

**The Art of Possible:
Experiences of Critical Pedagogy at a Higher Education Institution in the Sultanate
of Oman**

Submitted by Alina Rebecca Chirciu
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You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view

Harper Lee

Yesterday I was clever, so I wanted to change the world. Today I am wise, so I am changing myself.

Rumi

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research study was to explore the possibilities of critical pedagogy and critical literacy in an English language course at a higher education institution in the Sultanate of Oman. Its aim was to propose an alternative curriculum for an English language pathway module by introducing socially-contextualized generative themes, position questioning and post-methodological teaching and learning strategies which would lead to an increased engagement with multiple perspectives hence an increased level of critical awareness. Moreover, the study sought to provide a platform for students' voice where their views and choices were not only taken into consideration but had a direct impact on the direction of the critical intervention. The present study did not try to advocate for a new pedagogical framework that is prescriptive in nature but rather emphasize the ephemeral and hence dynamic nature classroom methodology.

The study took place at a private higher education institution in the capital city of the Sultanate of Oman. The site of the intervention was a lower level English language vocabulary and reading focused module that served as support for English language majors. The participants were two teachers who had taught the module in the past as well as a group of students who had enrolled in the module at the time of the intervention. The group of student participants was entirely composed of females who possessed various levels of English language proficiency and originated from various parts of Oman.

Data were collected during three intervention stages, following an action research design, through multiple methods: interviews, focus-groups, tests, questionnaires, observations. The research diary kept during the intervention represented another data source and an important instrument of recording instances of reflection on action. Participant confidentiality and anonymity was maintained throughout the data collection and analysis. The collected data was analysed following the principles of thematic analysis but also keeping in mind the democratic character of action research. Thus, a comparison of the researchers' interpretations of the analysis with the experiences of the participants as well as the opinions of the external observers was undertaken.

Several major themes emerged from the data at the different stages of the intervention: students' needs and abilities, the need for a reformed curriculum, assessment of the students' level of critical literacy, positioning and identifying multiple perspectives, students' views on the critical intervention and their development of critical awareness as

well as challenges and caveats at the intervention stage, students' resistance versus emotional attachment to the module.

In terms of readiness for a critical intervention, students and teacher participants held different views, as teachers associated readiness with a high level of critical thinking and language proficiency whereas students associated it with interest and emotional attachment. The majority of student experiences during the critical intervention were clustered around a shift in perspective which did not only evidence their increased sense of awareness of the world and its various social issues but also an increased display of empathy and compassion. Students also avowed an increased improvement in all four language skills as a result of this experience. Student silence had an impact on the reshaping of the intervention hence proved an opportunity for reflection and change. The key findings of the study suggest that, although considered a high-risk endeavour, critical pedagogy offers ample opportunities for English language education as students' attitudes to it were generally positive. Students wish to take an active role in authoring the course of their learning and will make apparent their choices even through opposition, resistance and silence. Furthermore, critical pedagogy needs to be understood in the context of possibility as it is not a prescriptive set of rules or strategies nor automatically democratic and free from imposition. It is constantly informed and transformed by its authors' and its participants' contributions.

The study has thus brought an overall understanding of the possibilities of critical pedagogical endeavours as well as the possibilities of critical action research to illuminate the phenomena of critical literacy and participant voice.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND DEFINITIONS

BES	Basic Education System
CAI	Critical Applied Linguistics
CDA	Critical Discourse Analysis
CLA	Critical Language Awareness
CLT	Communicative Language Teaching
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
ELT	English Language Teaching
EMI	English as a Medium of Instruction
IATEFL	International Association of Teaching English as a Foreign Language
OAAA	Oman Academic Accreditation Authority
OAC	Oman Accreditation Council
OPC	Oman Private College
TESOL	Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages
Omanisation	An Omani government official policy instituted in 1988 and aimed at replacing expatriate personnel with local work force and translated into practice by the establishment of obligatory employment quotas particularly the private sector for Omani nationals ("Omanisation programme and Policy OmanInfo.com", 2016)

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1. CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

1.1. Nature of the problem

Critical pedagogy has been part of the educational landscape for a long time under various terms. Critical pedagogy is essentially related to a perspective on teaching, learning and curriculum that “doesn’t take for granted the status quo, but subjects it to critique and creates alternative forms of practice” in the aim of cultivating active, engaged citizenship for the purpose of acknowledging inequality and hence striving for the development of more just, equitable societies (Crookes, 2013, p.15). Critical pedagogues seek to tap into the human potential while envisaging the possibilities of a more humane world (Kress, 2011). They endeavour to bring about the transformation of present conditions by envisaging future possibilities through inquiry-oriented, socially-contextualized, self-reflective practices (Kincheloe, 1993 in Kumaravadivelu, 2003; Simon, 1987). The aim of these endeavours is to cultivate a conscientization or critical awareness of social realities through teaching and learning acts (Freire, 1998).

When talking about critical pedagogy in the Omani context, further explanation is typically needed. With the advent of calls for educational reform in the post-Arab spring period and the requirement for a more inclusive, equitable higher education system (Al Issa, 2007; Al Issa & Al Balushi, 2012), the prospect of various avenues for post-method pedagogies and critical pedagogies of possibility takes contour. However, the prospect of critical pedagogy in action in the Omani higher education context has insofar remained a desiderata as there are no concrete studies to date, to document its possibilities and its challenges. The reasons for this are manifold and many of them are related to the overall socio-political as well as the educational context of Oman. English language teaching in Oman (ELT) is a relatively new endeavour as the Omani education system was formerly established only in the beginning of the 1970s after the accession to the throne of Sultan Qaboos bin Said (Al Issa & Al Balushi, 2012). Ensuing reforms, particularly in the area of ELT, were implemented in 1999 whereby English language education was introduced as a subject of study in primary education as compared to it being introduced in the secondary education prior to the 1999 BES (Basic Education System) implementation. As a result, communicative language teaching (CLT) pedagogy

was incorporated in the English curriculum and has since been the norm for development of tasks and activities in this field (Al Issa & Al Balushi, 2012). Thus, it is no surprise that critical pedagogy, particularly in the field of English language education in Oman, is relatively unknown and it is often conceptualized by ELT practitioners within the purview of critical thinking and problem-solving skills (Busaidi & Sultana, 2015). This misconception of what critical pedagogy entails is due to the “relatively strong hegemony of mainstream and apolitical approaches to English language teaching in the last few decades in general” (Troudi, 2015, p.89) and due to a deep concern for professionalism and the TESOL practitioners' struggles for professional identity formation (Chirciu, 2014). In spite of these contextual caveats, there is scope for the development of critical pedagogies in Oman, more so as an increased focus on the importance of national identity building coincides with an increased interest for critical questioning strategies in the ELT field (Samaranghe, 2014).

1.2. Rationale

The motivation behind this study draws from my experience as a TESOL practitioner in Oman and my subsequent search for the "holy grail" of a more student-inclusive, socially-contextualized, real-life oriented pedagogy. It all started with my own critical awareness development which draws from my own transition from pre-revolutionary, Iron Curtain Romania, where I completed my primary education to a post-revolutionary Romania where freedom of expression, movement and education became highly valued. Although, at the time, I did not possess the theoretical grounding of the critical paradigm which I later developed throughout my doctoral journey, I believe I have always harnessed the rebellious spirit that brings about a desire for change and a constant questioning of the “taken for granted”. My journey as an ELT or TESOL professional in Oman has added an educational dimension to my already existing critical stance. The Omani higher education system I operate in provides ample opportunities for critical approaches as it is a site where educational reform in the field of ELT has not brought about the anticipated changes (Al Issa, 2007; Al Issa & Al Balushi, 2012). The Omani higher education system is also a site that invites critical approaches due to the fact that its programs are delivered mainly through the English Medium. Students are thus expected upon completion of their post-secondary education English Foundation

program to possess an acceptable level of English which would allow them to enrol and succeed in the undergraduate programs. As a newcomer both in the Omani society and culture as well as in the culture of the classroom in the Foundation and Undergraduate Programmes at a private higher education institution, I had to go through a process of learning the specificity of the context and understanding the many challenges students face in their struggle to learn English. The premise of this study lies in the impositional nature of the EMI (Troudi & Jendli, 2011) but also in the hegemonic nature of methods and materials used in the English language classroom. Thus this study is built from what Canagarajah (1999) defines as a resistance stance where an alternative to the mainstream discourse of English language skill focused materials and methods is proposed. It thus seeks to explore a curriculum for an English language pathway module whereby socially-contextualized generative themes (Shor, 1992), position questioning (Janks, 2010; Janks, 2014) and post-methodological possibilities (Kumaravadivelu, 2003) interact in order to raise critical awareness among students.

Furthermore, from a teacher/researcher perspective, I wanted to provide my students with a platform where their voices as well as silences could be heard and considered. I also wanted us, students and teacher/researcher, as a classroom community of equals, to embark upon a journey of critical awareness and transformation through understanding and engagement with socially-contextualized themes and texts.

The thrust of the research is thus classroom-based exploration of what I believe to be a TESOL pedagogical gap hence the appropriate research methodology would be action research. Cohen, Manion & Morriison (2007) define action research as “a small-scale intervention in the functioning of the real world and a close examination of the effects of such an intervention” (p.297). The rationale for choosing this particular methodology is embedded in the research objectives evidenced above by trying to create avenues for change in terms of classroom methodology but also curriculum development and teacher education. It also intends to set the beginning of a community of practice where problems and solutions can be shared as it is my contention that in order for change to happen at an institutional level, it should have already taken place at the level of classroom practice.

1.3. Purpose of the study

The purpose of the study was to explore the possibilities offered by a critical pedagogy intervention in an English language course in terms of developing critical awareness and engaging with multiple perspectives on real-world issues. It also sought to provide a platform for student voices and opportunities for curriculum negotiation.

The present study is not trying to advocate a new pedagogical framework that is prescriptive in nature but rather emphasize the ephemeral and hence dynamic nature of a "becoming-appropriate" classroom methodology (Holliday, 1997). It tries to raise awareness among the TESOL professionals in Oman that this can be done through a constant reflective cycle, a constant quest of what is appropriate for their particular classrooms (Mcniff, 2000). Thus I believe that this purpose can be achieved through the formal dissemination of this research at different conferences and workshops but also its informal dissemination through discussions within my professional networks and on different virtual or non-virtual forums.

1.4. Significance of the study

Firstly, the significance of the study is directly related to the Oman higher education context where there is currently a growing tendency to opt for so called "internationally benchmarked materials" hence in-house materials tend to be pushed aside or given a lesser importance. In addition to this, an increased focus on standardization and abidance by international standards in all higher education institutions in Oman, add to the general drive for uniformity and outcome quantification. Oman's higher education accrediting body, the OAAA (Oman Academic Accreditation Authority) presents, on its website, information on institutional accreditation guidelines, schedules as well as quality enhancement resources such as KPI (Key Performance Indicators) creation and management for its higher education target audience (oaaa.gov.om). This movement towards standardization of materials and assessments has led to a consequent standardization of teaching methodologies and approaches (Troudi, 2015). One of the present study's aims was thus to raise awareness among the TESOL community in Oman that critical pedagogies of possibility can provide both students and teachers with opportunities for exploration of multiple perspectives and critical awareness development while engaging with various English language skills. This

research is also trying to argue against prescriptive, standardized, universal forms of pedagogy while advocating for a becoming-appropriate methodology driven by the belief that a culture-sensitive approach to English language is necessary if the question of context or situation appropriate pedagogy is to be addressed (Holliday, 2007; Troudi, 2005).

Secondly, the study is also significant due to its lack of precedence in the Omani context. Studies by Busaidi & Sultana (2015) and Al Mahrooqi & Risse (2014) tackle elements of criticality such as socially-contextualized pedagogy and materials (Kincheloe, 2008) however, they do not elaborate on the transformative effects of such an approach upon student participants. A similar, smaller-scale study focused on Freire's (Freire, 1998) critical dialogue was conducted by Chandella (2014) at a higher education institution in the United Arab Emirates. The study followed a different research design from the current one, with the researcher being an observer and not a participant in the critical classroom.

Thirdly, the significance of the study also lies within its purpose of empowering teachers to engage in a constant search and reflection upon their students' capacity for developing critical awareness and their own capacity of teasing out dominant discourses. The findings of the study seek to have an impact on curriculum development while trying to emphasize the value of authentic, culturally sensitive materials that would empower both teachers and learners. The study also seeks to raise awareness to the possibilities critical pedagogies can offer in terms of emotional and social education through ESL curricula.

1.5. Research Questions

In line with the tenets of the critical paradigm and action research methodology this study sought to understand the students' views on critical pedagogy, the factors that aided and those that hindered the critical approach and whether or not the intervention had an impact on the students' level of critical awareness. The research questions that guided the study were:

1. What were the students' views on the critical literacy intervention on an English language module at an Omani higher education institution?
2. What factors supported or hindered the development of a critical literacy intervention at the respective institution?

3. How did the critical literacy intervention help improve students' critical awareness?

The research questions were carefully formulated to reflect the scope of the study, its agenda and focus as well as the context in which it was carried out (Andrews, 2003). They also reflect the participatory nature of the research design whereby students' views represented a direct contribution to the development of the critical intervention (Somekh, 2006).

1.6. Structure of the thesis

In chapter one I presented a brief description of the background, rationale and purpose of the study as well as its significance to the research context and the absence of similar studies within it.

In chapter two I presented a detailed description of the macro-context of the study, namely the Omani society and a description of the micro-context, i.e. the higher education institution where the study was carried out.

In chapter three I presented a critical review of the relevant research and discussed a conceptual framework for the study which emerged from the reviewed literature. I also reviewed similar studies carried out in the world, in the Middle East and the Gulf region.

