, which was built around prompts and not fixed questions, facilitated the discussion and the interview. Then, recordings were listened to and notes were taken for issues which need further discussion in the second step follow-up interviews.

4.11.2 Step two (graphic story-line and follow-up interview)

From the piloting stage, I realised that sending the graphic story-line sheet via email to participating teachers and asking them to print it resulted in flawed print-outs. This was because of the incompatible versions of Microsoft Word I was using and the one installed in schools' PCs. Thus, as a preparation for the second step, I decided to have my own printed out copies of the second step sheet, which I

handed to teachers at the end of the first follow-up interview. This also gave me an opportunity to discuss the instructions of the task and go through it with teachers face-to-face rather than email clarifications. Teachers were given a week to complete the sheet. Although this task was a bit new for teachers and I expected them to face difficulties completing it, all 14 teachers managed to do it successfully, scanned it and sent it to me via email. One participant teacher commented that

“... technically, it was easy to do but it was not quick... I had to go on a backward journey searching my memories for experiences and events, explore how I viewed myself as a teacher and most importantly you asked me to reveal why I viewed it that way. I think, as teachers, we need to implement such a protocol at least once a year... so, we become aware of what and who influences our views of ourselves as teachers and try to boost this view from time to time.”

On receiving the completed sheets, I started arranging the time and place for the second step follow-up interviews. Again these were conducted in convenient rooms and were digitally recorded. Basing the second step interview wholly on exploring the content of the graphic story-line sheets allowed the discussion to stray into areas and issues outside the set prompts and I observed that it removed the formality which is often created in interviewing process. It allowed the participant teachers to express their experiences and views freely and generously, as they themselves noticed and pointed out in post-interview conversations. Some of them apologised for off-loading too much and for too long in this interview. These interviews took between 30 and 45 minutes. The recordings were listened to and notes were jotted down for further exploration and clarification in the third step of the interviewing process.

4.11.3 Step three (semi-structured interview)

Having noticed the influence of the previously discussed stimulus tasks on the quality and the richness of the data collected in the first and second steps, I decided to provide teachers with an outline of the areas of focus for the third step interviews prior to the interview. This was to encourage and allow the teachers to engage in reflection and preparation for the upcoming interview. It might be argued that this decision could have caused the participants' responses not to be spontaneous. Working from an interpretive perspective to research, I do not think that this is something I need to worry about when conducting interviews. This is because I believe that interviewees should not feel 'ambushed', but should be given time to think about and structure their responses. This is because, after all, as an interpretive researcher I am concerned with collecting well-considered and thoughtful responses rather than instant ones. Therefore, I emailed a short list of the broad focus areas to participant teachers via email. In fact, this decision proved to be a good one. Teachers were highly reflective about the CPD opportunities they have experienced. They tended to be expressive in their accounts of their perceptions about these experiences. This step's interviews took 30 to 45 minutes.

4.12 The data analysis stage

A qualitative data analysis approach was used in the organisation and processing of the data gathered for this research. The basic style for the analysis of data under this approach includes certain stages, which although they are labelled differently in the literature, they are actually quite similar. These can be categorised into four main stages; each has some steps and requirements. These four stages involve data preparation, data exploration and coding, data classification and organisation,

and data presentation and interpretation (Jamieson, 2016; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Creswell, 2007). It is worth noting here that these stages do not occur in a discrete and chronological manner, but rather the qualitative data analysis process is iterative and each stage is continually informed by and impacts on the others.

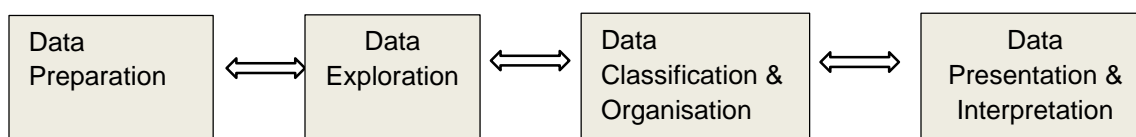


Figure 4.5: Qualitative data analysis process

4.12.1 Preparing the data

This stage includes familiarisation with the data, which enables decisions to be made about selection of the data and the type of transcription to be used. I started this stage by initially familiarising myself with the different sources of data collected for this research. I listened to the recorded interviews repeatedly and meticulously. While listening to the first two stages of the interviews, I had the participants' drawings and texts and their story-line graphs in front of me to make sense of what they were talking about and also to be familiar with these sources of data. This step enabled me to make informed decisions about the parts of the interviews which I did not need to transcribe and even noted down at what time these occurred to make the transcription step as precise and quick as possible. These parts included when a participant went off-task and started talking about issues irrelevant to the points of our conversation, such as my knowledge of their supervisors or head teachers. They also included when someone suddenly entered the room where the interview was taking place and started greeting us, apologising for interruption and going on with why they needed to use the room. However, I

tried to be vigilant and careful about not missing any important, interesting or relevant information.

This was followed with the step of transcription and translation. In qualitative data analysis approach, transcripts are considered rigorous data as they capture exactly what has been said. Therefore, they provide accurate and detailed tools which enable the researcher to capture the human interaction scientifically and are open to further detailed check analysis (Hammersley, 2010). Although transcription is essential for qualitative research, there is no universal code or form for transcribing research interviews. However, there are some standard choices to be made by researchers (Kvale, 2009). On this topic, Lapadat and Lindsay (1998; 1999) argued that these choices need to be made in light of the theoretical stance underpinning the research. As this research is based on a constructivist-interpretive paradigm, I transcribed the interviews by focussing on the meaning of what the participants said, more than their use of certain words or discourse. Thus, I decided to implement the abridged transcript approach throughout the three steps of the research. Although Krueger Casey (2009) discussed this approach in relation to the transcription of focus group interviews, I found it useful in transcribing the semi-structured interviews and it was suitable for the nature and the focus of my research. Krueger and Casey (2009) explained that this type of transcription focuses on the relevant conversations and comments on the research purpose and questions and so does not require the word-to-word type of transcription, as in linguistics or sociology.

The transcription process for this research was divided into three stages. As the interviews were conducted in Arabic, I started by transcribing all of the interviews in Arabic. Then, I translated the Arabic versions into English. The English versions were then given to two colleagues, who each hold a Master's degree in translation, to translate them to Arabic. Finally, both Arabic versions of the transcripts were thoroughly compared and checked. Accordingly, minor amendments were made to the English versions (see Appendix 5, 6 and 7) and all the transcripts were entered into a qualitative data analysis software called Nvivo which made the transcripts ready for analysis.

4.12.2 Exploring the data

In qualitative data analysis, data exploration involves developing a general understanding of the data by reading through all of the data set (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). It includes recording initial thoughts and ideas generated by reading the data in the forms of comments and memos (Jamieson, 2016). In this sense, I found myself starting to explore the data at the transcription stage. I made memos and wrote comments using words and short phrases in the transcripts' Word documents. Some links and contradictions were also spotted at this stage and immediately recorded.

However, the thorough exploration of the transcripts was implemented once they had been imported into Nvivo. Before the coding process, I read the transcripts thoroughly and used the annotation feature in Nvivo to write comments and thoughts. These annotations were helpful in making notes about or labelling a particular segment of the transcripts, before moving into the coding process. It was

also useful in relating and comparing what the participants said in the interviews with their pictures, texts and story-line graphs. This exploration process made me more familiar with these stimuli tasks and their links with what had been said in the interviews.

4.12.3 Classifying and organising the data

Classifying and organising the data means coding the data by dividing the text into small units, assigning a label to each unit and then grouping different codes into themes (Creswell, 2013; Jamieson, 2016). This thematic analysis approach process was, in fact, challenging and took me a very long time. I had to make so many decisions all the way through this process which are not necessarily included in the literature of research methodology, as these decisions mainly depend on the focus of each research and its questions. For instance, so many factors influence the researcher's decisions on the weight that could be given to different participants' comments and responses. One of these factors is the frequency of the comment; either a frequently said comment by different participants or an innovative comment by only one participant. Another factor is the specificity of the comment, that is the specific details of a comment provided by the participants.

Although the Nvivo software cannot help in such decisions, it was indeed of great help in this thematic analysis process. It enabled me to highlight, block and label segments from the interview transcripts with codes which were easily retrieved and amended at any time during this process. In addition, it displayed the codes in a visual manner, making it possible to spot the relationship between the different codes and easily access the different texts for one code and segments of texts

which were labelled with different codes. Then, these codes were organised and categorised into main themes and sub-themes. In this organisation process, the themes or the '*larger perspectives*' as Paulus et al. (2017) called them are the findings which provided answers to the research questions (see Appendix 8) .

It is worth mentioning here that the classification and the organisation of the data involved the comparison of the data across different time points or steps. After the coding of each of the three steps' data, I compared the generated categories across different time points and different sets of data. My aim of doing this was not to "*prove anything, but to generate ideas which are sufficient to make us think again about what is going on in the world*" (Holliday, 2010, p.101-102). This means that I did not use the data to state facts and truths, but rather to further explore and understand the topic under research, based on the interpretive research perspective. In other words, as Silverman (2004) suggested, this type of research is concerned with identifying important themes of meaning from the participants and highlighting how these themes are related to each other. For instance, one of the concurrent themes related to becoming and being a teacher is teachers' conceptions of learning and teaching. Table 4.5 below shows one of the conceptions, which is facilitation of students' understanding. Comparing the data from different time points and data sets indicates that some participants perceive learning as developing students' understanding and skills; yet the second interview of the first time point revealed that these teachers do not necessarily implement a parallel conception when it comes to teaching due to packed curriculum context and exam-oriented system. This means that there is a conflict between what teachers believe learning is and what the education system requires them to do.

Such inconsistency in the data bolstered me to be critically engaged with the data analysis such that incongruences and complexities are not lost sight of.

Table 4.5: Example of comparing code across different time points

| Code | Data obtained from time point 1 (image+interview) | Data obtained from time point 2 (story-line+interview) | Data obtained from time point 3 |
|--|--|--|---|
| Facilitation of students' understanding | <p>"if you have noticed here in the picture, the teacher is in the middle and the students are in groups around him ...the teacher is not the authoritative figure in the class, he just manages the events happening in the class to achieve the outcomes"</p> <p>Habiba's first interview</p> <p>"Unfortunately, I tend to focus on the knowledge outcomes and most of the time neglect the skills and the attitudes ones...There are issues which stop us from doing the right things"</p> <p>Habiba's second interview</p> | <p>"The extra-curricular activities assigned to me take me away from my teaching but I try my best to design and prepare activities which motivate my students and encourage them to search for the information."</p> <p>Habiba's interview</p> | <p>"They mainly focus on subject matter content. I can not remember a CPD opportunity which was not...we need programmes which help us to make our classrooms communicative and make our learners active not just recipients of the content"</p> <p>Habiba's interview</p> |

4.12.4 Presenting and interpreting the findings

In a qualitative study, presenting the findings involves a discussion of evidence and examples from the data for the themes and sub-themes yielded from the analysis process (Creswell, 2013). This discussion may involve the presentation of figures and tables which represent the main themes and sub-themes. In the case of this study, the representation of the findings from the different sources of qualitative data is provided in a figure at the beginning of each data findings chapter.

After presenting the findings, the researcher is expected to interpret them; this is often included in the discussion section of a research report (Paulus, et al., 2017; Jamieson, 2016). An alternative approach, which I implemented in this thesis, is the inclusion of my brief interpretive accounts of the meaning of the presented data immediately after each theme section in the data findings chapters. Some of these brief interpretive accounts were interpreted further in the discussion chapter, in which their meanings were considered in depth and woven with my views and those in the available literature in terms of the educational context in Oman.

4.12.5 Analysis of participant-produced drawings

As mentioned above in section 4.8.1, participant generated-drawings and texts were used in concert with follow-up interviewing and not as a sole method. They acted as stimuli or triggers to facilitate and deepen the participants' reflections on their sense of being teachers. During the first section of the first phase interview schedule, participants were prompted to interpret and give meaning to the drawings they had produced. This is because I felt that participants as the producers of the drawings are the most relevant and appropriate people to give

meaning to those drawings. As Gauntlett and Holzwarth (2006) stated “*the interpretation has to come from the person who made the artefact. My own guesses or speculations (as researcher) about someone else’s meanings are just that- guesses and speculations*” (p.86). Therefore, my role as a researcher was to analyse the participants’ interpretations of their drawings and not the drawings themselves. These interpretations formed the participants’ responses for the first section of the first phase interview schedule, which were analysed following the qualitative data analysis approach presented above in sections 4.11.1 to 4.11.4.

4.12.6 Analysis of story-line interviews

After the preparation and the exploration of the data collected for the second step of this research, I initially planned to implement the above-presented procedure for the classification and organisation of this data. However, half-way through the coding stage of the semi-structured interviews based on the story-line graphs, I felt that stories which constructs the participants’ career paths would be more appropriate to the nature of the second research question, which investigates the evolution process of the participant teachers’ professional identity over their career path. Thus, the analysis process of the data for this step followed a quite different procedure.

First is the descriptive level of the data. At this level, I developed fourteen stories which I chose to label as ‘Teachers’ career stories’, using the two interrelated sources of data: storyline graphs and semi-structured interviews. The process of the development of these stories involved careful reading, re-reading, reflection on the interview transcripts and comparison of these with the story-line graphs

produced by the participants. Elements from both sources were integrated, such that they represented an initial career story as understood by me. These descriptive accounts are presented in chapter 7 and form its first part.

The second level of analysis was the construction of themes and categories. The primary source of these themes was the data and my analysis of them. This was done inductively by noticing the recurrent patterns which cut across the data. The careful reading and re-reading of the interview transcripts and stories enabled me to compare them and come up with the main themes and sub-themes. This was done manually and with the support of the Nvivo software. I needed all the 14 stories and their corresponding graphs displayed in front of me at the same time to be able to effectively spot the similarities and differences and sort them accordingly. Thus, I printed the 14 stories and story-line graphs on A4 papers, compared them and sorted them in different ways according to the recurrent patterns appearing in them. This was happening concurrently with blocking and labelling segments of texts in the corresponding files in the Nvivo software and writing analytic memos, which were linked to quotations and codes. These 'notes to self' helped in the abstraction of ideas and the building of knowledge. Here I pulled together my interpretations and speculations of the connections between the themes and the research participants which is presented in the second part of chapter 7 titled 'Revelations of teachers' career stories'.

4.13 Trustworthiness in qualitative research

Interpretive research has long been criticised for not providing the kinds of generalisability, validity and reliability associated with quantitative research which grow out of a more positivist paradigm. The use of these terms and measures to establish the quality of an interpretive research has been contested. I do not think that it is logical or even acceptable to employ the exact same quality tests to two very distinctive research traditions and cultures. In addition, in this post-modern age, the task of researcher is to “*distrust all methods equally*” (Richardson, 2003, p.508), owing to the subjectivity of all human perceptions and the belief in the inability of even the so-called scientific methodologies to “*deliver on ultimate truth*” (Guba and Lincoln, 2005, p.205). The underlying assumption here is that even the most rigorous positivistic methodologies also fail the same objectivity measures and tests.

Alternatively, based on the notions presented in the seminal works of Guba and Lincoln in the 1980s, interpretive researchers argue for the use of the notion of ‘*trustworthiness*’ to establish the quality of such research. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), interpretive researchers need to employ four different aspects to ensure and evaluate the quality of their research: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability, which are in accordance with the relativist-interpretivist paradigm. This view was very well explained by Creswell and Miller (2000) by stating that:

“... constructivists believe in pluralistic, interpretive, open-ended, and contextualised (e.g. sensitive to place and situation) perspectives towards reality. The validity procedures reflected in this thinking present criteria with labels distinct from quantitative approaches, such

as trustworthiness (i.e. credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability)” (p. 125-126).

Therefore, a discussion of these concepts in relation to the present study’s design and procedure is of vital importance and is presented in the subsequent sections in the sequence mentioned in the quote given above.

4.13.1 Credibility

Graneheim and Lundman (2004) noted that the credibility of an interpretive research is related to the *“focus of the research and refers to confidence in how well the data and the processes of analysis address the intended focus”* (p.109). This suggests that credibility needs to be considered from the outset of the research process, in determining the focus of the research, deciding upon the research site, participants and methods of data collection and analysis.

One way of establishing the credibility of an interpretive research is by the use of triangulation. Creswell and Miller (2000) defined this procedure of credibility as searching *“for convergence among multiple and different sources of information to form themes or categories in a study”* (p.126). The significance of applying such a procedure of credibility is that it offers *“corroborating evidence collected through multiple methods...to locate major and minor themes”* (p.127), rather than relying on a single piece of evidence to identify themes that support the knowledge claims generated from the data. Triangulation was employed in the current study on two levels: that of methods and of participants. The data was collected by using participant-generated drawing and text, graphic story-line and semi-structured interviews. At the level of participants, data was generated from three different

subject teachers (Arabic, Science and Mathematics) to ensure that different perspectives of teachers' professional identity development were obtained.

Another credibility-establishing procedure in interpretive research is prolonged engagement in the field. This is because "*the longer (the constructivists) stay in the field, the more the pluralistic perspective will be heard from participants and the better the understanding of the context of participant views*" (Creswell and Miller, 2000, p.128). There is no agreed set duration for fieldwork; however, a range from 4 months to a year has been mentioned by different authors. As for the present study, I spent about two months in schools for the purpose of data collection, which can be considered as prolonged engagement in fieldwork.

4.13.2 Transferability

Transferability is related to the relevance of the research findings to other contexts (Richards, 2009). A more common term for this aspect of trustworthiness is generalisability of research findings, which as Thomas (2010) asserted should not be the aim nor the concern of interpretive researchers. In the same vein, Creswell (2007) asserted that "*as a general rule, qualitative researchers are reluctant to generalise from one case to another because the contexts of the cases differ*" (p.79).

It has also been argued that the production and the interpretation of interpretive research results are influenced by different contexts which have different socio-cultural elements, thus making generalisability of such research results difficult or even impossible (Flowerdew, 2002). The comprehensive nature of qualitative data which requires providing thick description of the phenomenon under study makes

such data limited in scope. This particular characteristic of qualitative data is considered as an advantage by some researchers and as a disadvantage by others. It is viewed as an advantage since it provides a deep understanding of the topic of research within a specific context. It is considered as a disadvantage because it does not provide a statistical generalisability of the findings.

The transferability or the relevance of the findings of this study to other contexts can be argued to fit into what Maxwell (1996) (cited in Robson 2002) referred to as 'analytic or theoretical transferability'. That is, this study is concerned about gaining theoretical insights that would help understanding similar situations. In the Omani context, the findings of this study provide useful insights into the nature and development of Omani teachers' professional identity other than those involved in this study. There is also a potential for analytic transferability beyond Oman, as HRD practitioners and teacher educators working in similar situations can gain insights that would help them understand the complexities of teacher professional identity development in their own contexts.

However, it is worth mentioning here that the evaluation of the transferability of this study research findings to similar contexts depends entirely on the perception of the reader. Shenton (2004) maintained that the interpretive researcher is able to relate to the context but unable to make inferences about the transferability of his/her research results as these are determined by the readers. Graneheim and Lundman (2004) shared a similar viewpoint and asserted that "*the authors can give suggestions about transferability, but it is the reader's decision whether or not the findings are transferable to another context*" (p.110).

4.13.3 Dependability

Richards (2009) considered that dependability in interpretive research involves “*an interrogation of the context and the methods used to derive the data*” (p. 159). This interrogation, as Richards argued, needs to include providing details about the research site and participants and the relevance of the methodology to the purpose of the study. It should also include discussing how data collection methods were actually used to generate the data and being explicit about the process of data analysis. Following Denzin (1989), Creswell and Miller (2000) used the term “*rich and thick description*”, which they used to refer to “*deep, dense, detailed accounts*” of the research process which enable the readers to be transported into the research setting and process (p.128). Such accounts are vital in helping the readers to make informed decisions about the relevance of research findings to their own contexts. In addition, an in-depth and detailed account of the various research procedures is essential in enabling other researchers to replicate similar research in other contexts.

In chapters one and two of this thesis, I attempted to provide a rich and thick description of the Omani context and the rationale of this study. In chapter three, a discussion on the theoretical framework used in the present study and its appropriateness for investigating teacher professional identity development was provided. This chapter involves sections which include details on the methodological considerations of this study, from deciding upon the research paradigm and outlining its appropriateness to the focus of the study, the procedures and methods of data collection and ending with an account of the data analysis process.

4.13.4 Confirmability

Confirmability in interpretive research “*depends on making the data available to the reader and this in turn depends on the transparency of representation*” (Richards, 2009, p.160). Interpretive researchers can ensure the confirmability of their studies by providing rich representations of participants’ voices and perspectives which should clearly emerge in the research report. Shenton (2004) asserted that this procedure ensures the minimum influence of the researcher’s bias over the research findings and makes certain that the reported findings are the participants’ direct thoughts and experiences.

As the topic of this study is teachers’ views on the nature and development of their professional identity, it is of a vital importance to provide rich accounts of participants’ various perspectives which reflect their thoughts, feelings and experiences. Therefore, the presentation and the discussion of this study findings take into account the centrality of teachers’ views and consider them as the unifying theme which link all the proposed arguments.

Consideration and awareness of some relevant ethical issues play a vital role in enhancing the trustworthiness of the present study. The following section discusses in general the ethical issues that have been taken into consideration during the process of this study.

4.14 Ethical considerations

The ethical considerations discussed in this section were considered at different stages of the research process and they reflect the concern of the researcher to get the participants’ acceptance and protect them from any possible mental or

emotional distress or harm. Prior to data collection, I began by obtaining ethical approval from the University of Exeter, Graduate School of Education Research Ethics Committee (see Appendix 9).

4.14.1 Access and acceptance

At the initial stage of a research process, access and acceptance are considered to be important ethical issues (Cohen, et al., 2007). They relate to the researcher gaining access to the participants and being accepted by the organisation to carry out the required fieldwork. This access is usually granted by a gatekeeper, which in the case of the present study is the Ministry of Education. Therefore, to enable teachers to participate in this study, I wrote a letter in Arabic (the official language of the country) to the 'Technical Office of Studies and Development', the department in charge of giving permission for research to be carried out in schools (see Appendix 10). This letter explained the purpose of the study, the research phases and data collection methods. This letter was supported by an English version of my research proposal including the objectives and the data collection methods and copies of the research instruments I was planning to use for the collection of the data. The Technical Office issued emails to various bodies at the Ministry and to the Educational General Directorates in the three governorates to allow me as a researcher to contact teachers and collect the required information. The Director Generals in the three regions forwarded the emails to schools to provide the necessary cooperation and assistance.

4.14.2 Informed consent

Informed consent gives participants the right to decide whether to take part in a research or not. This decision is based on the facts and information provided to

them (Cohen, et al., 2007). This information needs to include the purpose of the research, who the data are being gathered for, the use of the data, the questions to be asked and the benefits and risks for the participants involved (Patton, 2002). Accordingly, before collecting any data from the participants, they were provided with the required information about the research in order to seek their formal and written agreement to take part in this current research. Meanwhile, it was made very clear that their participation was voluntary and they were free to withdraw from the study at any time (see Appendix 1).

4.14.3 Anonymity of participants

Accepting that anonymity of research participants is the norm when conducting research (Lancaster, 2017), unless participants themselves explicitly and formally express the contrary, researchers need to take extra care to protect the identity of the research participants throughout the research process. In this study, participants chose to conceal their identities and thus they were assured that there will be no mention of their names or any information which could make them identifiable in any published work of this study report. They were asked to choose a pseudonym via which they would be represented in the report. Therefore, the utmost caution was taken in order to prevent participants from being recognised since anonymity is their choice.

4.14.4 Confidentiality

In this study, the focus of the investigation is on teachers' views, which is very likely to include personal information; thus protecting the privacy of the participants by keeping data confidential is of utmost concern. Denscombe (2002) argued that ensuring confidentiality helps to reduce the participants' concerns about presenting

themselves and as a result encourages more open responses. Researchers are obliged to make certain assurances to the participants that adequate security measures are taken into account. In the present study, participants were assured that data generated by them would strictly be used for research purposes and would not be revealed to anyone outside this framework. The data I gathered for this study included audio-recorded discussions of semi-structured interviews. These audio files were downloaded on my personal computer which no one else uses; in addition they were secured by passwords as well as the computer itself. As for the sheets produced by the participants as responses for the drawing and text method and the graphic story-line technique, a written declaration was taken from the participants to use these in the published report. In spite of this, these were kept in locked cabinets, where no one else had access to them except the researcher. Therefore, the information gained about the participants and data produced by them were kept secure and protected from inadvertent disclosure to others.

4.14.5 Avoidance of harm

I currently work as a Teacher Trainer in the Specialised Centre for the Professional Training of Teachers (SCPTT) in the Ministry of Education which is responsible for designing professional training programmes and training teachers, head teachers and supervisors from all over Oman. Being considered as a Ministry official might have had an impact on the participant. Teachers might be reluctant to explicitly express their views in regards to the Ministry policies. They may be reserved about expressing negative views about ministerial decisions and practices for fear of being harmed by such disclosures. Therefore, participants were assured that no

harm would be imposed on them as a result of taking part in this study and their anonymous responses would only be used for the purposes of the current research.

4.15 Scope and constraints of the research methodology

The research questions and methodology for this thesis were devised to allow me to examine the nature of Omani teachers' professional self-images, the evolution process of these images and to explore the impact of CPD opportunities on the development of these images. My intention was to explore the professional lives of Omani teachers in an open-ended and free-flowing way through their own perspectives and voices as encapsulated in their experiences and stories. This was to give me a lens on the form, formation and evolution of their professional identities. I do not claim that a sample of fourteen teachers represents the entire teaching profession working in the Omani government schools. However, the experiences of the range of the sampled participants, chosen with respect to diversity in terms of career stage, subject matter, taught level, gender and school context, gives an insight into the nature and the process of professional identity evolution across a cross-section of the teaching profession in Oman.

In relation to the sample, another limitation of this study could be linked with the very small number of male participants compared with the female participants: only two males out of fourteen. In fact, I was aware of this before the actual data collection stage. However, all my attempts to increase the number of the male participants were not successful. Through my contacts and colleagues, I managed to get verbal approval from 7 male teachers. However, after sending them the

information sheet which details what is required from them as participants in this research, they apologised for not being able to participate due to school time constraints and work load. Meeting these participants outside the school and the school timings was not possible due to cultural reasons. As a woman it is culturally inappropriate to meet a man who is not a father, a brother, a son or a husband outside work places and work timings. Thus, it is very likely that the findings of this study are dominated by female teachers' views and perceptions of the nature and evolution process of Omani teachers' professional identity. Certainly, the participation of more male teachers would have given a further dimension to the data and a more comprehensive picture of Omani teachers' perceptions and experiences.

The use of drawings in this study offered a rich and insightful stimulus to explore how the participant teachers make sense of themselves and their profession. However, their use also posed some constraints. I was lucky enough to get all the drawing and text sheets completed and none of the 14 participants refused to draw. I do not think that showed a commitment to someone they do not know (me), but a commitment to the people through whom I was able to get in touch with these participants and who introduced me and my research to them. Despite this, in the interviews some participants explicitly stated that my request to draw came as a surprise to them and they were about to hand me the sheets blank because they cannot draw. Although these teachers responded positively to my request, it is very likely that similar requests will face rejection. This is because of the common belief that not everyone can draw and that drawings need to be professional. In addition, although participants were completely free to draw what a teacher meant to them, I

am aware that the generated images as much as they deployed rich and meaningful knowledge, they excluded some other knowledge. The follow-up interviews attempted to dig deep and explore different aspects of these images but the generated images were still the main point of reference for this follow-up exploration.

Furthermore, the design of the graphic story-line produced significant data when carefully explored. I discovered that these story-lines tell a more interesting story than the one they were meant to tell. Initially, I decided to use this tool to examine the factors which influence the development of the professional identity of Omani teachers. The initial analysis of the piloting stage data resulted in coding some of the factors. However, careful analysis of the actual data by this method showed that the participants were actually telling the story of their evolution process as teachers throughout their career path. The evaluation component included in the design of the tool along with the chronological order of the years of experience gave rise to such data. The factors were embedded within the yielded data. The design of the tool made the participants narrate their career stories and highlighted the most important dynamic aspects of their professional identity from their viewpoints and perspectives.

Notwithstanding these limitations, I believe the findings and the discussion of this thesis which are presented in the following chapters have something new to offer, bearing in mind that the purpose of this interpretive study is not to make large-scale generalisations. The learning point is to address these limitations in future

research projects on teacher professional identity and the contribution of CPD opportunities on this identity.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have presented an explanation of the orientation of this study in terms of the philosophical underpinnings, a justification of the research design and methodology and a description of the tools and methods used in collecting and analysing data. This has situated this study within the area of interpretive research, as a consequence of both the study's main purpose and the techniques employed to value and privilege participants' voices. Thus, this chapter has presented the methodology and methods used to explore the nature and evolution process of teacher professional identity and the contribution of the CPD opportunities in the development of this identity in the Omani context.

In the chapters which follow data is presented and analysed in order to develop an understanding of the nature of Omani teachers' professional identity, the evolution process of this identity throughout career path and the impact of CPD opportunities on the development of this identity. In the following chapter, I proceed to examine and analyse the professional self-images resulted from the analysis of the follow-up semi-structured interviews which were based on the 'drawing and text' stimulus tasks.

5. Images of Teachers' Sense of their Professional Identity

Introduction

This chapter (chapter 5) and the following three chapters (chapter 6, 7 and 8) analyse and interpret the findings of the data from both stimuli tasks and the semi-structured interviews. These findings were obtained by adopting inductive thematic coding. Thus, findings in these chapters are presented according to the themes derived from the data in order to develop an understanding of the nature of Omani teachers' sense of their professional identity (chapters 5 and 6), the process of the evolution of this sense over the career path of these teachers (chapter 7) and the role of CPD opportunities in the development of this identity (chapter 8). The findings presented in these chapters attempt to answer the following research questions:

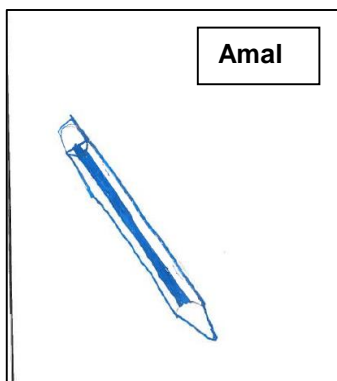
RQ1: How do Omani teachers view themselves and the work they do as teachers?

RQ2: How has this view evolved over the career path of Omani teachers?

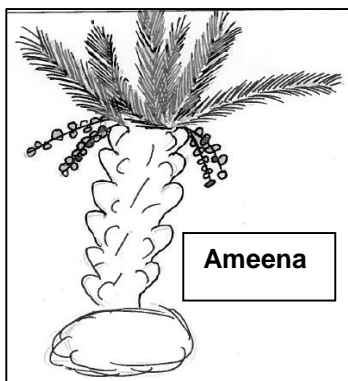
RQ3: To what extent have the CPD opportunities provided by the Human Resources Development (HRD) Directorate in the Ministry of Education contributed to the development of Omani teachers' professional identity?

In this chapter, I present teachers' conceptualisations of their sense of professional identity; in other words, representations of teachers' understandings of their own professional identity. The findings of these representations were drawn from two highly interrelated data sets: the 'drawing and text' stimuli task and its follow-up semi-structured interview with the fourteen participant teachers. Each participant teacher produced a drawing illustrating their conceptualisations of what a teacher

means to them. Thus, fourteen different pictures were attained as a result of this task. These are as follows:



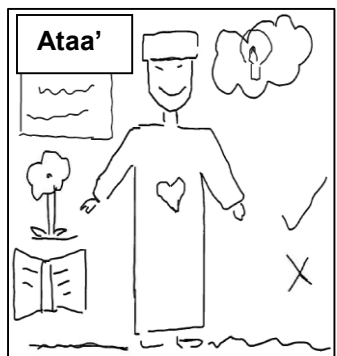
Amal



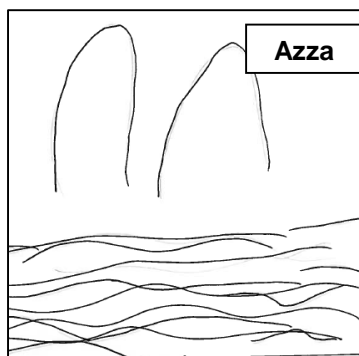
Ameena



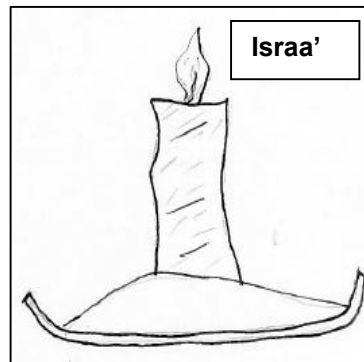
Asya



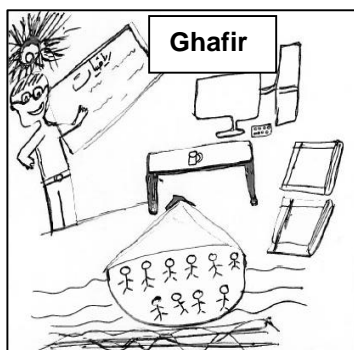
Ataa'



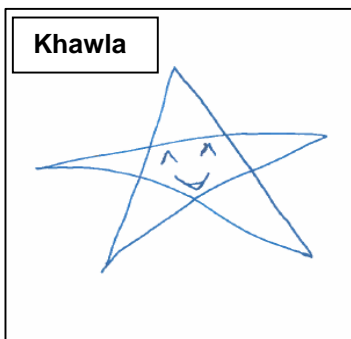
Azza



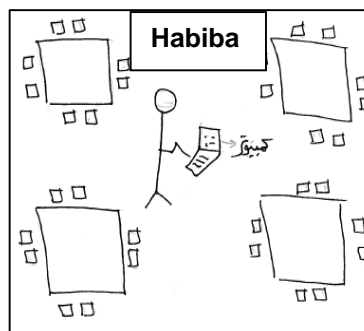
Israa'



Ghafir



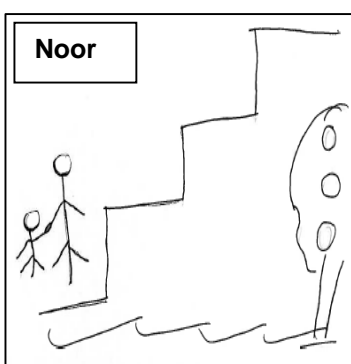
Khawla



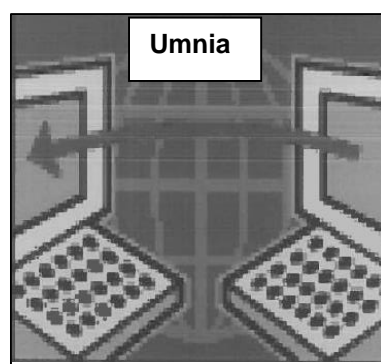
Habiba



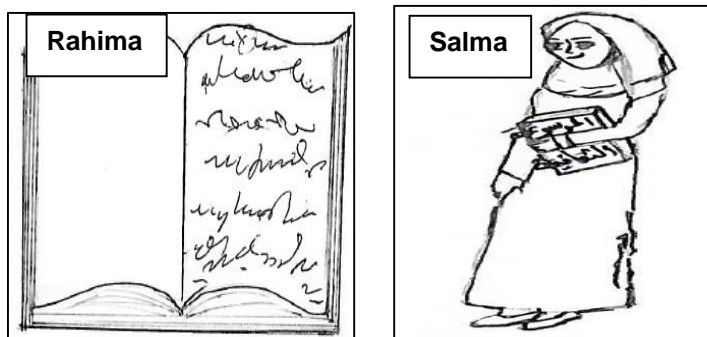
Manaar



Noor



Umnia



The follow-up interview at this step was designed to encourage teachers to interpret their drawings and sometimes their texts, and aimed at revealing these teachers' professional identities. The responses from this follow-up interview provided data which represented these teachers' perceived professional self-images, conceptualisations of themselves as Omani teachers. The analysis of this interview data revealed four types of professional self-images and accordingly, this chapter was structured into four sections. These are:

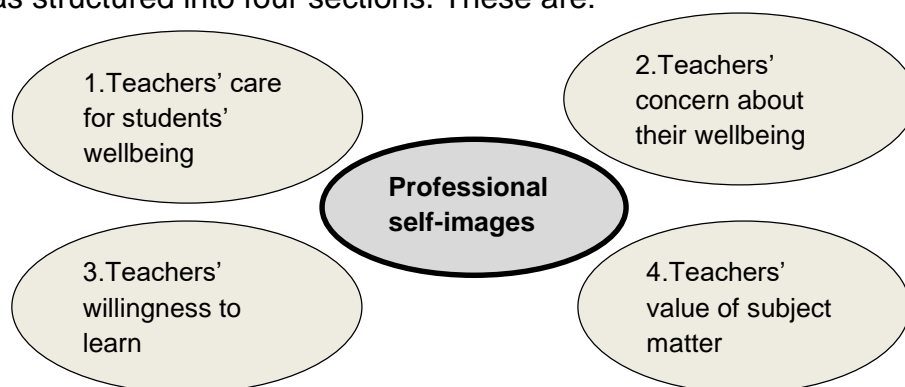


Figure 5.1: Themes related to professional self-images

It is worth mentioning here that I did not analyse and interpret the drawings and texts produced by the participant teachers. However, I analysed and interpreted the participant teachers' interpretations of the produced images and texts which were obtained through the follow-up interviews. That is, the findings in this chapter were gained through the analysis of what the participant teachers said about their

drawings and texts. Therefore, all the presented quotes in this chapter were drawn from the participant teachers' interview accounts and were sometimes supported by visual items from their drawings where appropriate.

5.1 Teachers' care for students' well-being

The findings demonstrated that teachers care about developing their students' morals and values, and empathise with students by supporting their emotional and social welfare. Although teachers stated that they found it difficult to symbolise these aspects, it was evident in some of their drawings and sometimes explicitly explained in the accompanied texts. They were expressed by the use of symbols such as a rose, a heart, a smiley face, a tick and a cross, teacher's outfits, holding hands, a fruitful tree, stairs and a smiley star.

5.1.1 Moral development of students

Many teachers expressed a high level of care about developing their students' morals and values and considered this to be a priority and a prerequisite for any efforts directed towards developing and supporting students' academic knowledge and skills. They viewed themselves as **educators and not only teachers**. This role, they perceived, obliged them to pay great attention to another dimension of students' attainment which is the attainment of morals and values.

"It is the Ministry of Education, not the ministry of teaching...I am trying to say that a teacher is not only in a class with a book, a board and a marker. The teacher first of all needs to take care of his students' morals and values...the corner stone in teaching is morals" (Noor)

"I think I am an educator before and then a teacher...a teacher who tries as much as she can to instil morals within the students...I do this by caring about the girls first and foremost" (Khawla)

The role of the teacher in nurturing and fostering the moral dimension of the students' well-being was viewed as vital in an age of accelerating changes and diverse social challenges. Some of the participant teachers showed awareness of the effects and threats of different social media programmes on the cultural and social norms and values of Omani society. They expressed a sense of responsibility towards advising and **guiding their students to keep to the Islamic and Omani norms and values.**

“Her outfits, her thinking, her morals and values in general, this I could not draw... I try as possible to dress up in a way suitable for a C2 [years 5-10] girls within the frame of the Sharia' laws (Islamic teachings). Especially these days, girls are open to different sources of social media and they see a lot of things not within this frame. So I think they need to see a real example of a person who follows these laws in her outfits in a way that is modern at the same time” (Salma)

“Students these days are open to so many social media websites and apps, they tend to copy what they see and hear, not all are suitable for our norms and values. I am sure you have heard and seen these things in the society. As a teacher, I need to notice these things, advice students and guide students to the right way” (Habiba)

Some teachers went to the extent of measuring their success with how much **impact their morals and values had on their students.** They considered this to be their long-lasting impact on their students, one which students preserve and keep remembering even at times when little or nothing has been preserved of the taught subject matter. They perceived such an impact as a source of joy and job satisfaction.

“They will keep praying for us and appreciate us even after they leave school. Actually we see this now when we meet our students in public places like malls or centres, they recognize us and come and talk to us. If I did not leave good impact on them because of my morals and the way I dealt with them not because of my subject matter knowledge, some of them did not score well and they do not have jobs and did not get a chance in the university, but still our good impact on them made

them eager to come and talk to us. For me, this is success, it makes me even happier than finding my students in the university.” (Noor)

Valuing students is how these two teachers described their care about developing their students’ morals and values. They stated:

“My students need to see that I care about them, I value them, they are important to me. For example, I noticed some girls laughing loudly in one of my lessons. This has nothing to do with my subject matter and girls are not going to be assessed on. I could have just ignored it and moved on. But I tend to talk to the girls and advise them about the consequences of this and how it might affect how people would regard them” (Khawla)

“You see these ticks and crosses, this means that a teacher needs to be a guide for her students, not an academic guide only but a life guide as well. Girls do care if they see that the teacher values them and care about them being good people” (Ataa’)

Besides caring about students’ morals and values, teachers demonstrated awareness of the vital role their own morals and values play in undertaking the role of an educator. Interestingly, this role was perceived to be mainly but not exclusively linked to teachers’ morals and values. Thus, they considered themselves **role models for their students**. They also showed an awareness of the influences and impact their social behaviour and cultural values have on the construction of their students’ personalities.

“First and most is my morals, a teacher is all about morals. His morals are the role model for the students” (Noor)

“Morals are very important things because he (the teacher) represents a role model for students. Students take many behaviours from their teachers either intentionally or unintentionally, a very big part of students’ personality is being affected by the teacher’s behaviours as well as their thinking and morals” (Manaar)

The importance of the existence and the practice of teachers’ morals and values for this Maths teacher was linked to arousing her students’ interests in the subject

matter and creating a willingness and eagerness to learn abstract and challenging mathematical content knowledge.