In chapter four I presented a detailed account of the action research methodology employed in this study and its relevance to the study's aims and critical agenda. Furthermore, I presented a detailed description of the three stages of the intervention: pre-intervention, intervention and post-intervention and the methods used for data collection and analysis. I also discussed my role as a teacher/researcher and its implications to the research methodology and data collection process. Additionally, I evaluated the limitations and detailed how the ethical considerations and questions of validity were addressed in this study.

In chapter five I presented the data and illustrated its analysis according to the major themes revealed during the three intervention stages. To achieve this, I included participants' verbatim statements collected via the various data collection methods employed: interviews, focus groups as well as questionnaire and test responses.

In chapter six I discussed the findings of my study in relation to the literature review and the macro and micro context.

In chapter seven, I provided a summary of the key findings then I explored the implications for future research and discussed the relevance of the study outcomes to the ELT field in Oman as well as my professional and personal experience.

2. CHAPTER II: CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

The current chapter presents the Omani context from two perspectives, the macro context of Omani political system, society and culture as well as the micro context of the higher education institution where the study was carried out. I believe that the two perspectives are essential in order to have a broader picture of the way the Omani higher education system functions and the role young Omani students are expected to play in it.

2.1. Macro Context: Oman

2.1.1. Political and socio-economic context

Oman is a country of approximately 3.000.000 people with a rich and diverse culture and history due its important geographical position in the Arabian Peninsula. The ascension of the Al Said dynasty to the throne established a monarchical form of governance with the title of sultan being transmitted by birth to male Muslim Omani descendants. The country has a governing cabinet, i.e. a Council of Ministers as well as a Parliament (Majlis al Shura in Arabic) which initially had a consultative role in line with the country's absolutist monarchy.

Throughout the course of its development, Oman, similar to other countries in the Arabian Gulf, relied heavily on qualified as well as unqualified expatriate workforce to cover the demands of the government as well as the private sector. The expatriate workforce still represents a third of the total population, with a predominant presence in the private sector (thetelegraph.co.uk).

In 2011 Oman was swept by a wave of protests as part of the revolutionary wave known as Arab spring. Among the protesters' demands were more jobs for Omani nationals, freedom of expression, less government control over media, political reforms, better living conditions and measures against corrupt ministers and civil servants.

As a result, the ruling sultan reshuffled the cabinet and extended the powers of the Parliament, established a monthly job-seekers allowance, increased pensions and pledged to create more jobs for Omani nationals. He also set-up a plan to create a second public university and decreed for an increase in government funding for study places at private higher education institutions in the Sultanate as well as abroad.

The results of the protests rippled out into society resulting in an increased number of Omanis in the workforce including higher education staff. In fact, the longstanding Omanisation policy enacted in 1988 is being strictly enforced through the supervision of the Ministry of Manpower hence has resulted in an increase in Omani faculty and Omani administrative staff throughout different departments at the institution where the study was carried out.

As part of the development program, the country is trying to diversify its economy and diminish its reliance on the depleting oil and gas reserves (mof.gov.om/English). With an increase in dependency on tourism and other service sectors it is expected that Oman's exposure to the global context would increase its demand for proficient English language -speaking, qualified citizens.

2.1.2. Education system

Education plays a major role in the country's modernization program initiated by Sultan Qaboos when taking up the rule in the early '70s. As stated in the Basic Statutes of Oman (mola.gov.om, 1996):

"Education is a cornerstone for the progress of society which the State fosters and endeavours to spread in order to make it accessible to all..." (article 13, paragraph 1, p.8)

The State provides public education, works to combat illiteracy and encourages the establishment of private schools and institutes under its supervision and according to the provisions of the Law (article 13, paragraph 3, p.8).

This is one of the reasons why the responsibility for managing the education system is shared by two ministries: the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Higher Education.

As a result of this vision, the education system in Oman has undergone several reforms mainly concerning the curriculum as well as teaching methodology. In the field of ELT in particular, the Ministry of Education decided, in 2008, to introduce the study of English right from grade 1, introducing a new curriculum which "aims to reflect contemporary thinking in ELT by, for example, emphasising meaningful and purposeful language use, promoting self-assessment, and providing a variety of interactive and motivating language learning experiences" (Borg, 2009, p.xi)

This aim is also reiterated in the higher education ELT where preparatory English programmes available at government as well as private higher education institutions

also known as General Foundation Programmes strive to "meet the requirements of sustainable development in the Knowledge Era, while preserving the cultural identity of Omani society..." (Al Busaidi & Tuzlukova, 2013, p.9) The existence of such programmes was in line with the implementation of English Medium policy, as English was recognized by the Ministry of Higher Education to be:

"..... important in the new global economy. English is the most common language for international business and commerce and is the exclusive language in important sectors such as banking and aviation. The global language of Science and Technology is also English as are the rapidly expanding international computerised databases and telecommunications networks which are becoming an increasingly important part of academic and business life "(Ministry of Higher Education, 1995, p. A5- 1 in Al Issa, 2006).

The current English as Medium of Instruction policy is being implemented at the publicly funded Sultan Qaboos University as well as throughout all the various degree programmes offered by government and private colleges. The teacher education programme at SQU currently graduates 120 students each year which is far below the market demand (Ismail, 2011). However, it is important to mention that the majority of this graduates opt for government posts within the primary and secondary education due to a general perception of higher privileges, i.e. fewer working hours, better job security and fixed payment grades. The primary and secondary education system has witnessed an increased level of Omanisation (Al Issa & Al Balushi, 2012). The resulting shortfall in ELT qualified Omanis in the higher education system is covered by expatriate teachers, often times native speakers who are poorly qualified and lack the cultural awareness and knowledge necessary in this particular context (Al Issa, 2006).

This being said, the 2011 protests brought about an increase in the Omani presence within the government and private higher education institutions in Oman, translating into preference being given to Omanis during the recruitment process at the institution where the study was carried out and raising the number of Omani faculty in the English Department to 40 percent.

2.1.3. A place for criticality in the EFL Omani Higher Education system

According to Al Issa (Al Issa, 2007) the Omani education system has been insofar characterized by “an adherence to one fixed and mandated syllabus... which prevents students from thinking analytically and critically” (p. 201). He adds that textbooks fail to take into account individual needs and interests as they are targeted to the entire student population hence “convey the ideologies (beliefs and ideas) of the dominant groups” (p.201). Although Al Issa’s statements pertain to the state of affairs in Omani secondary education, the effects of this highly centralized system trickle down in the more decentralized higher education system in terms of teacher and student practices and attitudes through a formal methodology approach and a largely passive student role (Al Balushi, 1999 in Al Issa in Al Issa, 2007). Furthermore, an increasing focus on standardization and benchmarking due to a hype in quality assurance procedures, audits and accreditation culminating with a series of accreditation exercises and pilot studies conducted by OAAA (oaaa.gov.om) marked Oman’s joining the global higher education bandwagon of accountability and application of a business model to the education sector through customer “service teaching” (Ness & Osborn, 2010) and communicative language teaching method panacea (Savignon, 2007). This is directly linked to the globalization of English language education and consequently, the promotion of EMI as part of a discourse that advocates “technology and science acquisition and economy progress” (Al Issa, 2007, p.204).

In this context, criticality in the Omani higher education system is taking shy steps forward. This, however, is limited to weaker forms of criticality advocating critical thinking (Burbules & Beck, 1999) as foregrounded by Samaranghe (2014) who views reading as a means of fostering criticality. In the same vein, Busaidi & Sultana (2015) present a set of possible strategies for fostering critical thinking through translated literature. Thus, transformative critical pedagogies in the Freirian tradition remain a desiderata in this particular higher education context.

Documented attempts at questioning the positioning of texts and discourses (Janks, 2014) and engaging with “dialogue” whose prominent purpose is “to conscientize the people” (Freire, 1970a, p.47 in Burbules & Beck, 1999) through pedagogical endeavours have not so far been documented in English language classrooms in Oman.

2.2. Micro-context: Oman Private College

This section presents an insight into the institution where the study was carried out. The Oman Private College (pseudonym used), henceforth referred to as OPC is a private college based in the capital city Muscat which offers degrees in business, information technology and English language. It also offers a number of language training and postgraduate courses all available through the medium of English. In order to ensure that students are prepared for the requirements of the English medium delivered programmes, the college offers a Foundation Programme which welcomes around 400-500 students every fall and around 200 students every spring. The English language department is comprised of approximately 25 academics, the majority expatriates from India, Pakistan, Eastern Europe and the US. These academics are typically highly qualified, the majority of them possessing and MA in English language, literature or Education. A low number of them are PhD holders. Their level of experience can range from 5 years minimum to 25 years. As a result of the country wide protests in 2011 and the reinforcement of the Omanisation policies, however, preference has been given to Omanis during the recruitment process hence a number of fresh graduates from either the Colleges of Education at the country's government university or departments of education or translation, English studies in other colleges have been recruited as teaching assistants.

As per the Ministry of Higher Education rules, private institutions including OPC have to work in collaboration with an accredited higher education institution overseas. OPC's relationship with its partner university in United Kingdom has been longstanding and standards-driven as OPC is following the quality assurance processes and policies implemented at its partner university. In 2009-2011, the Oman Accreditation Council (OAC) currently Oman Academic Accreditation Authority (OAAA) commenced the accreditation process for all private higher education institutions in Oman, process completed successfully by OPC. OPC is frequently involved in marketing activities taking part in Higher Education Fairs and Exhibitions and advertising in local newspapers.

2.2.1. English language modules

2.2.1.1. Foundation Programme modules

Going by the principle that “the more English is taught, the better the results” (Philipson, 2009, p.209), OPC offers several skill-based English modules throughout its different specialisms catering to different types of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) such as English for Academic Purposes (reading, writing), English for Information Technology, English for Business Studies etc.

All skill-based English courses emphasize academic and study skills, in accordance with the OAAA standards (OAAA, 2016). The Foundation Programme at OPC is presumably designed to cater to all levels of proficiency in English. It is comprised of English, Math and IT courses taught over two academic semesters (fall and spring). English courses focus on all four skills: reading, writing, listening and speaking with courses that put more emphasis on receptive skills (listening and speaking) while in the second semester the focus relies more on productive skills (reading and writing). All English modules require 18-20 contact hours per week, while IT and Maths course have up to 8 hours per week. Students are required to pass all the courses in the programme in order to progress to the undergraduate level.

The OPC Foundation Programme does not practice the tracking of students into levels thus the staggering majority of the students admitted in semester I courses falling under the “false beginners “category with a minority of students in the lower to upper-intermediate levels of English language proficiency. The OPC supports its non-tracking system by advocating for mixed ability classrooms that foster a more collaborative, peer-teaching oriented environment. The OPC has constantly endeavoured to set-up a support system in place for students who are struggling with their English courses, as the short duration of its Foundation Programme of two semesters Foundation Programme, one academic year, makes the implementation of different levels of proficiency unfeasible. This has been a matter of concern for instructors teaching on the programme as oftentimes they find that students need considerable training in study and academic skills that the current programme timespan does not allow (Chirciu & Mishra, 2011).

Instructors co-teach most of the English courses mentioned above and collaborate in creating assessments, grading and compiling results.

2.2.1.2. Undergraduate programme modules

The undergraduate programmes at OPC offer English modules that serve as support for the content modules delivered through the English Medium. The content courses are in line with each pathway requirements thus ranging from Business and IT field related courses to English language and literature courses. The modules typically integrate receptive and productive skills however, for the English pathway specialization, the support modules segregate these skills as there is more emphasis placed on language ability. Thus, the post-foundation English pathway support modules include reading and vocabulary building modules, speaking courses, study skills in English modules and grammar modules. In the case of the English pathway, the support modules are not awarded credit but are a pre-requisite for being admitted on level 1 of the English language pathway. These modules are delivered in periods of 4 hours each week for the duration of one full academic semester. Students who show evidence of accredited prior learning or pass an achievement test can be exempted from support modules and can move directly to the pathway modules.

2.2.2. Facilities at OPC

The classrooms at OPC are fully equipped with projectors and computers. E-learning tools are available such as Moodle platforms which all academic staff are encouraged and even compelled to use, as all of the assignments for the undergraduate programmes are submitted online. There is also a learning resource centre and a library available for both students and staff.

Staff are also provided with in-house workshops and given the possibility to participate in different international and regional conferences by being provided with a stipend once every two years upon approval from the faculty research committee.

2.2.3. Teaching methodology and materials

The teaching methodology preferred at OPC is learner-centred with a focus on collaboration and critical thinking skills. In order to follow this, there has been an expectation among staff to avail of the technological facilities and be more creative in their teaching. It is also expected that staff engage regularly in research and scholarly activities and two hours in their timetable have been allocated for this purpose.

As part of its quality assurance policies OPC has a peer-review process in place, whereby instructors are expected to observe their peers' classes and provide a written report based on the criteria mentioned in the peer-review form. Among the criteria mentioned, one is use of technology and the other is engaging students in group-work and pair-work.

Each module taught has a number of stated learning outcomes that academic staff have to consider when planning their teaching and assessments.

OPC has opted for a series of published textbooks combined with in-house materials for its Foundation Programme and in-house materials for other undergraduate English modules. Although, in the past, the Foundation Programme used to rely exclusively on in-house materials, staff have decided to move away from this option in an effort to achieve a greater standardisation of the programme.

2.2.4. Students at OPC

2.2.4.1. Foundation students

Students at OPC come from various backgrounds from different regions of Oman. Some of them have had limited exposure to English while others, especially living in more cosmopolitan Muscat come from mediums with more exposure to English language, albeit bilingual private schools. There is also a number of international students mainly from India, Iran and Bahrain. While students from the farther regions of Oman tend to be rather shy and secluded, students from Muscat tend to be more outgoing and more prone to collaborate with their classmates.