“From the first lesson with the students, the first thing students notice is not the subject matter knowledge of the teacher but teacher’s morals... If the teacher is dealing with the students morally, he can attract their attention from the first day...will make them accept what you teach them whether it is abstract or challenging” (Noor)

Viewing themselves as educators who care about their students becoming decent human beings by promoting their key moral qualities suggests that these teachers value their students. For these participant teachers, it seems that teaching is not only a job, it is a calling. It has at its core a desire to make a difference in students’ lives by enacting the role of the *‘life guide’*. This desire is backed by a confidence in their own moral capacity which is represented in them being a *‘role model’* for their students. This moral capacity seems to be derived from these teachers social *‘norms and values’* and religious beliefs which are represented in *‘Sharia laws’*. That is, these teachers’ conceptualisations of themselves as educators and particularly as *‘moral developers’* can be said to stem from and be driven by their social and religious beliefs and values.

5.1. 2 Emotional and social welfare of students

The data disclosed a high level of teacher care, and most importantly, support to their students’ emotional and social well-being. Teachers stressed the need to emotionally connect with students and **understand students’ personal and social tensions** and problems in order to best serve their academic needs. This necessitates communicating with their students in a motherly and brotherly manner and provide advice about different issues in life as these two teachers explained:

“We as teachers should not just go to class as teachers, at the end we might have students who have lost their mothers, I can deal with them as a mother and as an advisor” (Atta)

“I am trying to say that a teacher is not only in a class with a book, a board and a marker. The teacher first of all needs to be like a big brother, second like a family with the students, students are spending more time in school than at home” (Noor)

Developing personally connected relationships with students was found to be dominant in the teachers’ accounts of themselves as teachers. This was evident in teachers’ descriptions of their relationships with students as affectionate, close, secure and empathetic as expressed by these teachers.

“Here (pointing to the text) I wrote the ‘affective dimension of a teacher is considered to be the most important dimension in building a strong relationship with students’, I need to be close to the girls, deal with them as a big sister” (Manaar)

“I am very close to the students, I am close to their problems and challenges. I always try to be close to the students and get them to trust me. The heart here, not in its right place though, means that as a teacher I need to be empathetic and try to win the students’ love” (Ataa’)

These kinds of relationships were considered by most teachers to be a vital ingredient for students’ academic performance and success, which should not be overlooked.

“This (affective dimension) is very important because this reflects in her (the student) performance with me in the subject” (Manaar)

“There are so many things make students not achieve well, homes are full with different problems and challenges...When we teachers appreciate this and deal with the students based on this knowledge, then we can help them to move to the next level” (Noor)

As educators, the participating teachers perceived this role as including the duty to support and develop students’ social well-being. That is, to **sense and get to know students’ social problems** and difficulties with those around them, and support them to resolve these.

“Especially these days, girls are having lots of problems either in school with other students or other teachers or even at home. I shouldn’t only give scientific knowledge, at the same time I need to know who is this girl I am dealing with, I mean her background, and help her with her problems” (Manaar)

“I always tell the girls that it is true that I am your teacher but if you think I can help you with any of your problems please do not hesitate to do so” (Salma)

This acute sense of the importance of supporting and developing students’ social well-being is reflected in Ataa’s view of herself as a social counsellor and illustrated in Manaar’s attempt to help one of her students to resolve a conflict in her relationship with both parents.

“There are other things about me which are not in the drawing. I wanted to show that a teacher needs to be a social counsellor but couldn’t express it well in the drawing” (Ataa’)

“I told them (the students) don’t you want to share this success (exam results) with someone...why not to take your exam paper with my feedback and show it to your parents. All the girls were very excited about the idea except one girl although she scored a very good mark. She said I do not want to show it to my parents. I wondered why she is behaving like this. I talked to her privately and I got to know that her parents are separated and she is living with her grandparents who do not care about such things. I suggested that I can send two copies, one for her mother and one for her father. With the help of the Head teacher, I sent the copies to both parents. When she got the results of the second term exam, herself asked me to send it to both parents and she scored even better mark than the previous exam” (Manaar)

In each school in Oman, there is a qualified social specialist, a BA holder in Sociology, whose role is to deal with students’ social problems and tensions in and outside school. Despite this fact, some participating teachers considered this to be their duty and not the social specialist’s, unless the problem was beyond their reach.

“It is my duty first to do this for my students. I try my best to help them with their problems and if I couldn’t then I refer them to the social specialist” (Manaar)

This sense of duty was attributed to the unique kind of relationships and bonds between teachers and students. These make teachers closer to the students than the social specialists and therefore, better able to understand them and their problems, as expressed by the following teacher:

“There are social specialists in schools but they are not as close to the students as we teachers. They do not know what is going on in classrooms, we know. Even if the students go to the social specialist and tell her about their problems she will not be able to understand the situation as I do, because she does not deal with the girls as I do. So I need to solve such problems and guide my students” (Ataa’)

Interestingly, some teachers’ stated that some students feel more secure opening up to teachers and sharing personal problems with them than they do with their parents.

“You might not believe this, there are some problems we know from the students that even their parents don’t know about. We can sense these problems and students sometimes feel comfortable opening up to us than their parents. These social relationships with the students are important because we are close to them” (Manaar).

Representing themselves as ‘a mother’, ‘a big brother’ and ‘a big sister’ emphasises the great value these teachers place on their personally connected relationships with their students. In Omani society these figures are often considered to be affectionate and trusted. They play the role of advising, guiding and supporting other family members. This highlights that this particular image of care and support for students’ emotional and social welfare stems from these teachers’ emotional beliefs and cultural norms.

This finding of a caring teacher demonstrates clearly that the participant teachers’ values about education relate to their emotions, social norms and religious beliefs,

which are enacted in teachers' daily practices and expressed in terms of being 'a *life guide*' and '*social counsellor*'.

5.2 Teachers' concerns about their well-being

The participant teachers, especially those teaching post-basic classes (years 11 and 12), appeared to be concerned about the increasing demands and pressures of the teaching job and their impacts on their physical and mental health. These concerns were represented by the use of symbols, such as a mountain, a burning candle, a sharpened pencil and a palm tree.

Azza, for instance, chose to draw the teacher as a solid mountain which should be strong enough to face the rough sea, in her attempt to illustrate the burdens and pressures teachers are regularly confronted with. These, she indicated, negatively affect **teachers' physical health**.

"The mountain in the picture means that the teacher needs to be strong, I mean in a very good health because if he is not he is going to suffer a lot a lot...the teacher needs to have strength like the one in Satan, believe me, who else can shoulder the burdens and pressures on us teachers. He needs to have strength and health because he is exerting too much effort" (Azza)

A burning candle is the only image Israa' chose to draw for what a teacher meant to her which illustrates how the teaching job's demands and burdens are causing her **emotional burnout**. This image revealed the overwhelming levels of stress and anxiety teachers are experiencing in their day-to-day practices in schools which negatively affect their well-being.

"I try not to show them (the students) my frustrations, my stress and my worries even if I am burning from inside because I always think that they have nothing to do with this" (Israa')

Similarly, Amal's image of her professional-self demonstrated how teachers run empty year after year and how they invest themselves in order to fulfil the increasing working loads placed on them. The sharpened pencil icon Amal chose to describe her professional self-image represents this well.

"The teacher every year loses part of his health and memory because he is working very hard. Teaching is like the sharpener that takes a part of you and I feel every year the sharpener takes bigger and bigger part, but at the end that part does not come back" (Amal)

On the contrary, interestingly, although the demands of teaching constituted part of Ameena's image of her professional-self, these were viewed in terms of a teacher's capacity to manage such demands, which contributes to their resilience and the significance of this in an effective teacher's performance. This is evident in Ameena's representation of teachers, including herself, as palm tree branches which remain fixed and sturdy in the face of strong winds.

"I face so many challenges and difficulties as a teacher but I am still lofty, because if I bend and break I will not be able to perform well, I need to keep myself going. I mean if we just think about the difficulties and the obstacles we will not be able to perform well...you see the branches here, do you know that the palm tree is the only tree which its branches do not fall unless being cut. This means we teachers need to be strong and do not fall in front of winds" (Ameena)

Frustrated and worn-out teachers are the professional self-images perceived and expressed in the above participants' accounts. These images are caused by the increasing workload and demands on teachers and they clearly highlight the impact of this on these teachers' physical and mental health. These unfavourable work conditions can be assumed to impact the teaching and the learning process and to act as push factors for the new generation to not consider teaching as a career choice.

5.3 Teachers' willingness to learn and develop professionally

Besides representing teachers' physical and mental health, interestingly, the burning candle, the pencil and the palm tree, were interpreted quite differently, in fact positively, to represent teachers' willingness to learn and develop professionally. In addition, an open book with some empty pages and two wirelessly-connected computers were used to illustrate this readiness for professional learning.

Viewing herself as a burning candle, Israa' demonstrated agency in regard to the role of her years of experience in making her better aware of her students' needs and abilities. These demanding years of experience did not stop her from discovering new teaching methods and strategies.

"The good thing in the candle that yeah it is burning but we can still make it again as a new candle...I reformulate myself...I can brighten again in a new way. So I will be a new candle in a different shape...The material of the candle does not vanish, unlike other things which burn into ashes. It is difficult to rebuild them again into new things. It's true that I am burning, but I can still come back in a new way and enlighten in a way different than before" (Israa')

In the same vein, symbolising herself as a sharpened pencil, Amal expressed awareness of the importance of on-going renewal and update in order to make herself a better practitioner and to perform effectively. She stated that teachers need to be dynamic and engaging in order to respond effectively to students' needs and to requirements of classroom life. She explicitly expressed readiness to change and improve.

"The teacher is like a pencil, using the pencil needs you to sharpen it, to be effective, the same as the teacher...I chose a pencil not a pen, have you noticed the rubber at the end?, because it can be corrected...even if he makes a mistake he can correct it and change it to be better. The

teacher is not static even if he has a well- planned lesson, there is always a space for change and improvement” (Amal)

Similarly, Ameena’s image of herself as a palm tree, which is a symbol for patience and resilience in the face of the burdens and pressures of teaching, took another interpretive angle, which has to do with her commitment to improve herself professionally in order to better serve students.

“Something else in the palm tree, we live on its harvest throughout the whole year with different coloured and types of dates. This is the teacher, he is a giver, gives different and useful things for the students throughout the year. But to be able to give us tasty dates, palm trees need regular clean water, good fertilizer and care exactly like us teachers. To give students useful things, we need to read, search, question and try out new things” (Ameena)

Rahima, an experienced teacher, with 17 years of experience, described herself as having an on-going commitment to renew her teaching. She viewed herself as an open book with some pages already written and others waiting to be written on.

“The written pages are the accumulated experiences and the white ones are the teacher’s search for new ideas and strategies...which are new and up-to-date. I mean that even experienced teachers like me...are able to develop and improve because they are in an on-going giving process...Although I have so many things to give now, I still think that the future is having so many things that I have not tried before and these might be better than what I am having now” (Rahima)

Despite the fact that Rahima agreed with the importance of teachers being self-regulated in their pursuit for professional learning and development, as also stated by other teachers above, she brought up the issue of the role of others in helping teachers to develop professionally. She explicitly linked unlocking teachers’ existing potential with this role in relation to designing and implementing structured and systematic professional development opportunities.

“The teacher is an on-going giver. He has a lot of things to give. These might not be clear for him now but they are there. If they (teachers) get the chance to be developed and improved in a systematic and organised way, these things will get out and benefit students and education”
(Rahima)

Omnia, with 18 years of experience, agreed that a teacher professional development is their own responsibility, although shared with other professionals in their work situation. Viewing herself as a computer connected wirelessly to another computer, Omnia illustrated the significance of others within and outside school in developing and changing herself professionally.

“You cannot just work alone if you want to improve yourself and keep yourself going. There should be a group around you, interact with them and develop yourself from and within this group...Communication not only with the school community even the outside community. I learn a lot from parents. They might come to me and say that you are a good teacher but my child is not happy with this or that. This is important. It is a chance to develop and change” (Omnia)

This could possibly be attributed to the fact that both Rahima and Umnia are senior teachers -(heads of subject departments) and so are responsible for planning and structuring such professional development opportunities in their schools for their teachers.

This finding of teachers’ willingness and readiness to learn and develop professionally is, in fact, promising. It makes us wonder and question our observations as in-service teacher educators in Oman regarding teachers’ reluctance and sometimes rejection of some professional development opportunities. In fact, most importantly, as professional development providers it makes us reconsider the when, where, what, how and with who aspects of the

professional development opportunities provided for teachers, which is the focus of chapter 8.

5.4 Teachers' value of subject matter knowledge

Most participant teachers brought up subject matter knowledge in their illustrations and accounts of describing their professional self-image. This was mainly symbolised by the use of a book icon, except for one participant who chose to represent it by the roots of a palm tree. Possessing a good repertoire of specialised subject matter knowledge was linked to being a competent teacher, having professional self-confidence and being positively recognised in the teaching community, as expressed by these teachers.

“The teacher needs to be competent, the base here and the roots means that he needs to be competent, academically” (Ameena)

“I still think if you have a very good scientific background you...enter the class and you are confident about yourself, I have got a correct and good scientific knowledge which I can pass to the girls” (Salma)

“I remember when I was first allocated in this school, that was my first year, my subject supervisor, I still remember his words, he told me ‘Manaar, if you want to be recognised, you should be recognised for your strong and solid academic knowledge’...Now after 10 years I can say he was right. I owe him a lot in this regard” (Manaar)

This is because, as teachers stated, such a solid repertoire of subject matter knowledge enables them to notice the deficiencies in the content knowledge provided to students in the school textbooks. Manaar gave the example of a diagram of ‘the tongue and taste buds in year 12’, which illustrated that different sections of the tongue are exclusively responsible for different basic tastes and how her good subject knowledge made her notice the misconception in this regard.

“I have doubts about the information in the book...when comparing it with the English references I have, I found that this information in the school textbook is scientifically wrong” (Manaar)

In addition, Salma expressed a similar evaluative function for her good subject knowledge, but in her case it was used for judging the correctness of the scientific information students bring in to classroom from different internet sources.

“When I teach a point in Science, girls say ‘but teacher we read so and so in twitter’. Also in Science we have a self-learning task... the girls bring different information from different sources like twitter and even sometimes Facebook and these are often contradictory information.. here as a teacher I need to be knowledgeable and ...I need to be a judge in deciding on the correct scientific information” (Salma)

As well as viewing themselves possessing a good repertoire of subject matter knowledge, these teachers demonstrated an awareness of the importance of continuous pro-active pursuit and updating of this type of knowledge. This importance was mainly attributed to the on-going changes and developments in the world of knowledge and students’ easy access to information.

“You might be thrown with different questions, some students might be good readers, they all have their own devices at home, how should I deal with this? This required me to be up to date with my readings. Besides, there are many changes going on in the world around us, the information I give today might change next year, I need to be a good reader as well” (Ataa’)

Interestingly, Habiba provided a quite different image of herself as a teacher in regard to subject matter knowledge. Rather than possessing this type of knowledge, she presented herself as a guide and an organiser of students’ access to such knowledge.

“The teacher is an organiser and a guide for the students’ subject knowledge...organises how different information gets to the students either by peer learning or new communication ways...if you have noticed the picture I drew, the teacher is in the middle and the students are in

*groups around him...in a way that he can manage their communication...
He is a helping hand, a guide, an organiser” (Habiba)*

These teachers' value of their own and their students' repertoire of subject matter knowledge reflects some aspects of the educational context these teachers work in. The educational system in Oman is an exam-oriented system, which is heavily built on crammed curricular at all educational levels. Such a system as these participants have experienced as students as well as teachers has certainly formulated their beliefs about good teachers and shaped some aspects of their professional identity.

To sum up, the key findings from this section revealed that care about and support for students' well-being and concerns about teachers' well-being are of paramount importance to the participant teachers. This indicates teachers' involvement in emotionally-connected relationships with students and their dissatisfaction with the on-going and increasing demands and requirements placed on them by the Ministry of Education. As for the first of these aspects, it indicates teachers' positive feelings for their role as educators which are considered to be important for effective and quality teaching. The caring aspect suggests that teachers like and enjoy what they do, which links teachers' emotions with their professional identity. The support aspect in relation to students' social problems and tensions indicates the influence of cultural norms and values on teachers' professional lives and therefore the constitution of their professional identity.

Concerns about teachers' well-being as a consequence of the perpetual demands and burdens on teachers does not contradict the above interpretation of teachers being passionate about teaching. In fact, it highlights the tensions and conflicts

teachers are experiencing in the Omani educational system. That is, teachers believe that their main role as educators, and not only teachers, is to care about and support students' moral, emotional and social well-being which is considered to be vital for their academic success. However, the increasing demands and burdens placed on teachers, which are affecting their physical and mental health, do not leave enough space for teachers to think about and support students' learning in both domains. This signposts a mismatch between what teachers understand 'being a teacher' means and how the educational context forces them to behave.

Moreover, the image of the caring teacher was manifested in the participant teachers' accounts revealing their willingness to learn and develop professionally. Their care about students' learning and academic attainments acts as a motivator for professional learning and growth, which was pursued by utilising various means and routes as will be clarified in the following chapters.

6. Becoming and Being a teacher

Introduction

This chapter presents in more depth the findings related to teachers' conceptualisations of themselves in relation to their work. The participant teachers were asked to respond to a number of interview questions designed around the three key components of professional identity identified by Sachs (2005). These components of attention include 'how to be', 'how to act' and 'how to understand their work and place in the society'. Following Sachs, an in-depth investigation into these three components of teachers' professional life provides an insightful understanding of teachers' professional identity, bearing in mind the flexibility and the dynamicity of such an identity.

The notion 'being a teacher' relates to Mead's (1934) notion of 'self' consisting of the 'Me'; the social self that is created in social interactions and which an individual constantly responds to. In this chapter, the expression 'being a teacher' relates to the exploration of individuals as they exist in their present social context: Omani teachers teaching in Omani schools. The exploration of this social context through the teachers' perceptions resulted in data which following Sachs (2005) was categorised into three main themes (see Appendix 6). Each theme has sub-themes which resulted from the inductive analysis of the data generated from participants' responses to the second section of the first phase interview. These themes and their sub-themes are as follows:

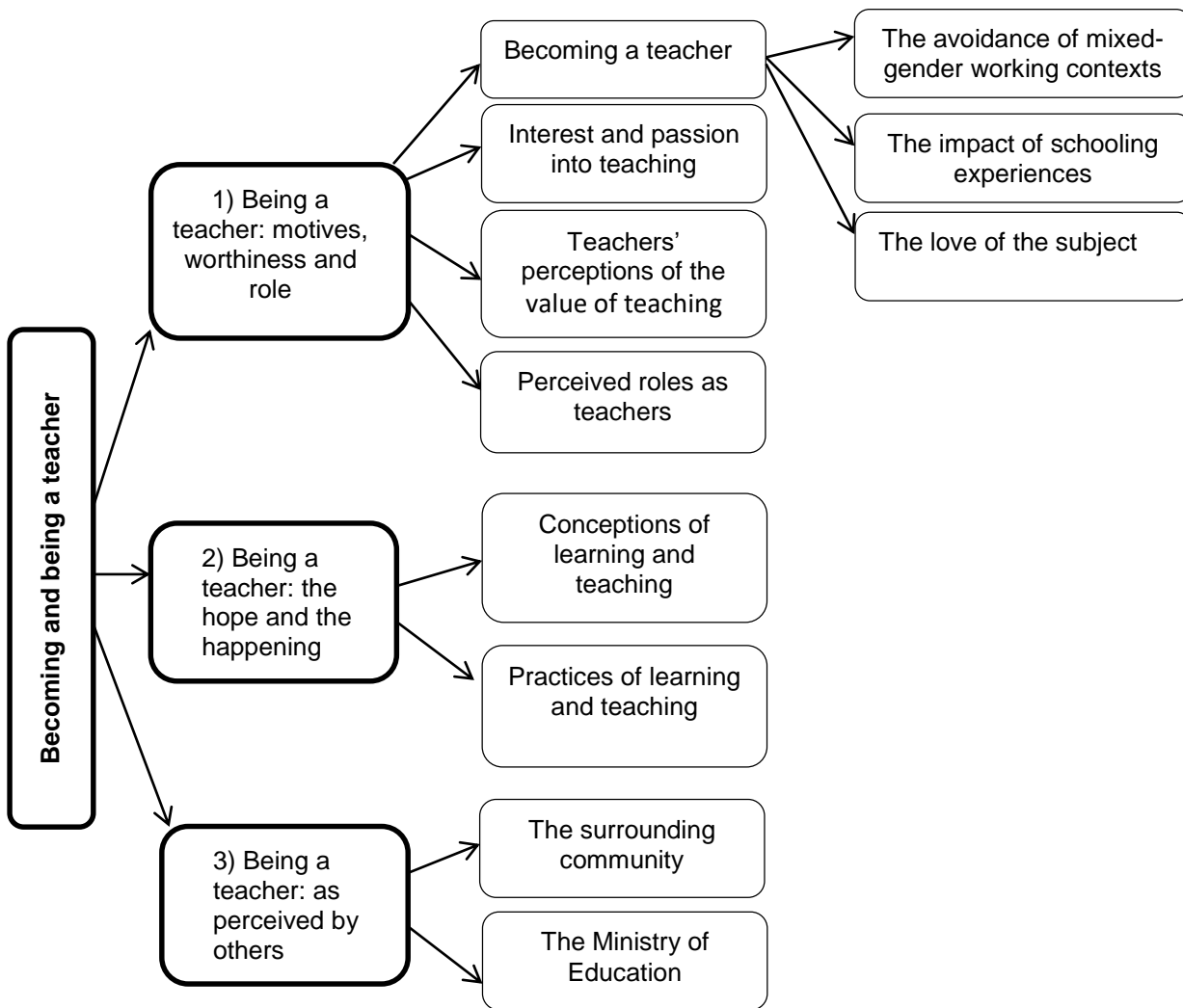


Figure 6.1: Themes related to becoming and being a teacher

6.1 Being a teacher: motives, worthiness and role

This section reports on the findings regarding the first component of Sachs' (2005) definition of teacher professional identity: '*how to be*'. Interview questions used in this exploration were predominantly abstract in nature: motives for becoming teachers, interest and passion in teaching, worthiness of the teaching job and their perceived roles as teachers. The exploration of such aspects provides a lens through which we can better understand the nature of Omani teachers'

professional identity. This identity was argued to have an impact on teachers' professional practices through the link between 'why I am here' and 'what I do'.

6.1.1 Becoming a teacher

The motivation or the impulse to be a teacher reported by most of the participant teachers did not always originate from a desire to be a teacher. For ten of the participant teachers, teaching was not a clear career choice made during their earlier school years. It became a career choice mostly after secondary school. The findings revealed a high degree of social and cultural influences on such a career decision. This was manifested in teachers' strongly held cultural beliefs and norms or in their compliance to such beliefs and norms. It was also found that previous positive schooling experiences played a determining role in some teachers' decisions to enter the profession. Interestingly, negative schooling experiences were also reported to be a driving force for the decision to enter the field of teaching. Love of the subject was also found to be a desire to become a teacher.

6.1.1.1 The avoidance of mixed-gender work contexts

It is worth noting here that there are separate girls' schools and boys' schools in Oman. Each gendered school is staffed with the same gender teachers and other related jobs. Thus, culturally, this makes girls' schools the most suitable workplaces for females in order to avoid mixed gender work contexts. Even in C1 (years 1-4) schools where there is coeducation, only female teachers teach there. This system reflects the beliefs and the norms of a society and a culture where many people do not perceive mixing with the opposite gender, especially non-relatives, to be appropriate and if it has to happen, it needs to be to a very limited extent. This belief was found to be one of the motives behind some of the

participant teachers' decisions to pursue teaching as a career choice. In fact, the data revealed that the older teachers were more conservative in this regard compared with the younger ones.

For instance, Khawla, with 11 years of experience, graduated with Distinction from the School of Science and could have joined many higher education institutes as a lecturer. However, she refused to apply for any of these job opportunities because they all involved mixed-gender work places. Despite her university experience of studying in a mixed-gender environment, she remained conservative in this regard. She preferred to take a one-year teacher education programme to become a qualified and certified school teacher. She referred to this as a 'personal conviction' and not a family-driven choice.

"I grew up not liking to be in a mixed-gender work places and teaching was the perfect match. I have a medical laboratory technician sister and a nurse one. It's not my family, my family are fine with it, it's me I do not like being in mixed-gender work places. It is a personal conviction" (Khawla)

This 'personal conviction' was also behind Noor's choice of becoming a teacher. Being an A student in the secondary school, Noor could have joined the School of Medicine or Engineering, but she made the choice to become a teacher to avoid such mixed-gender work environments.

"No, not my parents. They weren't into this. They were proud that I scored high and I was accepted into university, no more than this...They were happy that I joined the university. It was a personal choice because the working place would not be mixed-gender" (Noor)

Azza, with 15 years of experience, was fully aware of how this 'personal conviction' came into being. She stated that although her parents were not directly and explicitly involved in her choice of becoming a teacher, the way they brought her up, which was strongly influenced by the surrounding societal and cultural beliefs

and values, shaped this 'personal conviction'. She also pointed out another shaping factor for such a conviction which was the written discourse represented in books she was reading, advocating the protection of women through gender segregation and the undesirable consequences of mixed-gender practices.

"Why I decided to be a teacher? Well, because it is known where she works. There is not mixing with men, only for this reason, because you know the way we were brought up, the society, the kind of books I was reading" (Azza)

Although it was not their 'personal conviction', other participant teachers found themselves in a situation where they had to compromise their own aspirations of what to be with how their families positioned them. This position was highly affected by the cultural rhetoric Azza indicated above in regard to the protection of women by avoiding inter-gender interaction. To illustrate, Umnia, with 18 years of experience, gave up her dream of studying Dentistry because her parents consistently refused to allow it in order to protect her.

"Look, we are a generation where families were strict. The view was that the best job for a girl is teaching, to be a teacher, because they tended to protect girls a lot. We were the top students in our school. We were planning to study Dentistry in Bahrain, but we couldn't convince our parents. We didn't have the choice of working in private sectors or here or there even nursing wasn't a choice for us" (Umnia)

Interestingly, Ameena, with 8 years of experience, reported a similar tendency to compromise her own career aspirations with what her parents had set out for her. Experiencing the breakdown of her sister's career aspirations, Ameena avoided confrontation with her parents and programmed herself to be a teacher.

"The society does not allow you much freedom rather than teaching. My sister got very high results in the secondary school. She wanted to join the College of Medicine, but my father rejected the idea. So it is the society behind me becoming a teacher" (Ameena)

Individuals brought up in a value-laden society and culture tend to assimilate its beliefs and norms into their own value system and identity, compromise with them or resist them completely. The above findings revealed that most of the experienced participant teachers fit into the first category, whereas some of the early career teachers reported compromise.

6.1.1.2 The impact of schooling experiences

When asked about her motives to becoming a teacher, Rahima revealed that the image she had about her school teachers had a big role in this. Being constant givers, kind, noble and friendly in the way they used to treat students, Rahima's school teachers were the sole motivation for becoming a teacher. Interestingly, this image of a teacher remained unshaken, even when she herself became one. She just became more aware of what it requires to be like this and even better.

"I used to see teachers in a beautiful image...when I tried teaching, the same beautiful image remained. It did not change. The image is that the teacher is an ongoing giver. This image because of the different teachers I experienced in schooling. They affected my view of teachers positively and I got out of school with this positive image... I still view teachers in a beautiful image but now I know what it takes and what is needed to make this image even more beautiful" (Rahima)

Being influenced by so many characteristics of her teachers which made her secondary schooling experiences unforgettable, Ghafir wanted to provide such positive learning experiences to other students. She wanted to impact students' thinking and behaviours positively, the way her teachers had done to her.

"I have never wished to be anything rather than becoming a teacher. I scored 98% in the General Secondary Certificate. I could have chosen any college I wanted... all my choices were in the School of Education...I was influenced by many of my teachers. They had a big role in making me wish to be in their places one day... I thought it was good to be like those teachers and impact other students" (Ghafir)

On the other hand, findings revealed that negative schooling experiences also worked as motives for some participant teachers to become teachers. Experiencing tough and uncaring teachers in primary and secondary schools, Ataa' decided to be a teacher to change this stereotypical image of teachers in students' minds.

“When I was young, I wished to be a teacher...When I was in primary I thought that teachers weren't students, because they were very mean. They were tough and did not take care of students... I wanted to change this image of teachers. I was telling myself when I grow up and become a teacher I do not want to be like these teachers” (Ataa')

Describing her schooling experiences as boring, traditional and denying her right for speech and discussion, Habiba wanted to be a teacher to make schools motivating and meaningful places for students. During her six years of experience, she willingly moved between two different schools because she believed that it is her duty to spread the new and up-to-date ideas and strategies she had been exposed to on her Master's course.

“We had to sit in a class which we didn't like and had no chance to speak and discuss. It was all spoon feeding. Every day from 7 a.m to 2 p.m, we had to sit and get spoon-fed without any movement or comment or discussion...I was forced to sit in a place for a very long time without use. This is what I used to feel about school...Every day I was spending about half of my day in a boring place waiting for it to finish. Every day I woke up lazily to go to school. So I decided to be a teacher to change this” (Habiba)

The impact of their own experiences at school was found to play a great role in some of the participant teachers' decisions to be teachers. For these teachers, becoming a teacher was a clear career choice made during their early school years. Their school experiences strongly contributed to and influenced these teachers' perceptions of schooling and education. These teachers developed their sense of professional identity before entering teaching profession. To some extent,

they were able to visualise what kind of a teacher they wanted to be. This image of a teacher was either compatible with their school teacher(s) when the experiences were positive or completely different when these were negative.

6.1.1.3 Teachers' love of the subject

Some participant teachers stated that they were initially drawn into teaching because of their love of the subject and their desire to get others to sense and experience this enjoyment. Because of this fascination with the subject matter, their wish to transfer this enjoyment to others and bring these subjects to life, these teachers were quite strategic in their choice of university courses. Rather than choosing a course which would prepare them for education and learning in the classroom, but little advancement in the subject content knowledge, they chose to undertake a Bachelor's degree in the subject area. They described this as both an enjoyable experience and an important one in broadening and deepening their knowledge and understanding of the subject matter. The theoretical and the practical aspects of teaching in classrooms were then gained through undertaking a one year course in teacher education, as Asya maintains in the following extract.

"I could have joined the School of Education, I got the score for that, but I decided not because I love Arabic Language and I wanted to know more and more about it. So I registered in the College of Islamic Studies and Arabic Language and I specialised in Arabic Language" (Asya)

Amal's fascination with the Arabic Language is so great that it compares her love for her children, as she reported. It constitutes a very important aspect of her life and her decision to be an Arabic teacher was to transfer this love to all types of students.

"I am strongly convinced that I wanted to be an Arabic teacher...I like Arabic language as much as I like my children. It is exactly like my home

and family. It should have time in my life as my children have time. I love the subject matter. I always like the students to be good at it, both the good ones and the not so good ones ...I want them to love it.” (Amal)

“A piece of cake” is how Khawla described Mathematics and her fascination with Mathematical problems. Besides avoiding inter-gender working places, Khawla chose to be a school teacher to change students’ negative attitudes towards Mathematics by attempting to change the way they view mathematical problems. By implementing new and up-to-date ideas and strategies, Khawla tried to get her students to investigate and discover concepts for themselves and to view mathematical problems as tempting as a ‘piece of cake’.

“At the beginning my passion was Maths. I wanted to learn Maths not to teach it. However, later I wanted students to have the feeling I had when solving mathematical problems when I was a student. I wanted to transfer this feeling to students. When I used to face a challenging mathematical problem, I used to think that this is a piece of cake, it’s more appealing and attractive. It’s the way we programme ourselves. I wanted students to see and feel about Maths in this way” (Khawla)

Israa’s experiences and observations of different people’s negative attitudes towards Maths and Maths teachers made her decide to be a teacher. Her love of Maths and her belief in the positive impact of such a subject on her personality drew her to this career option.

“I like Maths...When I see a hashtag in the social media like the worst teacher or the teacher you do not like, it’s always the Maths teacher. This makes me feel sad. When I was 17, I was in Germany talking to an old lady. She said that her worst teacher was the Maths teacher. I thought this must be international not only in Oman... Because I love Maths, I want to transfer this love to students and I always tell my students you might not realise now how useful Maths is, but you will realise this in the future. Maths makes you precise and accurate in your work and life” (Israa’)

Findings like the above direct our attention to a different type of relationship between teachers and their subjects. Beside the cognitive and the instrumental

view of this relationship, which often focuses on teachers' repertoire of the content and their technical didactics, the above findings highlight an affective dimension. That is, teachers' emotional involvement with the subject and the influences of this on teachers' attitudes towards teaching and learning. Teachers' past and present experiences which result in such an involvement shape teachers' thinking about their subject and the way they teach it to students.

6.1.2 Interest and passion in teaching

After 18 years of experience, Umnia expressed great enthusiasm about teaching and was not in favour of the idea of resignation as many Omani teachers are after completing 20 years in the job. She stated that the impact she had had on different batches and generations of students made her feel that she was doing something important. In addition, the satisfaction she felt when being respectfully welcomed by her students whenever she met them cannot be obtained from any other job.

"We have got teachers in the school who were my students. They say we do not think that teacher Umnia might resign one day because they know how much I love teaching...Everywhere I go I hear my students calling me teacher Umnia teacher Umnia. This makes you feel that you are doing something important. Look how many students we affect and have an impact on, where else can you find this" (Umnia)

Some participant teachers related their passion for the teaching job to the opportunities it provides them to develop students' morals and values. They considered these opportunities as the fuel which maintains their interest in the job and helps them to sustain their passion for teaching. This finding is consistent with one of the four professional self-images presented in the previous chapter. When conceptualising themselves, the participant teachers demonstrated care and concern about students' well-being, which included students' moral development.

“I feel very interested, I enjoy it. Giving something to students, an advice, an information, teaching a value makes me feel the joy of teaching”
(Ameena)

“Educating students and caring for their attainment and development, yes I am very much interested and passionate... At the beginning of my career, I didn’t like school holidays because I had a lot to give to students”
(Habiba)

Commitment to the academic attainment of their students was also linked to some of the participant teachers’ passion for the job. It was found that this passion worked as a motivational factor, which positively affected teachers’ performances in very tragic personal situations and drove them to improve their students’ achievements. This strong drive for teaching enabled Ghafir to increase the learning potential of her students even while she was going through a heart-rending personal situation.

“I love teaching...From the end of the previous semester I tried to be ready for this semester. I wanted this semester to be special for me and the students. I lost my son during the summer holiday; he died. Glorified Be Allah, I haven’t got students who scored as good as my students this year. Their scores promoted the general score for the whole school. It’s true that I lost my child but teaching these students makes me strong and alive” (Ghafir)

Some participant teachers expressed their interest and passion for teaching in relation to the virtue of hope. This affective disposition was utilised by teachers as an energiser, stimulating them and sustaining them hard times. It was found that this virtue operated interrelatedly with teachers’ cognitive and behavioural activities. In fact, some of the participant teachers reported that hope and optimism motivates them to think about and implement new ideas and strategies in their classrooms.

“I like teaching ...I am always optimistic about the future and try to be ready for a bright one” (Ghafir)

“I am passionate about teaching, but I do not like the obstacles put in front of us. Teaching as a profession, I love it, but the burdens thrown on

our shoulders, these are the ones I hate. But I am an optimistic person. There are times when I feel down, but I like doing new things. Teaching gives me the chance to do new things. I mean implementing new ideas and activities with the students” (Manaar)

This interest and passion for teaching which was expressed through enthusiasm, caring, commitment and hope were found to be supported and sustained by responsive students, interaction with colleagues and cooperative school administration.

“The students themselves... There are students who do not motivate you to do new things. They do not let you feel that what you do is important But there are other students from their interactions you feel they say yes, next lesson we want something new and different... This keeps me motivated and makes me like what I do and encourages me to look for new ideas” (Manaar)

“Yes, I am, very much interested in teaching. It’s like a challenge for me. The way we deliver information to students, the way we present information, this is very important for me. I always work with my colleagues. We always discuss about new ways of teaching, about new strategies so we don’t feel bored and the students too” (Khawla)

“Very much. It might be something innate and it might be because thanks God things are facilitated for me. The administration is cooperative. This is motivating. They welcome new ideas and initiatives and try their best to provide what we need as a team” (Salma)

However, the most salient motivational factor for sustaining interest and passion in teaching was found to be the flexible nature of teaching: that is, the amount of autonomy teachers reported to have between the four walls of the classroom which allows them to try out new ideas and strategies for teaching and learning. This, they reported, makes them and their classrooms alive and prevents boredom.

“Because I always use new things, new strategies, new ideas. I love to see girls learning. I love their welcoming of the new ideas. It makes me in constant search for what to give and how to give. If I stop implementing new things, I might stop liking teaching and feel bored. But for 19 years now, thanks God, I haven’t felt bored. Every year, I try to change something” (Noor)

“Teaching is interesting... I constantly try to use new teaching methods and technology so I do not feel bored and my girls too. I love this in teaching” (Salma)

On the contrary, the absence of this peculiar characteristic in one of the participant teachers caused her to lose interest and passion in the teaching job. The effect of making no attempts to bring life to her pedagogy and classrooms made Azza lose the passion and interest she started her career with.

“To be honest, at the beginning yes, I was enthusiastic and active. But year after year, I am not saying that I am not putting effort into teaching or I am not working hard, but I do not have the passion. I feel bored and tired. It is the same routine, the same work every day, planning, teaching, marking, same thing no change” (Azza)

Generally speaking, most of the participant teachers appeared to be emotionally attached to the teaching job and enjoyed being teachers. This passion and enjoyment of teaching was mainly linked to working with students and inspiring them. This seemingly sustained passion and enjoyment was principally influenced by different agents in the school context, such as colleagues and administration. It was expressed in terms of enthusiasm, caring, commitment and hope.

6.1.3 Teachers’ perceptions of the value of teaching

All the participant teachers expressed great satisfaction with the financial aspect of the teaching job and considered teaching as a well-paid job in Oman. However, teachers highlighted other aspects which made teaching not so rewarding for them and not so appealing to the new generation of graduates.

The **lack of appreciation and recognition** was expressed by the vast majority of the participant teachers. They considered recognition as one of the highly important motivational needs of teachers, based on which they make a long-term commitment to their teaching career. Verbal praise and appreciation was the only

type of recognition Noor wished to get for her hard work and initiatives in the school. The disappointment she constantly got by not being recognised for all her dedication and extra-curricular activities made her decide to resign after completing twenty years of experience.

“What we need is just a nice and kind word. We often get visitors in the school from the Directorate, like administrative supervisors. They see the school files and might see a brilliant idea or an achievement had been done by a teacher. They never say I should meet this teacher and thank him personally, a very simple thanking word...They might pass by a school and notice a nice project going on. They do not ask for the teachers in charge to come and thank them. Thank you words do not cost money” (Noor)

Khawla echoed similar concern and disappointment. Apart from not being recognised and appreciated, she expressed frustration about the school administration's and the subject supervisors' way of dealing with their difficulties in the curriculum. She stated that what keeps her and her team going and putting hard work and effort into teaching is their religious belief that all this work and dedication is being observed and will be rewarded by Allah.

“Even a word of thank you we do not get. When we work very hard and we feel very tired and fatigue, we always remind ourselves and say that we do this to be rewarded and recognised by Allah not people...Nobody appreciates what we do and our efforts...They just catch our mistakes and wait for our slips” (Khawla)

In spite of all her hard work and efforts in getting her students to achieve the first place for the third year in two different competitions, Ghafir expressed great dissatisfaction with the lack of appreciation and recognition she received from the Educational Governorate. She stated that teachers' emotional and affective aspects are not recognised and valued.

“Teachers are like students, they need recognition and praise...We are not asking for too much. A paper of appreciation means a lot to us...Why

don't they award the outstanding teachers? Supervisors know our work and what we do in schools and for our students but I don't know why nobody cares. This piece of paper means a lot to us and it says that you are doing well, keep it up. These psychological aspects need to be cared for and supported" (Ghafir)

In line with recognition and appreciation discussed above and highly connected to it, **teachers' voice** was highlighted among the aspects which makes teaching not so rewarding in Oman. Some participant teachers attributed their dissatisfaction with the teaching job to the fact that teachers are not being heard. Habiba shed light on the failure to approach teachers and listen to their concerns and opinions.

"Visitors from the Ministry visit classes, talk to students and ask them about the problems and challenges they face, but they never look at the teacher and ask the same question. It is just bring me this file and that book. Ok listen to them, thank them" (Habiba)

In this regard, Noor pointed to the October, 2013 National Teachers' Strike. In the year 2013, a large section of teachers from across the country took strike action for various demands. Many schools did not function for weeks because teachers stayed away from work; this paralysed many government schools as students were sent home. Contrary to the public's understanding that this strike was to increase teachers' pay and other financial benefits, Noor reported that it was actually for teachers to be heard. She stated that when teachers came to a dead end when all their requests for changes and improvements in schools were received with deaf ears, they had to do something to get their voice heard.

"We took strike action because we wanted improvements and development. We wanted to be heard. We are not very much concerned about the financial aspect and our pay, because, thanks God, it is good...It was about the curriculum, the assessment, changing the way they deal with us. They had to listen to us" (Noor)

A similar explanation was offered by Salma regarding the 2013 National Teachers' Strike. It is worth noting that prior to this strike, specifically in October 2011,

teacher representatives from some educational governorates had gathered and demonstrated in front of their educational governorates buildings, demanding changes and improvements in education and schools. In relation to this, Salma reported that when teachers did not observe any concrete changes and any steps towards what they had asked for in their demonstrations, they had no choice other than strike.

“When teachers took strike action, many people said it was about money. It was not at all about money. It was about all what we experience and see in schools which we can do nothing about. We demonstrated, we talked a lot and we wrote many reports, but with no use. No one listened to what we said...We had to take the strike action...We weren't happy with it but they forced us to do that” (Salma)

It seems from the above findings that these participant teachers' thoughts and efforts are not valued by the educational system they work in. This has implications on the sense of value these teachers experience in such a system, given the reported lack of official reward and recognition and the absence of their voice in matters relevant to their students' education.