Although OPC abides by the principles of co-education implemented at tertiary level in Oman, male and female students are segregated by choice with females sitting together on one side of the class and males on the other side. For most of them, tertiary education is their first exposure to a co-education oriented system.

Expatriate academics are advised to adopt a sensitive attitude and not to force students to work in mixed gender groups.

Faculty members at OPC mentioned that group-work and collaborative strategies have to be implemented based on micro-cultural differences within the macro Omani culture, i.e. while collaborative strategies could work with students from Muscat they could not work with students from Sharqiya (a largely Bedouin populated region) (Chirciu & Mishra, 2011). Faculty teaching on the Foundation Programme are expected to assist students in dealing with the initial shock of

college environment during their pastoral advice hours and to offer academic support during their consultation hours and whenever necessary. This has raised the need for English teaching faculty to possess a deeper cultural knowledge (Troudi, 2005) and also take a gradual exposure approach in terms of the teaching strategies they apply in the classroom.

2.2.4.2. Undergraduate English pathway students

The undergraduate English pathway student population is generally female dominated as most students see it as a career path to teaching or other, according to Omani societal and cultural norms, more female appropriate professions such as administrative positions or other academic-oriented professions. The students that choose this pathway at OPC normally possess a higher level of English language ability and are more motivated in pursuing academic interests. The programme typically recruits a smaller number of students due to its high academic demands hence the class numbers are smaller. There is a general impression amongst educators at OPC that English pathway students, due to their higher level of English ability, are more inclined to engage in tasks that promote higher order thinking skills, are more open minded and more exposed to a variety of world issues.

2.2.5. The English pathway module that served as the site for the critical intervention

The English pathway module that served as a site for the critical intervention, or the possibility project as I like to call it, was a reading and vocabulary module offered at the post-foundation level as a support module for the English pathway. At the time of the intervention the module had been the victim of a change of teachers at the start of every academic semester, possessed an outdated and limited module outline and little or no materials were available for reference. For me this was an advantage as the course was effectively a blank slate thus allowing me to experience more freedom in planning the intervention. At the time of the study, the enrolment on the course had been particularly high, namely 17 students, which, according to my fellow colleagues who had previously taught on the pathway, was unprecedented. I can thus safely say that the context was favourable to the implementation of this possibility project and, as the following chapters will show, the students were ready and willing to experience critical pedagogy.

2.3. Summary

In this chapter I have provided a detailed picture of the macro-context of the study, namely Oman's historical and educational context. Furthermore, I have described the micro-context of the study, the Oman Private College's, an Omani higher education private institution, English modules and programmes with reference to their teacher and student population. Finally, I have described the module that served as site for the critical intervention. In the following chapter I will present a review of the relevant literature in the field of critical pedagogy and critical literacy.

3. CHAPTER III: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter sought to illuminate the major concepts that underpin this research study and the conceptual framework that served as guide for the critical intervention I and my students embarked upon. Thus, I began by looking at the concept of criticality within the domain of EFL and defining critical pedagogy in ELT. I then looked at the components of critical pedagogy, stressing particularly on critical literacy and critical consciousness. Consequently, I proposed a critical principle framework for EFL classroom practice as seen in Figure 2. The framework served as a guide for the critical intervention and informed the action research cycles. This chapter also presents a review of similar critical studies in the Middle Eastern macro-context while pointing out the scarcity of such studies in the Gulf and Oman in particular.

3.1. Setting the stage for a critical approach in English as a Foreign Language (EFL)

The education system has long been based on the positivist ideals of rationality, objectivity and truth (Carr & Kemmis, 2004; Giroux, 1997). This legacy of rationality as prevailing over lived experience made its way to the social sciences from a long tradition of research on the physical world whereby causal links could be easily established. For long this tradition of research and practice was associated with scientific rigour (Carr & Kemmis, 2004). Thus, critical theory appeared as a reaction to the dominance of positivist scientific thought in the twentieth century in the aim to renew the long lost relationship between theory and practice. This “required recovering from early philosophy the elements of social thought which uniquely concerned the values, judgements and interests of the human kind and integrating them into a framework of thought which could provide a new and justifiable approach to science” (Carr & Kemmis, 2004, p.132). In order to achieve the above mentioned goal, critical theorists returned to the work of Aristotle and considered his conception of phronesis which translates into what should be done in real-life situations.

Ethics, politics and education were considered by Aristotle as practical arts where only the above mentioned principle of phronesis could be applied. Thus early critical philosophers like Horkheimer, Adorno, Marcuse and later Habermas, in opposition

to the objective or neutral claim to reality science had made, tried to show that different kinds of knowledge are defined by particular human interests and their purpose (Carr& Kemmis, 2004).

In the field of education, however, the focus remained on a positivistic, cause and effect type approach to teaching and learning where the primary aim was to prepare students for the workforce (Kanpol, 1999). The works of John Dewey (Dewey, 1938) although not reactionary in nature, presented the need for reform in education and a re-forging of the connection between education and experience, the educational and the lived reality of both the teacher and the taught, in other words a return to phronesis.

A need for reform at the level of educational pedagogy was evidenced five decades ago with the resurgence of mass movements for political reform in Brasil which created an environment for Paulo Freire's critical circles, a pedagogical movement that had as primary aim the education and provision of fair opportunities to the marginalized groups in the country. The purpose of critical pedagogy was to renew the lost relationship between theory and practice and to bring forth the idea that all knowledge is interested (Macrine, 2009). Thus, knowledge is never neutral as it always serves political, social and economic interests (Giroux, 1997 in Macrine, 2009).

Critical pedagogy advocates a problematizing approach, i.e. "a way of exploring language in social contexts that goes beyond mere correlations between language and society and instead raises more critical questions to do with access, power, disparity, desire, difference, and resistance. It also insists on an historical understanding of how social relations came to be the way they are" (Pennycook A. , 2001, p.6)

Some of the domains of critical language education are critical pedagogy, critical literacy and critical awareness which I further discuss below.

3.1.1. Defining critical pedagogy in ELT

Critical language pedagogy is the result of an interaction between theories and practices that imply action from the part of both students and teachers towards addressing problematic aspects of their lived realities (Crookes, 2013). Critical pedagogy is rooted in what Pennycook (2001) defines "critical theory as problematizing practice, the inclination to turn a sceptical eye towards assumptions,

ideas that have become naturalised” (p.7). Giroux also talks about critical pedagogy as a reaction to the unchallenged “common sense” teaching practices that have led to an institutionalization of “an instrumental rationality” where matters of “justice, values, ethics and power are erased from any notion of teaching and learning” (Giroux, 2011, p. 3).

According to Freire (1970 in Morgan, 2002) critical pedagogy “has two aspects: first, students learn to perceive social, economic and political contradictions in what they know and what they are told. Second they learn to take action against the oppressive and dominant elements within those contradictory situations” (p.6).

The great desire to emulate Western standards and accountability driven education systems has in fact been detrimental to contextualised materials and pedagogies particularly the case of language education (Romanowski & Nasser, 2011).

I, as an ELT practitioner in Oman have experienced different barriers to the implementation of critical pedagogy strategies due to student expectations of talking about neutral topics or following a textbook and due to the institutional expectations of fulfilling a set of standardized objectives and learning outcomes.

This challenges taken into account, it is not impossible to implement and sustain critical pedagogy in language education in this particular context though it can be done by keeping in mind that “critical pedagogy involves an ever-evolving working relationship between practice and theory” (Mochinski, 2008, p. 10). This demands a constant reflection and reconceptualization, a constant reworking of the opportunities and challenges a classroom has to offer. Thus, in Kincheloe’s words (Kincheloe, 2008) critical pedagogy works to help educators “reconstruct their work so that it facilitates the empowerment to all students” (p. 9). This calls for small steps towards change and that change should never be perceived as an imposed change. It can be negotiated and accepted but never imposed which happens all too often due to the position of power both critical and non-critical teachers find themselves in. In the next section I will discuss at length critical consciousness or critical awareness and critical literacy as part of critical pedagogy and the reasons why I chose to opt for this particular avenue in the critical intervention implemented in my context.

3.1.2. Components of critical language pedagogy

3.1.2.1. Critical consciousness and critical literacy

In the section above I explained how the Freirian definition of an awakening and reflection on oppression and its causes is one that is applicable to this study. I would like to develop this argument by referring particularly to what Freire called “conscientizao” or critical consciousness which represents in fact the crux of this definition. Critical consciousness is a reaction to the banking system of education, where students are at the receiving end of knowledge and teachers are the givers, the depositors, by proposing a problem-posing alternative that would allow an action and reflection upon the world in order to achieve its transformation (Freire, 2005).

“Those truly committed to liberation must reject the banking concept in its entirety, adopting instead a concept of women and men as conscious beings, and consciousness as consciousness intent upon the world.” (Freire, 2005, p.77)

The ultimate goal is thus to move from a deposit-making pedagogical practice which turns students into what Giroux (2011, p.3) called “cheerful robots” to problem-posing practices that connect them with the world around them.

Thus, the education process is transformatory at a personal level through “the emergence of consciousness and critical intervention in reality” (Giroux, 2011, p.79). Freire (2005) further argues that transformation at a personal level leads to transformation at a social level as it “denies that the man is abstract, isolated, independent and unattached to the world; it also denies that the world exists as reality apart from people (p. 79).

Critical consciousness hence leads to a reading of worlds while reading and writing words (Freire & Macedo, 1970 in Mitchell, 2006) or what we call critical literacy. In Giroux’s view, critical consciousness is closely related to the principle of reconstruction where interests that underlie texts are refashioned “with the aim of developing social relations and modes of knowledge that serve radical needs.” (Giroux, 1997, p.90)

Reconstruction would lead to the production of curriculum materials and school practices “that embody and demonstrate principles that link conception and execution while simultaneously promoting critical attentiveness to forms of knowledge and social practices informed by principles that promote enlightenment

and understanding” (Giroux, 1997, p. 91). He describes such texts as being the very medium for critical pedagogy:

“Such texts become the medium for a critical pedagogy aimed at providing students with the knowledge, skills, and critical sensibility. They need to be able to think dialectically. That is students need to be able to grasp the ways in which the concrete world opposes the possibilities inherent in its own conditions; they need to be able to reach into history so as to transform historical into critical thought; and finally they need to be able to penetrate critically the categories of common sense and begin to move beyond a world constituted through such categories...” (Giroux, 1997, p. 91)

Critical literacy is considered to be complimentary or consistent with the aims of critical pedagogy (Crookes, 2013). Crookes (2013) sees critical literacy as having stemmed from critical language awareness (CLA). In the same vein, Pennycook (2001) defines critical literacy as one of the specific domains of critical applied linguistic (CALx) often found under the rubric of critical language awareness (CLA) which, along with critical discourse analysis (CDA), “empower learners by providing them with a critical analytical framework to help them reflect on their own language experiences and practices and on the language practices of others in the institutions of which they are a part and in the wider society within which they live (Clark & Ivanic, 1997 in Pennycook, p.12)”.

An example of significant work in this area is Janks (1993a in Crookes, 2013) and the workbooks she prepared to address the relationship between language and power. In her workbooks she makes the objectives of her critical literacy explicit to students:

“This workbook will help you understand what is meant by position. There are many meanings. It will help you to become critical readers by increasing your awareness of how language is working to position you. It will help you become oppositional readers, readers who know how to oppose the positions of writers, who know when and how to refuse to think what writers want them to think and who know how to recognise writing that they need to oppose. The workbook will increase your awareness of language so that other people cannot easily use language to disempower you.” (Janks, 1993a in Crookes, 2013, p.38).

The above quote represents, in Jank’s view, the crux of critical literacy and its purpose. She also provides guidance for teachers:

“teaches should facilitate class discussions. The workbooks deal with real and sensitive issues. Teachers need to help students to listen to one another and to try to understand the different histories and positions that other people in the class speak from. We need to hear other people and not try to convert them to our way of thinking” (Janks, 2010, p.40)

For Janks (2010), following the Freirian tradition of exposing the banking concept of education, critical literacy is inexorably related to issues of power and domination while rejecting the literacy/illiteracy binary as a label of the privileged/underprivileged, oppressing vs oppressed discourse. She also confesses that teaching English in a complex context such as the South African society cannot be divorced from teaching human rights:

“In South Africa where the struggle for language rights was intrinsically bound up with the struggle for human rights, I could not but be aware that language is fundamentally tied to questions of power” (p.11)”. She poses some very important questions regarding the teaching of English as a Foreign, respectively Second Language: “How should one teach English in contexts of diversity? What is a responsible approach to teaching an omnivorous language such as English?” (Janks, 2010). This study is to a great extent inspired by her experiences and experiments with critical literacy in the TESOL (Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages) field.

Janks was greatly inspired by her South African experience when defining a specific orientation to critical literacy. She also mentions the models of Green (2002 in Janks, 2010, p.38) and of Freebody and Luke (1990 in Janks, 2010, p.38) as a guide to her own synthesis of the domain of critical literacy. At the micro level or practical level of critical literacy, she defines the purpose critical readers need to have in mind when approaching a text. Thus, they need to be able to:

“a) decode the text. They have to make sense of the written code in order to work out what the text is saying. This necessitates competence in language;
b) Make meaning from the text by engaging with the writer’s meanings. Reading is an active process of bringing one’s own knowledge of culture, content, context, text-use and text-structure into an encounter with those of the writer, in an active process of meaning making

c) Interrogate the text to examine its assumptions, its values and positions. Readers need to understand what the text is doing to them and whose interests are served by the positions that are on offer. They have to imagine how the text could be otherwise in order to produce resistant readings that can form the basis of redesign.”

At the macro level, Janks (2010) proposes several interdependent orientations to critical literacy that could guide different, context-dependent pedagogical approaches:

Domination whereby language is seen as maintaining and reproducing unequal relations of power. This principle is widely associated with it is Critical Language Awareness which emphasizes that texts are constructed to serve the interests of dominant groups hence can be de-constructed. Simpson and Mayr (2013) define this manipulation of language in different social, cultural and political arenas as discourse. The dominant discourses will take prevalence over the marginal ones and will eventually be identified as the norm or the truth. Thus the practice of critical literacy aims to problematize the dominant discourses and encourages the reader to ask questions like: why did the writer or speaker make these choices? Whose interests do they serve? Who is empowered or disempowered by the language used?” (Janks, 2010, p.39)

Access

Domination and access are strongly intertwined as access to dominant discourses contributes to the perpetuation of such discourses however, lack of access would lead to the marginalisation of the targeted groups such as students/minorities of different kinds etc. One example of an access orientation to critical literacy lies in genre pedagogies which encourage reflection on “how and whether to make generic features visible in order to give students from marginalised discourses greater access to them” (Janks, 2010, p.39)

Diversity

Interpreting and constructing diverse images of the world is the key to changing consciousness. Diversity in critical literacy is based on the belief that “the differences between discourses are productive (Gee, 1990 in Janks, 2010). p.40).” By contrast, a unilateral discourse seeks to legitimize the authority of the powerful

through which they seek to transform social practices (Simpson, P.& Mayr, A., 2013).

Design

The idea of design focuses on the readers’ ability to re-construct existing discourses and produce new ones by generating multiple meanings by “using a range of media and technologies” (Simpson, P.& Mayr, A., 2013, p.41).

Janks emphasizes the importance of all these orientations and says that in fact “they are crucially interdependent” as summarised in

Figure 1
The Synthesis Model of Critical Literacy

Domination without access	This maintains the exclusionary force of dominant discourses
Domination without diversity	Domination without diversity and difference loses the ruptures that produce contestation and change
Domination without design	The deconstruction of dominance without reconstruction or design removes human agency
Access without domination	Access without a theory of domination leads to the naturalisation of powerful discourses without an understanding how these powerful forms came to be powerful
Access without diversity	This fails to recognise that difference ultimately affects pathways to access and involves issues of history, identity and value
Access without design	This maintains and reifies dominant forms without considering how they can be transformed.
Diversity without domination	This leads to celebration of difference without recognition that difference is

	structured in dominance and that not all discourses/genres/languages/literacies are equally powerful
Diversity without access	Diversity without access to powerful forms of language ghettoises students
Diversity without design	Diversity provides the means, the ideas, the alternative perspectives for reconstruction and transformation. Without design, the potential that diversity offers is not realised.
Design without domination	Design without an understanding how dominant discourses/practices perpetuate themselves, runs the risk of an unconscious reproduction of these forms
Design without access	This runs the risk of whatever is designed remaining on the margins
Design without diversity	This privileges dominant forms and fails to use the design resources provided by difference.

(Janks, 2010, p.25)

Although the above model provides a framework for understanding the complex orientations of critical literacy and gives an insight into the possibilities critical literacy offers, it leaves the field open for different teaching and learning strategies without going into specificities.

In fact, Janks's books (Janks, 2010; Janks, 2014) provide plenty of examples of how this model can be successfully exploited in the real classroom, however, very few examples are relatable, in my view, to the Omani ELT context. Thus, her model was used as a framework for creating different pedagogical tools or techniques

which I have found appropriate to the wider Omani cultural context but also the narrower context where I conducted the intervention. Therefore, it was customised to the group of students that took part in the intervention.

3.2. Conceptual framework of the study

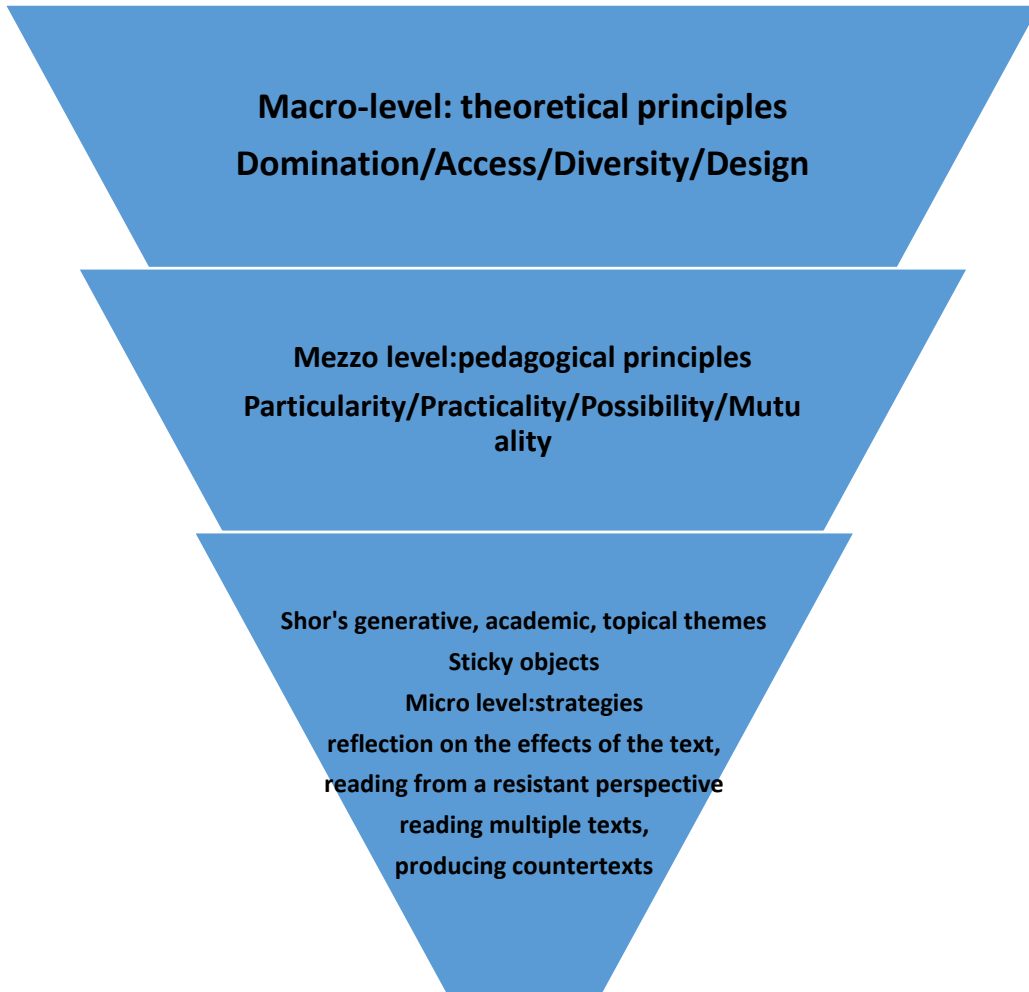
The current research draws upon critical theories and classroom practice and intends to explore the link between the two within the dynamic space of the classroom. At a theoretical level it is based on the principles of critical pedagogy as laid down by Freire (1998, see section 3.1.2.) and (Giroux, 1997b) and customized by Janks into a framework that would suit its spin-off, critical literacy (Janks, see Figure 1). It thus presents a progressive view of pedagogy (Freire, 1998) where “the analysis and level of experience shift from a preoccupation with transmitting positive knowledge to developing forms of pedagogy that recognize and appropriate cultural traditions and experiences that different students bring to the school setting” (Giroux, 1997, p.139) It implies forms of teaching to create possibilities for the production and construction of knowledge (Freire, 1998). Students and teachers cannot be seen as mere objects of instruction through their obedience to prescriptive curriculums and methods as “critical pedagogy’s chief concern is the humanisation of students and teachers” (Mochinski, 2008, p.139).

At the level of classroom practice, the study is based on the principles of post method pedagogy (Kumaravadivelu, 2003) and becoming-appropriate pedagogy (Holliday, 1994;Holliday, 2005) and the principles of exploratory-understanding level teaching (Bigge & Sharmis, 1999; Allwright, 2005).

The overarching principles of critical pedagogy as well as the practical principles of post method pedagogy and exploratory teaching have allowed me to compile a framework for the pedagogy for critical literacy which I implemented during the research intervention. The principle framework has three levels namely a macro-level, a mezzo level and a micro level which I will discuss in detail below.

Figure 2

A Critical Literacy Principle Framework for EFL Classroom Practice



3.2.1. A macro-level: domination, access, diversity, design

As mentioned earlier, the four dimensions of domination, access, diversity and design are interrelated. The interplay between power and access influences how texts are designed to serve dominant groups. Thus, de-constructing and unveiling the positioning of specific texts is the main objective of a critical literacy practitioner. This level of analysis looks into issues of identity and difference, diversity and access as they are represented in texts. It is at this level that one can develop critical consciousness and become an agent of re-design of text, discourse reconstruction and re-positioning (Janks, 2014, p.30).

3.2.2. A mezzo-level: the crux of the pedagogical level

At the mezzo-level, the pedagogy for critical literacy that I wish to propose is based on three principles outlined by Kumaravadivelu (2003a) in his post-method work

and an additional one that I have drafted based on Mochinski's interpretation of Freirian ideas on critical pedagogy (Mochinski, 2008):

3.2.2.1. The principle of particularity

The principle of particularity involves a sensitivity to the particular groups of teachers and learners as well as the contexts and settings they operate in. It thus requires a reflective cycle from the part of the teacher in order to establish what works and what does not with the particular group of learners he/she is addressing. "It starts with practicing teachers, either individually or collectively, observing their teaching acts, evaluating their outcomes, identifying problems, finding solutions, and trying them out to see once again what works and what doesn't...Such a continual cycle of observation, reflection, and action is a prerequisite for the development of context-sensitive pedagogic theory and practice"(Kumaravadivelu, 2003a, p. 35).

3.2.2.2. The principle of practicality

This principle implies teacher-generated guidelines of practice as directed by the day-to-day contextual necessities of the classroom. Just as the above principle of particularity, it involves continuous reflection and action.

"The intellectual exercise of attempting to derive a theory of practice enables teachers to understand and identify problems, analyse and assess information, consider and evaluate alternatives and then choose the best alternative that is then subjected to critical appraisal" (Kumaravadivelu, 2003a, p. 35)

The principle of practicality also implies a constant strive to explore different courses of action and a focus on product as well as the process of learning (Bigge & Sharmis, 1999). This principle does not only presuppose maximising learning opportunities inside the classroom but also understanding and exploiting opportunities outside the classroom (Kumaravadivelu, 2003a).

3.2.2.3 The principle of possibility

The principle of possibility implies the recognition that pedagogy is implicated in relations of power and dominance and demands developing an awareness of social inequalities and their influence in education. Thus this principle is also concerned with the teachers' and students' subjective positions and their individual identities.

“Language is the place where actual and possible forms of social organisation and their likely social and political consequences are defined and contested. Yet it is also the place where our sense of ourselves, our subjectivity is also constructed (Wenden, 1987, p.21 in Kumaravadivelu, 2003a, p.36).”

3.2.2.4 The principle of mutuality

This principle implies an equality of rights in the classroom where authority is shared by both teachers and students. It also implies the building of a relationship of mutual respect and partnership between teachers and students where opportunities for learning and growth are sought by both parties through mutual collaboration.

“Critical pedagogy demands of teachers that we be confident practitioners and theorists of subject matter while at the same time remaining humble enough to know we don’t know all things, that our students are going to know things that we do not, that the path of exploration and knowledge is laid and travelled alongside our students. (Mochinski, 2008, p.148)”

I believe the above framework is consistent with the demands and specificities of the research context, where, from a wider societal perspective, Omani students are more ready to welcome a diversity of opinions, as a result of the Arab spring (detailed in Chapter II) and also in the context of an increased ELT practitioner disenchantment with the “almighty” learner-centred pedagogy in Oman (Al-Mekhlafi & Nagaratnam, 2012). The above mentioned principles in particular, take into consideration the day-to-day context of the classroom as well as the students’ and teachers’ subjective needs and individualities and their lived realities. This framework emphasizes the problematic nature of prescriptive teaching methods and predominant focus on language abilities as well as the fact that the classroom is a community of learners “where ideologies are constructed and personalities are developed” (Troudi, 2005, p. 12).

3.2.3 The micro –level of critical pedagogy contains a series of more specific pedagogical principles and themes that are underpinned by the general principles presented at the macro and mezzo levels (see Figure 2).

3.2.3.1. Generative, topical, academic themes and sticky objects

At the micro-level of critical literacy framework lies Shor's conceptualization of generative, topical and academic themes used as part of the course curriculum. (Shor, 1992). Generative themes helped provide a more structured approach to the intervention which would serve as a starting point for topical themes.

The topical themes were chosen because of their key importance locally or internationally (Shor, 1992) which I deemed, from my prior experience and based on the pre-intervention findings, to be of interest to this particular batch of students. Most of these themes were emotionally charged in other words they constituted what Sara Ahmed calls "sticky objects" (2010, p.44 in Benesch, 2014, p. 106) to which emotions adhere in the English classroom. According to Ahmed, emotions do not flow aimlessly but have a direction and orientation towards an object. Since the student sample was entirely composed of women it is no wonder that women's issues oriented themes took a central position and represented sticky objects. The purpose of examining the emotional value of these themes or objects was to see whether they generated interested hence varied responses and whether they could facilitate critical awareness along with language learning.

Like Shor (1992) in his experience teaching a writing course at a public college, I found that the topical themes related to my students' immediate context and cultural background could be introduced without a prior discussion on a generative theme such as culture for example. Thus, the introduction of the topical theme led to discussions on generative issues such as the meaning of one's identity, racism, feminism.

The majority of the students in the class had joined the BA in English due to a personal interest, due to a self-assessment of their language abilities or because they had wanted to remain an integral part of the group of friends that had joined this degree. Their expectations were rather fixed on the academic and, possibly, the fun aspect of learning rather than the problem-posing one.