6.1.4 Perceived roles as teachers

The way in which the participant teachers viewed their roles as teachers and the types of responsibilities they assigned to themselves or were expected of them was also explored. This is because teachers' perceptions of their professional roles has a great impact on their classroom practices and therefore their students' learning and achievement.

Some participant teachers viewed their professional role to be **the development of students' morals and attitudes towards learning**. Amal, for instance, linked her role with her emotional and social feelings of communicating with learners in a

motherly manner. She prioritised her social and emotional relationship with the students than their academic learning. This does not suggest in any way that Amal's concern and care about her students' emotions and morals stood in conflict with her effort and dedication regarding their academic attainment and learning. In fact, it demonstrates her awareness as a teacher of the importance of the affective dimension in facilitating and supporting students' learning and achievement.

"My role is an educator, a mother, a sister, a friend. Morals and emotions come first then learning" (Amal)

Developing students personally and academically was viewed by Khawla to be the key role of any teacher including herself. Besides nurturing students' personal traits represented in their morals and values, Khawla viewed her role as developing students' positive attitudes towards learning and knowledge. This kind of attitude, she stated, is a prerequisite for unlocking and maximising students' intellectual abilities and academic attainments.

"The essential role of any teacher regardless of the subject is helping in developing students before teaching them... Instilling values and morals within students and making them love learning and appreciate knowledge...This is important for encouraging them to learn and accept the subject" (Khawla)

The practicalities of this dual role were demonstrated explicitly by Amal, as she highlighted the link between her classroom practices with how she conceptualised her professional role.

"My role is to develop within girls the love of learning... I try to do this by good preparation for the lesson and the use of strategies which attract students and make them like Arabic. For example, activities which encourages them think and work together collaboratively" (Amal)

Most of the Science participant teachers conceptualised their professional role in terms of **developing students' academic skills**, rather than academic knowledge.

They reported that students nowadays have easy access to information and might come to the classroom with more, and even sometimes up-to-date scientific information than that provided in the textbooks. In such an advanced technological era, these teachers viewed their professional roles in terms of creating a guided research culture, helping students to think systematically and equipping them with scientific skills. Interestingly, these perceived professional roles were not only adopted because they serve students' current academic needs, but also because they are closely linked to developing certain personal traits and qualities.

“Before students give information, they need to say where they got it from, so we can discuss whether it is a trusted source or not... They need to realise that not all references are reliable and shouldn't give information just because it is written by someone without knowing the exact reference...It is also a life skill” (Habiba)

“My main role as a Science teacher is to help students develop their thinking abilities. It is not just copying the information and memorising them, information are everywhere...I mean when they face a problem, they have to put hypothesis and they try these hypotheses. This is not only for the Science subject, it is a life skill. If they think in this way, they will be successful” (Salma)

“My role is to train them for the skills required to be Chemistry students, not only for year 11 and 12, for what is after this. They are Science stream students, so what skills as Science stream students they need in Chemistry. Like, how to read graphs, how to analyse tables. It is scientific knowledge that last for a lifetime” (Umnia)

On the contrary, unlike Science teachers, the participating Mathematics teachers viewed the academic facet of their role to be more towards **the development of students' academic knowledge**. This might be attributed to the nature of the mathematical subject matter, which mainly tends to be abstract and thus makes it difficult to be approached through self-study.

“My role is to deliver correct information for the students in a way that is clear and not vague. What basics they have got which assist me in

deciding on what to give them, the subject matter, the information, the style, the method, the strategy by which I give them this” (Noor)

“My role, I think, is delivering the required subject matter, the information and knowledge, but not in a traditional way, not by spoon-feeding style we are used to. We have to shift from the traditional style to a different style, using different ways and strategies” (Rahima)

Another interesting finding is the impact of some participant teachers’ **religious beliefs and understanding** on their perceived professional roles. The connection between how the participant teachers perceived their roles and their religious beliefs and understanding is prevalent. These teachers’ conception of the notion of ‘worship’ in Islam affected the way in which they viewed their roles and their responsibilities as teachers. That is, these teachers understood ‘worship’ to extend beyond the limited definition of the observance of certain practices and rituals, such as prayer, fasting, giving charity and other good deeds and works. Worship for them goes far beyond this. It is an all-inclusive notion which includes a person’s internal and external sayings and actions which are pleasing to Allah. This suggests that it involves one’s entire life including his/her personal and professional life. This was explicitly stated by Ameena who viewed her teaching and the students’ learning as part of a worship journey. This led her to perceive that instilling ‘the love of Allah’ within the students is her key role as a teacher. This is because she believed that this love is able to benefit students’ personal and academic life.

“My role? Look, the main reason for us being on earth is to worship, to worship Allah, our work is a worship. So the first thing as a teacher is instilling and planting the love of Allah within the students. Whatever we do and the students do is for the sake of Allah...He watches us and knows what we are doing. So our teaching and the students’ work for their studies need to be dedicated to Allah...if students can sense this and really feel it, they will be better in whatever they do” (Ameena)

Contemplation on creation was perceived by Habiba, a Biology teacher, to be her key professional role. This means helping students to study carefully all creatures, their perfection and refinement and reflect on their subtle differences, which consequently leads students to its Wise Maker (Allah). Through the thoughtful studying of creatures, Habiba believed that she was guiding students to the greatness of Allah and therefore appreciation and love of Him. Thus, it can be seen that Habiba viewed her role in a very similar way to Ameena's. However, the point of departure is quite different. Habiba used the subject matter knowledge and her pedagogical practices to achieve what she believed to be her key role as a Biology teacher. In contrast, Ameena worked on strengthening the love of Allah within the students and their dedication to Him in the belief that this is beneficial for their academic achievement.

“Contemplation. I think my main role is encouraging students to contemplate in God's ability, in creating different creatures on earth and in creating them (the students). This is important for today's students...They need to sense the abilities and the greatness of Allah in His creatures...sense his love” (Habiba)

In line with the already discussed understanding of the notion of worship was Ataa's perceived professional role as a teacher. Ataa' viewed her role as instilling the excitement of learning in her students. By doing this she thought she was helping students to fulfill one of their religious duties, which is learning and seeking new knowledge. This is because she believed that seeking knowledge is one of the highest forms of worship and is a religious duty for every Muslim, which unfortunately many teachers and students neglect.

“My role is to instil in them the excitement of learning. We might neglect that learning in Islam is one of our duties as Muslims. When we gather to learn something new, this is considered as worshiping in Islam and the

angels surround those who gather to learn new and useful things. This is a vital part in Islam, but unfortunately, we as teachers neglect this and do not instil it in our students” (Ataa’)

The above findings demonstrated that the participant teachers’ perceived professional roles are closely linked to their perceived professional self-images presented in the previous chapter. Most of the participant teachers mainly talked about a two-faceted role. This included nurturing students’ personal growth and developing their academic knowledge, skills and attitudes. For these teachers, viewing themselves as educators and not only as teachers required them to pay attention to and work on these two facets in varying degrees. For some of these teachers, current information technological advancements impacted the way they carry out this two-faceted role. In addition, the influence of the participant teachers’ religious beliefs and positions was evident in some of their accounts of their professional roles.

To sum up, the findings of this section revealed that some of the participant teachers’ religious beliefs strongly shaped their reasons for becoming and being a teacher. Their decision to teach seems to be motivated as much by cultural and religious norms about mixed-gender working contexts as it is about a vocational desire. These religious beliefs shaped some of these teachers’ perceptions of their professional roles as teachers. They also worked as motivational drivers which kept these teachers committed to their work within an educational system in which teachers do not feel valued or recognised as professionals.

6.2 Being a teacher: the hope and the happening

This section is concerned with the investigation of the participant teachers’ personal theories of learning and teaching and the practices relevant to these. This

includes how teachers think about learning and teaching and the correspondences or the inconsistencies between the two. This is based on the premise that teachers' professional practices and actions are, to a great extent, an identity work and what teachers do impacts their professional identity (Mockler, 2011). This premise is in line with the working definition of professional identity adopted for this study. In this definition Sachs (2005) considered teachers' professional identity as the framework based on which teachers construct their ideas of 'how to act'. The dynamicity of this framework enables it to be affected and impacted by the meanings teachers make of their experiences. The data analysis in this regard revealed teachers' conceptions of learning and teaching and their reported learning and teaching practices which shed light on sources of support and hindrances.

6.2.1 Conceptions of learning and teaching

Interestingly, some participant teachers demonstrated misperceptions in their understandings of the two different notions of learning and teaching. For these participants, learning was viewed to be teaching and therefore perceived in this sense. This can be possibly attributed to the fact that the interview was conducted in Arabic. In Arabic language these two terms come from the same lexical family. They have the exact same spelling except for one more letter in favour of teaching; (تعلم: taa'lum: learning), (تعليم: ta'leem: teaching). This makes the two concepts linguistically integrated. In English, unlike Arabic, learning and teaching come from different lexical families, which distinguish linguistically between learners and teachers. Although in the interview one of these participants echoed the term (تعلم: taa'lum: learning) after my question to make sure that she heard me right and another participant explicitly asked me about which one I was asking, they still

attributed mere teaching characteristics to the concept of learning. This confusion between these two terms in Arabic and consequently their conceptions is common in the educational context in Oman. This assumption is based on my experiences of working as a teacher, a senior teacher, a supervisor and a teacher educator in the same context. Although all these experiences are related to the field of TESOL, my constant professional interactions and regular communications with other subject practitioners validate this assumption.

In regard to the conceptions of learning, the vast majority of the participant teachers perceived students' learning as **an acquisition of content**. That is, students' learning for them is the intake of information and necessary concepts, which are prescribed in the syllabus and provided in the textbooks. This kind of learning is characterised by the memorisation of content without reflection or understanding of meaning, which results in last minute cramming for examinations.

“Learning for me is when students acquire information, either from the teacher or from the surrounding environment” (Manaar)

“Learning for me is what I want students to acquire either information or concepts I need them to know in my subject” (Noor)

Another group of participant teachers viewed students' learning as going through two phases. In addition to the accumulation of information and concepts, the second phase involves the application of these in evaluation tasks and tests. Thus, it can be concluded that the application of an accumulated set of information and concepts achieved through efficient recall is the ultimate goal of the teaching and learning process.

“... acquiring information and mathematical concepts and be able to apply them in tests, tasks and homework” (Rahima)

“... understanding and application. Understanding is by the end of lesson task. Application, the practical tasks” (Ataa’)

On the other hand, other participant teachers believed that information is everywhere and nowadays students have easy access to information which might be more up-to-date than that in their textbooks. Therefore, rather than acquisition and accumulation of information, these teachers conceptualised learning as **development of understanding and skills**. The benefits of such an understanding and skills, they stated, go beyond the school walls to extend to students’ future careers and professions. Thus, learning is viewed to be competence-focused rather than content-oriented.

“Learning for me is for students to have the required scientific knowledge and skills in chemistry, like how to read a graph, how to analyse and interpret a table...This knowledge lasts for a lifetime...information are there in their books and everywhere, like the dilution of a gas in a liquid, if working in a factory how would they make use of this information, this is more important” (Umnia)

Viewing learning as students’ responsibility, some participant teachers conceptualised learning as the development of students’ understanding. Being scaffolded and supported by teachers’ practices, students work by themselves in groups and gain understanding by discussion and thus, they are the ones who glean the knowledge. In this conception, students are viewed as being active learners, able to construct their own understanding.

“Students are responsible for their learning. Learning needs to start from them...for example when students ask me a question, I don’t like to give them the answer, I ask them another question, so they do the work themselves. The more effort students put in learning, the more they learn” (Ghafir)

“As it is in my drawing, learning needs to start from students not from me, from searching for information, discussing in groups. In this way, they can gain knowledge and develop their understanding” (Habiba)

Discarding the notion that learning is mere memorisation and reproduction of information, one participant teacher conceptualised learning as **a transformation of learners**. This teacher focused on the learner as a whole person who needs to be engaged in growing affectively and behaviourally.

“I think learning is change in beliefs and behaviours, not just memorisation of what is in the books for exams and scores. Learning is when students are convinced with new ideas and when these have an effect on their thinking and behaviours” (Salma)

Accordingly, the perceived conceptions of teaching expressed by the participant teachers varied. It was not surprising that the majority of them expressed **information-transmission** conceptions of teaching, which are compatible with the content-acquisition and application conceptions of learning mentioned above. These information-transmission conceptions were characterised by a content-oriented approach to teaching, which centred on the two elements of ‘what’ and ‘how’. In other words, the main focus was on the subject matter and the methods and strategies used to deliver this content. This is found to be in congruence with the subject matter professional self-image presented in the previous chapter. This particular professional self-image highlighted the importance of the participant teachers being subject experts and possessing a solid repertoire of the subject matter knowledge.

“My role is the use of different ways and methods to help students acquire the information of the content” (Manaar)

“... deliver the right information using new and different strategies” (Ataa’)

The participant teachers who expressed a learning conceptualisation focusing on developing their students’ understanding reported a parallel teaching

conceptualisation. They viewed teaching as the **facilitation of students' understanding** which focuses on teacher-student interaction.

"I do not think that this type of learning marginalises my role. It's completely the opposite. Guiding students to learning requires more effort from me as a teacher because I need to be aware of the sources they can refer to for their learning. So my role here is a guide and a developer for myself and my students" (Ghafir)

"I am an organiser and a guide for this learning. I mean how to organise the learning setting and the learning experiences so the students can develop their understanding. I mean guiding students to the different ways and sources from which they can get information, discuss it and come out with an understanding" (Habiba)

However, both teachers highlighted that they sometimes diverted from this teaching position and reverted to the information-transmission type in response to curriculum and assessment expectations and requirements. This was explicitly stated and justified by Umnia, who revealed very contradictory learning and teaching conceptions. Conceptualising learning as development of understanding and skills, Umnia demonstrated an information-transmission oriented conception to teaching.

"My role is to train them (the students) for the exam paper by giving them the required information. You know, they are years 11 and 12, they need this to do well and pass their exams...I have got very limited time with them. Sometimes I have to take extra lessons to cover the content...I know I need to teach and focus on scientific skills but I am not going to risk these girls' results, especially year 12" (Umnia)

The analysis also revealed that Salma's learner-transformation conception to learning was compatible with a **student-transformation** teaching conception. That is, she viewed teaching as developing students cognitively, affectively and behaviourally by providing experiences and activities.

"I try to give students enriching activities which require higher thinking skills for which they have to use outside sources, away from the school"

textbooks...This gets them to think about their ideas and attitudes towards something and discuss them in class” (Salma)

The above presented findings reveal that participant teachers expressed varied conceptions of learning and teaching, ranging from being content-oriented to being student-growth focused. The apparent dominance of content-oriented conceptions reflects the crammed and prescribed curriculum and exam-oriented educational system. This clearly indicates the impact of the professional contexts in which teachers work on their conceptual frameworks. This can also explain the reported incongruence in some teachers' conceptions of learning and teaching in favour of content-oriented approaches. This is because other conceptions of learning and teaching entail an adherence to certain approaches to teaching and learning. These approaches require sufficient time on task and immersion in learning tasks which allow students the opportunity to reflect and make meanings. These deep and engaged forms of learning are difficult to achieve in packed curriculum contexts and exam-oriented systems, such as the one in Oman. Thus, in such contexts some teachers tend to compromise what they believe learning and teaching is with what the educational system requires them to do. Thus, we find teachers like Ghafir and Habiba, who are pressured at times to give up their positions and revert to traditional stances or to appear to give them up in favour of assessment expectations, as Umnia did.

6.2.2 Practices of learning and teaching

The reported teaching and learning practices of the participant teachers were obtained by asking teachers to identify and describe the main principles which guide their planning and the way in which this planning was carried out in the

classroom. Teachers' accounts in this respect also revealed some sources of support and obstacles to teachers' teaching and learning practices.

The primacy of the prescribed content over all other elements of the teaching and learning process was dominant in all teachers' accounts about their learning and teaching practices. Some participant teachers placed great importance on being fully informed about each and every piece of information and facts students are going to be exposed to in the lesson. Reading carefully the content which consists of information and facts scripted in the students' textbooks was a common planning practice expressed by the majority of the participant teachers.

"It is impossible that I go to class without reading the content. I read each and every word in the content of the lesson. Then I go and consult other references in the same topic. Then I try to merge the information together" (Ataa')

"My planning happens after I have read the content and decided on what they (students) need to be ready to know in the lesson" (Khawla)

This primacy was also apparent in the participant teachers' practices in relation to learning outcomes. Although some of the participant teachers expressed satisfaction concerning the extent of autonomy they enjoyed in this respect, findings revealed that this autonomy was utilised to serve the tenets of the prescribed content- based curriculum. Not being happy with the prescribed learning objectives in the teacher's guide, some participant teachers tended to tailor these outcomes to suit the amount and type of content provided.

"Sometimes the Teacher's Guide does not do justice to the information in the textbooks. In the textbook for one lesson you can find an amount of information which is not included in the objectives. So as a teacher I have to formulate new objectives to cover all the information for that lesson" (Manaar)

“This lesson is for tomorrow. First, I looked at the content. There is too much information for one lesson. Here in the Teacher’s Guide, there are only three objectives for this lesson. I divided the content into seven objectives... I am going to divide them into two lessons” (Noor)

This crammed curriculum which is over-loaded with facts and information contributed to the tensions and conflicts some participant teachers experienced in schools and caused them a sense of dissatisfaction with regard to their reported practices. These teachers stated that they often found themselves being forced to neglect the affective and behavioural learning outcomes, which are intended to develop students’ understanding, skills and attitudes, in favour of the cognitive ones. They expressed the opinion that this practice has to be followed because they are aware of the importance of the cognitive aspect as a prerequisite for developing other aspects of learning.

“This is not satisfying. Outcomes which have to do with skills are very important for us Science teachers, but unfortunately we tend to focus on the knowledge ones...Some of these skills’ outcomes are very important. For example, the topic on cloning, it is an argumentative issue, students need to say their opinions about it because I do not think they are going to talk about it in another subject, from economic, social and religious aspects and ethical issues. Skills like these are important as much as knowledge...There are issues like these which prevent us from doing the right things” (Habiba)

Similarly, Ghafir pointed out the issue of the misalignment between time allocated for the implementation of the curriculum and the amount of content included in the curriculum.

“Either we focus on the cognitive objectives and give very little time for the other objectives, or we forget about them completely. Otherwise, we have to take loads of extra lessons to cover all the objectives... Time does not allow us to do the right thing...How can we cover all the cognitive objectives if we are going to give time for the other objectives. This is not possible...You know, to be able to only cover the cognitive objectives we sometimes take extra lessons” (Ghafir)

Interestingly, some of the participant teachers revealed that their teaching practices are often **guided by exam questions**. They considered the type of the exam questions relevant to the content of the target lesson as a key principle guiding their planning decisions and therefore their teaching approaches and practices.

“I need to know the type of question for this content in the previous exam papers. Some lessons are easy but the way they phrase the questions in the exam might make the question look difficult for the students” (Umnia)

“Two things are always with me when planning my lessons; the textbook and the exam papers. You know, some exam questions are not direct. Students need to know the information and they also need to know how to answer the question” (Rahima)

Most of the participant teachers demonstrated awareness of the importance of the use of unconventional and innovative teaching approaches and strategies. The **use of active learning strategies** and the use of technology were found to be popular among the participant teachers. These, they reported, bring life into the classrooms and attract students' attention, which can be easily distracted. However, the data analysis revealed that the use of these up-to-date teaching strategies and approaches was mainly directed towards the acquisition of information type of learning.

“When I am clear about what information I want to deliver, I go and look for suitable and untraditional strategies to deliver the information” (Ataa’)

“... things related to active learning, active learning strategies...I try not to give all the information myself in class. I try to get the students to search for the information” (Manaar)

Participant teachers' accounts of their passion and quest to inject life into classrooms revealed varied **sources for teachers' practices**. These included pre-service education, self-learning attempts, post-graduate degrees and school colleagues. Interestingly, the findings at this step revealed that CPD opportunities

were not among the sources which the participant teachers considered to be contributing to their professional selves and classroom practices. This issue is going to be elaborated in chapter 8.

Pre-service education programmes and tutors were highly valued by some of the participant teachers in relation to their roles in forming and shaping these teachers' sense of their professional selves. For instance, Ataa's professional self-image as revealed by the drawing and text task was predominantly shaped by the experiences she had had on her pre-service education programme and hugely affected by her Omani tutor during her practicum.

“When I started the practicum, I started building the right image, I started understanding correctly what a teacher is...I had a very competent Omani tutor, only then I started understanding what a teacher actually is. Maybe, this picture (her drawn image) is a reflection of the image he instilled in us of teachers. He was telling us, as a teacher you need to work with your hands, ears, eyes, mouth, legs, every part in our body can help us in teaching. Only then, I started building this image” (Ataa’)

This role was also found to be manifested in these teachers' teaching and learning conceptions as well as their reported classroom practices. Habiba, for instance, reported that the transformation in her conceptualisations of teaching and learning which resulted in her current communicative classroom practices was an outcome of her enrolment in pre-service education programmes.

“When I started University, I was thinking of a teacher as the one who spoon feeds the students as we used to have in schools...I think I was lucky to go to Education because I was fortunate to be taught by tutors who changed my thinking a lot. I learned a lot about good teaching from them. My aim was to equip myself with knowledge and tools which would enable me to go back to the field and change, to make teaching has meaning. They helped me a lot to achieve to this goal” (Habiba)

Moreover, some of the participant teachers demonstrated awareness of the significance of their own roles in their professional learning and therefore in their

students' learning experiences. This awareness was found to be in line with the 'Teachers' willingness to learn and develop professionally' professional self-image presented in chapter 5. They expressed a strong sense of responsibility in this regard and pointed out different sources which they used to achieve this. Interestingly, besides reading and YouTube videos, one of the most reported sources of the participant teachers' self-professional learning was found to be social media accounts, either Twitter or Instagram. These accounts varied from being general accounts to schools' subject-specific accounts. Finding these accounts beneficial in positively impacting their classroom practices and their students' learning, some participant teachers decided to have their own school subject-specific accounts, in which they posted their teaching ideas.

"Instagram and Twitter have very good ideas for us Maths teachers. Once I found an idea about how to teach angles using the classroom door, amazing idea. I told other teachers about it. They loved it and so many other ideas...I thought we also have good ideas, why not share them with other schools...Now we have our Maths team account" (Rahima)

"I learn new strategies from Instagram, anything that has to do with teaching Maths , anything new. For example, this is my third year to teach year 10 and I think this year I did better because I am more experienced and I got to understand the content better. However, one day I was browsing the Instagram and I saw a drawing of a summary of four different lessons, very simple and clear drawing. I showed it to students. They found it very useful. It saved me a lot of time in revising the content of these lessons" (Israa')

In addition, post graduate opportunities of some of the participant teachers was found to play a role in opening new perspectives in education which had not been available before. Such perspectives contributed to viewing and implementing teaching and learning differently.

"My Master in Science Curriculum and Teaching Methods. This opened new directions for me. I started seeing new angles in teaching which I can

say were closed before...It opened my eyes to new ideas. I can say I am a different teacher now” (Salma)

“I am doing a Master’s degree now in Educational Psychology. This has helped me a lot in understanding and dealing with my students. I do not blame other teachers when they do not care about this thing because they have not studied it as I have” (Ataa’)

Collegial interaction and reflection was also considered to be one of the key sources for the participant teachers’ professional learning and practices. This was reflected in the participant teachers’ collaborative examination of their practice and their collective future action plans. Khawla, for instance, talked about the impact of such practice in helping the Maths team in her school to restructure the subject scheme of work in a way which made it less time- and effort-consuming.

“Working collaboratively with my colleagues. The Maths team in the school is really cooperative. We often meet together, discuss and exchange ideas ... We bring students’ notebooks, go through their work of the whole semester and evaluate what we did. So like we need to teach this topic, for example, before this or we need to merge these lessons and so on” (Khawla)

This collegial interaction was found to extend the intra-subject team to other colleagues within the school context. Salma reported on the efforts of the career guidance teacher in her school in spreading new technological teaching ideas, which she found useful and effective.

“The Career Guidance teacher in our school has a master degree in Educational Technologies and she regularly sends us new ideas via the whole school’s Whatsapp group. I tried some of these ideas with my students. Last year I used some of these ideas with year 5 and they were fantastic. This year, I am using some with year 8 as well and they are going very well” (Salma)

In line with the previous section, the above findings revealed that the density of the prescribed curriculum and the exam-oriented assessment system shifted teachers’ focus and their classroom practices from the development of students’ skills and

attitudes to coverage of the content. This professional context certainly has implications for teachers' professionalism and identity formation. Such a context promotes a mechanical technicist mode of being a teacher whose sole role is the delivery of the prescribed content.

6.3 Being a teacher: as perceived by others

Undoubtedly, public perceptions of teachers influence how teachers perceive themselves. How teachers feel they are seen through other people's eyes in terms of their standing, status and regard impacts their views of themselves and the teaching profession. The exploration of this broad social context within which teachers work certainly informs our understanding of 'being a teacher' in Oman. Teachers' understanding of their place in the Omani society was gained through asking teachers about their perceived status in the surrounding community and their position in the Ministry of Education.

6.3.1 The surrounding community

The participant teachers expressed huge dissatisfaction and sorrow about their status in the surrounding community. They all agreed that there has been a steep decline of Omani teachers' standing in the community over the past two decades and considered teaching and **teachers in Oman are undervalued**. They stated that the public sees Omani teachers as less competent than the expatriate teachers and that society is not aware of the intellectual demands and responsibilities of teachers' job. Despite the fact that four decades ago most Omanis in general and parents in particular were not educated in schools, society had a much better appreciation and trust in what teachers were doing in schools. They used to consider their children were in safe hands in regard to their academic

attainments and social behaviour. Teachers were viewed as trustworthy sources of knowledge and role models in their social behaviour; thus, teachers and teaching were very well-respected and highly valued.

“The view of society, let’s say 15 years ago, was much better than it is now.” (Habiba)

“Less-competent than expatriate teachers. It is not satisfactory at all. They think that teachers are not doing much in schools. Unfortunately, teacher are not given the status which they deserve” (Noor)

Interestingly, although greatly dissatisfied with such a societal view, most of the participant teachers did not blame society for such an unsatisfactory view and they provided various reasons which had led to this “*serious crisis in teaching and education*”, as stated in Habiba’ words. This decline in Omani teachers’ status which has resulted in society’s disappointment and distrust in teachers and their work began in the year 2002. In the 1990s, there was only one governmental university in the whole country (The Sultan Qaboos University, SQU) and six governmental teacher training colleges (TTCs). Admission into these teacher training institutions, Whether The College of Education at SQU or the TTCs, was highly selective. There were second to the College of Medicine in offering places to high scoring secondary graduates. The demand for teaching jobs in schools was much higher than the total number of the graduates from the College of Education in SQU and the other six TTCs. This resulted in recruiting a large number of expatriate teachers in schools and the guaranteed recruitment of all Omani graduates of Education. Due to the increasing number of secondary school graduates and the limited opportunities of higher education institutions, admission into these institutions was highly competitive and left many with no chance of being successful. This was more apparent among female secondary graduates because

they could not work in so many types of jobs due to societal and cultural norms and beliefs. At that time, teaching was very attractive and appealing due to its financial rewards, societal status and guaranteed recruitment. The absence of any private teacher training institutions in Oman made these graduates and their parents look for self-funded training opportunities in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Oman's neighbour. In fact, there was only one private institution in the UAE which provided teacher training at that time and which was very low-ranked. Thus, initially the Ministry of Education rejected the recruitment of this institution's graduates as they were not compatible with the Ministry's recruitment standards and criteria.

However, in 2002, as the number of these graduates increased and in response to the policy of Omanisation, that is replacing expatriates with Omanis, the Ministry responded to these societal and political pressures by recruiting these graduates. Consequently, these teachers were allocated to different schools all around the country. Bearing in mind the level of preparation and pre-service education these teachers had been through, it was not surprising that they demonstrated **low professional attitudes and poor teaching performances**. Their teaching levels and performances were significantly below the Ministry's and society's expectations. Subsequently, this situation began to affect society's trust in teachers' ability to educate their children effectively, which therefore impacted the image of teachers within society.

"It is because of a category of teachers. These have distorted the image of teachers... They probably scored 70% (band C) or 60% (band D), they go and learn abroad, and were accepted to study in education, so became teachers. They do not have the talent and the ability to teach and came back weak. When they started teaching, their weaknesses were apparent for the students, especially now that all parents are educated

and many are university graduates. Parents noticed this in their children's attainments and started talking badly about teachers” (Azza)

Due to the oversupply of teachers between 2006 and 2010, the Ministry was more selective in its appointment of teachers and implemented some recruitment procedures, such as tests and interviews to all new teacher graduates from national and overseas teacher training institutions. As a result, hundreds of the UAE teacher training institution's graduates were not accepted as teachers and remained unemployed for this period of time. On February 2011, the year of the so-called 'Arab Spring', thousands of unemployed young Omanis, including teachers, protested demanding solutions for their lack of employment opportunities. Consequently, the Omani government responded by providing 50,000 job opportunities and within one month all the unemployed teachers were officially recruited. The participant teachers stated that this procedure affected the teaching profession badly and increased the distorted image of teachers in society.

“I can say that it (teacher's status) is lost... now people think that this profession (teaching) is a profession for profession-less” (Ghafir)

“When they (responsible bodies) decided to appoint as teachers every Tom, Dick and Harry, I do not blame society. I blame them for allowing anyone who does not have a job to be a teacher. Being a teacher and teaching is a noble profession not just anyone can do it” (Habiba)

In addition, many of the participant teachers pointed out the role of these teachers' **inappropriate public social behaviours** in enforcing the distorted image of teachers.

“Some of these teachers do other unacceptable behaviours in public, you know now photos go very quickly. If students get a photo of their teachers not in an acceptable manner, how do you expect these students will view their teachers? Such behaviours influence a lot the image of teachers in society” (Ataa’)

“The Omani teacher...is not at all a role model for students. He cannot be a role model for students anymore. I am not generalising, but as you know one person’s bad deeds create a common bad stereotype, but one person’s good deeds remain personal... A large number of society does not view Omani teachers as role models” (Habiba)

Moreover, the so-called ‘Arab Spring’ has affected the way in which people in general and professionals in particular asked for changes and improvements. Demonstrations in streets and in front of public and private civil institutions was a common trend in 2011. Accordingly, as mentioned earlier, some representative teachers demonstrated in front of the educational governorate buildings demanding changes and improvements in various educational issues. Some participant teachers talked about the way in which **2011 demonstrations** were treated and how this negatively impacted teachers’ status and image in society.

“I think you still remember when teachers demonstrated and were beaten by the rioting forces in 2011. This was like a big turning point. Teachers were viewed highly by society, now their status has become very low” (Ataa’)

Thus, the above findings revealed that the socio-political context within which teachers worked from the year 2002 had a strong impact on the participant teachers’ sense of status and value. The massive recruitment of incompetent teachers, some of whom display inappropriate public social behaviour, had resulted in a depressing sense of status within the society and made teachers feel devalued.

6.3.2 The Ministry

Contrary to my expectations, in the interviews the question of how they think they are positioned by the Ministry of Education produced the longest answers in the whole interview. I expected teachers to be quite reserved in their answers to this question, as for them I am a Ministry official. However, they appeared willing and

felt free to speak out their opinions and stories. As a person and a professional coming from the same cultural and professional context, I observed a big evolution in Omani teachers' criticality and, most importantly, their openness to share their critical views with senior authorities. This can be possibly attributed to the political and social changes resulted from the 'Arab Spring' presented above. Teachers possibly found this interview an opportunity to offload their thoughts and feelings in this regard.

In line with the teachers' perceptions of the value of the teaching job presented in section 6.1.3, most of the participant teachers highlighted the issue of **the absence of their voice**. Some of them expressed dissatisfaction about opportunities given to them for dialogue and discussion in macro-educational matters which concern them, such as curriculum, assessment and workload.

"We as teachers always ask for being involved in writing the syllabus. What really happens is that the Ministry forms committees for writing syllabuses and the majority are not teachers. I doubt if there are teachers in these committees. I do not think that teachers are going to produce such a very loaded syllabus with so many objectives that do not by anyway match the time provided. This makes us really disappointed. We teachers should form the biggest relative weight in these committees because we know what is going on in schools and classrooms" (Rahima)

"There are tests every two weeks. We need to assess the homework. I know that students copy from each other for the homework and I said this frankly to the supervisor and the Ministry people who visited our school last year. It's just a load on teachers. I suggested other useful ideas for homework. We can change and improve this, but they do not want to listen and make changes" (Ataa')

Some other participant teachers pointed out the absence of their voice, even in micro-matters, such as teachers' allocations in schools and transfers from one school to another.

“A teacher might be happy working in one school, then suddenly get transferred to another school without being notified, let alone, being asked. These teachers feel disappointed, infused and have negative attitude towards the new school administration and students” (Ghafir)

The lack of opportunities provided to teachers for dialogue and discussion which was common in the phase before the year 2011, caused teachers to demonstrate and strike to get their voices to be heard, as expressed by Ghafir.

“Our voices are not being heard as we wish to. You remember in 2011 and 2013? To get heard, teachers demonstrated and took strike action. Doors are not opened for dialogue and discussion” (Ghafir)

After the year 2011, channels for dialogue and discussion were provided and teachers were being constantly asked for their opinions on various matters relevant to teaching and learning. However, most of the participant teachers stated that they did not observe their opinions and ideas being put into practice.

“To be honest, they always ask us to write our opinions of different stuff but I do not think they consider them because what we write comes up again and again” (Manaar)

“They ask us for our opinions and we regularly send reports on so many things, exams, curriculum...etc. But I do not see that this is useful, why? Because what we write gets lost in a way or another. It might not reach the right people or they just do it as a routine work. They do not care about it, I don't know, I really don't know” (Khawla)

In addition, the data analysis revealed another form of absence of voice experienced by some of the participant teachers. These teachers felt that the Ministry views schools as experimental fields which are constantly being subjected to influx of initiatives and projects. Although most of these teachers seemed to welcome the potential of some of these initiatives, they expressed frustration at not being informed about the evaluation results of these initiatives. This made some of them to refuse to participate in any future initiatives.

“We implemented many projects and applied them and submitted the reports, so what? What is next, what is the solution, what is the result? We don’t know. Nothing. The rope had been cut. We have not been informed about the results, nothing. For example, the weakness in literacy, I can show you the exam, a test in reading, in writing, in listening and in spelling. We were asked to administer the tests and mark them for about 93 students for each teacher. We did this, we sent the marked test papers and the reports, then, what is the result? What happened? We don’t know. This was the year before the last... This year we refused to do it and we returned their envelope unopened” (Amal)

Another group of the participant teachers reported that the Ministry views **teachers as ‘machines’** which have to work non-stop. Some of them attributed the increasing work-load on teachers to the lack of coordination between the different departments in the Ministry. This situation resulted in the duplication of the same paperwork, which is directed to different departments.

“I feel they... view teachers as machines which are working and working and they add to their work until they explode. There isn’t any coordination between the different departments in the Ministry and the departments in the Directorate” (Azza)

“I think the teacher is viewed and wanted to be like a machine. Teachers are given so many roles and responsibilities... Teachers are scattered everywhere and are asked to do so many things and they just focus on paper work. They are very exhausted.” (Ghafir)

Other participant teachers attributed this situation to the presence of so many administrative staff members in one school, which adds to the burdens on teachers. The administrative staff members are assigned in schools to lessen the extra-curricular workload for teachers. However, the participant teachers revealed that such staff are actually adding to the increasing workload on teachers. Sarcastically, Salma stated that the Ministry is trusting teachers’ abilities to the extent that it asks them to do the work of others, namely of administrative staff. Consequently, this affects teachers’ time and effort, which should be mainly devoted and directed to teaching and students’ learning.

“I think the Ministry is trusting teachers more than it should be hahahahahahah to the extent that teachers are being asked to do their work and others’ hahah. Seriously, this puts lots of pressure on teachers. The teacher is doing the administrative staff’s work and the Activities Specialists’ work. So why are they there?...Teachers are not giving the required time and attention to their lessons and students...We are being loaded and pressured by other things than teaching and learning” (Salma)

These feelings and experiences of a large degree of marginalisation practised by the Ministry had depressing effects on the sense of status and position within the profession. Teachers are viewed as deliverers of the Ministry’s policies and projects and not as reflective professionals and reflexive partners in the education process.

In a nutshell, this chapter presented an in-depth account of the findings in relation to the participant teachers’ perceptions of themselves and the work they do as teachers. These findings were categorised into three main themes which were influenced by the three components Sachs (2005) identified in her definition of professional identity including ‘how to be’, ‘how to act’ and ‘how to understand’ their work and their place in the society’. One of the main findings revealed in this chapter was the impact of religion and culture on the professional identity of some of the participant teachers. Religious beliefs and cultural values were found to be represented in some of the participant teachers’ motives for becoming teachers, in their conceptions of their roles as teachers and in their motivational drivers which kept them going through hardships and a lack of official appreciation and recognition. This highlights the interaction between the teacher as a person and as a professional, which indicates the complexity in which teachers and their work are constructed. It also indicates that understanding teachers and their practices

requires adequate consideration of their religious beliefs and cultural values and practices.

Moreover, the above findings revealed the apparent dominance of the content-oriented conception and practices of learning and teaching among the participant teachers over other types of conceptions and practices. This was argued to be a reflection of the Omani educational system these teachers experienced as students and as teachers which is characterised by a crammed and prescribed curriculum and exam-oriented assessment. This finding indicates the impact of the educational system and contexts teachers experienced as students and as teachers on their personal conceptual frameworks and practices in regard to learning and teaching. Such an educational system has implications for teacher professionalism and identity formation. In other words, it mainly produces teachers whose sole role is the delivery of the prescribed content, which consequently promotes a mechanical technician mode of being a teacher.

Furthermore, in regard to the participant teachers' perceptions in relation to the way they are perceived by others, the above findings revealed a depressing sense of status within Omani society due to some political decisions related to the recruitment of incompetent teachers. These decisions had greatly affected teachers' sense of value and the appreciation of teaching as a job in Oman. This sense of being devalued was also experienced by the participant teachers in their relations with the Ministry. This relationship was perceived to be characterised by a large degree of marginalisation and an absence of space for voices and opinions, which indicates how teachers are viewed as professionals by the Ministry.

Teachers are perceived as deliverers of the Ministry's policies and projects and not as reflective professionals who can impact educational decisions and policies.

7. The Evolution of Omani Teachers' Sense of Professional Identity

Introduction

The purpose of this study has been to investigate the nature of the Omani teachers' sense of their professional identity: that is, the way in which these teachers conceptualise themselves in relation to their work. In the previous two chapters, I presented the self-images these teachers had about themselves as teachers and the findings of the three key components of being a teacher. The focus of this chapter is on the evolution process of this self-image throughout the career path of the participant teachers. Thus, in this chapter I attempt to provide findings relevant to research question two: How has this view of professional identity evolved over the career path of the Omani teachers?.

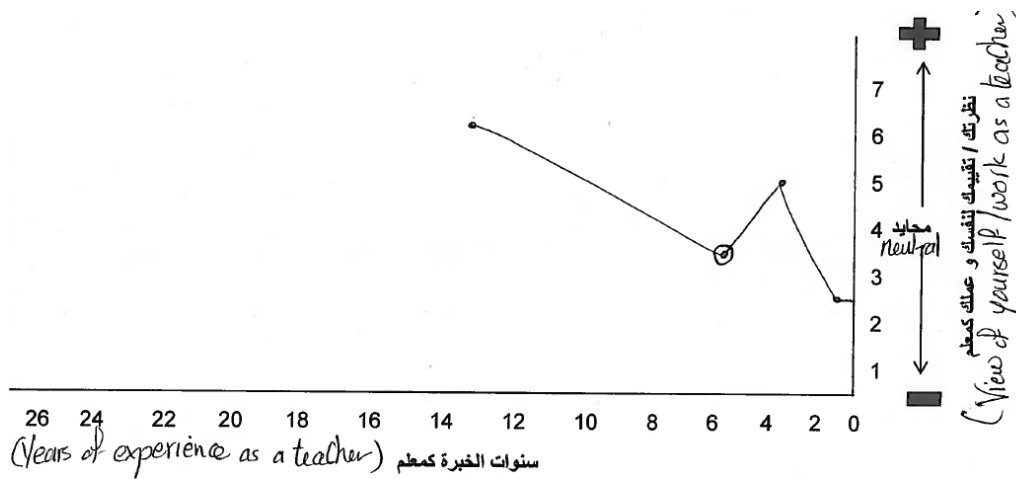
These findings were obtained from two highly interrelated sources of data: the 'graphic story-line' stimuli task and its follow-up semi-structured interview. The stimuli task was utilised to enable the participant teachers to evaluate over time their views of themselves as teachers; this revealed the evolution process of these teachers' professional identity during their career path. This evolution process was then unpacked by the follow-up semi-structured interview. Participants' responses to this interview were used to construct the participant teachers' career stories given below. My intention in the construction of these stories was to provide a window on, or interpretation of, the participants' career path, rather than present a definitive career history. To this end, much use is made of extended quotations throughout the course of the stories.

This chapter is divided into two main sections. In the first section, I present the career stories of the fourteen participant teachers. These stories take as their starting points the first year of teaching and as their end points the year the participant teachers were in at the time of the data collection stage of this research. Therefore, they mainly focus on the events and experiences the in-service participant teachers encountered throughout their career as teachers. However, due to the complex and intertwined relationship between in-service teachers' pre-professional life and their professional one, events and experiences from an earlier period of their life inevitably entered the discussion and cast light upon those that happened latter.

In the second section, I build upon these career stories to examine the key dynamic and shifting aspects the participant teachers perceived as evolving in their sense of their professional identity. This examination was carried out through the analysis of data across and between cases. It presents various conditions and events which have contributed to the evolution of these teachers' sense of professional identity throughout the course of their career. Thus, it provided further insights which enabled a better understanding of what 'becoming and being' a teacher means within the context of this study.

7.1 Teachers' career stories

Manaar



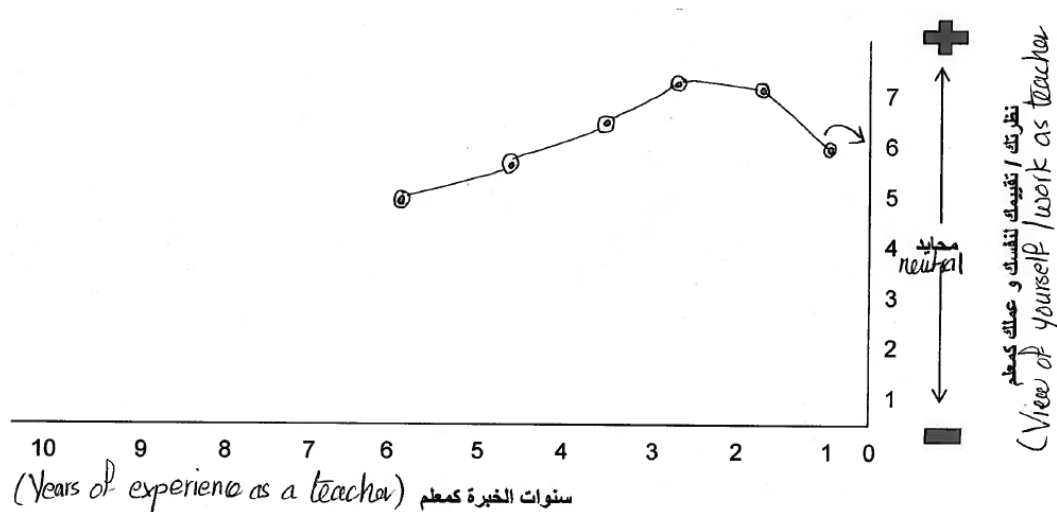
Having 13 years of teaching experience as a Science teacher in the same school, Manaar's sense of herself as a teacher began low and increased in her third year. However, the most significant rise was from her sixth year onward. Manaar attributed this big rise to the Master's programme in Curriculum and Teaching Methods she had the opportunity to take in her eighth year at Sultan Qaboos University (SQU). This is because as a teacher with a reasonable amount of experience, Manaar was able to relate to the theoretical content and notions provided on the programme. This enabled her to perceive her teaching practices with a different lens and be aware of different aspects of her professional self. In addition, implementing the knowledge and skills acquired in relation to educational action research assisted her understanding of some practical teaching issues and resulted in better students' classroom performances and attainment results.

"It was about my 8th year of experience, after I came back from the Master...We learned new things which made me like performing more, better aware about different aspects of the teachers and they gave us strategies for action research...From here I was able to build my character as a teacher...I tried out the reciprocal teaching with my students and saw the big improvement in their performance...I also did a research on the challenges of laboratory work"

The lowest sense of herself as a teacher was when Mannar was a beginning teacher, in her first year of teaching. In addition to the inevitable problems and challenges related to the nature of the transition period from being a student teacher to being a teacher, Manaar talked about the absence of a systematic and proper induction programme, which should be geared towards supporting novice teachers at this critical stage in their career.

“Here, it was my first year in the school. I wasn’t able to identify the different characteristics of the teacher... I was the only Science teacher in the school and another expatriate part-time teacher. There wasn’t that much cooperation between me and her and even between me and other teachers. There wasn’t, how to say this, professional development programmes for us new teachers. I mean for the school life not only for how to prepare and how to assess”

Habiba



While Habiba valued the theoretical and the practical input from her undergraduate experience, at its conclusion she felt very strongly that she did not have enough theoretical and pedagogical-content knowledge to make her the competent teacher she was hoping to be. She, thus, took a year off to do her Master of Education degree before commencing her career. During the Master’s programme, Habiba was constantly interacting and working with her classmates, who were mainly

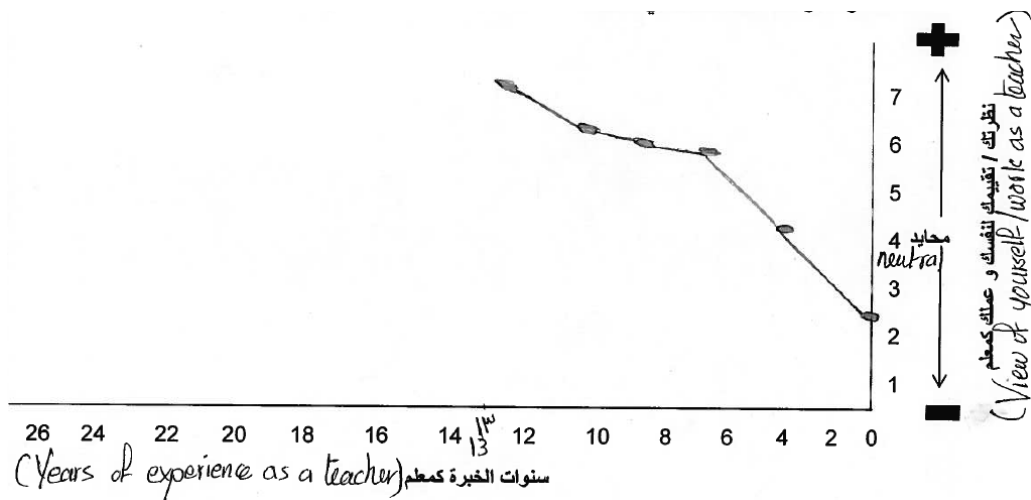
experienced school teachers and educational supervisors. This kind of interaction, coupled with the Master's level theoretical knowledge she was able to acquire, boosted her confidence in being ready to go to schools and make changes. Although Habiba viewed herself highly as a teacher in her first year, this view went up in her second year due to moving into a school with a large number of students and teachers. This provided her the opportunity to implement and share her ideas, which exclusively aimed at making schools a motivating and meaningful place for students, with a large school population.

"I implemented some of the ideas I learned from my Master's programme in my classrooms. But in (her first school), there were only 8 students and a small number of teachers. I wanted more students and more teachers to benefit from my ideas... because of my goal of making schools interesting and meaningful"

Noticing her commitment and dedication in regard to improving her students' attitudes and attainments and to voluntarily helping other school teachers to make their lessons motivating and meaningful, from her third year of teaching until the time of this research, the school leadership assigned some extra-curricular activities to Habiba. This required more time and added extra burden on Habiba's shoulders, which left her with less time for improving her own and other teachers' teaching practices. This resulted in Habiba feeling that her classroom practices were not up to her expectations and that her efforts and creative ideas were not being directed towards what she was here for in the first place.

"When they discover a teacher's desire for work, this teacher is taken to other areas like extra-curricular activities. These are not useful because they do not focus on academic attainment... of course they were extra load on me and they needed lots of time. The work I used to do does not have the same time"

Khawla



In the interview, Khawla talked about two dramatically different storylines: her teaching performance, and her job satisfaction and motivation to teach. The line in the above graph describes the first of these aspects. Khawla seemed satisfied with her classroom practices and the overall academic attainments of her students. She attributed the gradual rise in her confidence and satisfaction to her accumulative experience with the curriculum and with students. She also pointed out the significant role of the spirit of cooperation and collaboration which is dominant in the Maths department in the school.

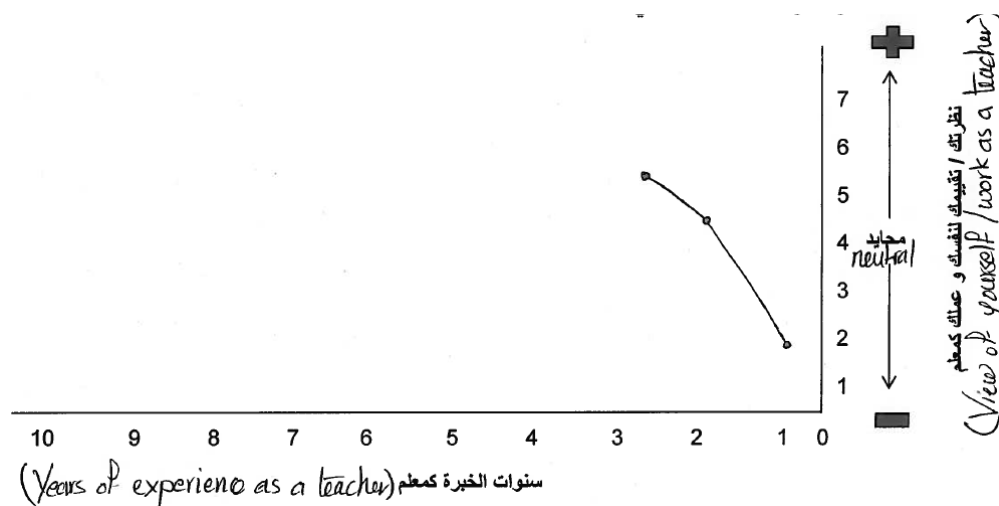
“Year after year, the quality of my performance gets better. I get to know more about students, use variety of strategies, learn about new ones from colleagues, even other subject teachers not only Maths... my colleagues, the Maths teachers have played a big role in this because we work as a team. We are very cooperative with each other”

On the other hand, Khawla expressed great dissatisfaction with her job and talked about a steep deterioration in her level of motivation and enjoyment of being a teacher. She pointed out the role of educational supervisors and school leadership in this respect. The impractical feedback that supervisors regularly provided her with in order to improve her practice and their non-acceptance of any critique she raised related to curriculum resulted in Khawla’s feelings of frustration. Furthermore, the absence of a detailed and comprehensive document of a

teachers' job description led Khawla's school leadership to assign different kinds of roles and responsibilities to teachers, which added an extra burden on their already loaded schedule.

"They (supervisors) always say, you need to do this and that but when I ask them how to? What do you suggest? They don't have logical and practical solutions...This have affected my emotions a lot and my desire to work...Something I get used to from my discussions with supervisors that what is written is holy and we have to abide by it. Isn't this frustrating?...Unfortunately, we don't know what is for us and what isn't, the rules are blur...Once I asked the Head teacher about a document which says that senior teachers do not attend substitution lessons. She said: you do everything. We are regularly asked to do work which is not ours"

Ataa'



Experiencing a very traditional schooling system characterised by teacher-centred classrooms and passive students, Ataa' evaluated her sense of being a teacher in terms of two key aspects: her relationship with students and recognition of initiatives. She was not very concerned about her classroom practices simply because she had a good repertoire of teaching ideas and strategies she had accumulated from her undergraduate studies. In addition, her technological skills enabled her to have easy access to a variety of technological aids, which enabled her to deliver professional development seminars for other teachers in the school.

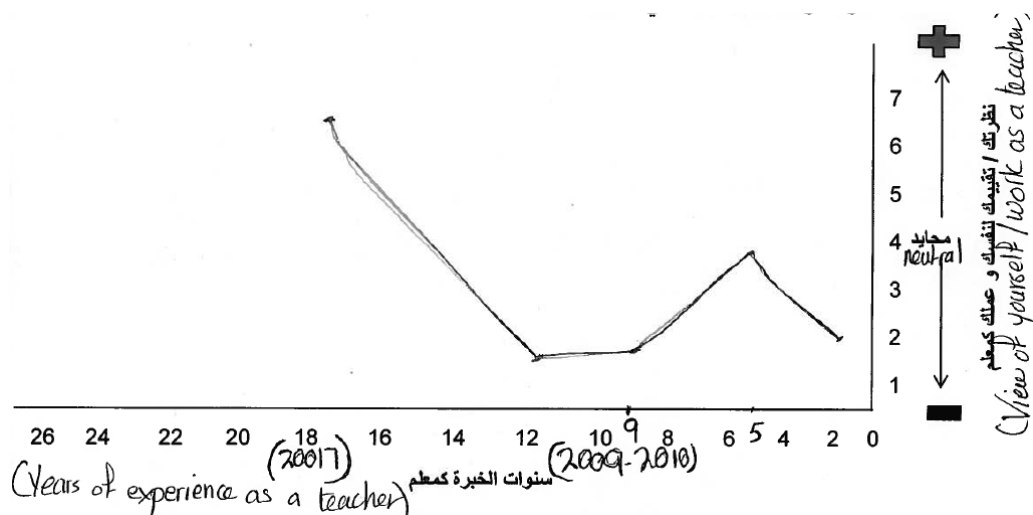
However, her key concern at the very early stage of her career was the way in which she would relate to students. She struggled to identify the fine line between having a democratic teacher-student relationship and keeping the required distance between her and the students. This did not seem to go well during her first year.

“When you are close to students, you get to know their opinions and their problems. I was close to them but that closeness was in a way negative. I wasn’t happy about it. I wanted to be close to them but in a different way”

Being able to identify the fine line between being a teacher and being a friend, Ataa’s sense of herself as a teacher increased dramatically. This big rise in Atta’s view of herself as a teacher was also generated by the school nomination of her project ‘The Key to Success’ to compete against other educational projects on a Governorate level.

“Now, I understand the limits that should be there and understand the way of dealing with students...My projects were only known within my school. This year the school chose my project among others to be sent to the Governorate...it’s a project called ‘a Key to Success’. It has four components: attainment, motivation, school-home communication and the last one is students’ evaluation of teachers”

Salma



Currently, Salma's sense of herself as a teacher is the most positive she has ever experienced throughout her career. She reported that the chance she was given to do a self-funded, full-time Master's degree for two and a half years enabled her to review her teaching conceptions and practices. Since she was still on the programme away from school, she was enthusiastic about going back to the classroom and implementing the notions and the strategies she had been exposed to. She talked about changes in her understanding of the notion of classroom management, her attitudes towards the use of technology in teaching and her implementation of various student-centred pedagogical strategies. The positive changes she noticed in students' attitudes and learning of the subject was encouraging for more development. This willingness to change was also supported by the existence of a school leadership which valued initiatives and creativity.

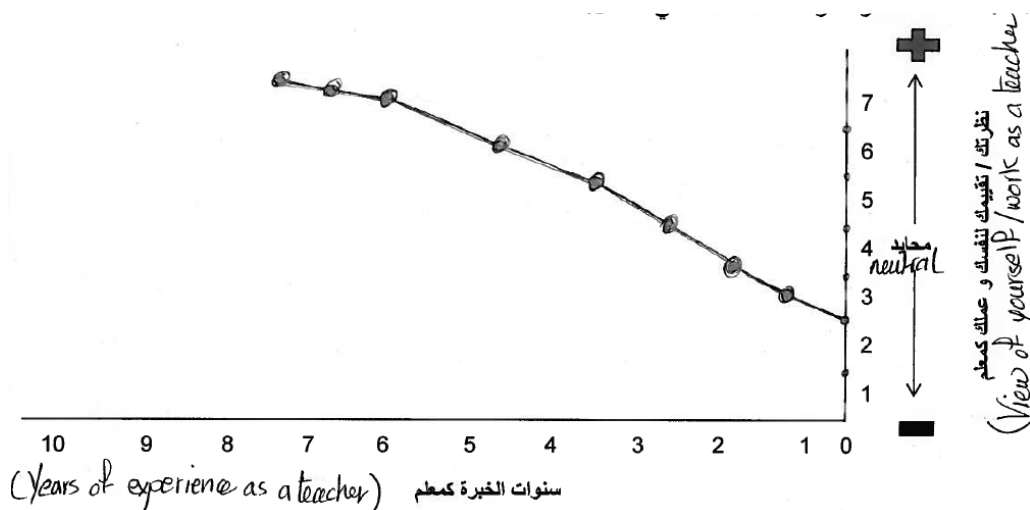
“After coming back from the Master’s programme, I tried to change a lot in my teaching methods. My teaching skills in general had changed, like classroom management and the use of different strategies in teaching and assessment for example using the smart devices and phones in teaching...When you see that students are responsive, this pushes you to do more...The school administration in my school encourages teachers to change and use new ideas and strategies...The administration contacted the Governorate and asked them to provided tablets for all students in my class. They also invited other schools to attend our workshop on how to use tablets and phones in classrooms”

Apparently, this was not the case after Salma spent the first 5 years in her teaching career. Her sense of herself as a teacher was declining year after year until it reached its lowest point when she had 10 years of experience, the year before embarking her Master's programme. The absence of the element of creativity and renewal, which resulted in the dominance of the delivery and lecturing mode in Salma's classroom practices, generated a sense of inadequacy, boredom and demotivation. In this regard, Salma pointed out the non-existence of in-service

professional development opportunities which could help teachers perceive their practices with fresh eyes.

“I felt these years (from year 6 to year 10) were routine years...I mean every year doing the same thing, teaching in the same way, nothing different. At times, when I felt the deep boredom and I saw the faces of the girls, I used to ask myself ‘am I teaching properly?’ There wasn’t creativity...No one before got me to see teaching in a different way even the professional development programmes from the Ministry”

Ghafir



Having 8 years of teaching experience, Ghafir’s sense of herself as a teacher was rising gradually year after year. Just as Mannar, Ghafir reported on the challenges and the difficulties she experienced for the first two years of her career in a rural school context, very-well known in Oman as ‘transit schools’. These schools are characterised by the constant changes of teaching and administrative staff due to the lack of teachers who are residents of the same area. Novice teachers from other areas are often allocated to such schools and are transferred to a nearby school to where they live after two to four years. Equipped with mainly theoretical knowledge about teaching from the Maths department in SQU, offered ineffective practicum opportunities and allocated to a non-supportive school context for two

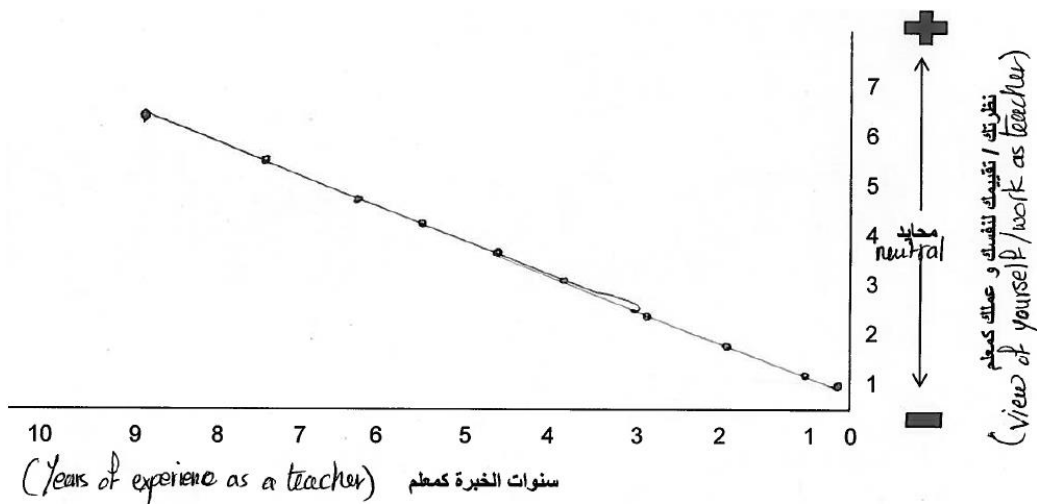
years, Ghafir's view of herself at that time was filled with deep uncertainties and despair.

“At SQU, I didn't get real practical experiences; theoretical knowledge is not an experience. The practicum was in the last year, one day a week in the first semester and two days a week in the second. Honestly, I did not benefit that much from the cooperative teacher. She visited me once to write the report on me, that's it no more...I was recruited in a transit school as they call them. There was me and another teacher from the previous year. In my second year, we got another new teacher...You can imagine my feelings at that time and my confidence in my teaching. Very low.”

Being transferred to her hometown school, Ghafir found a stable and a supportive school culture. This culture was represented in the school leadership, which placed great importance on the undertaking of different professional learning encounters and had high expectations for her students' achievements and attainments. It was also represented in the Maths team, which was managed by a competent and encouraging senior teacher and consisted of hard-working and creative teachers. This gave Ghafir the opportunity to be exposed to and gain different professional experiences, resulting in the improvement of her teaching practices and her relationship with the students.

“Here (in her current school) I met a very good senior teacher. She is experienced and does new things...She encourages us to be better than her...Teachers are experienced and teach by using new methods. I wanted to be like them, you know, as if I was competing with them...Students here are very good so I want to give them the best I can...The workshops teachers from different subjects do are really useful...The administration sometimes brings people from outside to do training for us, of course all these helped me a lot”

Israa'



Similarly, Israa’s storyline shows a constant and steady rise, reflecting an on-going growth in her sense of herself as a teacher. This sense was expressed in terms of increasing self-satisfaction with her classroom practices and her motivation for teaching. Israa’ talked about the positive effects of experiencing three different schools and interacting with new colleagues in the last nine years of her professional life, all of which had enabled her to learn different things about teaching and learning and reinvigorated her motivation, which could have not happened if she remained in one school.

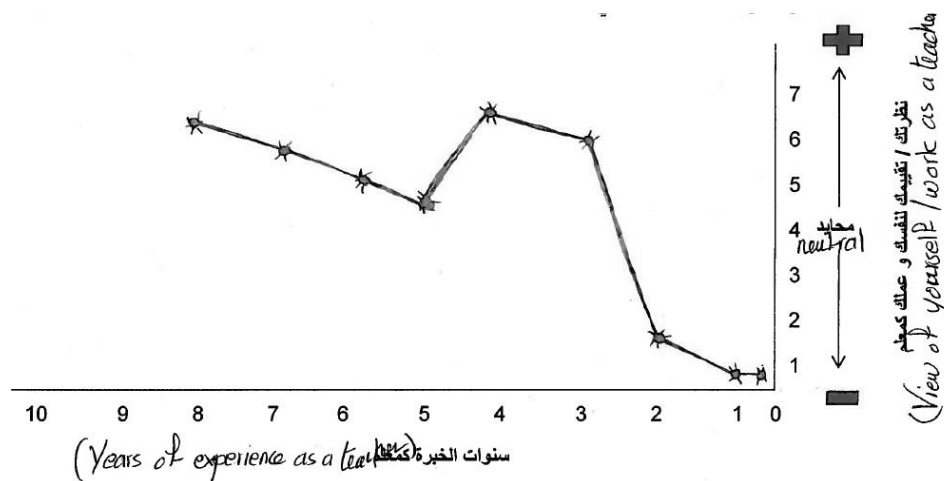
“This is because I moved to more than one school... each year I had an increasing level of positivity and enthusiasm. If I had stayed in the same place, it would be very possible that I might feel bored...From each school, I learned new things and I acquired new experiences. I became better at managing time and I learned different strategies”

In addition, just like Ataa’, the nomination of Israa’s educational initiative, the use of Master’s thesis to improve the teaching of Maths, enhanced her self-confidence as a teacher and promoted her motivation to teach. Moreover, Israa’ pointed out the big role of YouTube and social media, especially Instagram, as sources of new teaching ideas and strategies. These sources, she expressed, contributed to being

able to vary and update her classroom practices and thus, her sense of confidence and motivation as a teacher.

“What encouraged me was when the school administration awarded me because of my project. It was nominated to compete against others at the level of the Ministry...Some programmes like YouTube and Instagram, internet in general, has a very big role in my self-confidence as a teacher. I regularly watch videos, even in English, I translate the ideas in them and I apply what suits me and my students”

Amal



Spending the first two years of her career as a teacher of young learners in a small private school, for which she was not qualified and had no orientation training, caused Amal frustration and negatively affected her confidence in her professional judgment. This was particularly the case in matters of assessing children and deciding on the right time to move a child from one target to another. Her lack of knowledge and skills in this respect led to uncertainty, which often resulted in making wrong professional judgements. This triggered parental disapproval and conflicts. In addition to the limited teaching encounters that student teachers get in the practicum which was highlighted above by Ghafir, Amal revealed the absence of any opportunity provided to student teachers to practice assessing students.

“During the practicum, you have no right or authority to assess students. But when you become a teacher, you are suddenly given all the authority to do so. That was frightening for me, especially that I had bad experiences in this...One of parents came to school and discussed with me in front of the Head teacher and another teacher about moving his child to shaddah (a vowel in Arabic). He said that his child was not yet confident in sukoon (a vowel in Arabic), why did I move him to shaddah...I was really frustrated and I told the Head teacher that I could not stand this anymore...I was looking for a chance to move out of that school”

This sense of frustration changed dramatically when Amal was recruited by her hometown C2 school. She felt enthusiastic and passionate about working with her previous teachers, and with the age group she was qualified for, and teaching the Arabic language which fascinates her. In addition, she attributed the rise in her sense of herself as a teacher to the recognition and appreciation shown her by her school leadership and the senior teacher's. Furthermore, she highlighted the good academic level of students which encouraged her to constantly look for and provide good learning experiences. She revealed that the key sources of her interactive teaching style were the Diploma in Education she got from Jordan and, interestingly, her private school teaching experience.

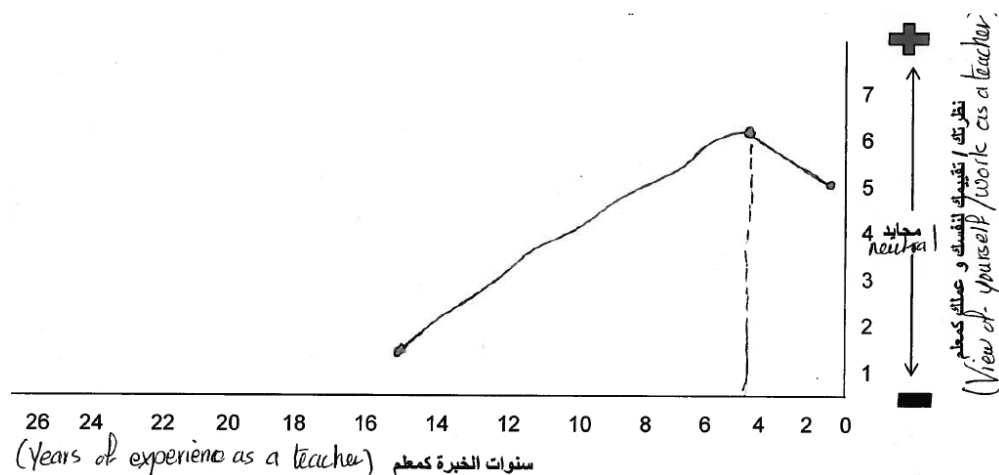
“I have good relations with teachers, most of them were my teachers. Students were really good, so I had to put effort. Teacher is valued in this school by the administration, the senior teacher and other teachers... Honestly speaking, my experience in the private school was key in this. I taught year 1 children. They were young and I taught them mainly by playing. Also my training in Jordan, the Diploma I got from there. The tutors there used to give us the content by stimulating our thinking not by spoon feeding and also my field training in Jordanian schools”

Experiencing some health problems in her fourth year of experience which required constant hospital appointments, Amal reported that these circumstances affected the time required for the planning and preparation of interactive classroom activities and her stamina in undertaking them. Fortunately, Amal managed to

recover after one year of her illness and came back to school filled with enthusiasm and energy as she used to be.

“Here in my fourth year I was not feeling well. I didn’t know why. I went to different clinics and hospitals but they couldn’t tell me the exact problem. Of course this affected my performance. I was weak and not in the mood most of the time...Thanks God, one of my relatives advised me to travel to India for treatment. I went in the summer holiday... thanks God, with the medicines I am feeling much better now”

Azza



Azza’s first four years of her career as a teacher witnessed the highest sense of self as a teacher. Being allocated in her village school, Azza was familiar with the nature of the students and the parents. She felt responsible towards teaching the children of her relatives and neighbours, whom she described as being academically hardworking and socially respectful. She enjoyed participating in these children’s education and helping them to achieve what most of their parents had not had the opportunity to accomplish.

“At the beginning, the students were close to me. I knew them and I knew their mothers. I had direct contact with them...I knew everything there...I felt enthusiastic and tried to give the girls all what I had...I had a responsibility...I felt girls were in needed of that especially that most parents were not educated, so these girls only had school to get education”

This high positive sense sustained until it was the time to get married and move to a town far away from her hometown. This social and professional shift dramatically affected Azza's sense of herself as a teacher and has unfortunately resulted in a steep decline in this regard for the last ten years. The increasing responsibilities of being a mother and a teacher in a well-recognised school put huge burdens on Azza's shoulders and caused her fatigue and burnout. This was coupled with discourteous students and a tough school administration as described by Azza.

"I found that students did not have good manners with the teachers and the administration was tough and strict...I had many embarrassing situations from the administration and students. I am not used to this. For example, it is very likely that a student replies in not a nice way to the teacher"

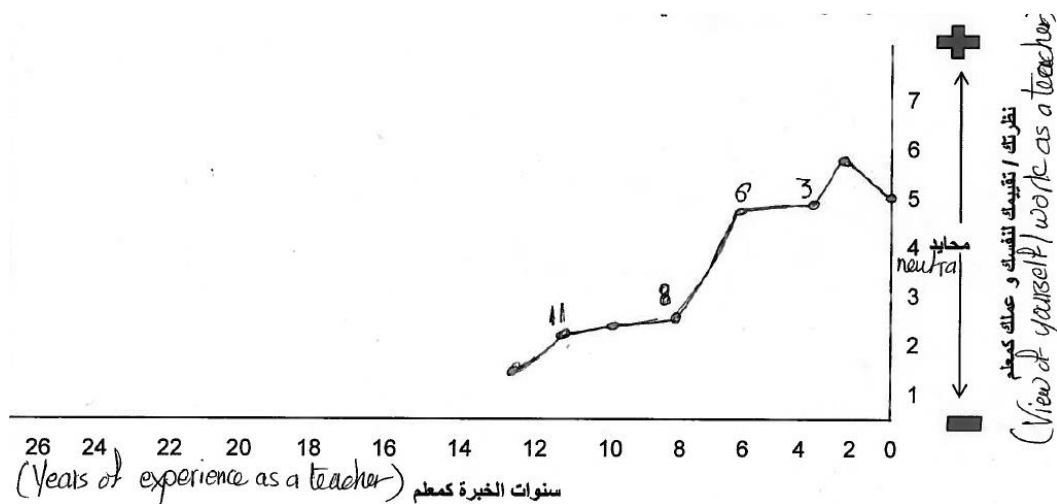
Azza explicitly revealed that this decline did not only affect her motivation for teaching, but also her sense of her self-efficacy as a teacher. Compared to her hometown students, the average to low academic level of her current students and their poor attitudes to learning made her doubt her teaching skills and abilities. In addition, her educational supervisor's decision to stop her in the middle of a lesson and to teach her class instead has greatly affected her sense of self-efficacy and has demotivated her ever since.

"I try to give students all I have but I do not get the results that I expect. I think I am not able to teach as I used to do. I do not have the ability I used to have...I was teaching year 12, it was my first year teaching year 12, I didn't teach more than year 9, I was pregnant and very tired. She (the educational supervisor) came to my lesson while I was teaching. After some time, she stopped me and started teaching my class. Can you imagine?...This affected my self-confidence and until now I am not at all confident about what I teach and how I teach..."

Interestingly, Azza was an Arabic teacher working in the same school as Amal. However, their perceptions of their senses of themselves as teachers when transferred to the school were in complete contrast. The elements of the school

context, such as the students and administration, which Amal pointed out as catalysts for the rise in her sense as a teacher, were considered by Azza as contributors to her decline in this aspect. This suggests that there is no one school context which is ideal and fits all teachers. This is simply because the sense of oneself as a teacher is an on-going meaningful interaction between the individual teacher and the social organisational context (the school in this case). Therefore, the constructed professional identity, how teachers view themselves, relies on who the teacher is, as much as where the teacher works. In addition, beside the spatial dimension, these two teachers' career stories highlighted the importance of the temporal dimension of a context. That is, teachers' sense of themselves as teachers can only be properly understood against the background of previous experiences.

Asya



Asya started her teaching career fully charged with enthusiasm and eagerness to meet the students on a daily basis. Although she stated that being a newly-appointed teacher required her to learn a lot about the practicalities of teaching and assessment, this did not affect her passion for teaching and her confidence in her

ability to learn and improve her teaching practice. At that period, Asya reported that she had time during the school day to discuss issues with her colleagues and even visit them in their classrooms. However, after two years from starting her teaching career, Asya stated that she, as other teachers, was burdened by an increasing and standardised workload, especially in regard to students' assessment. This, she reported, was continuously increasing and compounded by a constant flux of different initiatives and projects coming from the Ministry.

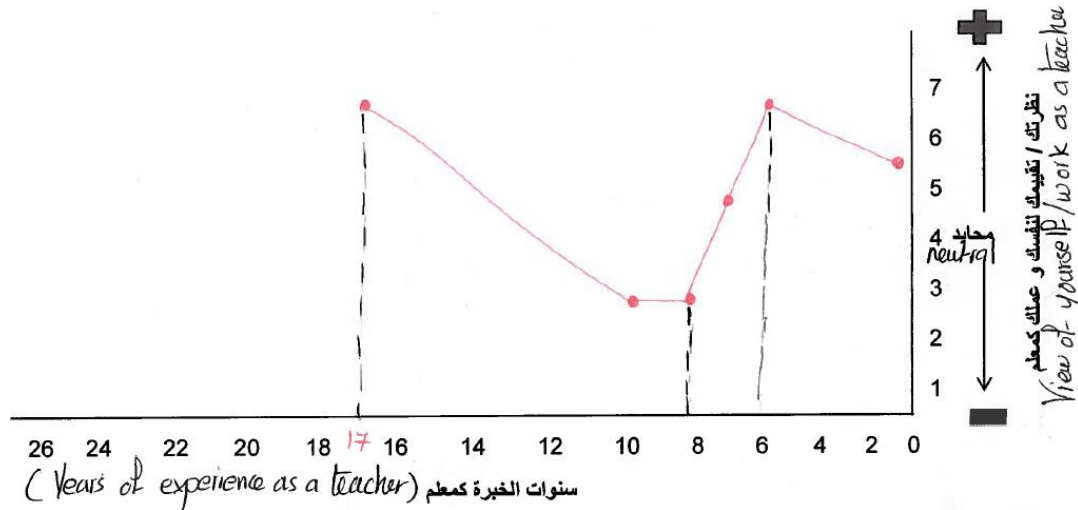
“After my second year, the workload increased. Before, we did not have to do model lessons, workshops and assessment activities... assessment activities weren't standardised. There were only three short assessment tasks and two homework tasks...Now we do not have freedom, we are forced to do three assessment tasks, two homework tasks and two tests for each semester. The homework is pre-determined. We do not have freedom. They tell you the homework needs to have this and that... the projects that come from the Ministry which we have to participate in them is another story. Otherwise, you are not a cooperative teacher”

Although not satisfied with this and spending most of her time working at school and at home, Asya started to get used to the new reforms in assessment which promoted stability in her sense of herself as a teacher. However, getting married and having two small children left Asya with only the time of the school day to undertake all her teaching, assessment and extra-curricular demands. Consequently, this put a huge amount of pressures on her and did not provide her the time and the energy to think about and implement interactive classroom activities. Her classroom practice reverted to being traditional and teacher-centred, which resulted in her dissatisfaction with her teaching performance and accordingly her motivation towards teaching.

“You see here, there is no change because I got used to it. I still don't like it but I got used to it. Then I had my children, only one year gap

between them. You can imagine the amount of work I have at home...I have no time at all for school work. I have to do everything at school. I am not happy, I am not happy at all about what I am doing with the students. What else I can do?...I do not have time, honestly, there is no time to prepare activities”

Rahima



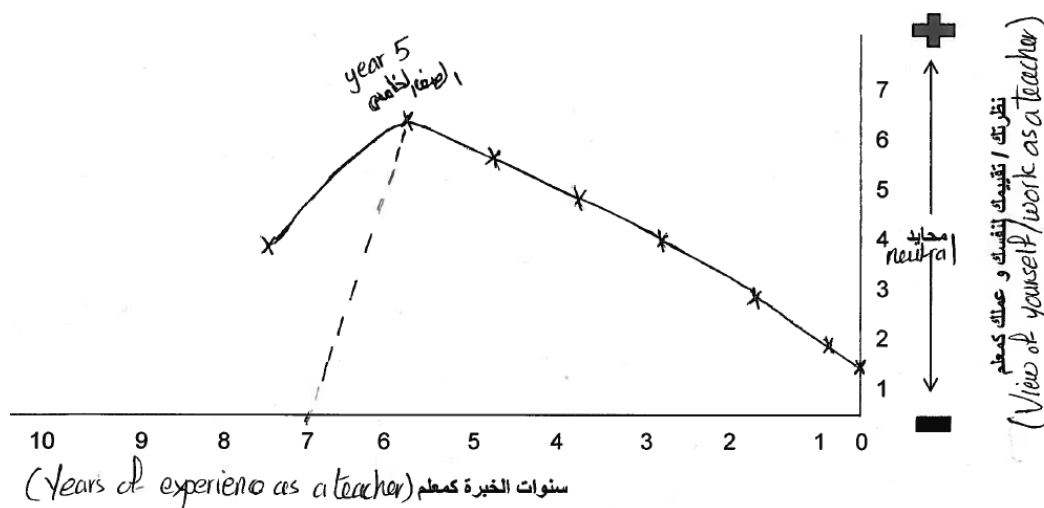
Just like Asya, Rahima reported that she started her teaching career with passion and motivation. She felt that she was appreciated by society and that she was doing a valuable job. This encouraged her to deal with and overcome her first two years of challenges and difficulties. She willingly accepted participation in extra-curricular activities because she believed that as a teacher her role is to develop students' learning as well as their interpersonal social skills. This motivation for teaching and eagerness to improve her classroom practices kept rising until the sixth year of her career when it was time to move to a new school due to being married in another area. There, she stated, she was faced with a one-sided administration which did not allow two-way communication with teachers and were not professional with regard to making judgements.

“In my first three years in this school, there was an administration which did not understand teachers and was not willing to listen to them. There was no give and take. It was this is what I see and that’s it...In my first year in this school, some girls complained to the administration about my fast pace in teaching. They (the administration) told me you did something wrong. I was astonished. I was known as a competent teacher in my previous school... of course my motivation for teaching declined. I was frustrated with their judgements”

With a change in the school administration, Rahima was able to get back her positive motivation for teaching and her eagerness to improve her classroom performance. She considered this period as the thriving period of her career, in which she was promoted as a senior teacher and awarded the prize as the teacher of the year.

“Then we got totally new administration. It follows the policy of give and take, and the careful observation without rushing into judgments. This period was a golden one for me. I was given the status I was looking for. I got awards for my hard work. I can say that 80% of the reasons for this is the school administration. If the school administration is not supportive, the positivity of the teacher reaches its lowest levels and the opposite is right”

Ameena



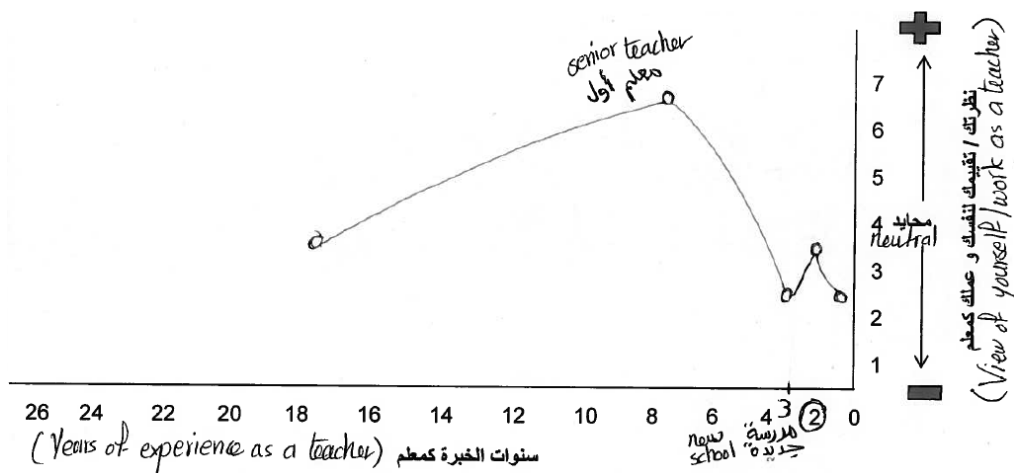
Just like Ghafir, being appointed at a rural ‘transit school’, which was nothing like the school she studied in and the ones in which she did her pre-service training, Ameena disclosed that her first year of entry was extremely challenging. As a

novice teacher, she knew her first year of teaching was going to be difficult, but she also expected to be surrounded by a supportive senior teacher and other colleagues, but this was not the case in the 'transit school'. She reported feeling depressed and lost and she reverted to teaching the way she remembered she used to be taught.

"I don't want to remember that year. Oh my God, it was really tough, really tough, very far away from home. I used to visit my family once a month. People there were very different. You know these areas, they are not like ours. I knew that teaching was not easy but honestly not as I experienced in that school. No one really knew what they were doing, hahaha. I tried to remember what my teachers used to do, how they behaved and I did like them... Seriously, what else I could do? I wasn't happy about it but what could I do"

Being transferred to a school near her town in which she found the good support system she expected to get as a teacher, Ameena's sense of her self-efficacy and satisfaction with her classroom performance started to increase steadily. The friendly and cooperative Arabic team, the experienced and encouraging senior teacher and the hardworking students contributed to the sustainability of this rise for the following six years. However, as a result of a draw the senior teacher had to carry out as most teachers in C2 schools often refuse to teach years 5 and 6, Ameena was 'forced' to teach year 5. Due to her lack of training in dealing with young learners, she reported a low sense of self-efficacy during her eighth year of experience.

"Things were going very well in this school. I like my students. I love being in classrooms. I learned a lot from my colleagues... the senior teacher is like a friend for us. She is really kind... but this year as you can see here, I am not satisfied. I find it really difficult to deal and control year 5 students. They need different ways of dealing with them and teaching them...I am teaching them as I used to teach years 9 and 10 but it is not working"



Although three years of teaching experience at a General Education school, Umnia reported feeling like a novice teacher when she was transferred to a Basic Education school. This was due to the big differences in both systems in terms of philosophy, curriculum, assessment and teaching practices. This was coupled by the lack of training about the new system which Umnia experienced. Orientation and induction into the new system was left to the inter-professional learning encounters and opportunities provided by her own practice and the support of other colleagues. As years passed, she found herself more aware of what the system requires and gradually became satisfied with her classroom practices.