Unlike Shor's students with their highly individualistic aspirations or Freire's marginalized peasants, my students' expectations were to attend classes, pass exams and assignments and most importantly get good grades that would reflect well on their certificates. This focus on grades provided excellent material for a topical theme which will be presented in detail at a later stage.

In addition to the above mentioned themes, the model lists some tools and strategies that, without being predefined, fall into the realm of the principles listed at the macro and micro levels: reflecting on the effects of texts on the reader, reading from a resistant perspective, reading multiple texts, producing counter texts. These strategies are based on the micro-level of critical literacy proposed by Janks (2010, see section 3.2.1.) but also on several articles portraying various experiments with critical literacy in language education. Thus, Michel's study (Michell, 2006) with secondary students in Istanbul, Turkey, uses the multiple texts technique to engage students in alternative discourses on the Middle East in the aftermath of 9/11. He emphasizes the need for alternatives to the mainstream press as "we need to be exposed to multiple and alternative perspectives, the sources of information that would help facilitate our questioning and deliberation, and to engage in dialogue about them" (Michell, 2006, p. 42). In the above mentioned article he presents excerpts of classroom observations and student testimonies on activities focused on a comparison of mainstream media and alternative press texts covering the events of that period, activities aimed at developing student's reading, writing, reading and debating skills.

In the same vein, Clarke & Whitney, (2009), in an essay published in "The Reading Teacher" suggest using the multiple perspective technique by exposing students to multiple –perspective texts in a reading class. They provide a list of fiction and non-fiction texts that could be used to exploit this strategy. They also provide a list of techniques that fall under the main strategies of deconstruction and reconstruction of texts. Thus in order to deconstruct a text, a teacher could engage student readers in theatre, where students can write scripts and plays presenting the different perspectives in a text they read as well as graphic organizers, visual representations of these different perspectives while making connections and disconnections with the text. Furthermore, to reconstruct a text, they propose using diary entries and re-writing familiar stories. Following the Freirian conceptualisation of critical literacy, they emphasize that "it is clearly not enough to read or write from different perspectives, but these activities can provide the building blocks that can be used to springboard into social awareness...By widening the exploration, students can have a better understanding of others, a greater appreciation of diversity, and an awareness of how to live in a globalized world"(Clarke & Whitney, 2009, p. 534). It is important to mention that their references are based on

experiences with 1st language users in the United States, experiences which are not necessarily applicable to other contexts.

Behrman (Behrman, 2006) in his literature review of 36 articles on classroom practices that support critical literacies at upper and secondary levels, mentions other critical literacy strategies such as reading from a resistant perspective, producing counter texts and conducting student-choice research projects. He points out that these strategies are meant to show students that “reading and writing are not merely communicative acts but parts of the habits, customs and behaviours that shape social relations” (Behrman, 2006, p. 497).

3.2.4. An overview of the proposed critical literacy pedagogical framework

As mentioned earlier, critical pedagogy presents a progressive view while trying to “empower (students) to be critical thinkers in order to realize their human potential” (Kumaravadivelu, 2003a, p. 141) It is an exploration of a way of teaching and learning that would enable both teachers and students to seize opportunities for learning both in the classroom and in real life, by looking at learning as a holistic process and not an exclusively academic endeavour. In this sense, it seeks to sensitise students to their civic privileges and responsibilities, it seeks to raise awareness of global issues, of social injustices and thus creates the space for creative solutions to these issues. One might say that this form of principled/exploratory teaching is too loose and utopian to work in real life. Usher and Edwards (1994 in Johnston, 2011) in fact raised the concern that there is very little connection between the philosophical position of critical pedagogy and its classroom practice. Although this may be the case, this form of pedagogy involves actual strategies and methodological rigor by promoting and advocating what Freire used to call “correct thinking” (Freire, 1998, p.14) Correct thinking here is conceptualised “ a capacity for not being overly convinced of one’s own certitudes” (Freire, 1998, p.14). In this vein, Benesch’s (2011) work on dialogic thinking presents opportunities for classroom applications of the above mentioned philosophical principles.

Benesch (2011) argues that along with the immediate academic needs, “a development of social awareness” should be brought to the classroom (Benesch, 2011, p. 579). One example of this was a hate crime topic that she used to engage students in an academic discussion. Her intention was not only to promote

academic skills “but also to promote tolerance and social justice” (Benesch, 2011, p.579). Her lesson plan challenged the assumption that violence was justified in dealing with homosexuality, assumption which, she had noticed, was harboured by a number of her male students. The discussion that ensued brought to light a number of fears and concerns students had regarding their expected behaviour when dealing with homosexuality. She mentioned that one of the students explained that he had had the urge to beat up a gay co-worker who had made a pass at him just to prove he was not gay. The dialogic aspect of the lesson did not only reflect in the combination of academic, specifically critical thinking skills and critical literacy skills but also in the dual role of the teacher:

“During the discussion, I played two roles: conversation facilitator and more judiciously, intervener. As conversation facilitator, I listened, took notes, and asked occasional questions to encourage elaboration. As intervener, I asked the students to examine certain assumptions further. That is, teaching critical thinking is neither an unguided free-for-all nor a didactic lecture but a balance between extended student contributions and extended challenges by the teacher” (Benesch, 2011, p.578).

She adds that “critical dialogue can help students explore their views and those they might not have been previously exposed to (Benesch, 2011, p.578).

Benesch’s examples served as a model and an inspiration for my critical literacy intervention as I too believe that second language skills and social awareness can and should be taught together in order to empower students to become critical readers of the worlds they come in contact with throughout their academic and professional lives. With a growing emphasis on employability and accountability in higher second language education, it is my view that one tends to lose sight of the all-roundedness expected as a result of an educational endeavour, all-roundedness which includes awareness of oneself and others as well as a critical reading of the complexities of life and society.

A similar pedagogical approach was followed by Williams (2008) in his critical cultural cyphers, a spin-off of Freire’s cultural circles (Freire, 1998), where he and his students embarked on problematizing the dominant discourses regarding hip-hop culture. The objectives of the critical cultural circles were to develop a more inclusive counter-narrative to the dominant discourse, to develop a language of

critique and transcendence and to develop conscientizacao, i.e. “the development of the awakening of critical awareness” (Freire, 1998, p.6).

Williams played the role of participant, observer/researcher thus encouraging students to engage in criticism and systemic critique which would serve to problematize hip-hop culture and generate multiple perspectives from the participants. Williams’ choice of problematizing hip-hop culture stemmed from its major influence on the youth and its problematic integration into the academic mainstream culture due to its” homophobic, misogynistic, ultra-violent, drug-promoting and greed-supporting lyrics” (Williams, 2008, p. 5). His topic choice was also motivated by the intention of creating a bridge between the mainstream curriculum and students’ lived realities.

3.3. Challenges and caveats of critical literacy in language education

3.3.1. Language ability

Crookes (2014) mentions the language level of the students engaged in this type of pedagogy as one of the caveats. In fact, highly developed communication abilities in the language of instruction were essential in the case of the above mentioned studies. Contrary to this, Benesch, in her experiences with Critical English for Academic Purposes, does not present language ability as a challenge (Benesch, 2011; Benesch, 2001). This, however, represents a major challenge in many EFL contexts preventing at times teachers from embarking on a critical pedagogy or critical literacy approach. Furthermore, most successful examples of critical literacy or suggestions of critical literacy techniques (see Janks, 2014) presuppose an in-depth knowledge of the linguistic potential of texts.

3.3.2. Different student perceptions of teaching and learning

While Freire’s culture circles involve discussion and reflection, i.e. cooperative learning, in many EFL contexts students have different expectations of their teachers, that is, they are used to direct instruction rather than open forum discussions. In many parts of the world students are not accustomed to group work or an inquiry-based curriculum, as they “have never been socialized into a different set of classroom events” (Crookes, 2014, p.63). Crookes (2014) further suggests that certain learning strategies or language items could be taught as a pre-requisite to critical literacy or critical pedagogy success.

3.3.3. A concern with conformity to a mainstream ELT discourse

While professionalism is generally seen as beneficial and is part of a movement of standardization and commodification of education, it is, in reality, a form of Othering, whereby specific groups claim a higher level of expertise which automatically place them in an advantageous position as compared to other groups. This is, in my experience, not only the case of the English-speaking Western educators but also those who have received their training and qualifications in English-speaking countries. I might also add that this group does not limit itself to the above categories but it includes the text book writers and publishers, members of certain professional associations such as IATEFL or TESOL International or other members privileged groups of experts. The mainstream ELT discourse that they use, is one that pervades the ELT field in the Arabian Gulf context in all its aspects, from recruitment and resources to the teaching and learning process. This discourse is frequently associated with a discourse of standardization and quality hence it imposes its parameters through an aggressive policy of abidance. This makes it is oftentimes difficult if not impossible for teachers to look at their practice through a problematizing lens. My previous study on teachers' views on learner autonomy in Oman stands to support the above argument. When asked whether they considered their students to be autonomous most of the teachers interviewed would say no or they would say that the majority of students are actually not autonomous. One of the respondents, Tania, an expatriate teacher claimed: "Ten per cent yes but again it's not a very happy percentage to have because those 10 per cent of the students are the high achievers and they know their aim, they have their focus intact but still ninety per cent of them learn not for themselves but for something else or someone else" (Chirciu, 2015)

From her statement we can understand the correlation between a high degree of autonomy and academic achievement and it implies that students' learning is mostly for the achievement of grades and certificates. This generalisation reveals her belief that this is a characteristic of the students in her context.

If the othering aspect in her statement is rather implicit, in the case of John, an American teacher it is explicit:

"I think teaching here, coming from America and teaching in the Middle East has made me think that it seems like it's a cultural thing."

In addition to this, an overall prevalence of imported curriculum and other commercial ELT products such as textbooks, CDs, as well as pedagogical approaches is often associated with a culture of quality and alignment with international standards that raise the status of the institution that adopts them. Al-Mekhlafi and Nagarathnam's study (Al-Mekhlafi & Nagarathnam, 2012) on the adoption of ESL/EFL learner-centred pedagogy in the Omani ELT context supports the above argument. They mention that curriculum developers and policy makers in the developing countries often fail to question the assumptions behind learner-centred pedagogy for fear of being deemed old-fashioned or resistant to change.

3.3.4. The regime of the classroom

The classroom is a complicated world defined by prescribed rules and ultimately a prescribed ideology which resides with the person who holds the ultimate power, be it the teacher at his/her own command or at the command of a prescribed curriculum. All these elements represent the regime of the classroom which the students have to accept, embrace or resist. Holliday gives an example of a small study undertaken by Hagayoshi (1996 in Holliday, 2005). Her study was based on the behaviour of seven Japanese students in Britain who were considered as lacking in language and academic ability as "they were silent, very slow to react and rarely expressed their opinions" (Hagayoshi, 1996 in Holliday, 2005, p.90). Outside the classroom the same students were lively, friendly and talkative. When the students were asked why they were silent in the class one student answered that "there are some invisible walls around me which prevent me from speaking in class" (Hagayoshi, 1996 in Holliday, 2005, p.90). It is the regime of imposed silence when the teacher is talking, of turn taking and certain Western specific mannerisms that equate with efficient delivery of the class that represent the invisible walls. We have only recently come to the realisation that classroom participation is in fact another type of Othering discourse, whereby only an interactive class can be deemed successful. I would like to add that the regime of the classroom can prove oppressive not only to the students but also to the teachers, who due to the above mentioned focus on conforming to a prescribed ELT mainstream practice, are expected to engage students and make the classroom student-centred and interactive. This is particularly the case when they are being observed during periodical reviews of their performance. In a previous study on the manifestation of

learner autonomy during classroom interaction I remember observing one of the participants' classes and finding it rather teacher-centred as it lacked group work. Then, I realised that students were participating probably much more than in a group-work oriented class, and they were solving genuine language problems with the help of the teacher. During the post-observation interview, the teacher-participant said:

“the teacher has to be very responsible with it (learner-centredness); they have to read a lot as to how it can be passed and implemented and when it should not be implemented. It has also been seen that learner-centredness is abused because some teachers feel, give them a task, give them a group work and you stay idle. The teacher should be around them in order to see whether they are getting the objectives met.” (Chirciu & Mishra, 2015).

This is an example of a subversive attitude towards the expected classroom regime from the part of the teacher. These subversive attitudes, either in the form of silence from the students or nonconformity from the teachers, represent, in my view, a resistance to the main-stream discourses that dominate the field of TESOL in general and the Gulf region in particular thus creating possibilities of introducing different forms of critical pedagogy. This being said, one cannot deny the fact that subversive or not, teacher-centred or not, the classroom regime is based on clear hierarchical structures of power.

Behrman (2006) points out in fact that, in most critical literacy studies, the hierarchical relationships between teachers and students remained clearly defined as even student control over the decision-making process was within prescribed boundaries and quotes Morgan (1997) stating that “ironically, an authoritative rather than negotiated pedagogy remains to be the hallmark of critical literacy instruction” (p. 496). While this is a matter for future research, it also brings forth the important point that various forms of critical pedagogy can only be context-bound and are highly dependent on the student expectations regarding their learning experience. My experience as an EFL practitioner in Oman has showed me that students expect teachers to make their authority and expertise apparent and that an excessive focus on group discussions, peer-work or open forums is viewed as a lack of involvement on the part of the teacher and can lead to student engagement in various forms of resistance such as non-participation, absenteeism and various complaints to authority inside the hierarchical structure or outside of it. Thus, I can safely say that,

ultimately, a pedagogy for critical literacy has to problematize the accepted views on classroom hierarchies, teacher-student relationships as well as the so-called panacea of a learner-centred curriculum. This view is well-reflected in the present study where although hierarchical structures are maintained negotiated pedagogies were made possible.