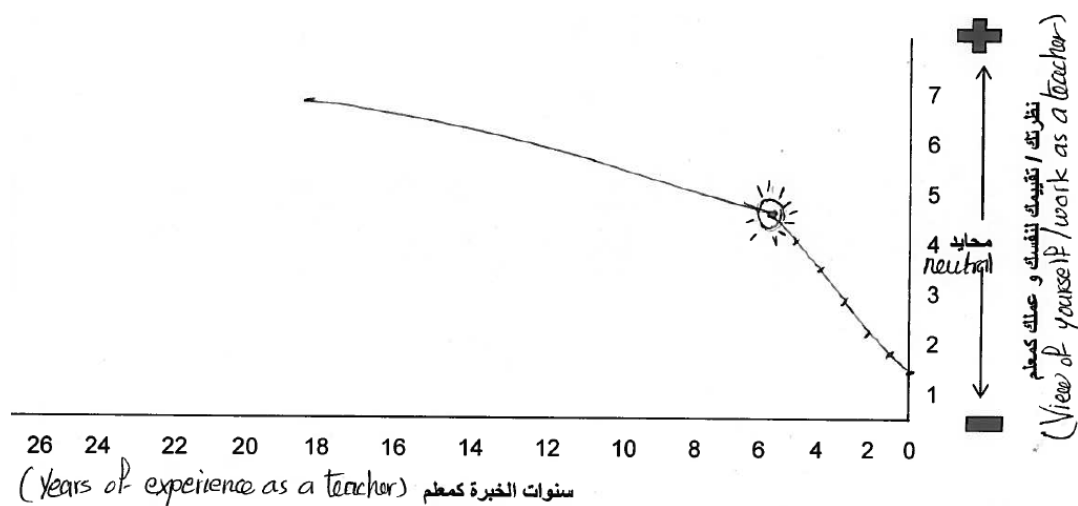
“When I started working in that school, everything was new for me: the books, the classrooms, the assessment, everything...I had to learn everything from scratch... it took me time to be confident again about what I do and how I teach... no training at all. It was only by asking and by practice... the senior teacher told me you need to plan like this and assess students like this...I attended lessons with her and other colleagues and thank God I learned”

Being appointed as a senior teacher after five years of experience in the new system, Umnia started experiencing a struggle between the demands of her role as a teacher and her role as a senior teacher. She revealed that the demands of her new role took most of her time and effort in the school, which consequently

affected the effective fulfilment of the teaching demands, especially classroom practices. The increasing technical and administrative burdens on her as a senior teacher left her with little time to look for and design new instructional strategies. This dual role has been generating a sense of dissatisfaction about her teaching practices ever since.

“These years, I don’t feel I have been doing what I am supposed to be doing as a teacher. I feel I am not giving my students what I should give them, especially my classroom practices...My many duties as a senior teacher, technical and administrative, are increasing every year...they are taking me from my classrooms. My colleagues are doing much better with their students than what I am”

Noor



In line with the some of the career stories already presented, Noor witnessed a gradual and steady positive rise in her view of herself and the work she did as a teacher. She attributed this to her willingness to be a competent and well-recognised teacher within her school and the governorate. This willingness, she stated, was powered by the high regard and status teachers used to have at early years of her career. The confidence she held about herself and her ideas was tested when she was in her fifth year of experience. Believing in the abilities of low-achievers, Noor thought that what was hindering them from making progress was

being mixed with other ability students which made it difficult for teachers to respond to their needs in a class with 40 mixed ability students. Thus, she proposed categorising students into ability classes. This was completely rejected by the school Head teacher and other teachers. With the support of her educational supervisor, Noor managed to put her idea into practice and after a one year trial, she proved that progress actually occurred in the low-achievers test results. This was welcomed by the school administration and it was decided to continue with the idea for the following year.

“I like dealing with low-achievers more than bright ones. I feel so happy when I manage to help them. I feel so happy when they make progress... of course my proposal was refused by the Head teacher because it was not easy to rearrange students and school timetable. Teachers were saying, who will teach the low-achievers will be the victims, because it required more work of course...When they all saw the results, they knew I was right... some other schools wanted to try the idea”

The success of her strategy for dealing with mixed abilities, enhanced Noor's confidence in her ideas and encouraged her to constantly look for new teaching methods and strategies. This on-going confident desire for change and renewal and the continuous implementation of up-to-date teaching strategies resulted in Noor's sustained positive view of the effectiveness of her classroom practices.

“I always look for new things. I like to change and vary my teaching strategies... Thank God my students' results are good and they seem to enjoy my lessons... so yeah I feel that I am doing well with students and until now I do not feel bored”

7.2 Revelations of teachers' career stories

The above presented participant teachers' career stories illustrate various career pathways each teacher experienced throughout their career. It might be argued that these career stories do not necessarily reflect the individual teachers'

experiences accurately. This argument is based on the premise that teachers' early experiences are reconstructed in the light of new ones. I agree that individual teachers' variations in their evaluations of the sense of their professional identity may reflect how an individual teacher felt about different career experiences. However, more importantly, I might argue that they also reflect how these experiences were explained and valued. Therefore, they revealed some key issues in the construction process of in-service Omani teachers' professional identity, which have given rise to a better understanding of what 'being' a teacher means within the context of this study. One of the significant issues highlighted by the above career stories is the non-stability and therefore the dynamism of the construction process of teachers' sense of their professional identity. These stories revealed some of the key dynamic aspects of the sense teachers have of their professional identity throughout their careers. In addition, they shed light on some of the key influential factors in the career evolution of the participant teachers.

These career stories revealed the complexity and the interdependency of two key dynamic aspects which the participant teachers perceived as causing their sense of professional identity to develop: professional self-efficacy and job-satisfaction. The fact that the participant teachers chose to focus on these two aspects and exclude others can lead us to assume that these were perceived to be the most important constituents affecting teachers' sense of their professional identity. Therefore, placing value on these two aspects clearly highlights what the participant teachers perceived as important about being a teacher.

7.2.1 Teachers' sense of professional self-efficacy

Teachers' sense of self-efficacy is used here to refer to the teachers' beliefs about their ability to influence students' academic attainments, and their motivation for learning, both their own and that of other teachers. For ten of the participant teachers, their sense of professional self-efficacy in the first year of teaching was reported to be low for varying reasons. For another four, interestingly, it was reported to be high; for two it was the highest throughout their career and for the other two it was the second highest.

7.2.1.1 Professional self-efficacy and entry into the profession

Apart from the well-documented challenges, uncertainties and anxieties newly-appointed teachers encounter when they start teaching, the absence of systematic and effective induction programmes in the context of this study makes this period of Omani teachers' career an extremely challenging one. In city schools, the newly-appointed teachers might be supported by the subject senior teachers (head of subject departments) and other cooperative experienced teachers. However, in rural schools (transit schools), as Ghafir and Ameena reported, the newly-qualified teachers find themselves unsupported and with no one to refer to. In addition, the absence of a young learners' teacher education programme at the pre-service level in Oman results in the allocation of newly-appointed teachers who are not qualified to teach at this stage of education. Thus, as reported by Amal, beside the normal teaching fright experienced by newly-qualified teachers, these teachers are placed in situations which rock their self-efficacy as teachers and cause them significant distress.

The perceived positive sense of first year professional self-efficacy of the other four teachers, which for two of them remained so for the following two to four years, does not suggest that these teachers did not experience the well-known teaching fright and anxieties, nor that some of the above-mentioned contextual aspects were not present for them. However, it suggests the existence of overriding effects of other factors which boosted these teachers' sense of professional self-efficacy at this critical period of their career. To illustrate, the up-to-date theoretical and practical knowledge and skills Habiba gained from doing her Master's degree before the profession, which other teachers in most schools lacked, enhanced her self-efficacy as a teacher. In addition, her strong belief in her role in making schools meaningful and purposeful for all students not only hers was reflected in her commitment and practices to share what she knew with other school teachers and contribute to their professional learning and development. Thus, professionally possessing and enacting what all other teachers in the school were not able to, contributed to Habiba's positive sense of self-efficacy as a teacher within and outside the classroom.

Rahima and Azza, started teaching in their village schools, where most people were not educated or had limited education experiences. They were among very few Omani teachers from the same village and more expatriate ones. Given this, they experienced a very high sense of regard and recognition both from within the school or from the surrounding community. They also reported a sense of relatedness and connection to the students and their families, who were mainly either relatives or neighbours. Perceiving themselves as being valued and having a sense of relatedness to students and the surrounding social community generated

a sense of great responsibility to be up to others' expectations and aspirations. This raised their level of motivation and commitment to positively influence their village students' academic attainments and motivation for learning.

In her evaluation of her self-efficacy, Asya seemed to value her students' motivation for learning and their engagement in the classroom. Due to a lighter workload, fewer assessment requirements and no family demands during the first two years of her career, Asya was able to think about, learn, design and implement more student-centred activities. These injected life into her classrooms, engaged students and raised their level of motivation to learning. The impact of her interactive teaching style at that period of time on both students' test results and their motivation to learning led her to perceive that period positively.

7.2.1.2 Professional self-efficacy and other career phases

Considering other career stages of the participant teachers, this perceived dynamic aspect of teachers' sense of their professional identity was found to take different directions, sometimes oppositional, due to various reasons. Whereas four of the participant teachers reported a sustained increasing rise in their sense of self-efficacy, eight revealed fluctuations and two expressed dissatisfaction in this respect. No correlation with the career stage of the participant teacher, whether beginning, mid-career or experienced, was found.

Khawla, Ghafir, Israa' and Ataa' reported an increasing rise in their sense of self-efficacy. They all agreed on the role of reflection in improving their classroom practices. They also reported working with cooperative subject teams were of great support in times of uncertainty about issues regarding subject matter content or

pedagogical queries. In addition, they stated that school-based professional development workshops conducted by teachers from within their teams or other subject teachers enhanced their classroom pedagogical skills and practices. Furthermore, Israa' and Ataa' pointed out the role of information technology, such as YouTube, and social media, like Instagram, as sources of pedagogical ideas. Interestingly, Israa' revealed making use of a unique and forgotten professional learning source in Oman; some Master's theses in the domain of mathematics curriculum and teaching strategies. These, she stated, in particular the ones about the curriculum were a great help in rearranging the problematic teaching units in the syllabus and restructuring the content of each unit. All these different professional learning encounters and development practices were reported to positively influence the above-mentioned four participant teachers' students' academic attainments and their motivation for learning.

As for the eight participant teachers who displayed variations in their sense of professional self-efficacy, the data analysis revealed that for six of them this sense started and kept rising again, whereas for two it continued to decline.

To illustrate this point, both Manaar and Salma perceived a decline in their sense of self-efficacy after five years of teaching experience. Despite their reported good repertoire of subject matter knowledge and the satisfactory test results of their students, both teachers described feeling a sense of inadequacy about their teaching pedagogies and classroom practices at that period. The dominant teacher-centred strategies both teachers were trained for and used for the first five years of their career generated in them a sense of incompetence in responding to their students' needs. Not being able to find a solution to this sense of inadequacy

in their schools or in the opportunities provided by INSET, both teachers decided to go on paid study leave and take a Master's degree in Curriculum and Teaching Methods. This professional qualification was a critical turning-point in their professional lives in general and led to a dramatic increase in their sense of professional self-efficacy. The theoretical and the practical knowledge they acquired from undertaking this qualification, especially on the topic of active learning, had a significant impact on their teaching practices. In addition, this qualification equipped them with skills and resources which assisted them in pursuing their own professional learning.

Unlike Manaar and Salma, Rahima, Umnia, Habiba, Ameena and Amal attributed the variations in their sense of self-efficacy which took place at different phases of their career to some structural, contextual and health issues. Moving into schools with different educational systems, from General Education to Basic Education, for which they had no training, both Rahima and Umnia felt a decline in their sense of self-efficacy. As for Umnia, this improved as time passed and as she became better acquainted with what the new system required. In contrast, Rahima reported a sense of low self-efficacy coupled with a low sense of motivation for improving her practice for four successive years. This, she stated, was due to the students' attitudes towards teachers and the school leadership's way of handling conflicts between teachers and students. With a change in the school leadership members and management strategies, Rahima expressed an increasing level of motivation which resulted in her eagerness to seek different sources of professional learning, particularly other schools' Instagram and Twitter accounts which consequently enhanced her classroom practices.

Similarly, Ameena revealed a downfall in her sense of self-efficacy when she was 'forced' to teach an age group, year 5 and 6, which all teachers in her school avoid teaching, due to their lack of training in dealing with young learners. This downfall occurred in her eighth year of experience: the time during which the data collection of this study was undertaken. Moreover, structural administrative burdens and demands related to the new roles assigned to Umnia (senior teacher) and Habiba (PD coordinator) and the consequent lack of time for teaching duties was found to be behind these two teachers' dissatisfaction with their sense of self-efficacy in the period following their promotion. Furthermore, Amal expressed an adventitious fall in her sense of self-efficacy related to some personal health problems lasting for a year. During this year, she tended to be more teacher-centred in her classroom practices which went against her perception of good classroom teaching interaction. However, during her gradual recovery, she got back the strength and the energy to design and implement the interactive teaching style she had always believed in. This resulted in a steady rise in her sense of self-efficacy for the following three years of her career.

In contrast, Asya and Azza expressed a long term sense of dissatisfaction with their professional self-efficacy, which started after the second year of entry into the profession for the former and after the fourth year for the latter and has continued since then. As for Asya, the on-going increasing burdens of teaching and assessment, and the growing family demands which happened after her second year of teaching, made her unable to practise what she genuinely believes in, values and was implementing for the first two years of her career. Therefore, ever since, she has not perceived her self-efficacy as being as high as it used to be.

Interestingly, her students' academic attainments and their good test results in her subject were not sufficient to make her view her professional self-efficacy more highly. The absence of the sense of enjoyment and engagement in her classrooms, which Asya was very well aware of, but could do very little about, resulted in her low sense of self-efficacy for the subsequent years.

For Azza, the dramatic professional and social shifts she encountered after her fourth year of teaching hugely affected her sense of professional self-efficacy. Moving to a big, new town and a well-recognised school where she knew very few people, Azza did not find the regard and status she used to have in her village. In addition, the differences in the nature of people in the town school from those in the village school from which she had come, made it difficult for her to relate to her new context and be part of it. She always felt that the town school was not really her place and tried to go back to where she had been. She was not supported by her husband. More importantly, the confrontational and the shocking educational supervision style she experienced in the town school resulted in her doubting her teaching skills and abilities, which resulted in a long-lasting sense of low self-efficacy.

7.2.2 Teachers' sense of job-satisfaction

Teachers' sense of their job-satisfaction is used here to refer to the teachers' feelings and attitudes towards the nature of the teaching job and the workplace conditions. It is worth mentioning here that teachers' job-satisfaction does not necessarily include the notion of teachers' job-involvement. Although the participant teachers' reported the sense of professional self-efficacy was the most prominent in the above-presented story-line graphs, teachers' sense of job-

satisfaction was brought up in the interview by all the participant teachers. All of them agreed that the current nature of the teaching job with its on-going and increasing demands and pressures, and the continuing influx of extra-curricular educational projects and initiatives generated in them a great sense of job-dissatisfaction. The physical and the mental fatigue all the participant teachers reported to experience due to the current situations in schools affected negatively the teachers' feelings and attitudes towards teaching as a job. Other participant teachers pointed out particular school context issues which had negative effects on their senses of job-satisfaction. For instance, Khawla and Rahima talked about the school administration's attitudes and practices which do not value teachers' opinions or consider their emotions.

Moreover, in addition to the current demanding nature of the teaching job in Oman, the data analysis revealed that some participant teachers' sense of job-dissatisfaction depended mostly on the expectations and values these teachers have of teaching. That is, some teachers might expect some opportunities from the teaching job; however, as these opportunities and expectations are not met, they tend to feel dissatisfied. These expectations and values might vary from one teacher to another. To illustrate, Azza's expectations and experiences of a school teacher as a well-regarded and respected figure by all relevant contextual agents, including parents, school administration and students, was not met in her town school, which caused her to have a low sense of job-satisfaction. In addition, Asya's expectations and beliefs of a good classroom teaching as being interactive and student-centred were not met after her second year of teaching, due to

contextual and personal factors. Consequently, this negatively affected her sense of job-satisfaction.

One of the significant findings from the data analysis in this regard is the interplay between teachers' sense of self-efficacy and their sense of job-satisfaction. Teachers' sense of job-satisfaction relates to their sense of self-efficacy in various ways. That is, the participant teachers who reported a high sense of professional self-efficacy did not necessarily expressed a similar level of job-satisfaction. In fact, in most cases these two dynamic aspects of the participant teachers' sense of their professional identity were oppositional. On the other hand, those who evaluated their sense of self-efficacy as low reported a similar perception of their level of job-satisfaction. Interestingly, no parallel positive sense of both aspects was reported in the data.

In sum, the above examination of the evolution process of Omani teachers' professional identity over the course of their career path highlighted certain issues which need careful consideration and hold important implications for the development of teachers' professional identity. One of the recurrent issues indicated by many of the participant teachers' career stories was the importance of training programmes and professional development encounters, which are based on careful analysis of teachers' needs and concerns. When tailored to meet teachers' needs and concerns, such programmes and encounters can contribute positively to the construction of teachers' professional identity. In line with this, teachers' use of social media platforms and YouTube as sources for their professional development urge professional development providers in Oman to re-examine the 'how' aspect of their programmes. Moreover, the above findings

flagged the vital importance of school context in the development and construction of teachers' professional identity on two fronts. First, the particularities of the school culture and the extent to which these match or mismatch with teachers' professional expectations and personal traits was found to have long-lasting effects on teachers' sense of professional identity. Second, the nature of relationships and professional support teachers experience in school contexts influenced their motivation, commitment and attitudes towards teaching. Furthermore, the policy context, namely crammed and prescribed curriculum, heavy demands for testing and marginalised teachers' voices, was found to shape teachers' sense of job-satisfaction to a great extent.

8. CPD Opportunities and Omani Teachers' Professional Identity

Introduction

This chapter draws on the third step interviews with the fourteen participant teachers. The interview schedule (see Appendix 4) was designed to investigate the participant teachers' perceptions and experiences in relation to the CPD opportunities provided by the Ministry of Education to assess their impact on these teachers' sense of professional identity. As discussed in chapter 3, CPD conceptions and implementations in the Ministry of Education in Oman are limited to training and professional development, which is centralised and top-down in nature. Thus, it was not surprising that when the participant teachers were asked about their perceptions and experiences of CPD opportunities, they mainly talked about INSET formal, structured activities. The analysis process of the data gathered at this step resulted in the clustering of the participant teachers' comments about CPD opportunities and their impact on their sense of professional identity into six themes which will each be presented separately.

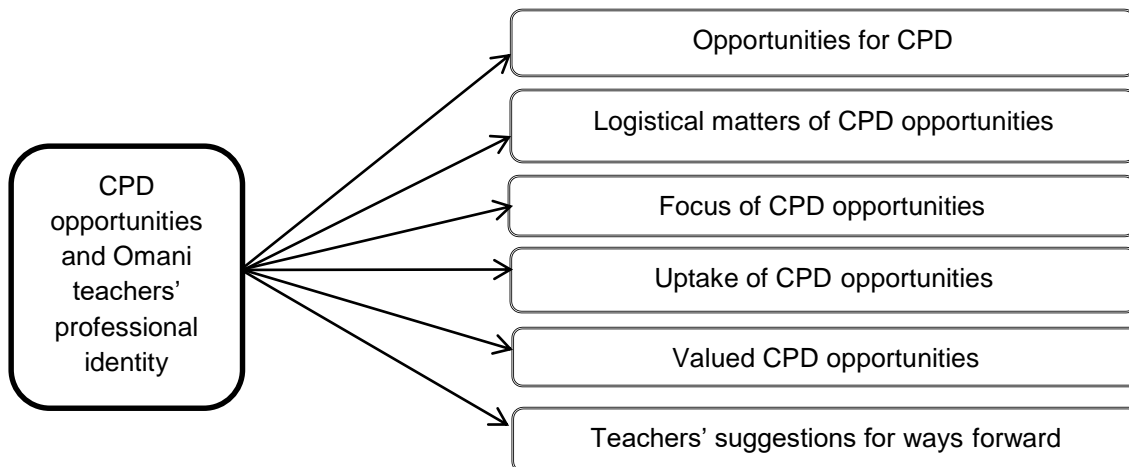


Figure 8.1: Themes related to CPD opportunities and Omani teachers' professional identity

8.1 Opportunities for CPD

In their comments on their access to CPD opportunities, the participant teachers made a distinction between two types of CPD opportunities. The first type is the in-house workshops and presentations conducted in schools. These are mainly conducted by the school teachers themselves or other institutions' providers, such as universities or private training institutions. The second type is the off-site opportunities including presentations, workshops and courses conducted away from schools. These are mainly conducted in the educational governorates training centres by educational supervisors or occasionally in the Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) by the university's academic staff.

Generally speaking, all participant teachers reported insufficient access to off-site CPD opportunities and expressed a desire to be given the chance to attend more of these. For instance, Ataa' revealed that throughout her three-year career, the only CPD opportunity she had the chance to attend was the new teachers' course at the Specialised Centre for Professional Training of Teachers (SCPTT).

"I went to one professional development programme during my three years of experience. It was the one in the Specialised Centre. Since then I didn't attend any outside my school" (Ataa')

This scarcity of the CPD opportunities was found to recur in the data, regardless of the participant teachers' years of teaching experience. For instance, with 18 and 6 years of teaching experience respectively, Salma and Habiba expressed similar viewpoints to Ataa's.

"Not sufficient at all... we as teachers need to meet other teachers from other schools, talk about our problems and listen to different solutions... Yeah there are opportunities here in the school but still we need to discuss with other teachers from other schools. I am sure they are doing interesting stuff" (Salma)

“After the new teachers’ induction day, within these 6 years, I attended a two-day presentation on the subject matter in the training centre and a research course in SQU because I am a member in the educational governorate’s research committee. Apart from these two, no, nothing else” (Habiba)

Moreover, the limited access to off-site CPD opportunities was explicitly evident in other subject teachers’ accounts.

“... for 5 years now, I have not attended any. Two years before going to do the master degree and three years after coming back I haven’t attended any” (Manaar)

“I don’t remember when was the last time I attended one. That was a long ago... they ask for certain year teacher or the new ones or those with 5 years of experience and all these did not apply to me for many years” (Azza)

The teachers’ comments above on the shortage of the off-site CPD opportunities provided to them was confirmed by the comments of the senior teachers in the sample. Compared with their chances of CPD opportunities, both Rahima and Umnia revealed that their colleague teachers did not get sufficient opportunities for certain reasons.

“If we look at the opportunities offered to teachers and the ones offered to senior teachers, for sure the senior teacher gets much more chances. I can say they are probably 1:10... this can be because of the number of senior teachers compared to the number of teachers. Senior teachers are fewer than teachers” (Rahima)

“As a senior teacher, I get some chances. But other teachers, no, they do not... maybe because when I attend a CPD, I would spread it to 10 of my teachers, which doesn’t always happen though. I don’t know... this is the most convincing theory to me for this situation” (Umnia)

On the other hand, all the participant teachers seemed satisfied with the quantity of in-house CPD opportunities provided to them. This was particularly the case for internal teacher-to-teacher CPD workshops and presentations.

“Every year we have a PD plan. We teachers conduct workshops to each other... they can be from within our subject or even done by other subject teachers” (Asya)

“Not only us Maths teachers. All other subjects have their own PD plans...There is a good number of these every year” (Noor)

As for in-house CPD opportunities undertaken by external CPD providers such as universities and private training centres, the participant teachers reported that there is a dearth in this respect due to lack of funding.

“You know, it would be really good if school administrations can afford bringing university tutors to schools...I once talked to the school administration to bring us my university tutor. He is really good in active learning strategies, but the Head teacher said: there isn't a funding item to support this” (Ataa)

“From time to time, it is really good to bring academic staff from the university. There are really some good ones, but I haven't seen this in my school” (Khawla)

This can be attributed to the fact that schools in Oman are being funded by the Ministry of Education to carry out internal in-house CPD provisions. However, there are no funds specifically provided for bringing in external CPD providers. These CPD opportunities can only be funded from school budget excess, which many schools use for other various demands.

The above findings highlight that the provided CPD opportunities for the participant teachers focused mainly on internal in-house provision. Undoubtedly, this type of CPD opportunities are invaluable as they are expected to emerge from and be directed towards teachers' practical needs and challenges. They also show the value placed by the educational system on teachers' professional expertise. However, regardless of their locations, the reported scarcity of other CPD opportunities provided to teachers by expertise other than teachers themselves can have undesirable consequences. Quality-assured CPD opportunities provided

by such expertise are important to avoid matters of 'groupthink' and false glass ceilings in teachers' professional development. They avoid teachers acting in a bubble and open up new approaches and fresh perspectives for them.

8.2 Logistical matters relating to CPD opportunities

This section is related to the reported administrative planning and organisation of the CPD opportunities including venue and timing. Some of the participant teachers considered the venue of the off-site CPD opportunities as one of the constraints which hindered them from attending these limited opportunities. Such opportunities are often provided in the Educational Governorate Training Centre. There is one training centre in each governorate, which is located at varying distances from the participant teachers' schools and residences, ranging from 15 minutes to one and a half hours. Israa' who lives and teaches in an area which is a one and a half hours drive from the Educational Governorate Training Centre expressed dissatisfaction about this matter.

"I don't think they (PD opportunities) are adequate...The location is not at all suitable for us from this area...It takes 3 hours going and coming when I go by my car and if by the school mini bus it takes even longer" (Israa')

Azza reported a similar viewpoint. In fact, she had refused to go to two of the CPD opportunities offered in her early career years because of the distance from her school to the training centre. Not wishing to drive long distances and the cultural inappropriateness of going with the school male driver when there are no other female teachers going were her reasons for rejecting these opportunities.

"I remember when I was in (her village) school. I told the Head teacher that I am not going to the training centre. I don't drive long distances and you know, it is not suitable to go with the school driver alone. There weren't other teachers going with me" (Azza)

To resolve this logistical problem, Habiba suggested the idea of clustering some of the nearby schools and providing such off-site CPD opportunities in a central school, especially since all governmental schools in Oman have well-equipped multi-purpose halls.

“I don’t know why they insist on doing these in the training centre. They can ask 5 or even 10 schools to gather in one school in the area and do the CPD. I am sure that Head teachers are welcoming and they like such events to be in their schools. They just need to be planned in advance”
(Habiba)

Moreover, the timing of the off-site CPD opportunities was considered to be another constraint. Most of the provided CPD opportunities are planned to be conducted during the semester. This often resulted in the refusal of some teachers to attend such opportunities. Khawla talked about her reluctance to miss lessons to go on a geometry course during the semester, as it was planned to be three days every month. This dilemma resulted in her decision to decline the offer of the course in favour of her lessons.

“When are these opportunities provided? Once they told me there is a course for me, a geometry course. I go three days every month. At that time, I thought a geometry course might be good and beneficial, but at the end I refused to go. The lessons I was going to miss were more important than attending the course. Imagine, three days a month for four months, too many lessons” (Khawla)

Israa’ also reported a similar experience. She attributed her decision to miss some of the CPD opportunities offered in favour of her lessons, due to the misalignment between the prescribed curriculum content and the actual teaching time.

“I sometimes say I am not going... timing is not suitable because of the syllabus and the teaching time. Without attending such CPD opportunities and we are taking extra catch up lessons. How would it be with attending these” (Israa’)

This misalignment and its consequences on teachers' decisions to refuse some of the limited CPD opportunities was also expressed by Rahima, a senior teacher.

“Sometimes the supervisor asks me to nominate names of teachers for some PD opportunities. When I ask the teachers, they refuse to go. I don't blame them because I see how much they need to be in school. They have no time to spend on CPD during the semester... there is rejection because of this” (Rahima)

In fact, the above findings on the venue and timing of PD opportunities as being constraints to teachers' professional development revealed a further constraint which can work as a barrier for proposed changes and improvements in this respect. This constraint is not an aspect of the PD opportunities themselves but directly affect their proper implementation. The crammed curriculum content and the misalignment between this content and the actual teaching time force teachers to sacrifice some of the already limited PD opportunities provided to them. Thus, the on-going presence of such a dense curriculum is likely to have a negative effect on teachers' presence in PD opportunities conducted even in a nearby school. In addition, it might seriously hinder efforts to provide sustained PD opportunities and avoid the one-off form of PD.

8.3 Focus of CPD opportunities

All the participant teachers reported that the vast majority of the off-site CPD opportunities provided to them focused on subject-matter knowledge. These subject-matter-oriented CPD opportunities, teachers stated, were not beyond the academic knowledge included in the content of the school syllabuses.

“We notice they focus a lot on teacher's repertoire of subject matter knowledge...I can say the majority of them...What is in the content of the syllabus is given more attention than how we teach it” (Amal)

“They tend to focus on subject matter knowledge of some years, like year 9. The content in year 9 is very loaded, so they focus more on this, clarifying this point and that concept nothing more really” (Manaar)

“I can hardly remember a CPD opportunity which was not on subject matter... things we know sometimes and other times things which aren't that important...” (Rahima)

The senior teachers in the sample pointed out another focus for the CPD opportunities provided to them. They talked about attending annual CPD provisions which introduce them to changes in the assessment documents for different school years. They, then, are responsible for disseminating these and cascading them for their colleague teachers in their schools.

“As a senior teacher, I have to attend presentations on assessment documents every year to tell teachers about the changes... We have got the documents in schools, we can read them” (Salma)

“Changes in assessment documents. They tell us about changes in the documents, boring stuff. They do not add anything new to us. When we tell them our opinions on them, they say this is how it is, it is from the Ministry” (Umnia)

They also talked about attending presentations on the criteria of writing good exam papers and analysing already administered exams.

“They were talking about writing exam papers, going from easy to difficult and linking these to syllabus aims and objectives” (Rahima)

“As a senior teacher, I also attend discussion sessions with supervisor and other senior teachers...We discuss exam papers from last semester and discuss why some questions were challenging for students” (Umnia)

The participant teachers expressed dissatisfaction about this narrow focus of the provided CPD opportunities and stated that these failed to provide them with fresh perspectives on new learning and teaching approaches and strategies.

“... there aren't CPD opportunities for, for example, a new teaching aid or a new teaching strategy” (Asya)

“They tend to forget that teachers need support in other areas not only the content...CPD can be effective if it is on what teachers need...We need about new teaching methods, different ideas and how we can benefit from them” (Khawla)

“The teacher in the classroom is much more than a subject matter knowledge. There are teaching methods and strategies, motivational strategies, psychological and individual needs of students, classroom management, but what can be noticed that the Ministry focuses on academic knowledge only” (Rahima)

On the other hand, when talking about the in-house CPD opportunities, the participant teachers revealed that these focus more on motivational ideas and teaching strategies that teachers implemented in their classrooms. These pedagogical-oriented CPD opportunities were viewed as being valuable and useful.

“I like attending for my colleagues, especially the new ones, because they brought with them from universities and colleges new teaching ideas...There was a workshop, a Science teacher did it, on using snake and ladder game for motivating students, groups in the classroom...I said why not try it and it was fantastic. The students were engaged and enthusiastic in the lesson... like these ideas is what we need to renew our energy and the students’ as well” (Ghafir)

“I can say the good ones are the ones I attended here in my school with my colleagues... They come out of our classrooms, what we need to improve in our teaching...The senior teacher noticed that we have shortages in teaching the values and attitudes included in the literal texts in the Arabic Language. These texts are rich with values and attitudes...She conducted a workshop entitled ‘Values in Texts’...I started applying the ideas with my students and noticed other teachers did as well” (Amal)

The above findings highlight the mismatch between what is offered to teachers and what they think they need in terms of CPD opportunities. This might indicate an inefficient system for needs identification and analysis used by the education system to arrive at their annual PD plans. The reported heavy focus on academic subject knowledge in CPD opportunities offered by the education system can lead us to assume that teachers and their work and, therefore, their professionalism are perceived in a very narrow way by the system.

8.4 Uptake of CPD opportunities

Although the different participant teachers talked about various CPD opportunities, they all agreed that the vast majority of the off-site ones were theoretically-oriented in their content. These opportunities tend to deliver abstract knowledge which does not speak to teachers' day-to-day concerns and challenges.

“They focus on theoretical academic knowledge, nothing practical, nothing concrete” (Israa)

“Honestly speaking, many of them were chunks from the internet, theoretical stuff... even when they try to talk about teachers not academic knowledge, it is theoretical... as a teacher you should have this and shouldn't have this, but how? nothing about this” (Asya)

In addition, the participant teachers commented on the delivery mode of such CPD opportunities. They revealed that most of these were mainly conducted in an uninspired lecture style, which often resulted in disengagement and boredom. Most of them lacked interactive encounters which promote the active engagement of the teachers.

“They (her colleague teachers) refuse to go...They say these are boring” (Rahima)

“I call them the dark room presentations, hahaha. Seriously, just walk through the corridors of the training centre when the training rooms are busy, you will see dark dim rooms and a voice of someone lecturing” (Israa)

“They are conducted in a routine and boring style...I often feel asleep out of boredom, no interaction, just lecturers talking and talking, the door and curtains are closed, the lights are off for the PowerPoint, the atmosphere is all set for sleeping” (Ghafir)

Some of the participant teachers also mentioned the regular reiteration of some of the CPD opportunities provided. Consequently, they stated, this reduces the chances of CPD opportunities for mid-career and experienced teachers, for whom off-site CPD opportunities are already limited.

“Topics are often reiterated... actually they are the same but the title is different like ‘The Professional Teacher’ and ‘The Aware Teacher’. The content is exactly the same, nothing new. We had enough about these topics in the college” (Israa)

“They often ask the new teachers to attend because CPD is repeated every year” (Umnia)

Interestingly, most of the participant teachers showed an awareness of the importance of such external off-site CPD opportunities for their own learning and development. They stated that they are missing a lot because they were not able to find these useful and beneficial. Coming together from different schools and with various classroom experiences, the participant teachers viewed such encounters, even those lasting only one day, as potentially invaluable learning experiences, if these were effectively designed and delivered.

“Spending one day with teachers from different schools is really useful...We all come to the training room with different problems and different ideas too, but there is no chance for these to show up” (Salma)

“I think they can be useful...What is missing is the management of the teachers’ learning...Supervisors need to know that they should be facilitators and guides for the learning in the training room, not lecturers” (Habiba)

In fact, the participant teachers mainly attributed the above-mentioned constraints which prevent them from making use of off-site CPD opportunities to the providers of the CPD opportunities. As for Maths, Science and Arabic teachers in Oman, the educational supervisors are the ones responsible for designing and delivering the off-site CPD for these teachers. However, the participant teachers did not exclusively blame the supervisors for such ineffective CPD opportunities. They were aware that these supervisors were not qualified to carry out such duties, as they lacked the relevant training skills required.

“I am not saying that supervisors should not train teachers anymore. What I am trying to say is that they need to be trained and qualified to do so...We know those were teachers and seniors teachers like us, then they became supervisors. I have got some friend supervisors, they are not trained for this” (Rahma)

“Training is a skill. I attended a course in training when I was in SQU...it’s not just go and train. There are principles you need to follow...I don’t think that most of supervisors are aware of these” (Manaar)

In-service teacher education in general and its providers have a crucial role to play in meeting the professional learning needs of teachers and supporting these teachers in handling their day-to-day challenges. The complexities of this role require CPD providers to be more than simply effective educational supervisors. They themselves need to be supported and qualified in order to carry out their role effectively. This suggests the need to review and reconsider the ‘who’ aspect in the CPD opportunities provided to teachers by the HRD practitioners. Training and qualifying the CPD providers is an essential step in making CPD opportunities have a positive impact on teachers’ professional identity.

8.5 Valued CPD opportunities

The participant teachers reported a wide range of CPD opportunities which they found valuable. These ranged from an hour in-house session to a semester long off-site courses and programmes. The most prominent feature in most of these CPD opportunities was found to be valuing teachers’ prior knowledge and experiences.

“She (CPD provider) gave us scenarios of situations we face in classrooms. We discussed those and thought together about solutions ... something we tried before or we saw other teachers doing, from anywhere...We listened to so many experiences and ideas” (Amal)

“You know, for me, the most exciting thing about these is to meet and listen to teachers from many different schools... He (CPD provider) was good in encouraging us to share our experiences and ideas... it was

mainly from us teachers and much less from him...It was really interesting to know how other people think of and act towards the same challenge” (Ghafir)

In addition, sharing other teachers' expertise and successful attempts to introduce innovative teaching strategies was rated highly by some of the participant teachers. This might explain the agreement among some of them about the usefulness of the annual teachers' forums. These used to be conducted annually in every educational governorate, in which teachers from different subject matters share their classroom ideas and experiences in short sessions or workshops. Unfortunately, these forums have not been conducted since the year 2012 for unexplained reasons. Salma regarded the forum she attended as the best CPD opportunities she had had the chance to attend for the whole 18 years of her career.

“It was the teachers' forum. it used to happen every year. I attended one of these only. I don't know how they chose teachers to attend... the experiences they presented were real not just theoretical ideas...One of these was a session in Chemistry conducted by a teacher...She gave us enriching academic knowledge in Chemistry. It was on 'transitional elements' in year 12... the knowledge and the handouts she gave us in the session, I still use them with my year 12 students. They are really useful and save my time and the students' time” (Salma)

Israa' also expressed a similar viewpoint and talked about how an hour-long session in one of these forums made significant changes in how she taught particular topics in Maths and the impact it had on her students' learning.

“... the seventh teachers' forum. You can choose which session to attend...I attended a session on bar modelling in Maths...The teacher visited Singapore and saw how this was used in classrooms. She tried them and told us about her experience, using the normal way and the bar modelling...I tried these with year 6. There are topics, if I used the normal way it takes very long time but with the bar modelling the students were much more responsive like for example proportion and proportionality and the higher order mathematical problems.. it is similar to mind maps” (Israa')

Moreover, some of the participant teachers valued CPD opportunities which provided interactive encounters among the participants and perceived them as active learners. These, they commented, gave them a space to voice their ideas and opinions within small groups and to listen to others' as well. As an early career teacher, these encounters played a significant role in reassuring Ataa's confidence in her classroom practices.

"I think the SCPTT one because it was the only one which had interactions between teachers and we got to know other teachers' opinions of stuff and alike... discussing with other teachers, I felt yeah I am doing a good job with my students" (Ataa')

In line with Ataa', commenting on a workshop she attended on literary analysis, Asya highlighted the role of the interactive exercises as one of the key features which promoted her engagement in that workshop.

"... the existence of group work exercises at the beginning. We were interacting with each other in the groups. It was more like a discussion not a lecture and giving our opinions. Then he (CPD provider) discussed these with us all and gave us the summary" (Asya)

Furthermore, applicability to classroom practices was considered by most of the participant teachers as a core feature in the CPD opportunities which they perceived as valuable. Asya, for instance, kept referring to the literary analysis workshop which provided her with a systematic procedure and approach on how to teach reading texts and poems. This, she commented, shifted her practice in this regard from a trial and error phase to a structured and procedural approach which she found effective.

"It was about an essential thing in teaching Arabic, reading, texts or poems...It taught me how to gradually analyse a literal text with students. I tried different ways. I didn't have a procedure for this. It taught me not to behave randomly and to go about it in ordered steps. When I implement

it, I knew it was going to work. It had been tried before and proved to be effective” (Asya)

Similarly, Ghafir considered the off-site session on developing students’ observation skills in Maths as having a lasting impact on her teaching and her students’ mathematical skills and exam results.

“He taught us how to enhance our students’ abilities in noticing... These noticing skills helped students a lot either in class or in exam... this can save a lot of their time in the exam... instead of using a pen and paper for every question, especially in the multiple choice questions, by noticing they can exclude the wrong answers and quickly spot the right ones” (Ghafir)

Interestingly, some of the participant teachers spoke highly about a CPD opportunity which mainly focused on academic subject matter knowledge. Bearing in mind their perceptions of subject matter oriented CPD opportunities in section 8.3, this finding might initially seem incongruent.

“I found it (Sultan Qaboos University’s academic week) really useful... there was a focus on academic subject knowledge, an enriching one ” (Rahima)

“It was The Academic Week. I think that was the best. It enriched my academic subject knowledge” (Manaar)

However, this seeming incongruence might be explained in terms of balance and quality. That is, the participant teachers might not be against CPD opportunities which focus on subject matter knowledge, but they were simply not satisfied with the dominance of these over the pedagogical-oriented ones. In addition, the quality of the delivered content on subject matter knowledge in the SQU opportunities was probably higher than that offered in similar CPD opportunities. This might explain their description of these as ‘enriching’. Again, for inexplicable reasons this valuable CPD opportunity is not available for teachers anymore.

This interpretation leads us to suggest the importance of reviewing and effectively evaluating the annual professional development plans produced and conducted by each subject department in the educational governorates. This review and evaluation needs to consider the teacher as a whole and find the right balance between issues connected with subject-matter and pedagogy. Moreover, the knowledge and skills of the CPD providers need to be given prime importance. Their professional development is as essential and significant as the teachers'. In fact, it is the key for successful implementation of any effective, quality-assured plans.

8.6 Teachers' suggestions for ways forward

When asked about their needs and suggestions for enhancing and improving the current CPD opportunities, the participant teachers offered several interesting suggestions. To overcome the dilemma of teachers' need for external CPD on one hand and their over-loaded teaching timetables on the other, most of the participant teachers (12 of them) suggested making effective use of professional development weeks. In fact, there are three weeks of this kind dispersed throughout the school academic year in Omani government schools: the first is at the end of August, the second at the end of January and the third at the end of June. During these weeks, students do not attend schools because of the summer holiday and the first semester break. The participant teachers reported that the provision of CPD opportunities at these times of year is convenient for the majority of teachers in schools.

“Why not make use of professional development weeks and provide PD opportunities. We are more free in these weeks. Yeah, we do some

administrative stuff but it is much better than missing our lessons”
(Khawla)

“They are called professional development weeks but there are no professional development opportunities provided in these weeks, not in the school and not outside... we spend them in getting school ready for students and other administrative stuff but not in PD. I personally prefer going on PD in these weeks rather than asking me to miss my lessons”
(Habiba)

To benefit from such professional development weeks, in addition to attending off-site CPD, some of the participant teachers suggested providing sufficient funding for schools to be able to bring in external expertise, such as university scholars.