3.4. Critical pedagogy and critical literacy in the Middle East

There have been a number of studies related to critical pedagogy of English language in the Middle East. One study which I have found particularly relevant to the context of my own intervention is the one by Fairley (Fairley, 2009) in Egypt where she focuses on the relationship between gender and the willingness to communicate in the EFL classroom. This study is related to forms of resistance to the classroom regime mentioned above (see section 3.3.4.). Her study used critical, controversial topics for the purpose of de-silencing female voices and attempting a more equal gender participation in class. She concludes that an increase in female participation, hence a more equal gender contribution in class, was not based on the chosen topics but possibly on females having been provided with the time and space to voice their opinions as well as having been allowed time to prepare for class discussions. Her assumption invited for further investigation.

Among other studies related to aspects of criticality however, not specifically to critical pedagogy, this time in the Gulf, is Hopkyins' study on female Emirati students' beliefs and its effects on their culture and identity (Hopkyins, 2015 in Al Mahrooqi & Denman, 2015). Although she shows that the majority of participants stated that English had a positive influence on their identity, the discussion brings forth the necessity of channelling more effort towards Arabic language and culture within the local education systems. In direct relevance to the Omani context, my own study can be mentioned here, study in which I sought to problematize the ELT practitioners' conceptualization of learner autonomy and explore the related attitudes and strategies teachers bring to the classroom (Chirciu, 2015).

Another study questioning the feasibility of critical pedagogy in the educational system of Iran by Safari and Pourhashemi (Safari & Pourhashemi, 2012) interrogates teachers' views on this particular approach. This issue comes into play in my intervention where my own class observations as well as my external

observations also look at the challenging factors of the proposed pedagogy for critical literacy.

In the Gulf, Chandella's (Chandella, 2014) study at a higher education institution in the UAE revealed the opportunities dialogic reading have to offer in terms of critical awareness development in the classroom.

There are however, no studies related to actual critical pedagogy or critical literacy in Oman. One study by Busaidi and Sultana (2015) has elements of critical pedagogy such as the introduction of a socio-culturally relatable material, an English translation of an Arabic novella, however, the study relates the analysis and evaluation of the material to critical thinking strategies and is not necessarily driven by a critical agenda in the terms described in the present study's conceptual framework. Similarly, Risse and Al Mahrooqi's study (2014) embraces critical elements through inquiry into students' views on the literary materials appropriateness and cultural proximity in an English language class, however the study does not present instances of critical questioning of the material on the part of the students nor presents opportunities to re-design the course.

The reasons for a lack of similar studies in Oman can be linked to a strong dominance of the mainstream TESOL pedagogies and discourses (Troudi, 2015). Another reason could be the educators' lack of awareness in this area and Safari & Pourhashemi's study (Safari & Pourhashemi, 2012) gives evidence for that. He presents some of the reasons why critical pedagogy proves a challenge in the Iranian educational system after having interviewed 12 English language teachers with different levels of experience. Some of the reasons they found were: a general lack of familiarity with the approach, shortage of fluent competent teachers, inaccessibility of critical textbooks for both teachers and learners, resistance of institutional authority to such an approach, unequal power relationships between teachers and students, and, interestingly, what the teachers saw as a culturally and politically inappropriate approach for their education. Although most of these reasons are specific to the Iranian educational context they also extrapolate to the overall Middle Eastern context. My own experiences while discussing the possibilities of critical pedagogy and critical literacy with fellow ELT educators support the above statements. I have oftentimes found that the ELT practitioners that I have encountered either possess limited knowledge of critical pedagogy or they find it impractical particularly in the case of learners with low-level English

language proficiency. The findings in the pre-intervention stage of the study, presented in Chapter V, evidence the above statement.

3.5. Summary

This chapter sought to present the role of critical pedagogy in the EFL field by referring to the domains of critical pedagogy as defined by its major theorists and the role and scope of critical literacy within the critical domain. Consequently, a pedagogical framework for critical literacy was proposed (See Figure 2) moving from the macro-principles proposed by Janks (2010) to the mezzo level of pedagogical feasibility inspired by Kumaradivelu (2003a) and moving to the strategies and techniques presented by different research studies in the field. The chapter also looks into the challenges and caveats implied by critical literacy pedagogical interventions and reviews various local or locally relevant studies in the field.

4. CHAPTER IV: METHODOLOGY

This chapter outlines the research methodology and methods used in the current research study. According to Crotty, methodology reflects a plan of action, a strategy which motivates the choice of particular methods while linking the choice of the use of the latter to the former. The choice of methodology in the case of this research study is motivated by its purpose and nature of the problem described in detail in chapter 1 of this thesis. I will, however, discuss the motivation for this choice in further detail here while providing a rationale for the adoption of Mcniff's, 2002 (Mcniff, 2002) model of action research for the purpose of my study. I will proceed by providing details as to the methods employed for data collection and I will close the chapter with considerations on the ethical, validity and reliability aspects of this research study.

4.1. Choosing the research methodology

The area of criticality in TESOL has long been a source of intrigue for me starting with my sheer ignorance and continuing with a process of exploration and wonder combined with a very strong sense of justice and the desire to adopt dialogic modes of teaching (Benesch, 2011). This intrigue combined with a strong belief in pedagogies of enquiry (Janks, 2010) as well as the emancipatory aspect of research into classroom practice (Giroux, 2011) have led me to think that the most appropriate way to implement, observe and reflect on a critical pedagogy for critical literacy is through an action research design. My experience as an ELT practitioner and a doctoral student has brought me to the realisation that, all too often, theories of various aspects of teaching and learning, including critical pedagogy, occupy the front seats of the academic debate, ignoring the need for real practical accounts of critical teaching and learning hence “being more concerned with the philosophy and the philosophical discussions of teaching rather than the actual practice of teaching itself” (Akbari, 2008, p. 645).

This has motivated me in choosing to implement and explore critical pedagogy in my classroom as a means of observing, discovering and promoting learners' critical awareness and extending the language education act beyond the realm of structure and form into that of social awareness and practice.

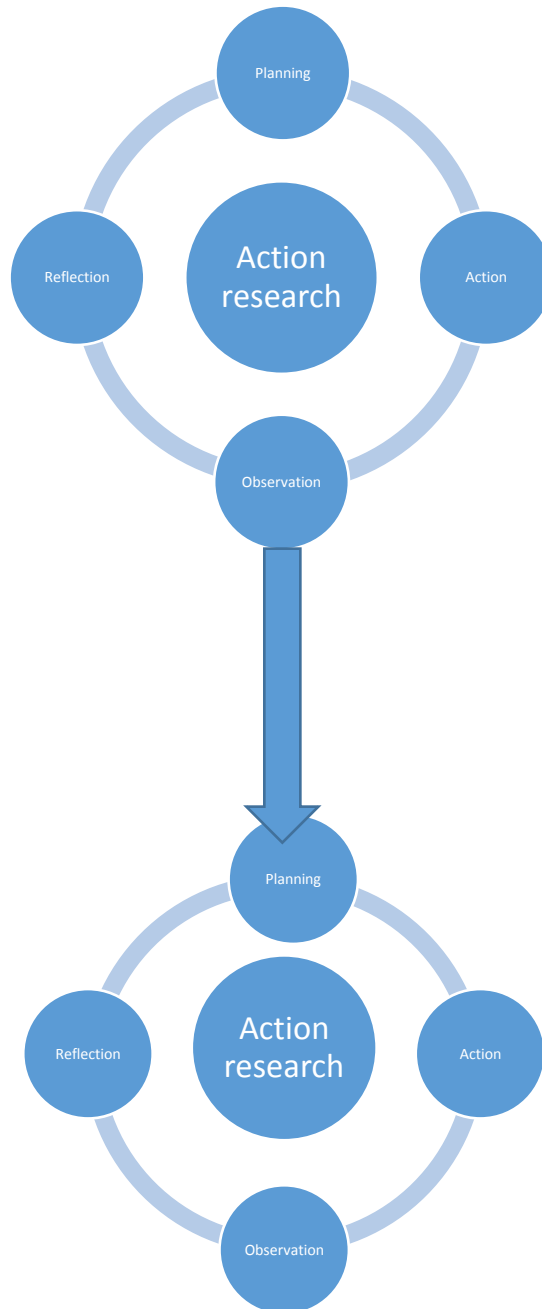
My belief in the Freirian principle of constant construction and reconstruction of knowledge in the classroom as a means of empowering learners with lifelong skills

further motivated me to see the action research intervention that I implemented as dynamic and contextual, in a process of constant becoming. My opting for an action research methodology is also driven by the belief that “educational theory is practical...its purpose to inform and guide the practices of educators by indicating the actions they need to take if they are to overcome their problems and eliminate their difficulties.” (Carr & Kemmis, 2004, p. 130).

4.1.1. Rationale for choosing McNiff’s, 2002 model for action research

“ Action research involves learning in and through action and reflection” (McNiff, 2000, p.15). This statement captures the essence of what my intervention is about as I interpret its focus on learning rather than teaching as a collaborative, shared experience among students and teachers. The action and reflection, although initially planned by myself as teacher, practitioner/researcher was carried out and further developed by all the members of the newly formed classroom community, i.e. myself and the students that participated in this study. Thus, my view of action research is one based on epistemological and methodological considerations that can be applied to practice, what McNiff (2002) calls E-theories, which look at observing and describing individuals’ actions but also one that could influence social change through descriptions and explanations of our (mine and the students’) education practice, i.e. I-theories or rather, in my case, We-theories. Thus, in this view, knowledge is constantly renewed, co-created, fluid as the action research cycle continues through the constant development of personal and collaborative learning with “potentially limitless influence for social evolution” (McNiff, 2000, p. 38). In this way, the action research takes place in continuous sequences of cycles of planning, reflection, action, observation as seen in Figure 3.

Figure 3
Mcniff's,2000 Action Research Cycles



Out of the various action research models (Burns, 2010; Norton, 2009; Somekh, 2006) I chose Mcniff's model (2000) as it best fits my research purpose and design. Mcniff's model emphasizes the cyclical aspect of action research while including the social and socially-mediated aspect of critical pedagogy. It allows a re-iteration of the creative cycles subject to the workings of classroom forces hence allowing "generative transformational processes" to take place (Mcniff, 2002, p.36; Mcniff & Whitehead, 2000).

The methods used to collect data were multiple and diverse, as action research lends itself to multiple data collection methods (McNiff, Lomax, & Whitehead, 1996), namely researcher diary writing, observations, surveys, interviews, audio data of the pedagogical intervention, student response to materials and tasks.

4.1.2. Rationale for the intervention – pre-intervention stage

When deciding to conduct any research the need of establishing a gap in practice or literature is obvious, however, in the case of action research the need to identify problems and search for solutions is even more stringent since this need lies at the heart of undertaking action research in the first place (Norton, 2009; McNiff, 2000).

The critical pedagogy intervention that I decided to embark upon posed all the more an element of risk as there is no prior evidence or guideline for such an undertaking in my respective context. This being said, my experience and practice did not suffice to provide an informed research need for such a complex endeavour hence the pre-intervention stage served this purpose. Action research operated in cycles, one cycle serving to inform the other and the research design I chose is based on this reiterative conceptualisation of action research (McNiff, 2002).

The pre-intervention stage consisted of multiple elements: 2 interviews with teachers that had previously taught the module where the intervention was going to be carried out, 1 focus group with students who had taken the module in the past, one interview with a student who had previously taken the module and could not attend the focus group, a focus group with the students who were to become participants in the study and a diagnostic test administered to the prospective participants. The reason for using a focus group and an interview with student participants was rather of a logistical nature meaning that it was a challenge to arrange interview timings with students during the summer holidays and prior to the start of the fall semester when the intervention started.

4.2. Setting and context

The setting for this study was a private higher education institution in the capital of Oman, Muscat. For future reference the institution where the research was conducted would be referred to as OPC or Oman Private College. The institution is a medium-sized private educational venture employing around 200 staff members, both academic and administrative and receiving an approximate of 3000 students

each year. Students enrolled at OPC have to attend the classes of an English Foundation programme unless they show proof of accredited prior learning or sit an ability test where they need to score an average of 65+ out of 100 to move on to the degree programme. The ability test is internationally benchmarked including IELTS type tasks. The degree programmes offered cover the areas of business management, human resources, tourism, English language studies, Information Technology, networking and other related fields.

The fact that OPC is based in the capital area has an impact, I believe, on the general profile of the student population that is admitted here. Similarly, one of my former colleagues who had previously been employed in another private higher education institution, based in one of the interior regions or wilayas of Oman, told me that “students in Muscat are much more sophisticated” and that “at least here I don’t have to start with the ABCs.”

Having taught at OPC for several years, I realised that the student profile varies. However, the majority of the students are open to discussion and debate, provided they feel comfortable to express their opinions in English. The general attitude to education, however, can be deemed a conservative one, meaning that students and teachers have pre-defined roles and adhere to them, students expect teachers to take decisions about curriculum and teachers expect to follow the set curriculum and fulfil the learning objectives in order to achieve the specific learning outcomes. OPC avails of the latest technological advancements such as e-learning platforms, smart boards and openly declares its adherence to learner-centeredness and giving voice to student complaints and suggestions. OPC has different forums for students to voice their concerns, the most visible one being the academia-student meeting which takes place every semester where students and academics can discuss both academic and non-academic issues. The management of OPC has, on several occasions, declared an open-door policy with regard to student concerns which has placed students, according to some of my colleagues’ views, in a position of power, with some teachers striving for student popularity rather than academic achievement.