“Schools need to have more connections with the university (SQU). We need expertise from the university to train us on new and updated thinking and ideas in education... When we suggest this to the Head teacher, she always says there is no funding for this” (Manaar)

“When I was doing my Master’s degree, I thought of how much we teachers are missing in schools. I was lucky to get the chance but many teachers do not have it... the problem is not with the school, our Head teacher welcomes such ideas, but she can do nothing about it. These are not being funded” (Salma)

In this regard, Israa’ pointed out an important aspect which needs to be considered by schools which at times do manage to provide funding for such opportunities. This is related to the choice of the expertise and its relevance to teachers’ professional needs.

“In one of the professional weeks, the Head teacher did something good. She invited a tutor from the college... it was interesting. He was using good strategies and we interacted with him... but we told the Head teacher that it was not what we want. He was talking about an age-group different than the one we deal with” (Israa’)

In addition, to cater for some logistical issues especially location and distance of off-site opportunities which prevent some teachers from attending some of the provided CPD, Israa’ suggested the provision of online training, such as webinars

and online courses. These, she reported, can be carried out in the weekly release time for each subject department.

“... why not use the internet in schools...Each teacher has her own laptop... we have got one free lesson for all of us Maths teachers in the week. It's for our meetings or discussions and other stuff... we can use this lesson for online training” (Israa’)

Believing in the importance of sharing ideas and experiences between teachers from different schools and having experienced the benefits of such encounters, Salma suggested bringing back teachers' forums. She proposed the idea of having an online teachers' forum which can be run and managed by the governorate's supervision department for each subject.

“Now we know about some schools' ideas from their social media accounts, but not all schools have these accounts...We need like one account which gathers all schools in the governorate like the forum they used to do... instead of that forum, supervision can do an online forum...It will be really useful” (Salma)

In line with the virtual CPD provisions, Ghafir raised the idea of having a regional e-CPD library. This virtual library, she stated, will enable all teachers to have access to all CPD opportunities offered, which can be watched at times and venues suitable to them.

“I know they cannot cover all teachers, but still they can reach all teachers...Why don't they establish an e-library for all the sessions and workshops they do...We can watch these in our schools or any other places” (Ghafir)

Furthermore, the need for qualified and skilled teacher educators was highlighted by some of the participant teachers. These teachers made references to an existing project in this respect which targets the TESOL teachers in Oman. In every educational governorate, there are a number of TESOL in-service teacher trainers who are well trained and qualified to carry out all TESOL teachers' CPD.

“... you can tell that some sessions are chunks from the internet ... because supervisors are busy with different things, school visits, exams and other stuff... there needs to be people responsible for training teachers, like the English language trainers” (Ataa’)

“The English language teachers have programmes not only sessions because they have special people to train them not only supervisors...I feel there should be the same for us and other subjects” (Amal)

These suggestions made by the participant teachers have implications for the HRD practitioners in the Ministry and in the educational governorates. Further steps need to be taken in regard to structuring and organising in-house teachers’ CPD. This is particularly applicable to the CPD weeks. Funds and resources need to be available for schools to carry out these efficiently. Additionally, it became apparent from the above findings that the participant teachers have leanings towards online and electronic forms of CPD opportunities. This should urge the HRD practitioners to consider the introduction of such CPD provisions to reach out to teachers and play a role in the construction of these teachers’ professional identity.

To summarise, the analysis of the participant teachers’ perceptions and experiences in relation to the CPD opportunities provided revealed that teachers were more satisfied with the internal in-house CPD opportunities than the external off-site ones. Apart from their scarcity, the external off-site CPD opportunities were perceived to suffer from acute problems in relation to aspects including the ‘what’, the ‘who’ and the ‘how’. To illustrate, the heavy dominance of subject matter oriented CPD opportunities raises questions about the extent to which teaching in the Ministry is regarded as a profession with a wide range of knowledge and skills beyond subject and assessment knowledge. This applies equally well to the view of in-service teacher educators’ professionalism with its own specialist body of knowledge and expertise beyond just being effective supervision. In addition,

bearing in mind teachers' readiness and their inclination to use information technology in CPD this makes the introduction of such forms into the CPD system in Oman an urgent and pressing need. This, in turn, might be part of the solution for the reported challenges of venue and timing of CPD provisions. Therefore, in order to play its core role of developing teachers professionally and be an effective contributor in shaping and constructing their professional identity, it is imperative that HRD practitioners in the Ministry reconsider their policies and practices in relation to these three aspects among others.

9. Discussion of Findings

Introduction

In this chapter, I provide a discussion of the major findings presented in the preceding four chapters (chapters 5,6,7 and 8) in relation to the objectives of this study and the existing literature. To reiterate, the overall aim of this study is to develop an understanding of the nature of Omani teachers' professional identity. This overall aim has been brought to fulfilment by exploring the perceptions of Omani teachers themselves in an attempt to understand: (1) their conceptualisations of themselves and their work as teachers, (2) the evolution process of their professional identity and (3) the role of the CPD opportunities provided by Human Resources Development (HRD) Department in the development of this identity. Thus, this chapter discusses the contribution of the findings to a fuller conceptual understanding of the construct of teacher professional identity and the notion of INSET in a top-down hierarchal structure.

The findings presented in the preceding four chapters highlight a range of similarities and differences in motivations, personal experiences, professional learning and approaches to teaching and learning. They represented teachers' lives and work as complex, dynamic, multifaceted and multi-layered. Omani teacher identity and learning have been found to be mainly influenced and shaped by four key sources (see Figure 9.1 below). These include religious schema, managerial system, school context and CPD policies and practices. Religious schema was found present in teachers' career choices, conceptions of their roles and their sense of resilience.

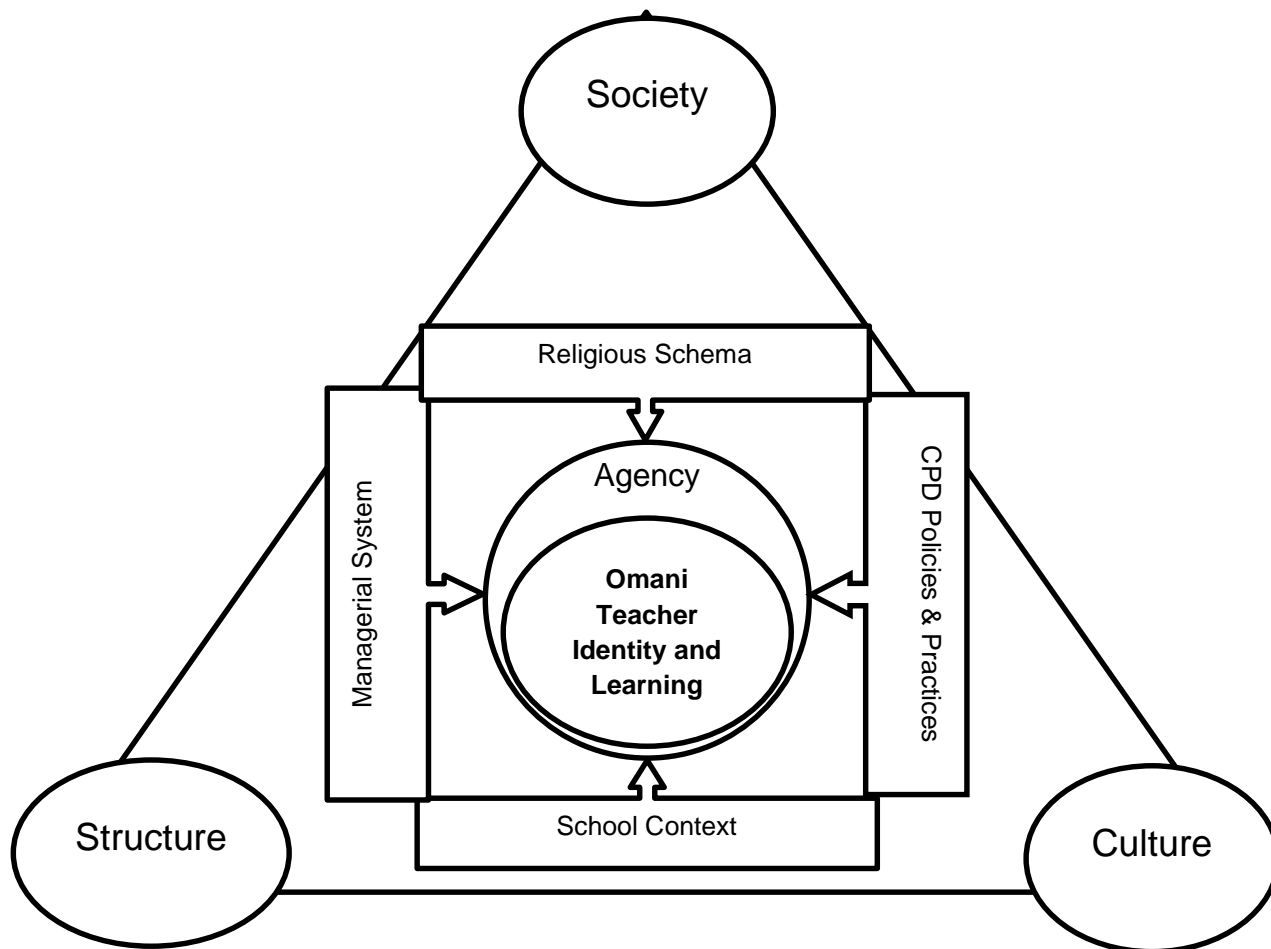


Figure 9.1: Synthesis of the research findings

The bureaucratic managerial approach used in managing and running the education system in Oman including the CPD opportunities provided to teachers was also found highly influential in shaping Omani teachers' professional identity as well as their professional learning. In addition, the micro context of these teachers' school environments including school leadership, colleagues and students played an important role in these teachers' conceptualisations of themselves and in their learning decisions and trajectories. Moreover, the top-down CPD policies and practices, which do not cater for teachers' needs and challenges, inhibit teachers' learning and the positive evolution of their professional identity. These four influencers were found to be socially-driven, culturally-guided and

structurally-directed. Teachers' agency and their subjective capacities enable them to actively engage in ongoing reflection and action, which result in professional learning and identity construction. In the end, every teacher is a unique project of an identity in the making.

This chapter provides a discussion of the main issues suggested by the findings, which illustrated in the above figure (see Figure 9.1). The first issue is related to the influence of faith identity on teachers' conceptualisations of their professional identity, while the second issue is related to the impact of the bureaucratic-managerial approach on being a teacher in Oman. The third issue discusses the recruitment policies and practices of teachers' in Oman and their impact on the teachers' sense of their status and their public image. The fourth issue portrays how the relational dimension of the teaching profession has potentials and hindrances for the evolution process of teacher professional identity. The final issue focuses on the role of tradition, culture and structure as inhibitors for the contribution of CPD opportunities (INSET) in the development of teacher professional identity.

9.1 Being a teacher in Oman: Religious schema

A particularly prominent finding in this study is the influence of faith identity on teachers' conceptualisations of their professional identity. Batty and Franke (2008) discussed the way in which teachers thought about themselves in relation to particular culture and context as either a 'White' or 'African American' teacher. As evident in their research, teachers in this study were found to conceptualise their professional identity within a cultural sphere, particularly a faith dimension, and not in isolation. The faith schemas and beliefs valued by the teachers or imposed on

them by significant others were found to influence different aspects of who they are and what they do.

Teacher professional identity constitution and development has been widely viewed as complex and relational, as well as dynamic. Gibbs (2006) observed that *“the journey of becoming and being a teacher is unique for each teacher and yet depends on others”* (p.2). This stresses the importance of the link between teacher self-concept and the socio-cultural contexts within which teachers were raised and now live (Edwards & Edwards, 2017). Thus, there is a growing appreciation of the need to understand teachers’ socio-cultural contexts in order to better understand their professional identity and, thus, support the development of this identity (Brown, 2004; Day, 2013). This is particularly vital for teachers, like those discussed in this study, for whom religious worldview is important. Islamic teachings and beliefs are considered to be an important source for Omani people’s values and practices. Rather than focusing solely on cognition, this theoretical perspective on teacher professional identity links mind, behaviour and context (Bell, 2011). It foregrounds interaction, participation and context in understanding teacher professional identity and its development. Thus, it offers a lens that can usefully link teachers’ religious schema and beliefs to their perceived understandings of who they are and what they do. Therefore, it is used here to frame a discussion of some of the key findings in this respect. There are three particular aspects in teachers’ conceptualisations of their professional identity which this research found to be influenced by teachers’ religious schema that merit further discussion.

9.1.1 Religious schema over teachers' roles

Religious faith was found to be represented in some teachers' conceptualisations of their own roles and responsibilities and those of their students. The religious understandings and beliefs of these teachers, which were derived from the values and teachings inherent in the religion of Islam, affected the way in which these teachers thought about and acted towards their professional activities and practices. This study found that these understandings and beliefs related to religion worked as a 'schema', which influenced these teachers' perceptions and reported actions in connection with teaching and learning. 'Schema' as defined by McIntosh (1995) is "*a cognitive structure or mental representation containing organised, prior knowledge about a particular domain*" (p.2). Schemas in general and religious ones in particular are built through on-going encounters with social contexts and have reciprocal relations with them. Thus, as social contexts, professional realms are not at all immune from being influenced by its agents' religious schemas, especially in societies where religion is of prime importance and its teachings and values constitute a big part of its culture and its people's worldviews. Therefore, the findings of this study demonstrated that teachers' religious schemas with their peculiar sets of interpreted Islamic notions and beliefs served as interpretive frameworks based on which some teachers in this study perceived and approached their work as teachers. This was especially prevalent in the strong influence of Ameena's religious schema in relation to the religious notion of 'worship' on her perception of her own and her students' role. Her inclusive understanding of this notion which extended the observance of certain rituals and practices to include all a person's internal and external sayings and actions as

being pleasing to Allah, made her perceive her teaching and her students' learning as a worship journey. Similarly, Habiba's religious belief in the existence of a divine and merciful creator for this universe, who is manifested in Allah the Almighty affected her perception of her role as a Biology teacher. She viewed her role as helping students to thoughtfully study Allah's creatures' perfection and refinement and reflect on their subtleties, which consequently leads them to their Wise Maker (Allah) and sense his love.

In line with the above cognitive view of religious beliefs, in his inquiry into teacher knowledge, Baurain (2015) noted that the construct of 'beliefs' in this field was researched and theorised in relation to various aspects, including classroom management, methodology, curriculum and professional development. However, he stated that religious beliefs are often neglected and he argued for the inclusion of this kind of beliefs in academic conversations and research related to teacher knowledge. This is because elements of personal faith demonstrably find their way into how teachers think, feel and act towards different aspects of their professional lives (White, 2010). Baurain's argument was supported by a study, which aimed at exploring the impacts of Christian faith on TESOL teachers' professionalism. He concluded that these teachers' personal religious beliefs constituted a prominent part of their professional knowledge and actions. They perceived their personal religious beliefs as interacting dynamically with their professional identities and practices. In a similar vein but within a socio-Islamic culture, Mansour (2008) explored the influences that shaped Egyptian science teachers' beliefs and practices about STS (Science, Technology and Society) education. His findings suggested that it was mainly teachers' personal religious beliefs (PRB) and

practices which had noticeable influences on these teachers' professional beliefs and practices and acted as a filter in their work. Mansour (2008) reported that the influence of PRB was found to impact teachers' role, learners' role, teachers' knowledge of science and their pedagogies.

Moreover, the findings of this study concur with other studies conducted in the Omani context in relation to the influence of teachers' religious beliefs on their professional beliefs and practices (Al-Zadjali, 2016; Al-Balushi, 2017). Al-Zadjali (2016) reported that Omani ELT teachers' religious beliefs contributed and influenced these teachers' standards of practice to the extent that some modified their lessons to debate issues relevant to the religion of Islam, rather than achieving the stated instructional objectives for these lessons. In an attempt to introduce the participatory model of CPD to ELT teachers, Al-Balushi (2017) commented that the effectiveness she observed of this model among Omani ELT teachers can be partly attributed to the compatibility of the principles underpinning this model, such as cooperation and mutual support with these teachers' religious beliefs.

Although carried out in two completely different socio-faith cultures and with different discipline teachers, the above-mentioned studies and this study too emphasised that faith affects an individual's views, attitudes and understandings. It is a foundational and enduring facet of human thought and action and therefore it is inevitably present in professional beliefs and practices. Faith beliefs are often at the core of how we perceive ourselves and others and thus influence the way in which we envision and pursue our professional activities, relationships, ethics and overall well-being. Teachers' faith beliefs are linked with their cultural experiences,

events and relevant others in their lives (Olson, 1988). They are constructed and reconstructed through an interactive process between individuals and their surrounding socio-cultural context throughout their life trajectories (Richards, 2015). Therefore, each teacher develop his/her own 'Personal Religious Beliefs'(PRB), which often act as a filter for any new knowledge or experience s/he encounters (Mansour, 2008). This leads me to claim that considerable attention needs to be dedicated to understanding teachers' faith positions which underpin their cultural knowledge and practices, if we are to understand their professional identity and practices.

9.1.2 Religious schema over teachers' sense of resilience

Interestingly, this research has revealed, furthermore, that religious schema and beliefs act as motivational drivers, which keep teachers committed to their work. Within an educational system perceived by teachers as lacking recognition and posing threats to their sense of value as professionals, teachers' religious schema and beliefs worked as a source which nurtured their sense of resilience and motivation. Their strong faith in Almighty Allah and His justice made them committed to their work for His sake first and foremost, regardless of the frustrations and unfavourable conditions in their work environment. Relevant to this and strongly linked to it is their doubtless religious belief in the existence of the afterlife, the hereafter, where all a person's good deeds are rewarded and bad ones punished. This Islamic-driven conception makes these teachers view their entire life including their professional one as 'a farm for hereafter'. They dedicate all their efforts and hard work for Almighty Allah, who they believe is watching them at all times and in all places. Allah is, therefore, fully aware of their good deeds,

which He is certain to reward in different forms, either in this temporary life on earth or in the eternal life of the next world.

In this vein, teachers' capacity to retain and nurture a sense of resilience and motivation, which keeps them going as they experience various vulnerable work conditions has been widely researched and theorised (Gu & Day, 2013; Johnson et al., 2014; Mansfield et al., 2016). This is because teachers' sense of resilience is perceived to be a necessary condition to engage productively with the challenges and adversities of working conditions (Gu & Day, 2013). As described by Day and Gu (2010), it is a '*quality retention*' issue, namely retention of committed and motivated teachers who continue to strive, thrive and provide high quality teaching (p.40). Generally speaking, this body of literature was mainly concerned with providing insights and understandings into key factors associated with teacher resilience, identifying personal and contextual resources, strategies and outcomes of the resilience process, and discussing the implementation possibilities in pre- and in-service teacher education (Mansfield et al., 2014). Bearing in mind these findings, my focus here is on resilience-related factors and resources.

Given the complexity and the multifaceted nature of resilience, various factors and resources have been found to be relevant to teachers' capacity for sustaining resilience or otherwise. Recently, in an attempt to produce an evidence-based framework for building teacher resilience in teacher education programmes, Mansfield et al. (2016) reviewed resilience literature from the past 15 years. Their review used major databases, such as ERIC, ProQuest, SAGE journals and A+ Education and included 71 texts involving book chapters and peer reviewed journal articles. Among other objectives, this review aimed at identifying the range of

factors that authors mentioned as influencing teacher resilience. Mansfield et al. (2016) reported 51 factors, which they categorised into personal factors such as sense of purpose and value, contextual factors such as relationships with colleagues and recognition, and resilience strategies such as help-seeking and faith practices.

Of particular relevance to the aforementioned finding of this study is the strategy of faith practices. Practices of faith, such as prayer, were found to enhance believers' well-being (Yates, Pelphrey & Smith, 2008; Curry & O'Brien, 2012) and acted as a protective resource for teachers (Ebersohn, 2014). However, the influence of the religious schema and beliefs, such as notions of God's existence and the hereafter, on nurturing teacher resilience and motivation revealed by this study is a novel insight in our understanding of teacher work and identity. Based on this finding, I can claim that some unobservable teachers' cognitive structures and mental representations of their religion or faith, which is their religious schema, can act as a resource which contributes to teachers' resilience and motivation. Therefore, based on this finding, the topic of religion or faith which is well-cited in literature on teachers' work and identity in general and teacher resilience and motivation in particular can now include two different dimensions: faith practices and faith schema.

9.1.3 Religious schema over teachers' career choices

Moreover, the data revealed that some teachers' decisions to enter the teaching profession were greatly influenced by religious beliefs and norms. This was represented in some teachers' strongly held religious beliefs and norms about mixed-gendered workplaces being inappropriate working environments, especially

for women; this feeling was predominant among the experienced teachers. It was also evident in some other teachers' compliance with their families' religious beliefs and norms in this regard, which made them abandon their career aspirations and become teachers instead. The fact that public schools in Oman are single-sex makes schools and teaching 'the perfect match' for people with such religious beliefs and norms, as there are separate girls' and boys' schools staffed with the corresponding gender of teachers and administrators. Even in C1 (grades 1-4) schools where there is co-education, only female teachers and administrators are allocated. Being an in-service educator, I noticed that this strongly held religious belief and norm was also behind some competent senior teachers' (Heads of subject departments in schools) refusal to be posted as educational supervisors because supervision departments in the educational governorates are mixed-gender. Instead they prefer to be posted as Deputy Head teachers and Head teachers in schools as contact with the other gender is very limited in these posts and does not occur on a daily basis.

In this vein, Al-Belushi (2003) reported that in Oman, which is considered to be a conservative social context, many people believe in the value of sexual segregation and oppose the idea of mixed workplaces based on religious grounds. Interestingly, she added that this belief has positively affected the marriage chances of female teachers. She explained that in line with this belief, men often prefer for a wife "*to work in a place which guarantees minimal or no contact with the opposite sex*" (p.207). More recently, investigating Omani teachers' job satisfaction, Al-Balushi (2017) noted that some dissatisfied female teachers remain

in the teaching job out of a desire to conform to their husbands' wishes, as no other career would provide an all-female environment.

To put this particular religious belief and norm in context to better appreciate its influence on some teachers' decisions to be teachers, especially for older teachers, it is important to provide a brief account of its underpinnings. It is also worth noting that I chose to label it as religious not Islamic because it is product of people's interpretations and lay understandings of Islamic teachings and norms. These interpretations and understandings may vary among Islamic scholars and from one period of time to another. The religious orientation towards mixed-gender workplaces, which is present in the above-mentioned finding, adopts a certain stream of interpretation on the issue of mixed-gender conduct in Islam. This particular stream is informed by the conceptualisation that the mixing and intermingling of women and men in one place is prohibited by the law of Islam (Shari'ah). This stream considers such an act to be one of the causes of committing of indecent acts and wrongdoings. This conceptualisation was a dominant view in Omani society and was evident in spoken and written discourses on this issue. This might explain the experienced teachers' 'personal conviction' of avoiding mixed-gender work places and their preference to work in schools and become teachers.

However, another stream of interpretations on the same issue appeared later and stated that segregation of genders is not an absolute requirement in Islam, as men and women used to interact during Prophet Mohammed's time without any partitions. Supporters of this view claim that interaction and socialisation between men and women is permissible in Islam under certain regulations. These mainly,

but not exclusively, include meeting in public, having no physical contact, speaking in a decent and respectful manner and lowering their gaze. This might explain why such a 'personal conviction' did not exist for teachers in the early and mid-stages of their career as motivation to become a teacher. It is worth mentioning that both streams of interpretive frameworks still exist among people in Oman. However, mixed-gender conduct is gaining more acceptance when it comes to professional work places, but not in other social activities. This can be attributed to financial considerations relevant to securing another family income and also to political issues relevant to the current government's orientation towards empowerment of women and fulfilling quotas of working women.

Faith or religious schema and beliefs are inescapable as an entity in one's culture (Tillich, 1983) and therefore they could possibly influence decision-making and career choices (Bigham, 2008). If we accept that personal axiological dispositions influence and shape personal identity, it is then legitimate to expect and observe the same type of influence on people's decisions to become teachers (Serow, Eaker, & Ciechalski, 1992). However, when the issue of organised religions or spirituality in its broad sense is discussed in literature in relation to people's decisions to become teachers, it is often presented in terms of a sense of calling or purpose. Calling is attributed to an intrinsic motivation, which stimulates people to serve humanity and the greater good, which is derived from a sense of purpose and meaning (Bigham, 2008). A career of service, like teaching, affirms people's perceived purpose and meaning in their lives. It is worth noting that the term calling is not limited to people who use it in a religious context. However, this calling for people with religious or spiritual schema is viewed as service to God and doing the

will of God. Although this religious sense of calling was present in the findings of this study in the forms of considerate and caring teachers, the aforementioned finding supports another dimension to the link between religion and people's decision to become teachers. This has to do with conforming to God's orders in relation to gender segregation as interpreted by the religious school of thought they adhere to.

9.2 Being a teacher in Oman: Bureaucratic-managerial approach

Another significant finding of this study is the influence of the bureaucratic approach to managing and running education in Oman on teachers' conceptualisations of their professional identity. In a '*bureaucratic-managerial*' (Vonk, 1991 in Wai Yan, 2011) organisational structure, authority is generally concentrated at top management level; thus, policies and directives flow from top down (Kilinc, Kosar, Er & Ogdem, 2016). This organisational structure encourages a professional culture focused on control and command, where operational processes are rigidly controlled and tightly supervised (Hoy, 2003). Such 'bureaucratic-managerial' education systems hold and work within a very constrained view of teacher professionalism which is reflected in their education policies and practices. Managerial professionalism, as termed by Sachs (2001), is the dominant view of teaching professionals in these systems.

In a high level bureaucratic-managerial structure, which Hoy and Sweetland (2001) described as featuring coercive formalisation and hindering centralisation, the level of authority and autonomy which teachers have is limited. Teachers' agency is restricted as spaces for democratic practices are denied (Hall, 2013). Lines of communication are often one way, that is top-down, which limits the

degree to which teachers have a say in teaching and learning matters. Even in seemingly open lines of communication, the responsible personnel and decision-makers in these systems are unresponsive to their stakeholders (Hoy & Sweetland, 2001). Teachers' perspectives and opinions "*get lost in a way or another*", in Khawla's words, because they were asked for as routine, not because they are considered. The purpose of such a bureaucratic-managerial education system is to guarantee controlled and disciplined compliance of teachers, whose sole role is viewed as the implementation of the top authority's prescribed policies and decisions without having a say in the decision-making process (Hoy & Sweetland, 2001). There are two main issues in teachers' views of themselves and their work, which this study found to be affected by the bureaucratic managerial approach implemented by the Ministry of Education in Oman.

9.2.1 Teachers' conceptions and practices as formed by technicality

There is a strong suggestion arising from the findings that Omani teachers conceptualise and compose their professional identities in response to a professional environment which is characterised by the hegemony of technicality. The Omani educational system is based on a national curriculum provided to teachers in prescribed teachers' books and to students in the form of dense and crammed textbooks. Its assessment system depends heavily, if not solely, on exams from year 1. These exams are mainly designed to assess students' acquisition of facts and information and their mechanical reproduction of these on an exam paper. This education context has greatly influenced Omani teachers' conceptual frameworks and reported practices related to notions of learning and teaching. The apparent dominance of the content-oriented view of learning and

teaching revealed by this study compared with that of student-growth is a clear sign of this strong influence. Needless to say, this dominant concept of learning and teaching found its way into these teachers' reported learning and teaching practices. This dominance was also revealed in a few teachers' incongruent conceptions of learning and teaching in favour of a content-oriented approach. In addition, under the pressure and demands of such an education system, some participant teachers reported practising teaching behaviours related to content-oriented approach and refraining from focussing on student growth.

It seems that tendencies towards neo-liberal education policies which incorporate standardisation, audit and accountability, and centralised control approaches (Evetts, 2009) have been widely exercised. In Anglo-American contexts, particularly in the UK, the USA and Australia, the forces of neo-liberalism at work within and beyond education have promoted a discourse of instrumentalism manifested in education policies that have given rise to narrow and restricted conceptualisations of professionalism (Mockler, 2011; Hall & McGinity, 2015, Ladd, 2017). Through the proliferation of various policies of standardisation and audit, teacher professionalism has become a tool used by governments for controlling and constricting teachers' practices (Hursh, 2007), which ultimately results in "*restricted occupational professionalism*" (Hall & McGinity, 2015, p.4).

In Anglo-American contexts, instrumentalism or performativity has been viewed as a '*trend*' (Bryan & Revell, 2011), a '*revolution*' (Hall & McGinity, 2015) and a '*blunt instrument*' (Mockler, 2017). In England, this revolution was manifested in the creation of a new education system with a National Curriculum, national testing and league tables which rank schools according to performativity standards (Ball,

2012; Hall & McGinity, 2015; Wyse & Craig, 2018). A similar trend towards centrally devised policies was reported in the USA, such as the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act. This test-based accountability and data-driven act has resulted in narrowing the view of schooling to how to do well in tests (Ladd,2017) and schools have become reduced to data calculation and management centres (Koyama, 2011). Parallels can also be drawn with education policies in the Australian context (Mockler, 2011; Gough, 2015; Buchanan & Varadharajan, 2016). The incorporation of the instrumentalist ideology was documented to be manifested in mandatory 'A to E' reporting, performance pay for teachers and standardised testing for students.

This trend, although lasting for decades now, followed an era in which education systems in these contexts were characterised by "*trust, partnership, collegiality and discretion*" (Hall & McGinity, 2015, p.3), which Hargreaves (2000) termed as an era of collegial professionalism. Therefore, there has been a huge discourse and rhetoric on the influence of these transformations on teacher professional identity and conceptualisations of professionalism. Aiming at conceptualising teacher professional identity in England, particularly teachers' resistance, under the current education policies of performativity and competition, Hall and McGinity (2015) stated that their work revealed the emergence of a form of professionalism which is characterised by a restricted sense of agency and autonomy. They reported a high level of compliance amongst teachers in schools in response to neo-liberal education policies, which makes teachers' resistance in this context no longer worth taking seriously. Similar levels of compliance were also found in the American context. Buchanan (2014) examined teachers' identity formation and

negotiation within the rising accountability discourses and contexts imbedded in schools. Acknowledging the complexity and the multi-dimensionality of teacher professional identity, Buchanan (2014) similarly reported that restricted teachers' practices due to accountability fed back into their identities and had the potential to transform their professionalism. She added that some teachers in her study were beginning to wholeheartedly embrace the restricted scope of teaching and learning promoted by the high-stakes of standardised testing which drove others away from the profession.

Unlike Anglo-American education contexts where technicality and accountability has been viewed as a trend, in fact it has been a norm of the education system in Oman since this system formally started in 1970. Therefore, I do not think that the above rhetoric on transformations of professional identity and professionalism as a result of neo-liberal education policies applies equally well when discussing Omani teachers' professional identity. This does not suggest in any sense whatsoever that these teachers' professional identities have not undergone some transformations. However, what it suggests is that these were not directly linked to the existing neo-liberal education policies in the country, since these are traditions not a trend. In addition, this claim does not disregard or undermine the influence of such ideological traditions on the reported forms of professionalisms in this study. However, it asserts that they are not an outcome of a revolution but have been a fundamental pillar of the education system in Oman since it was established.

The technician view of education in general and teacher professionalism in particular is the norm in most Arab education systems (Abu-Nimer & Mahmoud, 2014; Abu-Shomar, 2013; Nasser, Faour & Muasher, 2011; Masri & Wilkens, 2011)

and Oman is of no exception (Al-Riyami, 2016; Al Issa, 2010; Al Nabahani, 2007). The relative youth of the Omani formal education system, started in 1970, compared to other education systems in other Arab countries, such as Egypt, Lebanon and Tunisia, made Oman seek assistance for building its modern education system from these countries. Coming from neo-liberal political and educational backgrounds, these countries' expertise greatly influenced the nature of the education system in Oman. In fact, in its early stages, Oman used other Arab countries' curricula in its schools until it was ready to form its own, which unsurprisingly are an extension of similar education philosophies and practices. Although the Education system in Oman has gone through some changes and innovations, Al-Nabahani (2007) argued that its underlying philosophy and general aims and objectives have remained largely unaltered. Omani teachers have been encultured into such political, cultural and educational neo-liberal contexts for about five decades now, to the extent that introducing liberal educational philosophies and policies might be viewed as a 'trend' or 'revolution' and met by resistance from many teachers. Al-Zadjali's (2016) findings on the impact of the prescribed curriculum on Omani teachers' professional identity lent support to this assumption. She reported that teachers in her study viewed the prescribed curriculum as having many practical and administrative benefits on their practice; in fact, nobody has asked for its cancellation.

9.2.2 Teacher s' sense of value as eroded by relegation

Teachers' intrinsic motivational forces, such as their morale and job satisfaction, are reflections of the multiple dynamics within the larger educational setting and system in which they work (Mockler, 2011).When these integral elements of

teachers' professional lives are overlooked and demeaned by the system, lower levels of morale and, more importantly, an eroded sense of value may result (Bosso, 2017). The findings from the current study show that a sense of purpose, dedication to their profession, obligation to their students and an overall passion related to their work are salient sentiments expressed by most of the teachers in this study, which policymakers must better recognise and value. However, these teachers revealed an issue of concern: the erosion of their sense of value and recognition. This was manifested in the absence of recognition and reward of teachers' expertise, skills and efforts. It was also evident in the reported absence of teachers' voice in matters relevant to their working conditions and students' education. Such findings are powerful predictors of the respect in which teachers are held and their levels of empowerment, which are both fundamental constituents of a teacher's sense of value (Bogler & Nir, 2012).

Given the on-going stressful and pressured working demands and conditions teachers are working in, recognising and valuing their work and efforts whether formally or informally can augment teachers' motivation and morale. The fulfilment of these socio-emotional needs enhances teachers' desire to remain in the profession (Bosso, 2017). Thus, if we are really genuine about the quality of teaching in Oman, using a globalised matrix and comparisons cannot alone achieve this goal. One of the urgent measures suggested by these findings is the need to act upon making teaching a sought-after profession. This does not happen unless teachers "*are praised and prized for what they do*" (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012, p. 16); this is common practice in the high-performing educational systems such as Finland and Singapore. Our attention and policies need to equally focus on

what is afforded to teachers, as well as what is required from teachers in these systems. In Singapore, for instance, teachers' contributions and efforts to the academic and character development of students, their collaboration with parents and their contributions to their colleagues and the school as a whole are appraised annually and rewarded accordingly. A similar annual appraisal system does exist in Oman, but has no effect on praise and prizes for teachers. It is merely carried out as an administrative requirement by Head teachers and educational supervisors; teachers know nothing about and it has no effect on these teachers' rewards.

In addition to recognising and validating teachers' work, creating opportunities for teachers' perspectives and opinions to be heard and valued is crucial for enhancing and boosting teachers' sense of value. Inclusive educational systems which demonstrate trust in teachers' expertise and perspectives promote teachers' self-perception and feeling of belonging to their profession. Feinauer's (2017) action research on the impact of collaborative curriculum design and planning on early childhood teachers in a private Montessori school lent support to this premise. Based on Spreitzer's (1995) psychological empowerment scale, Feinauer (2017) examined changes in the teachers' perceptions of four aspects of empowerment, namely meaning, competence, self-determination and impact. She reported that the opportunity for participative decision-making on teaching and learning afforded by the intervention led to a heightened sense of competence, self-determination and impact among the participants. Within the Omani context, Al-Balushi's (2017) attempt to introduce and implement the participatory model of CPD to EFL teachers yielded similar outcomes. In other words, enabling teachers to be active agents in making decisions about their CPD by collaborating and

cooperating with other educational stakeholders enhanced their sense of professionalism, which was previously limited to spaces within their single classrooms.

Conversely, in education systems that are controlling, hierarchical and lack connectedness, teachers' sense of value suffers and their professionalism is constrained. In such systems, teachers are often marginalised in the policy-making process and sufficient consultation in relation to their work is often absent (Wong, 1995, in Wai Yan, 2011). The findings of this study revealed the lack of opportunities given to teachers for discussion and dialogue in relation to macro-educational matters, such as curriculum and assessment, as well as the absence of their voice in micro-matters, for example their transfer from one school to another. Under such a system, education professionals in Oman have been viewed and positioned as compliant operatives (Smyth, 2001) which signals the kind of professional relationship within this hierarchy that is characterised by the loss of trust in and autonomy of teachers. For more than four decades this seemed to be the case and there were no overt signs of resistance and activism from Omani teachers. However, during the so-called 'Arab Spring', Omani teachers' demonstration in 2011 and their strike action in 2013 as discussed in chapter 2, revealed that teachers were actually in a state of simulated compliance (Thomson, 2008). Teachers were not actively and visibly resisting the centralised and authoritative policies and decisions which were not in accordance with their professional principles and beliefs although they expressed their dissatisfaction about these among themselves. However, when the country's political circumstances permitted, teachers demonstrated obstructionism and outright

resistance by actively and visibly voicing their concerns and perspectives in the form of collective demonstrations and strike actions. This was also evident in the participant teachers being openly critical in their responses in regard to issues of teaching and learning, as I personally observed during the interviews for this study.

9.3 Being a teacher in Oman: Teachers' recruitment policies and practices

An issue of concern strongly suggested by the findings of this study is the public image of teaching and teachers in Oman. Teachers reported a depressing sense of low status in relation to how others, the public, view and regard them and their work. Status is used here to refer to the social standing of teachers and the teaching profession (Fuller, Goodwyn and Francis-Brophy, 2013). Although "*status is not a term that is frequently heard on the lips of teacher*" and is a low priority among some teachers' motives for choosing teaching and continuing to work in the profession (Hargreaves Cunningham, Hansen, McIntyre and Oliver, 2007, p.16), it is of prime importance for attracting and retaining highly-qualified people in the profession (Hoyle, 2001). In Oman this assertion proves to be right as the early retirement of experienced school teachers has increased by 30% in the year 2016/2017 compared to the 2010/2011 rate (Kutty, 2017). These teachers tend to retire after completing the minimum years of service, that is twenty years, with an average retirement age of 47 (Kutty, 2017) which contributes to the shortage of national teachers in schools.

In his quest to find an answer to the question '*Why are they resigning?*', Al-Khaifi (2017) investigated the motives which drove many civil service employers in Oman, including teachers, to resign at an average age of 47. Among other reasons, he stated that the high rate of resigned teachers was attributed to the low

societal trust and confidence in national teachers and national education. In a similar vein, AL-Habsi (2009) investigated Omani teachers' motivation as a result of the waves of changes in the system. He found that only one third of the surveyed teachers in his study reported feeling valued by parents. Moreover, previously the teaching profession in Oman used to attract the brightest and best secondary school graduates and was rated the second most admired profession after medicine (Al-Hammami, 1999). Nowadays, unfortunately, the profession is struggling to attract high-achieving secondary graduates, as they prefer other sectors such as medicine, engineering and law (Al-Balushi, 2017).

The subsequent loss of status suffered by the teaching profession in Oman can be arguably attributed to some of the recruitment policies and practices of teachers implemented by the Ministry of Education. The massive recruitment of poorly-qualified teachers, some of whom display inappropriate public social behaviour, has certainly resulted in long-lasting negative impacts on teacher quality and student performance. The compliance of the Ministry in the face of political pressures for rapid Omanisation at the beginning of the last decade, as well as this decade's public pressure as a result of the 'Arab Spring', has resulted in appointing "*as teachers every Tom, Dick and Harry*" in Habiba's words and therefore, to borrow Ghafir's phrase, teaching has become "*a profession of the profession-less*". One of the keys to teacher quality is selecting the right teachers, as a bad selection decision can result in up to forty years of bad teaching (Chapman et al., 2012). Given the important work teachers do, namely ensuring children's intellectual growth and preparing them to meet the challenge of the future, Hargreaves (2009) stated that one might expect a high status and considerable respect for teachers.

Despite this, she asserted that this expectation depends on the nation in question and cannot be directly linked to the high level of pay for teachers. Regardless of being well-paid, the quality of Omani teachers is perceived to be low in the public's opinion and thus a breakdown in trust and a growing distrust can be observed. This is very well-observed in Oman, where levels of private tutoring and enrolments in private schools mainly staffed by non-Omani teachers are high. The existence of highly-qualified, dedicated and committed national teachers in public schools in Oman must be acknowledged and should not be neglected. However, with low values ascribed to the quality of teachers, the probability of generalised trust is low, irrespective of the good teachers in the system (Borgonovi and Burns, 2015). As Habiba so clearly articulated *“one person's bad deeds create a bad common stereotype, but one person's good deeds remain personal”*.

9.4 Evolving as an Omani teacher: Teaching as a relational profession

Prominent among the issues highlighted by teachers' evolution stories is the importance of the contextual influences of the workplace on teachers' professional growth or otherwise. In particular, the nature of the interpersonal relationships and professional support teachers experience in their varied school contexts was perceived to greatly influence their sense of professional identity through the course of their careers. Teachers' social relationships with students, teachers and members of school leadership have been found in this study to play a decisive role in the construction, deconstruction and reconstruction of teachers' sense of professional identity. This was found to be evident in teachers' sense of their professional- efficacy, motivation and attitudes to teaching.

The work done by Mead (1934) on the concept of identity described how the image of who a person is is influenced through interaction with their environment. The field of teacher professional identity describes the professional self-image as relational, flexible and evolving, as it is affected by the surrounding contexts and through interaction with others (Beijaard et al, 2004; Korthagen, 2004). The human relational domain of the teaching profession has contributed to the dynamicity and the on-going evolution process of teacher professional identity, which is intersubjective in nature (Flores & Day, 2006). The acknowledgment of the roles and influences of both, the individual teacher and others within the school setting contributes to our understanding of teacher professional identity formation and transformation. There are two particular aspects in this regard that I believe contribute to our understanding of teacher professional identity growth and that merit further discussion.

9.4.1 Schools as social professional networks

Collaborative actions and collegial relations are important elements of the school as a workplace, since they influence the professional development of teachers and the construction of their professional identities (Kelchtermans, 2006). Teachers in this study attached great importance to school colleagues and leadership as influencing agents in facilitating or hindering the development of their positive sense of professional identity. Teachers' perceptions of the way collaboration and collegiality were experienced within their school contexts have influenced their reported sense of professional self-efficacy, motivation and attitudes towards teaching.