4.3. Participant selection

The participant selection was based on my familiarity with the context due to my daily access to it as a teacher/researcher for the past five years. In many ways, I

had timidly experimented with critical pedagogy in a more or less successful manner as I have always believed that the academic skills and content taught could not and should not be divorced from the social lives of the individuals that made up the classroom community. Thus, the political turmoil explained in chapter two, the, at times, blatant sanitization of education from social issues in the name of neutrality and political correctness which, in my view, results in a visible disempowerment of the students in their role as citizens and social actors, have prompted me to enter the struggle for a critical pedagogy. I believed this would enhance the learners' critical awareness by exposing engagement and resistance, by negotiating the decision making power in the classroom, the materials and by deconstructing and reconstructing the givens of the set curriculum and its propensity for skills at lower levels and content at higher levels.

I decided that the best course to take was to engage in critical literacy in order to develop an initial critical awareness in my students and thus allow them to look at texts in a manner they were not familiar with, through questioning and deconstruction. The module I decided to conduct the intervention in, was a lower level skill-based English module where various reading texts as well as audio-video content and writing topics would be used as a springboard for strengthening the afore mentioned skills. Since I wanted to give a voice to students and to co-construct the curriculum, I did my initial planning in terms of generative and topical themes (Shor, 1992) but I invited students' suggestions regarding texts and topics.

4.3.1. Teacher participants

In order to give an initial shape to the curriculum for the respective module, I interviewed two teachers who had previously taught the module. Thus I hoped to gain an insight into what materials and strategies they deemed fit to explore the "social, political and economic realities of their (the students') worlds" (Kress, Degennaro & Paugh, 2013, p. 7). At the same time, I also wanted to minimize the effects of teacher/researcher/participant observation by introducing a non-participant observer, one of my fellow teachers, who had not taught the course prior (Burns, 1999). All the teachers involved in this project were highly qualified, all MA and/or MEd holders, one a PhD holder, with levels of experience ranging from 15 to 22 years in various Gulf and non-Gulf contexts. The teacher sample was entirely purposive in the sense that the above mentioned participants have been chosen "on

the basis of their typicality or possession of the required characteristics being sought” (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007, p.115). As mentioned above, the typicality in the case of the two teachers interviewed during the pre-intervention stage was the fact that they had both taught the course while the external observer had no experience in teaching the respective course.

4.3.2. Student participants

The student participants were 17 females, with ages ranging from 17 to 22, all enrolled in this module due to their major which was English language, as this module was meant to support them with their reading and vocabulary building skills. This module was hence awarded no credit but passing was mandatory for moving to the undergraduate level from Foundation level. The students enrolled in this course all presumably possessed a higher level of English as their admission to the pathway depended on their having obtained high grades in the Foundation programme. The students came from various backgrounds, some with more exposure to English than others as they were based in the capital, Muscat, where opportunities for using English are more frequent. These students also had experienced more exposure to the cosmopolitanism of the capital as they lived at home, not in the college’s accommodation, were mobile, some of them already owning a driver’s license and a car hence had more freedom to go to the shops, malls and were more sociable and carried themselves with more confidence. Few other students had come from a more conservative background in various remote areas of Oman and lived in the college’s accommodation hence were more restricted in terms of mobility and opportunities to practice English in a real-life context.

The student population being entirely composed of female students can be attributed again to their pathway choice, as not many male students would opt for an English language degree as they perceive it limiting in terms of employment opportunity and more prone to what they deem as female dominated professions in the Omani context, such as teaching or translator positions.

The sample was convenient in nature as I had easy access to the participants (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007) having been assigned to teach the course for the respective academic semester.

4.4. Role of teacher/researcher

My role in the current research study was not only to be a teacher implementing a pedagogical intervention but also a participant observer driven by the belief that “for action research to operate successfully as a methodology for social change, the locus of responsibility needs to shift from an “external” researcher who is observing and describing other people’s activities to practitioners themselves who give accounts of their own activities in terms of their values and hopes” (Mcniff, 2001, p.17).

My teacher/researcher role implies an ambivalence in terms of the outcome expected, what McNiff (Mcniff, 2002) calls the individual development versus community development. Although her arguments imply a clear-cut distinction between the two, in my view, they are two components that overlap, support and supplement one another. In McNiff’s view individual development refers to the professional development of the action researcher, stating that with the great degree of accountability that has seeped through academic institutions, there is a great need for continuous professional development of educators and the need to prove their competency and capability. The relationship between knowledge and individual development thus needs to be problematized by asking the questions “What do we know? What do we need to know? Who for? Why?” (Slee at al., 1998 in McNiff, 2001, p.60).

In action research, the researcher’s self can be a research instrument in itself hence researchers need “to take into account their own subjectivity as an important component of meaning-making” (Somekh, 2006, p.25). As a teacher/researcher, my duality, my multiple self (Mead, 1934 in Somekh, 2006) implied an inescapable emotional involvement in this study. My thus admitted subjectivity made me realize that, during this critical intervention, my own self is socially constructed and complex (Somekh, 2006) hence forms an integral part of the intervention. My awareness of the subjectivity and volatility of my role has however exerted me to engage more intensely with my reflective self hence be more committed to action, to a continuous critical design, which, in the words of Kincheloe (Kincheloe, 2008), represents the mark of transformatory teaching. I, as a teacher/researcher, am an integral part of the study, where my ambivalent self (Mcniff, 2000) allowed me to explore, act, observe, hence become an integral part of the newly formed

classroom community along with my participants which, in turn, made me more receptive to their voices and their silences.

It is thus from this perspective that I, as practitioner/researcher, conceptualise this pedagogical intervention. My role as researcher is fulfilled within the framework of a collaborative dialogue where the participants in my research are also researchers themselves and where the stages of planning, acting, observing and reflecting are done collaboratively “within a social praxis that entails both reflection and political action” (Freire & Macedo, 1999, p.49). The critical inquiry thus started from the following research questions:

1. What were the students' views on the critical literacy intervention?
2. What factors supported or hindered the development of a critical literacy intervention?
3. How did the critical literacy intervention help improve students' critical awareness hence critical literacy skills?

My main purpose was to introduce, to expose students to the possibilities of critical literacy while well aware of the risks and limitations such an intervention might pose. Exploring and understanding students' reactions to critical pedagogy thus became of paramount importance for my conceptualisation of a negotiated, participatory curriculum along with seeing myself as a co-constructor of this intervention. These questions also reflect the continuous cycle of planning, observing, acting, reflecting and planning again as they follow the developmental continuum of a negotiated curriculum. Finally, the third question prompts the students and the researcher to evaluate the intervention from the perspective of a self-perceived increase in critical awareness and critical literacy skills as a result of this journey. A quantification of these skills is beyond the scope of this study as its purpose is driven by the realization of the possibilities critical pedagogy can offer in this particular context and setting and not its generalizability to the wider population.

4.5. Research Methods and procedure

Action research represents the integration of research and action in a series of cycles through an integrative process of data collection, analysis and interpretation, planning and introduction of strategies deemed to bring about change in the current status quo and provide solutions to existing problems and evaluation of those changes through further data collection, analysis and interpretation (Somekh,

2006). The different stages of the action research intervention are detailed in the following sections.

4.5.1. Planning the intervention and pre-intervention data collection procedures

Reflecting on my own experience

When planning the intervention, I spent many hours thinking long and hard about what shape a critical pedagogical intervention in the context of my study could take. In order to do this, I had to engage in a reflection exercise on my own practice. I started thinking about what I was actually teaching during my classes and I realised that, until that moment, my practice had frequently been overly focused on either language skills or content. I tended to associate the teaching of content with a higher level of English proficiency in my students whereas a strong focus on skills would account for what I considered to be lower levels of English language proficiency. It is important to mention that I possessed, just as my students did, a strong feeling of discontinuity and at times alienation from real life. I then started experimenting with a more contextualised approach where I would expose students to texts which related to their national context and general topics of interest such as sports competitions, environmental issues in Oman etc. My approach was neutral in the sense that I exploited these texts as I would any other text, as I thought at the time it would be enough to expose students to things that they supposedly knew because they talked about the reality of the country they lived in. It was only when I started thinking that, in order to connect with the students' lived realities, I needed to bring a level of critical awareness to the classroom, a critical perspective of important issues that I and they believed affected or would affect their lives, that the intervention started taking shape. My initial purpose for bringing a critical perspective was to stimulate the students to participate in discussions and exploit their higher-order thinking skills, such as analysis and synthesis of information. I thus decided to teach a text from the textbook I was using at the time which talked about the Transcontinental railway and the use of Chinese labour and the terrible conditions in which the Chinese labourers worked and lived in. As a comparison, I presented a Human Watch report regarding the conditions of migrant workers in the Gulf States. The report had a great impact as it had numerous photos to illustrate the terrible living conditions of the migrant workers. The discussion that ensued was very interesting as it included a range of viewpoints from those who didn't believe in

the report to those who felt extremely bad about it and thought something should be done to change this situation. One of the students mentioned that the lesson prompted her to show her compassion towards one of the cleaners in our building and bring him a plate of food from her home. I continued experimenting with this approach in different classes, where we discussed texts related to poverty, the discrimination of people with intellectual disabilities such as Down syndrome and how sports competitions such as Special Olympics helped them gain self-esteem. I noticed that the emotional impact was far greater hence the student engagement with the topic was much more significant. I realised that this form of pedagogy had great potential as it was a vehicle for language skills and furthermore it engaged students in a critical awareness exercise. What I saw in my students was something along the lines of what Freire called conscientization (see chapter III, section 1) and taking a small, minute step towards maturity as students but also as members of a community, be it the classroom, the college, the family, the country or the world.

Talking to other teachers

My own experience provided a starting point for experimenting with critical pedagogy however I wanted to know what other teachers felt about bringing social events to the classroom and raising the level of critical awareness among students. I found this dialogue with other teachers to be especially important since I had previously researched teachers' views in order to determine if they adhered to the dominant TESOL discourses or if they could read through their stereotypes (Chirciu, 2015). I thus decided to gather some preliminary data in the form of semi-structured interviews, data which was gathered in the pre-intervention stage of this study and is presented in chapter V, section 5.2.1. I hoped this would give me an insight into where the gaps in content and skills that pertained to lifelong learning and higher order thinking would be and thus I would be able to address them. Secondly, I wanted to know what they knew about critical pedagogy and what they thought it would bring to our English language learning context.

The initial plan for the intervention

Starting from these considerations I decided on an initial plan for the reading class I was going to teach in the fall semester. Although this reading module had previously focused mainly on writing techniques such as identifying main ideas, thesis statements and amassing vocabulary, I thought it was particularly important to introduce reading materials that would serve as a springboard for speaking,

writing and vocabulary tasks. I thought that, this way, the four language skills could be integrated with the content I was presenting. I was particularly encouraged to do so after reading the module descriptor where one of the learning outcomes stated that by the end of the course students should be able to understand and establish a successful connection between the reading and writing process. The module did not follow a particular textbook or material hence I was fairly free to introduce my own materials and establish my own scheme of work provided that the learning outcomes were achieved.

Starting from the preliminary data, i.e. my conversations with other teachers and my own reflections on my experiments with critical pedagogy, I decided on a few topics that would include the domains of critical pedagogy (Crookes G. , 2013). Thus, I decided to present students with material that had a direct relation to their lived realities, was related to the Omani society and, at the same time, presented them with texts that would allow them to compare the issues in their society and relate them to the wider issues in the world. Considering that all of my students were women, it seemed important to include some forms of feminist pedagogy at least at the level of content such as topics related to women rights in Oman and in the world, pressures on women regarding physical appearance and so on. I also thought it particularly important to discuss issues of identity, especially in the beginning, when talking about the topic of identity, as Oman possesses both racial and ethnic variety (see chapter II for more details) and has not, in the past, fallen short of discriminatory practices. Finally, I decided to include what I thought to be a very important aspect of Omani society and government policy which was censorship, in its overt or covert forms and then discuss censorship in other societies around the world. The planned curriculum would be divided in three major areas or what Shor (1992 in Crookes, 2013) used to call generative themes “which would make up the primary subject matter. [and] grow out of student culture and express problematic conditions in daily life. (Shor, 1992 in Crookes, p.37)” These generative themes would include several topical themes [which relate to] “ a social question of key importance locally raised in class by the teacher (Shor, 1992 in Crookes p.37)” These would be exploited academically by analyzing and critiqueing formal bodies of knowledge such as certain writing techniques and language sequences that help convey a particular message (Figure 4).

One might say that such thorough planning before acting defies the democratic principle of critical pedagogy and it represents just another imposed curriculum that the students must follow. I can counter this by stating that, as Freire believed, a teacher should be not afraid of being directive and dialogic teaching should not be equated with a laissez-faire approach (Freire & Macedo, 1999). Furthermore, my intention was to propose this plan to the students and ask for their views and their suggestions. I intended this plan as a means to negotiate a critical curriculum for reading and writing and not as a set collection of topics. As Shor states: “Critical teachers are willing to take the risk of introducing topical themes because student conversation and thought often do not include important issues in society. A topical theme, to be critical and democratic, cannot be an isolated exercise or unchallenged lecture by the teacher...The topical theme is part of a syllabus students can reject or amend as they exercise their democratic rights. Critical teachers offer students a topical thematic choice which they can accept or reject. (in Crookes, 2013, p. 38)”

Figure 4
Preliminary Collection of Generative and Topical Themes

Topic 1
Identity, Ethnicity, Language and Gender
Who am I – academic texts about identity from a cultural perspective – language identity, cultural identity, gender perspective
What do I want from this course – critical needs analysis?
Omani ethnic groups and their language and culture – dialogue and conflict
Examples of other multi-ethnic societies around the world
Women in Oman – women’s rights: Employment, Education, Marriage, Attire
Women outside Oman –women’s rights: employment, education, marriage, attire
Physical appearance – beauty and its role in the Arab world.
What role does beauty play in the world today?