School contexts were viewed by William, Prestage and Bedward (2001) to be situated on a continuum, which they characterised as moving from highly individualised through structural collaboration to spontaneously collaborative. Even under the best of circumstances, uncertainties and threats to teachers' self-esteem are endemic to the teaching job (Mausethagen, 2013). School working conditions which are characterised by norms of individualism and self-reliance have negative impacts on teachers' experiences of their job (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011) and leave teachers with very few opportunities to develop and thrive (William, Prestage and Bedward, 2001). This is because in such school contexts learning to teach becomes a lonely process and thus teacher professional identity becomes bounded and boundaried (Flores & Day, 2006). While Hargreaves (1994) warned of the "*foolishness of presuming that all teacher individualism is iniquitous*" (p.183) and called for consideration of its potential strengths, evidence from many studies suggests that individualistic school contexts are damaging to teachers' professional development and to the longer-term interests of the school. In their longitudinal study of the ways in which Portuguese novice teachers' professional identity is shaped and reshaped over time, Flores and Day (2006) noted that the process of learning to teach for these teachers occurred mainly in isolation, as very little importance was attributed to colleagues. Among other issues, individualism of their school cultures was found to be responsible for the loss of teachers' idealism and their inclination to give up. More recently, in their mixed-methods research Hongboontri and Keawkhong (2014) investigated the influences of the school culture on Thai teachers in two language schools in Bangkok. They revealed that a culture of balkanisation; that is division into uncooperative subgroups, and

individualism which dominated the working conditions in both schools led to routine and uncertain instructional practices which limited teachers' professional growth.

Unlike the above-mentioned studies, the teachers in this study reported working in schools that exhibited cultures of collaboration and collegiality. Collaborative actions and good collegial relations within and across different subject teachers were reported to have positively benefited these teachers' sense of professional-efficacy and motivation. This culture of collaboration was represented by informal "*collegial working relationships*" (Farrell, 2003, p.13) that occurred in natural and spontaneous manners which senior teachers and colleagues facilitated and promoted. That is, senior teachers and other colleagues in school operated as "*buddy system*" (Flores, 2005, p.406) which teachers reported as an opportunity to share their uncertainties and challenges. As teachers tend to work in isolation, for most of the school day, such collaborative relationships and positive feedback can help to reduce the anxiety and stress related to work performance (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). Although the policy contexts of increasing demands and pressure reduce the amount of time teachers are able to connect and share with each other, it is precisely these work conditions that make collaboration and sharing an important requirement for enhancing teachers' resilience and motivation. Moreover, as technology has changed concepts of space, time and place, this culture of connection and sharing extends the immediate context within a school to include other schools. In this regard, participant teachers mentioned making use of and benefiting from other schools' subject departments' Instagram and Twitter accounts which gave them ideas and activities for how to do things differently, thus saving their instructional time and improved students' learning. This encouraged some

other subject teams in other schools to establish their own accounts to celebrate what they were doing well by sharing it with others.

This finding corroborates that of Al-Bahri (2009) regarding the culture of collaboration and collegiality in Omani schools. Al-Bahri (2009) investigated the impact of first year teaching experiences on the understanding and practices of Omani teachers of English. She reported that, to a great extent, the development of these teachers' initial understanding and practices was supported by the senior teachers and colleagues of the English departments in schools.

As well as enabling, interpersonal relationships in schools can also be hindering. Not only can individualistic school cultures play this hindering role, but also some school leadership approaches can be damaging to teachers' sense of professional-efficacy and motivation. Leithwood and Beatty (2008) argued that Head teachers need to be aware that their attitudes towards teachers have the power and influence to promote or hinder teachers' careers. For teachers in their mid-career phase, an authoritative and oppressive school leadership style has been found in this study to influence their sense of professional identity. Teachers who reported working under this leadership style have reported experiencing a growing lack of professional commitment and a low sense of professional efficacy; thus, they find it difficult to sustain a positive professional identity. Bass (2008) described authoritative or autocratic school leadership style as "*being arbitrary, controlling, power-oriented, coercive, punitive, and close-minded*" (p.440). This non-inclusive, close-minded school leadership system produces an unpleasant working environment, making it difficult for teachers to do their work efficiently, which

negatively affects teachers' professional-efficacy and their sense of morale (Slater, 2005).

9.4.2 Teachers' sense of relatedness

One of the interesting findings to emerge from the teachers' career stories is the role of the sense of relatedness in the evolution process of being a teacher. As well as being influenced by others, the evolution process of being a teacher is unique for each teacher (Gibbs, 2006). The formation and reformation of the professional identity of a teacher is influenced in large part by what he/she brings to the school context (Edwards & Edwards, 2017). The extent to which this individual repertoire aligns or misaligns with the school context, as well as the responses of the individual teacher to the misalignment, plays an important role in the evolution process of being a teacher (Zeichner, Tabachnick, & Densmore, 1987). In this study, the vital role of this sense of relatedness was evident in Amal's and Azza's reported senses of professional identity. Being transferred to the same school after a period of teaching in previous different schools, their perceptions of their senses of themselves as teachers when transferred to the school were in complete contrast. The elements of their school culture and the extent to which these matched or mismatched with Amal's and Azza's professional background, experiences and expectations was found to have long-lasting effects on their senses of professional identity. The students and the school leadership, which Amal pointed out as catalysts for the improvement in her sense as a teacher, were considered by Azza as contributors to the decline she experienced in this respect.

Becoming a member of a new and different school culture, teachers go through a process of learning the goals, the values and the standards of conduct that are

considered to be desirable in the new school culture (Calderhead, 1992). In their attempt to explain what happens when a teacher's individual repertoire meets with new school culture, Zeichner, et al. (1987) suggested that this meeting could yield two distinctive outcomes: either a match or a mismatch. A matching school culture tends to confirm and reinforce the individual teachers' beliefs and expectations. As a graduate of the same school, Amal held realistic expectations about the nature of the students and the school leadership in her new school. These expectations matched with the school culture, which facilitated Amal's sense of relatedness to students and the school leadership, and thus enhanced her sense of belonging to her work context. This positive sense of relatedness and belonging was widely attributed to teachers' engagement, motivation and positive sense of professional efficacy (Klassen, Perry & Frenzel, 2011). This applied equally well to Azza when she was teaching in her village school. Her positive sense of relatedness to the familiar school context and village community resulted in a high positive sense of being a teacher.

Conversely, in the case of a mismatch, the teacher's responses will determine how her sense of professional identity then evolves. Some teachers tend to attempt to fit in with the new school culture and start to rethink their previous repertoire and gradually begin to think and behave in line with the new school culture, which was described by Lacey (1977) as "*internalised adjustment*". Under the pressure of the new school culture, some other teachers' denoted behavioural changes whilst underlying beliefs and values remained unchanged. This process of seeming alignment was termed by Lacey (1977) as '*strategic compliance*', whereas Thomson (2008) described it as '*simulated compliance*'.

In the case of Azza, the mismatch between her previous professional experiences with students and school leadership in her old school and those she encountered in the new school destabilised her sense of professional identity. Her inability to relate to some elements of the new school culture, either internally or strategically, negatively affected her sense of belongingness to her new school context, which consequently influenced her sense of motivation and professional efficacy. Despite having good collegial relations, her poor relations with the students and the school leadership were more powerful in determining the way in which her sense of being a teacher evolved. This finding is in line with the research conducted by Klassen et al.(2001), which investigated how the satisfaction of teachers' need for relatedness is related to work engagement and emotions. Reporting on three different studies they conducted in this respect, Klassen et al. (2001) stated that the convergent findings from their three studies consistently emphasised that teachers' satisfaction of the need for relatedness with students led to "*higher levels of engagements and positive emotions, and lower levels of negative emotions, than does satisfaction of the need for relatedness with the peers*" (p.150).

9.5. Being and evolving as a teacher in Oman: The role of CPD policies and practices

The participant teachers' predominant focus on the structured formal INSET offerings, whether internal in-house or external off-site, when asked about their experiences and perceptions of CPD opportunities, confirms the argument stated in Chapter 3. I have argued there that the concept of continuous professional development (CPD), its policies and implementations in the context of this study aligns with the traditional and narrow conceptualisation of CPD. To borrow Al Fahdi and Swailes (2009) words, it is "*synonymous with training and not much else*" (p.6).

In his account of the development of the organisational concepts of CPD, Al-Zeidi (2016) stressed that the understanding and the implementations of this concept have shifted and crossed the boundary of technical know-how, which is achieved through training, to a more strategic view, which incorporates “*organisational planning, employees responsibility for gaining knowledge, expanding team learning, career development, inner consultancy, organisational management and the intellectual development of an organisation*” (p.39). Based on this account and his examination of the situation of CPD in state-owned organisations in Oman, he asserted that CPD understanding and implementations in these organisations have not yet undergone a similar shift. Thus, he proposed a national continuous professional development model, which he claimed would help these organisations to make the shift and cross the boundary to a more strategic understanding and implementation of the concept.

The Ministry of Education in Oman, the context of this study, is no exception to this view, as evidenced by the findings in this study. Motivated by the comprehensive educational reform in Oman in 1998, Al-Hinai (2002) explored the continuous professional development vision, policy and practice which targeted teachers in the Ministry of Education during the reform. The results of his study verified that there is a strong vision of and commitment to developing teachers professionally. However, his research findings revealed that the top-down managerial system in the Ministry resulted in inconsistencies and a wide gap between the vision-holders and the implementers of the policies. He claimed that despite the transformational vision of teacher professional development, which underpinned the 1998 reform, its influences upon PD policies and practices, was weak. He added that these policies

and practices relied heavily on central and regional short INSET courses, which he described as insufficient and ineffective. More recently, in their review of the policies of professional development in the Ministry of Education and their implications for teachers' professional development, Dissomimba, Abdul Malik and AL Sawafi (2015) reported that the concept of professional development was narrowly conceived. Their findings indicated that the policy-makers in the Ministry conceptualise the image of professional development in the form of instrumental and formal INSET training, as the focus of these policies is on the infrastructure of training and the investment on structures, such as the quantity of offerings and the establishment of training centres. Consequently, the following discussion on the impact of CPD opportunities on Omani teachers' sense of professional identity will primarily focus on the main findings regarding the perceived contribution of structured formal INSET provisions on being and evolving as an Omani teacher.

The huge investment of the Ministry of Education in Oman in the professional development of teachers reflects its committed support to developing teachers professionally, which is hoped to contribute positively to students' learning and achievement. Evidence of this commitment is its sponsorship of this current research. However, in light of the participant teachers reported experiences and perceptions in this respect, it is noticeable that the implementation of this commitment by the policy-makers and the HRD practitioners has resulted in very limited influence on teachers' professional development and the formation of their professional identity. The findings revealed the disparity between INSET offerings and the highly demanding nature of teaching. The views of the participant teachers on the current INSET offerings indicated that these provisions have not been

arranged considering the various facets of teaching and teacher work. Khawla summarised this by saying “*the teacher in the classroom is much more than a subject matter knowledge*”. This lack of suitable INSET has wasted most teachers’ chances to benefit from these provisions and so has subsequently hindered the potential contribution of these valuable offerings to the identity formation of teachers.

Acknowledging the drawbacks of INSET which are very well cited in the literature (Eraut, 1972; Fullan & Stiegelbauer, 1991; Dadds, 1997; Clarke and Hollingsworth, 2002), I think that INSET has the potential to help teachers develop professionally and contribute to their identity formation (Altun, 2011; Noonan, 2014; Bautista and Ortega-Ruiz, 2015). Indeed, the findings reported in chapter 8, section 8.5 provided instances of some INSET provisions which had such potential. However, in most of the reported INSET experiences, these potentials were blocked. I argue that the interplay between tradition, culture and structure is behind this situation, which is worth further discussion.

9.5.1 Influence of tradition, culture and structure over INSET provisions

Coming from a TESOL teacher education background and working as an in-service teacher trainer for a short period of time with other discipline teachers, I noticed that there are two completely different camps of INSET perceptions and practices within the Ministry of Education: those held and implemented by in-service TESOL teacher trainers on one hand and non-TESOL teacher trainers on the other. Listening to and analysing this study’s participant teachers’ accounts of their experiences and perceptions of INSET offerings reminded me of my own experiences of INSET as a TESOL teacher working in a General Education school

during the first two years of my career, 1999-2001. The features of the three main elements of any INSET, which are 'the what', 'the how' and 'the who' reported by the participant teachers, resemble to a very large extent my own experiences about two decades ago.

Although the top-down policies of teacher professional development remained the same during the reform, the MOE attempted to infuse international perspectives into these policies through the recruitment of consultants from the UK in the TESOL camp and from Canada in the other camp. The interpretations of these policies in terms of their quality and quantity were mainly given to UK expertise for the former and remained context-related for the latter. Thus, the TESOL INSET perceptions and practices in Oman can be found to be more aligned with international perspectives. This is particularly evident in the view of teachers as being valued and active learners in the training room, the incorporation and activation of both the education and the training elements of INSET, the link between the training room experiences and the classroom experiences, and the creation of spaces for professional dialogues. Above all, the professionalism of the in-service teacher educators was taken seriously by appointing qualified and skilled Omani teacher trainers who are continuously supported to develop professionally.

As for the non-TESOL camp, the internal forces of local expertise are dominant. The tradition, culture and structure of the local context played an important role in the construction of this camp's INSET strategies and practices. An understanding of the educational traditions of a particular context, what Earley (1995 in Glover & Law, 1996) called their '*historical baggage*', is potentially valuable for our understanding of what gives primacy for particular perceptions and practices over

others in regard to INSET. The tradition of the content-centred approach which was dominant in the General Education and which I argue is still dominant in the reform era as revealed by this study's participant teachers' conceptions of teaching and learning, influenced the local INSET implementers' agendas and their PD annual plans. The findings revealed that the participant teachers could hardly ever recall an INSET offering which was not a subject-matter oriented. Furthermore, the tradition of a highly prescribed curriculum represented in the 'instructions manual' teacher's book led to the assumption that teachers do not need further support with their subject-pedagogical knowledge and skills. This was evident in the participant teachers' appeals for pedagogical-oriented INSET offerings which are seriously lacking in the current provisions. Moreover, the tradition of an exam-oriented education system, which persisted in the reform and was made worse by the increasing demands on audit and performativity, tailored the INSET input on subject-matter to exactly match what is in the students' textbooks.

As Lees (2003) stated, organisations are at the micro-level of the wider culture, which he defined as the national culture. With this in mind, it may not be possible to separate the national culture which is embedded in any country from management practices. This proved to be true in the way INSET is being managed and implemented in the context of this study. The cultural assumptions of paternalistic responsibility of the Ministry of Education, represented in the INSET designers and implementers, is prominent in the findings. These assumptions were based on the lack of expertise in the schools and hence their existence with those outside schools who are better able to decide on what teachers need to be better teachers. This was evident in the absence of an effective system of needs identification

which should take into account teachers' opinions on their professional needs and the support they require for their classroom challenges. The inclusion of teachers' voices in the ministerial annual professional development plans does not seem to happen due to the cultural belief that only those at the top level of hierarchy know what is good for those under their leadership (AL-Hinai, 2002). Consultation with those at the bottom of the hierarchy, namely teachers, might be viewed as a sign of incompetence in the leadership, which needs to demonstrate a knowledgeable approach towards the welfare of its employees (O'Sullivan, 2016). This is very clearly mirrored and illustrated in chapter two, Figure 2.4. The annual professional development plans for different subject teachers are constructed by mainly depending on directives and instructions from curriculum officers', assessment officers', educational supervisors' and school performance officers'. There is no room for senior teachers' and teachers' expertise and voices in these plans. Being at the receiving end, teachers' roles in their INSET are restricted to obedience and compliance to these professional development plans and they are expected to wholeheartedly and eagerly respond to calls for centralised and imposed INSET offerings.

This finding resonates with the findings of a study conducted in Turkey by Gungor (2017). He scrutinised the incongruences between teacher identities and the INSET programs offered by the Ministry of National Education (MNE) in Turkey, which he described as far from including the collaboration and the reflection of teachers. The authority and responsibility of planning and organising INSET programmes have been removed from MNE and given to local administrations since 1995 and expected to be planned in conformity with local requirements.

However, the findings of his study revealed that provincial administrations practised similar centralised decision-making processes which marginalised teachers and left them with no say on their INSET programmes. A similar situation was noted by O'Sullivan (2016) in the UAE. Based on a case study of a private university in the UAE, she asserted that "*leadership in the region (Middle East), and in the UAE in particular, is paternalistic in nature*" (p.54). She argued that under such a leadership style, productivity is undermined and the effects can trickle all the way down to the classroom.

In line with the paternalistic responsibilities of INSET and highly related to it are the hierarchal physical structure and power relations which characterise the education system in Oman in general and the management and implementation of INSET offerings in particular. This system maintains a structure of 'top-down' control which is manifested in the centralised INSET plan that is generalised for all the eleven educational governorates (Al-Lamki, 2009; Al-Balushi, 2017). In addition, the annual professional development budget, which is decided upon based on the quantity of the professional development offerings on the centralised annual professional development plan, is given to the regional training centres and schools has no share in this budget. Schools are provided annual funds for internal in-house INSET, but they are not funded to bring in external expertise which can help in responding to their specific needs. The role of the school as an important learning unit is marginalised, as is evident from the absence of school-initiated and based INSET programmes.

In this vein, Al-Lamki's (2009) study revealed that the Ministry's officials are aware of the absence of teachers' voices and opinions in decisions relevant to their formal

professional development. In justifying this lack of involvement, the officials provided two justifications. First, in accordance with the way things work in the whole system, the content of and nominations for INSET are done in a top-down manner. Second, not all teachers are able to make decisions about their CPD needs. These two justifications seem to be still at work after about the decade, roughly, which has elapsed between Al-Lamki's study and this one. The centralised top-down structure used to manage and implement the INSET offerings resulted in frustration and disappointment amongst the participant teachers of the current study. This is evident in some teachers' reported refusal to attend some of the imposed offerings and their reported dissatisfaction of the quality of the majority of these. The second justification raises a question of what it means to be a teacher in the eyes of the Ministry's officials. Based on the findings of this study, I argue that teacher professionalism in Oman is at its crawling stage of infancy. Nothing much has been achieved in this respect compared with what had been practiced before the reform in 1998. The international perspectives accompanying the reform, which were expected to find their ways in policies and practices relevant to in-service teacher education and training, collided with traditions, culture and structure, which proved to be more powerful.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I critically discussed the main findings of this study in light of its research questions, the particular features of the context in Oman and the existing literature. This discussion shed light on the influence of teachers' faith identity represented in their religious schema on becoming and being teachers. Most importantly, it outlined a novel insight into the theoretical terrain of teacher

professional identity by stating that teachers' religious schema can work as a resource which nurtures and contributes to teachers' resilience and motivation. In addition, I discussed the impact of the policy environment within which teachers work on their views of themselves and their work as teachers. This environment is characterised by a high level of bureaucratic-managerial approach, which gives rise to the hegemony of technicality and affects teachers' sense of value and recognition. The impact of this policy environment on teachers' professionalism and identity was also discussed.

Furthermore, the role of the teachers' recruitment policies and practices implemented by the Ministry of Education in Oman was emphasised. I discussed the effect of these on the subsequent loss of status of the teaching profession and the public image of teachers. Moreover, I presented an account of the relational dimension of the teaching profession and its impact on the evolution process of being a teacher. This account emphasised the reciprocal feature of this dimension and the importance of the interplay between both the individual and the professional context for this aspect to have a positive impact on the process of teachers' evolution. Finally, I provided a discussion on the contribution of CPD opportunities (INSET) on teachers' sense of being teachers. Here, I argued that tradition, culture and structure have negatively influenced the potentials of these offerings in the development of Omani teachers' professional identity.

10. Conclusion

Introduction

This study raises a number of issues concerning teacher professional identity and development and how these affect teaching and learning. These issues were an outcome of an interactive discussion between theoretical informed ideas and empirical data and findings. In this concluding chapter, I present a summary of the main findings of this study in relation to the research questions. This chapter also highlights the contribution of this study and offers significant recommendations for how this study's results can be taken forward. I then address the limitations of this research and identify some directions for further research. Finally, I conclude with some final thoughts on my personal learning as a result of my research journey.

10.1 Summary of the key findings

This study was conducted to investigate the nature of Omani teachers' professional identity. Of particular interest, was teachers' conceptualisations of their sense of professional identity, the evolution process of this sense and the role of CPD interventions (INSET) in the development of this identity. I was interested in obtaining teachers' perceptions of themselves in relation to their work and their experiences in relation to the evolution process of these perceptions. I was also interested in knowing their perspectives and experiences pertinent to the CPD opportunities provided in order to unpack their role in the development of these teachers' sense of professional identity.

The issues suggested by the main findings of this study, as discussed in the previous chapter (chapter 9), provided a conceptual understanding which explains the formation and construction of teacher professional identity for the participants

within the study and suggests a number of significant issues in the formation and evolution of teacher professional identity in general. The findings pertinent to the first research question on teachers' views of themselves and their work revealed four different professional self-images. The overall arching professional self-image is that of caring, which teachers considered to be their main role and task as educators and not only teachers. This caring aspect was represented in supporting students' moral, emotional and social well-being, which teachers considered as a pre-requisite for students' academic success. The image of the caring teacher was also manifested in the findings revealing teachers' willingness to learn and develop professionally in order to promote students' learning and academic achievements. However, the increasing demands and burdens placed on teachers, which are represented in teachers' concerns about their well-being, do not leave enough space for teachers to think about and support students' well-being and their academic learning. These findings signpost a mismatch between what teachers understand 'being a teacher' means and how the educational context forces them to behave.

Furthermore, becoming and being a teacher in Oman was found to be affected by culture, the nature of the education system and the political environment within which teachers work. To explain more fully, teachers in this study were found to conceptualise their professional identity within a cultural sphere, particularly a faith dimension. The influence of faith identity on teachers' conceptualisations of their professional identity was found to have a bearing upon three particular aspects. First, religious faith was found to be represented in some teachers' conceptualisations of their own roles and responsibilities and those of their

students. Second, the data revealed that some teachers' decisions to join the profession were greatly influenced by religious beliefs and norms. More interestingly, this research has revealed, furthermore, that religious schema and position acted as motivational drivers which kept teachers committed to their work within an educational system that they perceived as failing to recognise their value and even as posing a threat to their sense of value as professionals.

Another significant finding in this respect is the apparent dominance of the content-oriented conceptions and practices of learning and teaching among the participant teachers. This was found to be attributed to the influence of the bureaucratic-managerial structure to managing and running education in Oman. The study highlighted that Omani teachers conceptualise and compose their professional identities in response to a professional environment characterised by the hegemony of technicality. The findings also indicated that one of the concerning consequences of this education system is the erosion of teachers' sense of value and recognition. Furthermore, the findings revealed a depressing and a sorrowful sense of status in relation to how others, the public, view and regard teachers and their work. Teachers attributed this to the influence of the lenient policies and practices implemented by the Ministry for the recruitment of teachers.

As regards the findings pertinent to the second research question on the evolution process of teachers' sense of professional identity, teachers' career stories revealed some of the key dynamic aspects of the sense teachers have of their professional identity throughout their careers. They highlighted the complexity and the interdependency of two key dynamic aspects, which the participant teachers perceived as evolving in their sense of their professional identity. These were

found to be professional self-efficacy and job-satisfaction. What is more, these stories shed light on some of the key influential factors in the career evolution of the participant teachers. These were represented in the training programmes and professional development encounters which are based on careful analysis of teachers' needs and concerns. In addition, the findings highlighted the role of self-regulated professional development encounters, such as the use of social media platforms and YouTube as sources for professional growth and a positive sense of professional self-efficacy. Moreover, the findings flagged up the vital importance of school context in the development and construction of teachers' professional identity on two fronts. First, the particularities of the school culture and the extent to which these match or mismatch with teachers' professional expectations and personal traits was found to have long-lasting effects on teachers' sense of professional identity. Second, the nature of relationships and professional support teachers experience in school contexts influenced their motivation, commitment and attitudes towards teaching.

Concerning the study's third research question on the contribution of the CPD opportunities provided by the Ministry of Education to the development of Omani teachers' professional identity, the findings revealed the disparity between INSET offerings and the highly demanding nature of teaching. The views of the participant teachers on the current INSET offerings indicated that these provisions have not been arranged considering the various facets of teaching. The potential success of INSET offerings in the development of teacher professional identity was blocked due to tradition, culture and structure.

The above summary of the main findings of the study show that teacher professional identity is culturally-dependent, experience-contingent and individually-driven. Who a teacher is, or the conceptual framework which guides teachers' thinking, actions and practices is, context-specific, influenced by various factors including personal, professional and political, reliant on interactions with others and the self, flexible and dynamic, and constructed through language. Moreover, although INSET is a dominant universal practice for the professional development of teachers, the contextual character of INSET policies and practices should not be neglected. These contextual influences need to be recognised and taken seriously by researchers and INSET providers to inform and improve their local policies and practices.

10.2 Contributions of the research

This research results in some theoretical and methodological contributions to existing knowledge in relation to the field of teacher professional identity and the ways in which this complex notion can be explored. In this section, I will address these contributions, making a claim for their significance in advancing scholarship and thinking around the notion of teacher professional identity.

This research was based on three different educational governorates in Oman. The participant teachers were state school teachers representing the three stages of school education in Oman as they taught in Cycle1, Cycle2 and Post Basic. They taught three different subject areas (Arabic, Mathematics and Science) with teaching experiences ranging from three years to nineteen years. They went through different pre-service routes (SQU, TTC, Jordan and Dubai). The participants share a similar policy environment and education context as other

teachers from other education governorates in Oman. They all implement the same curriculum for each grade, follow similar assessment procedures and guidance and get similar in-service training. Thus, based on this sample, the opportunity for transferability of the findings of this study to other education governorates is quite high. In addition, given similar socio-cultural and socio-political circumstances, the findings could have relevance to other international contexts. Therefore, this study adds to a growing body of international literature exploring teacher professional identity and their professional development. By undertaking this research in one of the less researched contexts such as the Arab world, it is an attempt to respond to calls by researchers to conduct more research on teacher work and identity in contexts other than Western and developed countries (GUR, 2014; Cheung, 2015).

Based on the premise that teacher professional identity is a highly complex, abstract and intangible construct, it is therefore challenging to observe and be empirically investigated. There is the a danger of being lost in abstraction which might cause frustration for many novice researchers (Kelchtermans, 2004); this led others to call for the abandonment of the concept altogether and start using a term with a clear meaning (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000). This research fills a gap in the scholarly field of teacher professional identity by empirically investigating ideas about collective identity formation and construction, as explored by scholars such as Sachs (1999, 2003, 2005). Based on Sachs' conceptual understanding of the notion of teacher professional identity, three components were extracted, which provided theoretical insights through which to research the construct of teacher professional identity. These components included 'how to be', 'how to act' and 'how to understand their work and their place in the society', which are intended to aid

researchers in further study of teacher professional identity. The use of these three components as the guiding framework for constructing and composing the interview prompts enabled the linking of the ideas about collective identity formation and construction presented in the scholarly field of teacher professional identity with an understanding of teachers' own perspectives on what it is to be a teacher. The findings revealed that these three components are crucial for understanding teacher professional identity. These components interact with each other and influence teachers' conceptualisations of themselves as teachers. The unpacking of these three components of teachers' lives proved to be able to provide lenses through which we can understand the 'conceptual frameworks' (Beijaard et al., 2000) which guide teachers' actions in practice.

This study has also contributed a novel theoretical insight on the concept of teacher professional identity by theorising an additional dimension in our understanding of teacher work and identity. The findings of this study revealed that religious schema and positions acted as motivational drivers which kept teachers committed to their work. In a context lacking recognition and posing threats to teachers' sense of value, these religious schema and positions were found to work as a source which nurtured and retained teachers' sense of resilience and motivation. To explain, teachers' unobservable cognitive structures and representations in relation to God existence, His justice and the sureness of the hereafter were found to contribute to teachers' capacity for sustaining resilience. Based on Mansfield et al.'s (2016) review of resilience literature over the past 15 years, in which they aimed at identifying the range of factors that authors mentioned as influencing teacher resilience, I can claim that this finding is a novel

contribution to the scholarly knowledge on teacher work and identity. That is, the topic of religion and faith in relation to teaching and identity, particularly to teachers' resilience and motivation, was dominated by a discussion on the influence of faith practices such as prayers on teachers' well-being. This research added a new dimension to this discussion, namely the influence of teachers' unobservable faith schema on their work and identity, and in particular their capacity to sustain and retain resilience and motivation.

At a methodological level, most qualitative studies in an international context have not utilised stimuli prior to interviewing teachers to explore issues related to teacher professional identity. Most studies depended on using direct interviews, either focus group or individual, while others implemented teacher narratives. This research attempted to contribute to the literature on how to investigate a complex and intangible construct, such as teacher professional identity. In particular, it adds to the field of qualitative research methods by utilising stimuli as the basis for a mediated individual interview to investigate issues related to teacher professional identity which require depth and richness. These stimuli included 'drawings and texts' and 'a graphic story-line' produced by the participants. The use of these stimuli as triggers to the interviews were to produce and integrate visual, written and spoken data which aimed at externalising the internalised thoughts and feelings of the participants. To the best of my knowledge, this study is the first to utilise these two techniques in investigating the topic of teacher professional identity. This makes this methodological attempt an original contribution to the field of researching teacher professional identity.

10.3 Implications of the findings

This study sheds light on several issues in regard to the nature of Omani teachers' professional identity, the teaching profession in Oman and the human resources development opportunities provided to teachers in order to help them develop professionally. These highlighted issues have implications for both the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Higher Education. Educational policy-makers and practitioners in both ministries may use the findings of this study to improve practice and policy in regards to teaching, teacher education and development. The findings of this study call for a number of recommendations.

10.3.1 Actual teacher involvement in curricular framework and assessment procedures

This study highlighted the dissonance between the dominant and the overarching professional self-image Omani teachers held for themselves and their reported experiences of 'being' a teacher. The overall arching professional self-image is that of caring, which made teachers prioritise students' moral, emotional and social well-being and considered these to be the foundations of students' academic achievement. However, experiences reported by most teachers of 'being' teachers reflected the hegemony of technicality and mirrored teachers as mainly curriculum implementers. What is worse, the over-loaded curriculum and the exam-oriented system forced teachers to neglect the affective and behavioural objectives explicitly stated and merely focus on achieving the knowledge or information ones. In a highly competitive world and with easy access to knowledge and information, the Ministry of Education needs to urgently engage in a thorough revision of its curricula and assessment procedures. This curricula need to provide more space for teachers to carry out their roles as educators, which entail the development of

the whole learner; morally, emotionally and socially; not only his/her temporary repertoire of factual information. I am aware that these dimensions are not easy to measure, but they are vital for building good citizens and human beings. In line with this and highly linked to it are the assessment procedures, for it is these which guide teachers' practices in a specific direction. The heavy focus on factual exams from year 1 of schooling is not going to produce citizens able to build Oman and participate in global advancements and innovations. Apart from factual exams, the assessment procedures need to include activities which show the accumulative learning of the students. These activities need to encourage learning to learn skills and promote morals, values and positive attitudes towards other human beings and humanity as a whole.

This thorough revision can be achieved through considering the involvement of teachers, officers from curriculum and assessment departments, and researchers in both fields. The involvement of teachers, which is of particular importance in this study, should go far beyond the currently adopted method by the Ministry. This involvement needs to start right from the beginning of deciding upon the elements of curricular frameworks and not just nominating some teachers to sit on authoring committees. In addition, teachers' comments and opinions in this regard need to be taken seriously and not just as a routine work which gets lost somewhere along the line and does not appear in the final curricular and assessment documents.

10.3.2 Considering faith identity in pre- and in-service education

Another significant finding from this study which calls for recommendation is the influence of faith schema on teachers' conceptualisations of their professional identity. This finding has implications for both pre- and in-service teacher

education. As well as their varied experiences, teachers' religious schema needs to be explored and considered, especially in contexts such as Oman where religion, particularly Islamic teachings and beliefs, are considered to be an important source for people's values and practices. To understand teachers and support them professionally, this vital dimension in their professional identity should be integrated into planning and organising teacher education programmes, either pre- or in-service. Therefore, an important activity for teacher education in such contexts is to explore and understand teachers' schemata in general and their religious schema in particular to genuinely explore their professional identities. Teachers need to be supported in examining and reflecting on their religious schema, which might underpin some of their thoughts and actions, to help them understand and develop their professional identity.

In addition, this faith schema was revealed to be significant in this study's teachers' capacity for resilience in contexts which lack recognition and pose threats to teachers' sense of value as professionals. This calls for recommendations at two different levels. At one level, this affirms the need for resilience to be part of teacher education in Oman which is currently completely neglected. Resilience-related skills and strategies need to be an essential component of teacher competency framework and therefore can be developed through pre-service education programmes, school-based experiences and in-service programmes. This can be achieved through explicit and directed approaches to skills and strategies which were found to support resilience. In the Omani context and other similar ones, one of these as revealed by this study is teachers' faith schema. Thus, at another level, pre-service teachers need to be given time and space to

discuss and reflect upon their religious positions and beliefs and explore how these can act as supporters and motivators when transiting into the real schools. Furthermore, in-service teachers need to be made aware of this valuable resilience resource and be supported to work on ways to nurture it.

10.3.3 Lifting the quality and status of the teaching profession

The findings revealed a depressing sense of status in relation to how others, the public, view and regard teachers and their work in Oman. Teachers attributed this to the influence of the lenient policies and practices implemented by the Ministry for the recruitment of teachers. Although these policies and practices are likely to affect the teaching profession in Oman for more than twenty years, Oman needs to take serious steps in ensuring that the future intakes of its teachers are among the top talents to be able to reframe the teaching profession. Raising education quality in Oman requires highly-qualified teachers, which suggests that automatic recruitment into the teaching profession should no longer be the right policy, even in situations of teacher shortage. Ensuring a supply of well-trained and highly-qualified teachers is as important as ensuring that those selected for teacher education programmes have a reasonably high level of commitment to becoming teachers. To do so, the government needs to give considerable attention to teachers' selection and recruitment by taking cues from other high-performing countries in education.

Darling-Hammond and Lieberman (2012) provided good examples of some countries around the world which have developed successful policies and practices related to teacher selection and recruitment. These policies and practices put these countries at the top of the list when it comes to high quality teacher education. In

Finland, for instance, teacher education programmes are extremely selective and recruit from the top quartile of the college-bound cohort. Applicants are assessed based on very high standards and go through different stages including exams, interviews and teaching-like activities. Only candidates with a clear aptitude for teaching and strong academic performance are admitted. These high standards for being admitted into a teacher education programme make getting into one a prestigious accomplishment. Teachers' initial education and preparation is only carried out at Finish universities and teachers are required to hold a Master's degree to ensure quality control and consistent standards. Teacher education programmes at these universities are heavily research-based with a strong focus on pedagogical content knowledge. The fact that teacher education programmes are held at research universities has also conferred prestige on the prospect teachers. Thus, it should be no surprise that teaching is one of Finland's most admired professions. I think that similar criteria for teacher recruitment and selection need to be put in place in Oman if the government is really genuine about raising the quality and status of the teaching profession.

In addition to this, lifting the quality of education and the teaching profession in Oman requires the Ministry not to lose sight of the existing teachers in the system. Long and strategic CPD programmes, which are based on the professional standards of the Ministry of Education and the 21st century competencies, are urgently needed to raise the quality and the teaching performance of these teachers. The current provided strategic CPD opportunities are left to teachers' willingness. This needs to be replaced with a system, which links teachers' accomplishments of these programmes to their appraisals and their professional

licenses. This ensures that all teachers in the education system get the support required to teach satisfactorily. Moreover, professional learning communities (PLCs) need to be encouraged and teachers need to be trained on how to actively engage in such communities. PLCs provide teachers with a space for reflection, which develops their skills, strengthens and helps them to build their practices.

10.3.4 Balancing ‘top-down’ and ‘bottom-up’ approaches to INSET offerings

It is clear from the findings of this study that there is a disparity between the current INSET offerings and the highly demanding nature of teaching. These INSET offerings have not been arranged considering the various facets of teaching. The potential of these provisions in the development of teacher professional identity was blocked due to tradition, culture and structure. Thus, any recommendation for making this situation better has to take into consideration these factors and not lose sight of teachers’ personal and professional needs. In addition, the training facilities and resources already established by the Ministry of Education in Oman need to be part of the plan. This does not mean that the Ministry should continue with its ‘top-down’ approach; however, it means that there need to be a gradual shift to a ‘bottom-up’ approach to professional development. This approach needs to take into consideration how to support schools to be more active in individual teacher and institutional development. Thus, an interaction between the ‘top-down’ and the ‘bottom-up’ processes of INSET needs to be encouraged and promoted.

Given this, rather than advocating for a totally de-centralised INSET system, a participative approach to planning and designing INSET plans and provisions might be a viable recommendation. Decisions on teachers’ training needs and teaching

challenges need to be based upon teachers' own perceptions, as well as those supporting teachers, such as senior teachers, Head teachers and supervisors. The Ministerial annual training plan has to provide space, time and funds for updated regional INSET offerings. Through subject supervisors, teachers in schools can suggest issues for INSET opportunities, so that offerings are suggested by teachers and for teachers. In addition, schools represented in subject departments need to have their own INSET plans and funds, which do not have to be totally school-focused as in the current situation. Schools need to have their own workshops and seminars which make use of school teachers' ideas and experiences, as well as inviting scholars from universities.

Furthermore, the selection and recruitment of in-service teacher educators have to be reconsidered. The task of in-service teacher education has to be delegated to well-trained, skilled and qualified teacher educators. These have to be carefully selected based on certain personal and professional standards and criteria. They can be selected from teachers, senior teachers or supervisors. They need to go through an accredited 'training for trainers' course which equips them with the theory and practice required for designing and providing INSET offerings for teachers.

10.4 Study limitations and future research

As is commonly the case in research, there are inevitably some limitations that need to be addressed. Some of these, particularly the ones in relation to research methodology, have already been discussed in chapter 4. These limitations along with the overall findings and the theoretical contribution of this research, suggest

some possible future directions for research that can be carried out in the Omani education system and which may also be applicable to other contexts.

In this study, I attempted to include a strategic mix of teachers teaching different subjects, at different stages of their career, working in three different school phases (Cycle 1, Cycle 2 and Post Basic) and within diverse school contexts. The findings highlighted similarities and raised questions about the impact of particular contexts and roles which would be worthy of further research. An examination of the form, formation and construction of professional identity for senior teachers, for instance, teachers recruited in the year 2011 after the Arab Spring and teachers with Master's degrees would build on the findings of this study and further consolidate an understanding of teacher professional identity. Likewise, a similarly structured comparative study of the nature and the evolution of teacher professional identity between female teachers working in girls' schools and male teachers working in boys' schools would help to extend the findings of the current study.

The findings of this study have revealed the impact of teachers' religious schema on their sense of professional identity. In particular, this study has made an original contribution to knowledge in regard to the role of faith schema on nurturing teacher resilience and motivation. Further research might investigate the extent to which this is the case across a broader cross-section of teachers, focusing upon other aspects of faith schema and positions which might contribute to teacher professional identity generally and their capacity for resilience in particular.

This research focused primarily on teachers' views of themselves and their work and as such the findings are based upon their self-perceptions of their professional

identity as relayed to the researcher through interviews. By utilising observation and other fieldwork methods and strategies, further research could build on the findings of this research by exploring the enactment of professional identity within classroom practices. Exploring the practical dimension of teacher professional identity would push beyond the findings of this study and thus provide another layer to our understanding of teachers' work.

This study also revealed the dominant public image of Omani teachers within society as perceived by teachers themselves. This image was not at all satisfactory and there is the danger of the effect of this on the attractiveness of the job and the desire of the young people to seek out teaching as a career. Thus, this study calls for an urgent investigation into this vital issue by exploring the perceptions of the public about teachers and the teaching profession and the attitudes of Omani young people towards becoming teachers. In addition, an issue suggested by the findings of this study which is worthy of investigation is the view of the Ministry's personnel towards teachers and the extent to which this is congruent or incongruent with the findings of this study in this regard.

Finally, based on teachers' perceptions and reported experiences, this research has suggested that tradition, culture and structure played an important role in the construction of the INSET strategies and practices. These three aspects have been seen to act as blockers for the potentials of INSET in developing teachers professionally and in contributing to their identity formation. Thus, further research is needed to explore the perceptions and practices of HRD practitioners in this regard to consolidate this argument and find ways to lessen the effect of these three aspects in order to make INSET offerings achieve their desired purposes.

10.5 Reflection on my research journey

My decision to do a Doctorate degree was not out of a passion; in fact it was out of curiosity. I used to look at people with Doctorate degrees as extraordinary and highly intelligent. I was eager to personally engage in this adventure to feel and experience how it is to be a PhD student and how this process transforms a person to be like the doctors I know. When he knew I was going to do my PhD, my Head of Department commented 'I really cannot imagine how a person can study one single topic for four years. It must be boring and a waste of time'. This was probably because he was merely focusing on the tip of the iceberg; the product; he was not aware of the process to achieve that product. His words did not discourage me as I had an expectation that this experience was going to be a great learning opportunity and was going to add significantly to me both as a person and as a professional. After four years, I can now say that my expectation turned to be true and this experience has constructed and reconstructed me in various ways.

Research-wise, this experience has been a great shift in my stance towards what a good research is and what other research cultures are available for me as a researcher. Coming from a context highly dominated by a positivist view, my conception of a good scientific research was based on questionnaires and statistics. This experience has transformed my ontological and epistemological assumptions in this respect. Being a human endeavour, research is inevitably underpinned by researcher's world view and not in separation. A researcher's position in regard to 'being and knowing' influences the type of the research culture s/he adopts and the methodological decisions s/he makes. The effect of the

different ways of 'being and knowing' can extend to the type of the research questions a researcher asks and thus the type of knowledge s/he is after.

My research journey, furthermore, taught me that as a researcher I need to be open and welcoming to surprises and unexpected changes. The research process is never a linear one. Even with a very good research design and plan, things are very likely to go in unplanned directions. These are sometimes more interesting than our plans. We just need to be open to welcome these and weave them into our established plans. As long as these new directions fit into our research objectives, we should not hesitate to consider and include them in the research project.

In addition, investigating professional identity has not only been a topic for getting a Doctorate, it has become a lens through which I view people and surrounding events. I have become more aware of how I have been shaped by my culture and society and reshaped by various experiences I decided to go through or which were imposed on me. This has made me more vigilant about the experiences and events my four children go through and try my best to provide and guide them to ones which will make them better human beings before anything else. This lens has made me more understanding about why people think and behave in certain ways more than others. I have become a better listener and observer and much less judgemental towards people and events. Identity, its construction and influences, has become the analytic lens through which I analyse and understand what is going on around me.

Finally, at a professional level, this research process has enabled me to clearly see the big picture within which teachers work. The findings of this research and their critical discussion have transformed my view of education and teacher development. They have provided answers to many questions which have been going on in my head for so long. They have unveiled some parts of the bottom of the iceberg which revealed how deep and multi-dimensional the problems are with our education system. These problems do not only require effective philosophies and visions. Equally important, they require human resources practitioners who understand and believe in these philosophies and visions and work wholeheartedly towards the achievement of the country's welfare. The knowledge I have gained from doing this research make me determined to go back to my work as in-service teacher trainer in the Specialised Centre for the Professional Training of Teachers (SCPTT) and spread these new insights. This can be done through our regular meetings and discussions. I can also conduct seminars on these insights during the professional development opportunities for trainers and administrators. With the assistance of the Research Unit team in the centre, I can participate in taking further one or some of the recommendations I have suggested above for future research.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Participant information sheet and consent form



INFORMATION SHEET AND CONSENT FORM FOR RESEARCH

Title of Research Project

'Omani Teachers' Professional Identity and CPD Practices'

Details of Project

My name is Mahfoodha Al-Bahri. I am a PhD student at the University of Exeter, the United Kingdom. I would appreciate your participation in my research entitled: **"Omani teachers' professional identity and CPD practices"**. The study aims at identifying Omani teachers' views of their professional identity, their perceptions of how this view has been constructed and the role of the provided CPD opportunities in this view. The research involves:

- 1) a simple drawing and an explanation of your drawing produced by you followed by a 30-40 minutes interview
- 2) a graphic story-line filled by you followed by a 30-40 minutes interview
- 3) a 45 minutes to 1 hour long interview. The data collected (your interview transcript, drawings and texts and the story- line sheets) will be used in the current research project and in future research and publications.

Contact Details

For further information about the research, please contact:

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If you have concerns/questions about the research you would like to discuss with someone else at the University, please contact:

Professor Debra Myhill

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Confidentiality

Interview recordings, drawings and texts, and story-line sheets will be held in confidence. They will not be used other than for the purposes described above and third parties will not be allowed access to them (except as may be required by the law). However, interview transcripts might be given to a third party to check the quality of translation. If you request your interview transcript, you will be supplied with a copy so that you can comment on and edit it as you see fit (please give your email below so that I am able to contact you at a later date). Your data will be held in accordance with the Data Protection Act.

Data Protection Notice

The data and the information you provide will be used for research purposes and your personal data will be processed in accordance with current data protection legislation and the University's notification lodged at the Information Commissioner's Office. Your personal data will be treated in the strictest confidence and will not be disclosed to any unauthorised third parties. The results of the research will be published in anonymised form.

Anonymity

The data and the information collected will be kept strictly confidential and will be held and used on an anonymous basis. No names will be linked to the research materials or be used in reporting the results of the research.

Consent

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

I understand that:

- there is no compulsion for me to participate in this research project and, if I do choose to participate, I may withdraw at any stage;
- I have the right to refuse permission for the publication of any information about me;
- any information which I give will be used solely for the purposes of this research project, which may include publications or academic conference or seminar presentations;
- all information I give will be treated as confidential;
- the researcher(s) will make every effort to preserve my anonymity.

.....

(Signature of participant)

.....

(Date)

.....

(Printed name of participant)

.....

(Email address of participant if they have requested to view a copy of the interview transcript.)

.....

(Signature of researcher)

.....

(Printed name of researcher)

Appendix 2: Drawing and text worksheet (adapted from Mattock, 2010)

1) Drawing and explanatory text

When you think of a teacher, what do you see? Please draw that image in the box below. Simply draw the image of what '**a teacher**' means to you or things that are associated with being a teacher. Remember, it does not have to be a perfect drawing.

Then, please write about your image. Why have you chosen to draw this image? What does it represent? What does it mean to you?

| IMAGE | TEXT |
|-------|------|
| | |

Appendix 3: Graphic story-line worksheet

2) Graphic story- line

Bellow you will find a grid on which you can begin with the earliest period you can remember and draw a continuous line to the present. This line would indicate, for each period, ***how you view yourself and the work you do as a teacher considering the various conditions and events which influenced your view either positively or negatively.*** The more positive the view, the more upward the displacement of the 'life-line'; the more negative the view the more downward the displacement.



Brief description of the highest point:

Brief description of the lowest point:

Appendix 4: Interview guide

| Interview Questions | Comments/Notes |
|---|----------------|
| <p><u>Phase one:</u> RQ1: How do Omani teachers view themselves and the work they do as teachers?</p> | |
| <p><i>How the image reveals the teachers' professional identity</i></p> | |
| <p>Lets talk first about your drawing and the way you chose to draw it</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feelings about doing the drawing • What are you trying to show? • Is it you? • Describe the teacher in one word or phrase • Good or bad teacher? • Qualities of this teacher • You from these qualities | |
| <p>'How to be', 'being a teacher'</p> | |
| <p>Tell me more about you as a teacher</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Your role as a teacher • Kind of teacher you are • Always wanted to be a teacher? • Passionate about teaching? • Important to be a teacher? • Teaching rewarding? | |
| <p>'How to act'</p> | |
| <p>Let's move on to your classroom practices. Could you please tell me about:</p> | |

| | |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning and your role • Main guiding principles in planning • These principles in actual teaching • Beliefs about teaching & classroom practice | |
| <p>'how to understand' their place in society</p> | |
| <p>Tell me in as much details as you can about:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers' representations in society (dominant representation) • Positioned by the Ministry (dominant image) • Effects of these on you | |
| <p><u>Phase two:</u> RQ2: How has this view evolved over the career path of the Omani teachers?</p> | |
| <p><i>How the graphic story-line reveals the evolution process of teachers' professional identity</i></p> | |
| <p>Let's talk about your story- line:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feelings about the task • The highest point in the graph • The lowest point in the graph • Other points in the graph • Contributors to change? • Turning points or critical incidents • Relevant others/persons | |
| <p><u>Phase three:</u> RQ3: To what extent have the CPD opportunities provided by the Human Resources Development (HRD) Directorate in the Ministry of Education contributed to the development of Omani teachers' professional identity?</p> | |
| <p>Could you please talk me through your experiences of human resources development</p> | |

| | |
|--|--|
| CPD opportunities, practices and programmes | |
|--|--|

- Access to CPD opportunities.
- Good opportunity.
- Less than good one.
- Best CPD experience in your career.
- Its contribution to your formation as a teacher.
- Needs from HRD Department.

Appendix 5: An example of first phase interview transcript

(Manaar)

How the image reveals the teachers' professional identity

MA: Thank you for sending me the drawing and the text. It is really appreciated. Before we talk in details about the drawing and the text can you tell me what was your reaction when I asked you to draw?

Manaar: I am not good at drawing. I find it difficult to draw but when you asked me to draw I imagined myself, what image I have in my mind for myself as a teacher, how I am as a teacher, what qualities I have as a teacher when dealing with students and the school environment.

MA: I see. So what came to your mind when you imagined yourself? How did you see yourself as a teacher?

Manaar: As my drawing shows, the most important thing is the knowledge repertoire, I mean how knowledgeable the teacher is. students nowadays just try to catch teachers' mistakes even if it is a simple mistake. They have got an idea that nowadays teachers do not have good knowledge repertoire so they don't know how to teach. Also, my good repertoire of subject matter knowledge enable me to give the right information. Once I had doubts about the information in the book. There is a diagram in year 12 textbook about the tongue and taste buds. When comparing it with the English references I have, I found that this information in the school textbook is scientifically wrong.

MA: Oh. How do students formulated this idea about teachers? I mean what makes them think in this way about teachers?

Manaar: It is accumulative. Even we as teachers notice that in recent years, some graduated teachers, we notice that their academic knowledge is not as it should be. Specially those graduated from private universities either here in Oman or from other Arab countries. I feel they just studied to get a certificate and a qualification but they do not like the subject matter they have learned, so you feel that they have weak academic scientific knowledge.

MA: Do you think they do not like the scientific subject matter or they do not like teaching?

Manaar: I think it can be both. They think that this is my destiny and I can do nothing about it. I remember a teacher worked with us some years ago, she was exactly like this. She was saying there wasn't a vacancy for me in another specialisation, so I was allocated in the biology specialisation, I do not like it but I

had to graduate. Even when I talk with her and discuss some biological scientific knowledge, you feel she does not have the basic required knowledge. I think this is also because these teachers just depended on the modules textbooks when they were in the college and the school textbooks when they became teachers but as further readings no they do not do this. I remember when I was first allocated in this school, that was my first year, my subject supervisor, I still remember his words, he told me 'Manaar if you want to be recognised, you should be recognised for your strong and solid academic knowledge'. He used to give me books to read. For instance in year 12, there was a topic on cellular respiration, he gave me a book on this which he discussed with me in his next visit to the school. He discussed with me what I learned from the book and what new things I gained. He even encouraged me to read scientific books in English and advised me to not only rely on the Arabic sources and to read other Arab countries school textbooks. He even brought me Jordanian school textbooks and Palestinian textbooks. Now after 10 years I can say he was right. I owe him a lot in this regard. I am not flirting myself but I do really feel that the girls think I am competent in biology and from the first year I taught year 12, every year 12 new batch ask for me to teach them. This encourages me to carry on improving my knowledge repertoire as it proves to be very important for teaching.

MA: What else are you trying to show in this drawing?

Here (pointing to the text) I wrote the 'affective dimension of a teacher is considered to be the most important dimension in building a strong relationship with students', I need to be close to the girls, deal with them as a big sister. I am trying to show (in the picture) that there should be an integration. I mean entering a class I am not only supposed to give the girls the scientific knowledge and that's it, no, there should be a kind of interaction with the girls, I need to take care of the knowledge aspect as well as the affective aspect. This (affective dimension) is very important because this reflects in her (the student) performance with me in the subject, especially these days, girls are having lots of problems either in school with other students or other teachers or even at home. I shouldn't only give scientific knowledge, at the same time I need to know who is this girl I am dealing with, I mean her background, and help her with her problems.

MA: How do you do this as a teacher?

Mannar: sometimes through the situations in the class. For example I relate the scientific matter to our daily real life and the reactions of the girls. As a simple example, in year 9, after the first term results I wanted to know the girls' reactions to the exam, so when I was distributing the marked exam paper, I asked the girls to evaluate themselves and see where they did well and where they didn't. Then, I told them don't you want to share this success with someone. They said what do you mean? I said why not to take your exam paper with my feedback and show it

to your parents. All the girls were very excited about the idea except one girl although she scored a very good mark. She said I do not want to show it to my parents. I wondered why she is behaving like this. I talked to her privately and I got to know that her parents are separated and she is living with her grandparents who do not care about such things. I tried to tell her that what you are doing now in your studies is for your own good and I am sure that your parents are proud of you. I suggested that I can send two copies, one for her mother and one for her father. With the help of the head teacher, I sent the copies to both parents. When she got the results of the second term exam, herself asked me to send it to both parents and she scored even better mark than the previous exam

MA: Don't you think that solving such problems is the school's social workers' responsibility?

Mannar: She is dealing with students' problems but I think it is my duty first to do this for my students. I try my best to help them with their problems and if I couldn't then I refer them to the social specialist. I always tell the girls that it is true that I am your teacher but if you think I can help you with any of your problems please do not hesitate to do so. If you think I cannot help you then you can talk to the administration or the social worker. I think we as teachers are more close to the girls than the administrators or the social workers.

MA: How do you think you got to this conviction that this aspect is your responsibility?

Manaar: I think it is from our social relationship in the outside community. When I personally face a problem I go and talk to the people close to me like my dad, my mum or my sisters. This is the way we were raised up to be. This is part of our social upbringing. I even try to encourage the girls to open up to their mothers and fathers. We are living in a weird society these days, lots of problems we have never heard about before. You might not believe this, there are some problems we know from the students that even their parents don't know about. We can sense these problems and students sometimes feel comfortable opening up to us than their parents. These social relationships with the students are important because we are close to them.

MA: I see. Can I say that this drawing reflects Manaar as a teacher?

Manaar: It might be difficult to judge myself but I can say that I implement these three aspects with the girls. So yeah to a great extent this might be me Manaar.

MA: You mean by the three aspects as you wrote here in the text, the knowledge aspect, the affective aspect and the ...

Manaar: Communication

MA: You wrote here the social communication

Manaar: Yes, the social communication. With the social communication I mean the new advancements.

MA: Here in the text you divided this aspect into two, the face to face communication with the head teacher and the other teachers

Manaar: Yes that's right and the other aspect is related to the social media communication.

MA: Do you mean that as a teacher you need to know how these social media applications and programmes work and be a good user of them?

Manaar: Not exactly. I myself do not know lots of features in these apps and programs in details but I am up- to- date. Yeah I do not know the details but I have a Facebook page and I follow some scientific accounts on twitter which are useful for my scientific knowledge.

MA: Why you think it is important for you as a teacher to be up- to-date with these apps?

Manaar: Because these are the students' interests and orientations these days. They look for scientific information from these apps and bring them to class. This especially happens in the self-learning task. The girls look for answers for the task from different sources, especially the social media sources. As a teacher, I need to be familiar with these apps so I can guide my students to the good ones.

MA: Interesting. Ok can you describe the teacher you drew with a word or a phrase?

Manaar: I can say that this teacher is integrated and interactive.

How to be:

MA: Ok. Let's talk more about you as a teacher. You, Manaar as a teacher, what do you think your role is?

Manaar: Mmmm my role is to deliver correct information for the students in a way that this information is clear and not vague.

MA: So you think your role is to transfer information for the students.

Mannar: Yes.

MA: Ok. If I ask you what kind of teacher you are, what would you say?

Manaar: What do you mean?

MA: I mean how would you describe yourself as a teacher?

Manaar: I can say that I am a kind of teacher who likes to bring in new ideas. I do not like, for example just a simple example preparation. Some teachers they just copy the last year's preparation from their preparation books. I personally don't like this, there should be something new there should be something new. I like to add new ideas to my lessons every year. For this reason teachers ask me for my preparation books because they know I put in new things.

MA: Ok. Do you consider yourself passionate about teaching?

Manaar: Yes. I like teaching. I am passionate about teaching but I do not like the obstacles being put in front of us. Teaching as a profession, I love it, but the burdens thrown on our shoulders, these the ones I hate. But I am an optimistic person. There are times when I feel down but I like doing new things, teaching gives me the chance to do this, I mean doing new ideas and activities with the students

MA: What makes you like teaching?

Manaar: What makes me like teaching are the students themselves. Yeah there are students who do not motivate you to do new things. They do not let you feel that what you are doing is important. There are students like this. They don't care whether you do new things or not. But there are other students who from their interactions you feel they are saying yes next lesson we want something new and different. This year, I can sense this in year 9 students, I mean I used 'scrape and win' cards as a praising strategy. This encouraged them to work harder and their results this term are much better than the last one. They asked me for something new this term. It really motivates the students. They like trying new things. The girls even talk about it in their homes. One mother told me once that her daughter is working hard to win the card. This keeps me motivated and makes me like what I am doing and makes me look for new ideas

MA: Oh. It's really a nice idea. Ok Manaar, have you always wanted to be a teacher?

Manaar: Yes.

MA: Why?

Manaar: You know when I was a child and I was asked to draw what I want to be I always draw a doctor but then in the secondary I thought about it. I can't stand seeing blood and people suffering. I just could not imagine myself in this. Even engineering I thought it's not for me because I do not like working in a mixed

gender working places so I took myself away from these and I felt that teaching is the suitable one for me based on my personality. I mean what I like doing and what I do not like doing in life. You know even now with my students, I tell them to choose their careers based on their capabilities and personalities not because someone wants them to be such.

MA: Do you encourage your daughter to be a teacher?

Manaar: Yes, I do. I found many interesting and good things in teaching as a profession. There are difficulties and challenges in this profession, but as a teaching profession building the students, building the mind of the student, yes I encourage her. This is important.

MA: Is teaching rewarding here in Oman?

Manaar: Mmmmmmmmmmm. I do not think so.

MA: Why?

Manaar: If we look at the graduates from schools who join higher education especially I am teaching year 12, I can say no. In general, these are not rewarding for us as teachers. Here, I can blame the way by which students are being allocated to higher education institutions. For example, some students are very happy with a C or even D grade because they know with this grade they will be allocated to an institute. Whatever I do as a teacher to help them improve their scores, they do not care because they are confident that this level is enough to ensure them a place in higher education institutes. It's really affecting students' performance and effort in the class. Also the automatic progression from one year to another. Students think in any case I am moving to the next year why should I work hard. It's really affecting students' motivation. Now they do not care about getting high scores, they just care about passing from one year to the next.

MA: Anything else you think contribute to this attitude?

Manaar: Yes. The community. I do not think that parents care about education and learning. They just care about passing from one year to another. They do not instil the love of learning in their children and that learning is not just for this year. It is for my whole future and we can sense this with the students. For instance, they learned something this year, next year they do not remember it because they care about learning the information for the exam and once they pass that's it finished. They do not care about being the best and having knowledge for life.

How to act

MA: That is really disappointing. Alright, let's talk now about your classroom practices. What do you think learning is?

Manaar: Learning for me is when students acquire information whether from the teacher or from the surrounding environment. Learning needs to be from different sources.

MA: Am I right in saying that you think learning is the acquisition of information?

Manaar: Yes, information and skills.

MA: What is your role in this learning?

Manaar: My role is using different ways and methods to help students acquire the information of the content. I mean new teaching methods and strategies to deliver this information.

MA: Ok, How do you usually plan to teach a topic in biology?

Manaar: When I plan for any topic, I have to refer to the aims written in the teacher's guide and I can think myself of other aims. Then, I start thinking of strategies that will help me to achieve this aim and based on this I structure my lesson.

MA: So you start with the aims?

Manaar: Yes, the written aims and the mental aims.

MA: What do you mean?

Manaar: Sometimes the teacher's guide does not do justice to the information in the textbooks. In the textbook for one lesson you can find an amount of information which not all included in the objectives. So as a teacher I have to formulate new objectives to cover all the information for that lesson.

MA: I see. What about the teaching strategies provided in the teacher's guide?

Manaar: They are all out of date, old strategies. All of them about brainstorming, discussion, group work , this kind of stuff.

MA: What new methods you bring?

Manaar: I bring things related to active learning, active learning strategies. I have got a book about this, I refer to it from time to time. I try not to give all the information myself in class. I try to get the students to search for the information.

MA: How did you get to know about active learning and its strategies?

Mannar: From my study.

MA: The BA or the master?

Manaar: In the BA I got to know very few and simple things about it. In the master I got to know about it much more.

MA: Do you mean that another biology teacher who has not had a master degree would not know much about it and thus might not implement it in her classes?

Manaar: Yes. Because they do not know about active learning as we do. Active learning has lots of strategies, useful strategies. Teachers need to train the students to use them smoothly and effectively. At the beginning, it might seem difficult but by time girls like them and if I go back to old strategies they feel bored.

How to understand their place in society

MA: Ok. I'd like you to tell me your opinion about the Omani teacher's status in society. I mean from your contact with the Omani society and as a teacher, what images do you think the Omani society has about teachers?

Manaar: You mean how the society views the Omani teacher?

MA: Yes. Exactly

Manaar: It depends on the teacher himself. I feel if the teacher is working hard to get the students to learn and the students talk about this with their parents. Here I think the teacher's status is high and positive. I sense this here in the community. Sometimes in social gatherings, mothers which I do not know and I have never met before when they get to know that this is me, they talk very highly and positively about me and my work with their daughters. I mean how to say this, we say 'what goes around, comes around'. What you do comes back to you whether it's good or bad. The more we care and work hard for students, we definitely find appreciation either from students or from parents. The girls I taught in year 12 ten years ago, they still talk about me highly in front of others when I meet them anywhere. Once in the health centre, a lady came to me and said I know you don't remember my name but I was your student and now I am working here in the laboratory. You know why because you taught me biology. You can't imagine my feelings at that time.

MA: That's really thrilling. So can I say that you are satisfied about how the Omani society views Omani teachers?

Manaar: No, I am not. If we talk about this view in general I am not happy about it at all.

MA: Why?

Manaar: I mean how the community here views me, I am happy about it but in general I am not. The society views Omani teacher's main concern is to get his salary at the end of the month and does not care about the students and their academic performance. This might be the view of some students about the teachers and it spreads through the whole society. I cannot say that all students think in this way but this is the dominant image I can say in the society. Some people say this explicitly about teachers.

MA: I see. So why you think the surrounding community think of Omani teachers in this way?

Manaar: As I told you, some teachers' behaviours make the society think in this way.

MA: Who are these teachers?

Manaar: You know, these teachers from private institutes from Oman and from other countries. Their behaviours changed the society's view about us teachers. It changed a lot.

MA: I see. What do think about the status of Omani teachers in the Ministry. How does the Ministry position teachers?

Manaar: Mmmmm. I sense that the Omani teacher hasn't been positioned high. There are so many shortages in this.

MA: Can you give me an example?

Manaar: For example, for the honouring ceremonies, they select the very experienced teachers, they do not select teachers for their achievements and initiatives. It is always based on years of experience. They check if you have been honoured before, they will not select you again as if you have got the right for one time no matter what you have done, without considering your new initiatives.

MA: Do you think your voices as teachers are heard in the Ministry?

Manaar: To be honest, they always ask us to write our opinions about different stuff but I do not think they consider them because what we write comes up again and again. To be fair, it happened only once. We were asked about our opinions on year 12 biology exam and we asked to change the pictures they assess students on as they used to bring exactly the same picture from the textbook with some

slight changes. We asked them to bring outside pictures not from the text book and this happened.

MA: I see. Ok, thank you very much Manaar for your time and ideas. Do you have anything else to add?

Manaar: No, thank you. Can't wait for the coming interview, hahahha

M: hahah. Thank you.

Appendix 6: An example of second phase interview transcript

(Manaar)

MA: First, I would like to ask you about this task, How did you find it?

Manaar: At the beginning, I found it difficult. But then when I started thinking about my teaching journey, I enjoyed doing it. It was as if I was rewinding a video of my teaching career. It brought me stuff from long ago. Interesting, it is interesting.

MA: Ready to talk about your graph?

Manaar: Sure. I was waiting for this meeting hahahaha.

MA: Ok, shall we start with the highest point in your graph. Tell me about it?

Manaar: Before the highest point, if you can see here the rise started about my sixth year. This year where I started my master degree at Sultan Qaboos University. It was about my 8th year of experience, after I came back from the Master.

MA: What is your Master's degree in?

Manaar: In curriculum and teaching methods.

MA: What exactly happened at that time. Why your view to yourself as a teacher started rising when you started your master?

Manaar: We learned new things which made me like performing more, better aware about different aspects of the teachers and they gave us strategies for action research. You know different teachers like different stuff. Some like to improve their teaching strategies, some like doing research and others like to do new initiatives. From here I was able to build my character as a teacher. I mean how to find myself in the teaching profession. Then, I start from here.

MA: So where did you find yourself from all of these issues?

Manaar: Teaching first. Using new ideas and strategies especially the active learning ones. But also, when I came back I felt that I have a tendency towards research. So, with the help of other teachers, I started doing very simple studies, mainly action research ones. I started doing interventions in my lessons and I evaluated the results. This is secondary but as a core character I like being a teacher.

MA: You mean you did an action research on your own classroom practices?

Manaar: Yes, exactly.

MA: Can you give me an example?

Manaar: For example, I used the same topic of my master thesis, the reciprocal teaching. It deals with analysing scientific texts and linking this with the critical thinking skills of the students.

MA: I see. How does this help your students in biology?

Manaar: For example, there is a challenging scientific text in year 11. I encourage the girls to read the title. Then move to the first two lines and look at the pictures in the text. Here the student can guess what the text is about and start reading it carefully and underline the phrases which they do not understand and start asking classmates or the teacher. Then they summarise their understanding of the text with a story or a min map. I tried out the reciprocal teaching with my students and saw the big improvement in their performance.

MA: Do you share these research studies with other teachers?

Manaar: Yes. I document all the steps. Then I share with the teachers and they sometimes add interesting ideas. I also did a research on the challenges of laboratory work.

MA: What about the lowest point on your graph? From your graph it is about the first two years of your career? Why was it low?

Manaar: Here, it was my first year in the school. I wasn't able to identify the different characteristics of the teacher. I felt this depends on the cooperative work among teachers. As a new teachers, I needed the help of other experienced teachers to figure out this. Of course this would have helped in building my professional identity.

MA: You told me before you were the only Science teacher in the school at that time.

Manaar: Yes, I was the only Science teacher in the school and another expatriate part-time teacher. There wasn't that much cooperation between me and her and even between me and other teachers. There wasn't, how to say this, professional development programmes for us new teachers. I mean for the school life not only for how to prepare and how to assess. These programmes are important for new teachers. They could have helped me a lot at that time.

MA: From the second to the fourth year there is a big increase. What happened?

Manaar: I started to be more close to some teachers in the school. So, I started to know what is required from me as a teacher and what could make me a good teacher.

MA: How did you know this?

Manaar: I started to ask questions. Also, the workshops some teachers do in the school help in a way. Also, being part of a group, this helped me a lot.

MA: What have changed in the group?

Manaar: The number. We were two teachers. Then another experienced Omani teacher joined the group. She had different experience. We shared together. This was useful for both of us.

MA: And then I can see that there was another decline, what happened?

Manaar: I felt I do not have the desire to teach, I was doing my best though. I felt the need to change. I felt my teaching strategies were old a bit. I felt I need something new. Professional development programmes were not giving me this, the ones in the school I mean. The ones out of school were rare and also they didn't have what I needed. I felt I had to study. I was really eager to study. I applied once and it was rejected. I applied again the next year and it was accepted. I really needed something new.

MA: New! you mean for renewing your teaching strategies?

Manaar: Yes, something new. I wanted something new in teaching and learning. But actually, I learned more than this. As I told you I learned about action research as well. This also reflected in my teaching and strategies.

MA: So, that's why there is an increase in the eighth year?

Manaar: Yes.

MA: And it kept increasing since then.

Manaar: Yes, because I now somehow know where to go when I want something new. I can use YouTube, Instagram, accounts of other schools, Twitter and others. I also have a very good team in the school. We are cooperative. There is another teacher doing her master in our school and she continuously tells us about new ideas and recommends readings for us. So, I feel I am in a learning environment. Teachers are willing to listen to my ideas and they are like me in continuous search for new ideas. We all benefit from each other.

MA: Interesting. Thank you Manaar. Would you like to add anything else?

Manaar: No, thank you. Wish you all the best.

Appendix 7: An example of third phase interview transcript

(Manaar)

M: Today, we are going to talk about the human resources development opportunities provided to you. What do you think of them?

Manaar: if we talk about their number, I do not think they are enough. I think we need more of these. For example, for 5 years now, I have not attended any. Two years before going to do the master degree and three years after coming back I haven't attended any. At the end of every semester, they ask us to write what programmes we need. We write but they don't do them. This is not only me. I can see in my school that teachers are very rarely asked to go on programmes. Not enough at all.

M: Do you remember how many you attended until now?

Manaar: Yes, I do. Every year I have to document them in my file. They need to be there. They are 5. For thirteen years, I attended 5 only.

M: What do you think of these?

Manaar: How to say this. Not really useful. I don't want to sound harsh but actually they are boring. Nothing new, nothing useful. They tend to focus on subject matter knowledge of some years, like year 9. The content in year 9 is very loaded, so they focus more on this, clarifying this point and that concept nothing more really. It is not at all what we need. I told you before, I decided to do my Master because I needed something new. I was bored. I couldn't find these in these programmes. Very traditional.

M: Isn't there any which you can regard as good opportunity?

Manaar: maybe Intel one. I learned something new from this experience. I applied it in my school in a project. I participated with my project in Jordan. This year another teacher is doing it and I am helping her in it.

M: Why you consider it as very good opportunity?

Manaar: Because I learned new and useful things from it. I learned how to choose a topic for a teaching unit, how to phrase objectives for it, for each objective what are the materials and tools I am going to use, and how to deal with technology. Also, the topic needs to be interesting for the students, clear and you deliver it in easy way. Also, the trainer was contacting us a lot during the project. He was with us step by step, giving us feedback on our work. This was really encouraging.

M: How long was it?

Manaar: It was for three days. I mean the face-to-face training. Then, the trainer visited us in schools when we needed any help.

M: For how long they supported you?

Manaar: Throughout the whole project. It was for one semester.

M: What about after the semester. Was there any contact and support?

Manaar: Yeas, there was. But I left school for my Master so another teacher took over.

M: I see. Any other oppportunities you think of as good?

Manaar: Mmmmmmmmmmm. It was The Academic Week. I think that was the best. It enriched my academic subject knowledge. They talked about new issues in Biology. They made us think about the information we have in the textbooks. It really expanded our knowledge in Biology.

M: Ok, do you remember any not so good one?

Manaar: All others. Hahahahhahah. Seriously, all of them were theoretical. There was nothing we could use in our classrooms. Outdated, theoretical and boring.

M: Why you think they are like this?

Mannar: I don't know really. But maybe, as you know, in the classroom, the teacher can make a difference. It might be the same topic from the same textbook, but it all depends on the teacher. The same thing in training. Training is a skill. I attended a course in training when I was in SQU. I attended for different trainers in this course. I observed how the trainer can make it work or not. it's not just go and train. There are principles you need to follow. I don't see these principles in the programmes that supervisors conduct. I don't blame them. They are meant to support teachers in schools by discussing their lessons. They are not qualified for this role. I don't think that most of supervisors are aware of these principles.

M: I see. Ok, what do you think you as teachers need for your professional development? I mean quality-wise

Manaar: Doing my Master in SQU, I felt that we teachers in schools are missing a lot. There are many useful stuff tutors in the university can give teachers. There should be connections between schools and the university. Schools need to have more connections with the university (SQU). We need expertise from the university to train us on new and updated thinking and ideas in education. Unfortunately, this does not happen in schools. When we suggest this to the Head teacher, she always says there is no funding for this.

M: Thank you very much Manaar for your time and insightful responses. Do you have anything else you want to add?

Manaar: No, thank you. Just wishing you all the best in your research

M: Oh, thank you very much

Appendix 8: Nvivo nodes (codes)

a) Professional self-images

teachers' views of themselves as teachers.nvp - NVivo Plus

FILE HOME CREATE DATA ANALYZE QUERY EXPLORE LAYOUT VIEW

Go Refresh Open Properties Edit Paste Copy Merge Cut Copy Merge B I U A Format Paragraph Styles Select PDF Selection Text Region Editing

Workspace Item Clipboard Format Paragraph Styles Editing

Nodes Look for Search In Nodes Find Now Clear Advanced Find

Nodes Cases Sentiment Relationships Node Matrices Sources Nodes Classifications Collections Queries Reports Maps

Nodes

| Name | Sources | References | Created By |
|---|---------|------------|------------|
| Teachers' professional self-images as revealed by interviews on drawi | | 0 | MA |
| Caring for students' well being | | 0 | MA |
| moral developmwnt of students | | 0 | MA |
| valuing sts | | 4 | MA |
| guiding sts towards Islamic & Omani norms & values | | 5 | MA |
| impact of teachers' morals and values on sts | | 7 | MA |
| teachers' as role models | | 6 | MA |
| educators not only teachers | | 12 | MA |
| emotional and social welfare of students | | 0 | MA |
| sense & get to know sts social problems | | 9 | MA |
| developing personally connected relationships | | 11 | MA |
| understand sts personal and social tensions | | 12 | MA |
| Teachers' concerns about their well-being | | 0 | MA |
| teachers' physical health | | 6 | MA |
| teachers' emotional burnout | | 7 | MA |
| Teachers' willingness to learn & develop professionally | | 5 | MA |
| Teachers' value of subject matter knowledge | | 11 | MA |

b) Becoming and being a teacher

teachers' views of themselves as teachers.nvp - NVivo Plus

FILE HOME CREATE DATA ANALYZE QUERY EXPLORE LAYOUT VIEW

Go Refresh Open Properties Edit Paste Copy Merge Cut Copy Merge B I U A Format Paragraph Styles Select PDF Selection Text Region Find

Workspace Item Clipboard Format Paragraph Styles Editing

Nodes Look for Search In Nodes Find Now Clear Advanced Find

Nodes Cases Sentiment Relationships Node Matrices Sources Nodes Classifications Collections Queries Reports

Nodes

| Name | Sources | References | Created By |
|---|---------|------------|------------|
| Becoming & Being a teacher | | 0 | MA |
| (how to be) Being a teacher motives, worthiness and role | | 0 | MA |
| becoming a teacher | | 0 | MA |
| the love of the subject | | 4 | MA |
| the avoidance of mixed-gender working contexts | | 6 | MA |
| the impact of schooling experiences | | 4 | MA |
| teachers' perceptions of the value of teaching | | 0 | MA |
| teachers' voice | | 9 | MA |
| lack of appreciation and recognition | | 12 | MA |
| perceived roles as teachers | | 0 | MA |
| impact of Ts' religious beliefs and positions on their professi | | 6 | MA |
| the development of students' academic skills | | 4 | MA |
| the development of students' academic knowledge | | 6 | MA |
| the development of students' morals and attitudes | | 10 | MA |
| interest and passion into teaching | | 14 | MA |

teachers' views of themselves as teachers.nvp - NVivo Plus

FILE HOME CREATE DATA ANALYZE QUERY EXPLORE LAYOUT VIEW

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Workspace Item Clipboard Format Paragraph Styles Editing

Nodes

Look for Search In Nodes Find Now Clear Advanced Find

Nodes

- Nodes
- Cases
- Sentiment
- Relationships
- Node Matrices

Sources

Nodes

Classifications

| Name | Sources | References | Created By |
|---|---------|------------|------------|
| Becoming & Being a teacher | 0 | 0 | MA |
| (how to be) Being a teacher motives, worthiness and role | 0 | 0 | MA |
| (how to act) Being a teacher the hope and the happening | 0 | 0 | MA |
| conceptions of learning and teaching | 0 | 0 | MA |
| transformation of learners vs student-transformation | 1 | 5 | MA |
| development of understanding and skills vs facilitation of Ss | 3 | 9 | MA |
| an acquisition of content vs information transmission | 11 | 21 | MA |
| practices of learning and teaching | 0 | 0 | MA |
| guided by exam questions | 8 | 10 | MA |
| The use of active learning strategies | 10 | 13 | MA |
| sources of teachers' practices | 9 | 19 | MA |
| The primacy of the prescribed content | 14 | 22 | MA |

teachers' views of themselves as teachers.nvp - NVivo Plus

FILE HOME CREATE DATA ANALYZE QUERY EXPLORE LAYOUT VIEW

Go Refresh Open Properties Edit Paste Copy Merge B I U A Format Paragraph Styles Select Text Region Find

Workspace Item Clipboard Format Paragraph Styles Editing

Nodes

Look for Search In Nodes Find Now Clear Advanced Find

Nodes

- Nodes
- Cases
- Sentiment
- Relationships
- Node Matrices

Sources

Nodes

Classifications

| Name | Sources | References | Created By |
|--|---------|------------|------------|
| Becoming & Being a teacher | 0 | 0 | MA |
| (how to be) Being a teacher motives, worthiness and role | 0 | 0 | MA |
| (how to act) Being a teacher the hope and the happening | 0 | 0 | MA |
| (understanding their place in society) Being a teacher as perceived by o | 0 | 0 | MA |
| surrounding community | 0 | 0 | MA |
| teachers are undervalued | 0 | 0 | MA |
| 2011 demonstrations | 4 | 5 | MA |
| inappropriate public social behaviours | 6 | 7 | MA |
| low professional attitude and poor teaching performance | 14 | 33 | MA |
| The Ministry | 0 | 0 | MA |
| Teachers as machines | 8 | 11 | MA |
| The absence of teachers' voice | 12 | 22 | MA |

c) Revelations of teachers' career stories

Evolution process of professional identity.nvp - NVivo Plus

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Workspace Item Clipboard

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Nodes

- Nodes
- Cases
- Sentiment
- Relationships
- Node Matrices

Sources

Nodes

| Name | Sources | References | Created By | |
|--|---------|------------|------------|----|
| Revelations of teachers career stories | | 0 | 0 | MA |
| Ts sense of self-efficacy | | 0 | 0 | MA |
| Professional self-efficacy and entry into the profession | | 0 | 0 | MA |
| high self efficacy | | 4 | 11 | MA |
| low self-efficacy | | 10 | 19 | MA |
| Professional self-efficacy and other career phases | | 0 | 0 | MA |
| dissatisfaction about self-efficacy | | 2 | 6 | MA |
| sustained rise in self-efficacy | | 4 | 12 | MA |
| Fluctuations in self-efficacy | | 8 | 25 | MA |
| Ts job-satisfaction | | 14 | 20 | MA |

d) CPD opportunities and Omani teachers' professional identity

Professional development Vs professional identity.nvp - NVivo Plus

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- Cases
- Sentiment
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- Node Matrices

Sources

Nodes

| Name | Sources | References | Created By | |
|---|---------|------------|------------|----|
| logistical matters of CPD opportunities | | 6 | 13 | MA |
| Uptake of CPD opportunities | | 11 | 15 | MA |
| Focus of CPD opportunities | | 13 | 21 | MA |
| Teachers' suggested ways forward | | 14 | 25 | MA |
| Opportunities for PD | | 14 | 26 | MA |
| Valued PD opportunities | | 11 | 27 | MA |

Appendix 9: Certificate of ethical approval from University of Exeter



GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

St Luke's Campus
Havitree Road
Exeter UK EX1 2LU

<http://socialsciences.exeter.ac.uk/education/>

CERTIFICATE OF ETHICAL APPROVAL

Title of Project: Omani Teachers' Professional Identity and HRD Practices

Researcher(s) name: Mahfoodha Abdullah Al-Bahri

Supervisor(s): Debra Myhill
Susan Jones

This project has been approved for the period

From: 06/02/2017
To: 30/09/2019

Ethics Committee approval reference:

D/16/17/25

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'P. Durrant'.

Signature: Date: 06/02/2017
(Dr Philip Durrant, Chair, Graduate School of Education Ethics Committee)

Appendix 10: Arabic letter to the Ministry of Education to get their approval



بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

المحترمة

الفاضلة / مديرة المكتب الفني للدراسات والتطوير بوزارة التربية والتعليم

الموضوع: طلب الموافقة على تطبيق دراسة حول " أثر برامج تنمية الموارد البشرية على الهوية المهنية للمعلمين العمانيين بوزارة التربية والتعليم"

يسرني ان ارفق لكم طيه نسخة من مخطط الدراسة التي أود القيام بها في ثلاث محافظات تعليمية هي محافظة الباطنة جنوب, محافظة الباطنة شمال و محافظة مسقط التابعة لوزارة التربية والتعليم, و ذلك كجزء من متطلبات رسالة الدكتوراه التي أقوم بها في كلية العلوم الاجتماعية والدراسات الدولية بجامعة اكسيتير بالمملكة المتحدة. كما أود أن أؤكد تعهدي باستخدام البيانات والمعلومات لغرض البحث العلمي فقط وسوف يتم التعامل معها ضمنا كبيانات عامة, بدون أي تصريح مباشر لأسماء الأشخاص أو الجهات المتضمنة بالدراسة.

أرجو التكرم بالموافقة على تطبيق هذه الدراسة في المحافظات الثلاث المذكورة أعلاه, و مخاطبة الجهات المعنية لتسهيل مهمتي لإتمام هذه الدراسة الميدانية, والتي تتضمن عمل ميداني لتجميع بيانات من معلمي الرياضيات والعلوم واللغة العربية من مدارس الحلقة الأولى والثانية و مدارس ما بعد الأساسي, حيث أن عينة الدراسة وأدوات جمع البيانات تتألف من التالي:

- 1) توزيع ورقة عمل على المشاركين تتطلب منهم رسم و كتابة شرح للرسم متبوعة بإجراء مقابلات مع المشاركين للتعرف على طبيعة و جوانب الهوية المهنية للمعلم العماني.
 - 2) توزيع ورقة عمل أخرى على المشاركين تتطلب منهم رسم خط زمني للأحداث والخبرات والأشخاص الذين اسهموا ايجابا او سلبا في تشكيل و تطوير هويتهم المهنية متبوعة بإجراء مقابلات مع المشاركين و ذلك للتعرف على مختلف العوامل التي تسهم في تطوير الهوية المهنية للمعلم العماني في الحقل التربوي.
 - 3) اجراء مقابلات مع المشاركين للتعرف على خبراتهم و آرائهم فيما يخص البرامج المقدمة من قبل المديرية العامة لتنمية الموارد البشرية بالوزارة ومدى اسهامها ف تطوير هويتهم المهنية.
- حيث سأقوم شخصيا بالعمل الميداني المتعلق بالدراسة الميدانية ابتداء من التواصل مع المشاركين و انتهاء بإجراء المقابلات و ذلك بعد التنسيق مع المديرية العامة للمحافظات الثلاث.
- هذا وفضلوا بقبول فائق الاحترام والتقدير,

مقدمة الطلب: محفظة بنت عبدالله بن سالم البحرية

طالبة دكتوراه بكلية العلوم الاجتماعية والدراسات الدولية-

جامعة اكسيتير-المملكة المتحدة

الوظيفة: اخصائية تدريب بوزارة التربية والتعليم

للاستفسار والتواصل: masa201@exeter.ac.uk

Professor Debra Myhill المشرف على الرسالة

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