Topic 2
Language and Education
The importance of English in Oman
The importance of English in the world Why English?
Topic 3
Society and Media Issues
Health issues in Oman : Drugs and HIV
Health Issues around the world : Drugs and HIV
Employment : Omanisation and immigration
Media in Oman: The issue of censorship

Each topical theme would be exploited through what I called a text cycle as seen in Figure 5. I also intended this text cycle as an initial plan open for negotiation with my students, however, I held on the importance of questioning as a tool for deconstructing and unveiling the positioning of texts which was after all the main avenue for raising critical awareness and promoting critical literacy in my writing class.

Figure 5
Critical Text Reading Cycle

Text cycle:
1. Exposure to the topic: initial discussion prompted by the title, predicting, making assumptions.
2. Viewing the topic in texts and codes -reading, viewing, listening
3. Questioning
What is the writer's point of view?
What is his/her agenda?
What is he/she trying to convey.
Unveiling of positioning leads to an alternative perspective
4. Generating an alternative perspective- argumentative writing, writing from a different perspective

Although I intended the curriculum for the course of the 14 weeks of teaching to span over four hours each week, I initially wanted to limit the use of this critical questioning to two hours per week, reserving the rest of two hours to technical aspects of writing such as vocabulary and grammar. I had decided that, based on the progress of the intervention and students' views, I would extend the practice of questioning to the technical aspects as well, however, I wanted to see whether a neutral strictly skill-based exploitation of the text would have the same impact on the students, in other words if they reacted to it in the same manner. This room for comparison between the two approaches would allow me to better appreciate their increased level of critical awareness.

4.5.2. Triangulation

As discussed in the previous section, action research relies on multiple sources of data depending on the purpose of the intervention (Burns, 2010). As this involves multiple collection methods, triangulation occurs almost naturally in the process of data collection and analysis. Usually, triangulation involves a combination of data collected from three perspectives: the teacher's perspective (usually through interviews or diaries), the students' perspective (again via interviews, focus groups or surveys) and the perspective of an outsider or third party (by observation) (Altrichter, Posch, & Somekh, 2005) or the use of three or multiple data collection methods (McNiff et al., 1996).

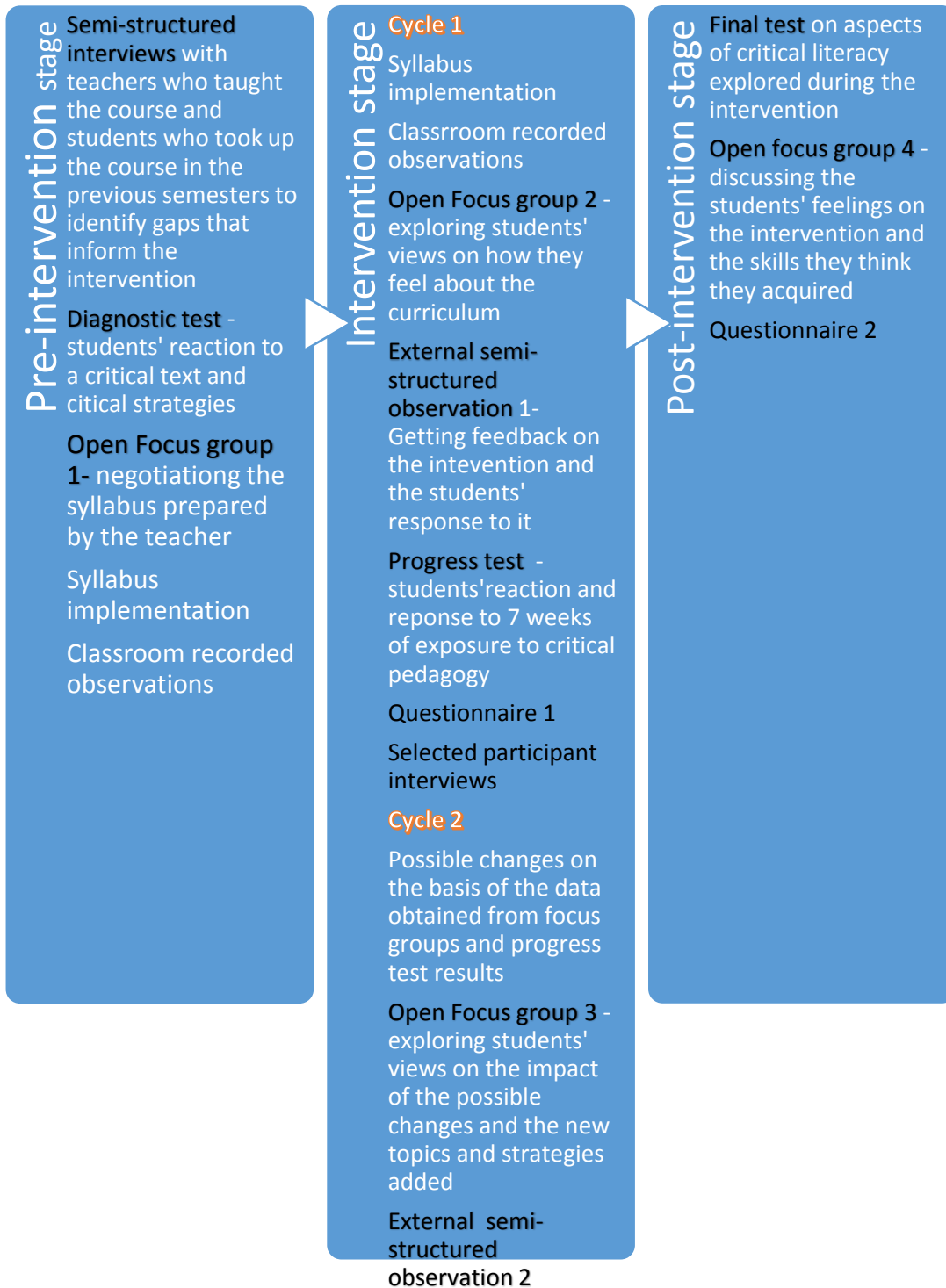
The importance of triangulation has often been emphasized in the educational research as it leads to a more credible interpretation of the data. The identification of differences in perspective as well as possible contradictions and discrepancies paint a more detailed and balanced picture of the situation under investigation (Altrichter et al., 2005). I however, believe that the importance of triangulation does not lie only in the credibility of the interpretation but also in its contribution to anchoring this particular study in its critical domain. It does so by "breaking the hierarchy of credibility which limits our understanding by giving equal status to people from different ranks (Altrichter et al., p.115) and by allowing students to present their perspective hence maintain or alter the course of the intervention. Thus, triangulation in this particular study does not only impact on the validity and credibility of the study which I will discuss more at length in the following section but it ensures the collaborative, participatory character of this pedagogical intervention.

4.5.3. Data collection procedures

The data collection procedures aimed at capturing different perspectives of the intervention (Altrichter, p.103). The different stages and the data collection instruments used can be observed in Figure 6.

Figure 6

Intervention stages and instruments



4.5.3.1. Interviews with fellow teachers

I had decided early on that this action research project would benefit from the involvement of other members of my teaching community. In fact, I thought that talking to them prior to implementing the intervention would allow me to uncover areas of criticality that could be explored with my participants, in other words, get a clearer picture of what the students needed in order to develop a critical awareness. In order to do this, I decided to use a semi-structured interview approach with two of my colleagues teaching on the same programme. The two interviews lasted approximately 40 minutes. Some of the questions that I asked were related to their views, if any, on critical awareness and critical literacy, what did they think it was, how did they think it was important for students, why it was necessary or why it wasn't (a summary of the interview questions is available in Appendix F). Thus the interview was used here as "an explanatory device" (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007, p.165) to help in gathering information on the prior delivery of the module, identify the need for the critical intervention in it and ideas for the direction of the critical intervention. It also served to establish whether criticality had been touched upon during the course, whether it was part of the respective teachers' philosophy and what the respective teachers thought of its possibilities for classroom implementation. All this would to inform the initial planning of the intervention and help me gain an in-depth view of its micro context.

4.5.3.2. Research Diary

As mentioned earlier, I had decided on an initial curriculum plan to be implemented in the reading classroom which is shown in Figure 3, however, I intended this as a template, a framework which would be negotiated with my students. This negotiation would take place while I, as a teacher/researcher, found myself engaged in action but at the same time in reflection both during the time of the action, that is, during the intervention, and on action, at the end of each class. Thus I decided that a research diary would serve as a tool to record my reflections which would also constitute a data source. I thought that keeping a research diary would act as a companion to the other research methods used and allow me to write reflections on my observations, the research methods used and my own role as a researcher. It would also help me keep a record of ideas and insights which "can

lead to the development of theoretical constructs which in turn can be used to interpret data”(Altrichter, Posch, & Somekh, 2005, p.13). I recorded new observations in my diary after each “critical class” as well as during the planning phase of the lesson prior to the “critical class”.

4.5.3.3. Initial focus group discussion

Focus group discussions are important tools in the process of creating a negotiated curriculum and establishing a collaborative relationship with the participants (Bloor, Frankland, Thomas, & Robson, 2002). I decided that, during my first class of the semester, I would present students with the curriculum plan for the semester and ask them how they feel about it as well as explain about my research and the critical intervention I had planned and see how they felt about it. Apart from being an introductory lesson, this discussion would also yield initial data for the intervention and ensure the presence of the participatory element which is essential for a critical pedagogy intervention.

4.5.3.4. Observations

“Observing and describing have a key role to play in Action Research” (Burns, 2010, p.57). Indeed, observation is a natural process which takes place during the teaching act. As teachers we constantly observe our actions and reflect on their impact. In this respect, teaching and observing form an almost organic relationship as they can hardly be separated from one another. However, in the context of this study observations were used as a research method which requires that the teacher/researcher look at her classroom from a stranger’s point of view (Altrichter et al., 2005; Burns, 2010). Thus action research observation is: “focused: you are seeking specific information about something rather than looking in a general way; objective: you are aiming to see things as they really are and not just through a personal, subjective or intuitive lens; reflective: you are observing in order to see things from a position of inquiry and analysis; documented: you deliberately make notes or records of the information; evaluated and re-evaluated: you check out your own interpretations later by yourself or collaboratively with others”(Burns, 2010, p.57).

The teacher/researcher duality discussed earlier in section 4.4. made it challenging for me to engage in objective observations hence I decided to use an audio-

recording device as an observation recording tool as it would allow me to take a step back from my role as a teacher which was primordial during the intervention and slip into the researcher's shoes so to speak while listening to the recording and reflecting on the data gathered. Thus, a total of 17 recorded observations conducted during the intervention stage were carried out. Each observation varied between 1 hour to 2 hours depending on the topic and the tasks at hand. This type of unstructured observation was another way of ensuring that I remained true to my role as a researcher while inhabiting my teacher's role. Thus my internal observations would be contrasted with the external observations of a fellow teacher which would ensure different perspectives are brought into the data collection and analysis and that self-observation is supplemented with collaborative observation (Burns, 1999; Burns, 2010).

My observations were unstructured as their purpose was "hypothesis-generating rather than hypothesis-testing" (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007, p.397). By contrast, my fellow teacher's external observations were semi-structured started from an agenda of issues (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007) to be explored as detailed in the External Observation Form available in Appendix K. A total of two such observations were carried out during the intervention stage.

These measures would allow me to distance myself from the research situation and look at it in a more objective manner. I fully understood at the time of my planning for the intervention that video recorded observations would probably offer a more holistic picture of the situation, however, I realised that they may involve ethical issues especially in a conservative cultural context such as the one I am operating in. Another impediment for the use of this data collection tool was the fact that I was meeting my students for the first time at the beginning of the semester hence I had not had the time to develop rapport and trust prior to the intervention and I did not want to abuse my position of power as a teacher by expecting them to consent to video recordings or convincing them to do it. I felt that that would be an invasion of their privacy and comfort zone which would also have a direct impact on the success of the intervention itself.

4.5.3.5. Focus group discussions

I decided on using focus groups as a research method as this would be perceived by students as being less intrusive than the other methods as classroom

discussions are a form of interaction that is commonly accepted as a classroom activity where the group provides “a socially legitimated occasion for participants to engage in<retrospective introspection> to attempt to collectively tease out previously taken for granted assumptions” (Bloor, Frankland, Thomas, & Robson, 2002, p.4). Furthermore, focus groups would provide data which cannot be obtained through individual interviews “as the hallmark of focus groups is their explicit use of group interaction to produce data and insights that would be less accessible without the interaction found in a group” (Morgan, 1997 in Hatch, 2002, p.30). A total of three focus groups were conducted with the 17 participants. During the first focus group, in the pre-intervention stage, all the participants were present although few of them contributed to the group discussion. The second focus group discussion, during the intervention stage, had the same number of participants as the first one with the majority of them contributing to the discussion. The third and final focus group discussion had only 7 participants as the post-intervention stage was carried out at the end of the academic semester hence attendance was low due to final exam pressure on students.

Furthermore, focus groups and interviews complement each other as research methods, the former providing insights into the reaction and interaction of groups to specific tasks and the latter providing individual insights into the students’ reflections on specific tasks.

4.5.3.6. Selected participant interviews

Selected participant interviews represented an ad-hoc instrument that was not included in the initial intervention plan. The need for including these interviews in the data collection methods rose from the fact that focus groups did not manage to capture to fully capture the “deviant experiences” (Bloor, Frankland, Thomas, & Robson, 2002, p.8). Thus, the selected participant interviews were meant to shed light on the reasons for some students’ enthusiasm for the critical pedagogy intervention or students’ resistance to it. These two interviews were thus scheduled at the end of the first cycle of the intervention as their purpose was also to inform the changes to be made during the second cycle. The interviews were unstructured as their purpose was to acquire a unique, personalized information about the students’ perspectives on the intervention (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007).

4.5.3.7. Periodical anonymous surveys

If the above methods are interactive hence involve direct dialogue and can be intimidating for students while inherently perpetuating the power image of the teacher/researcher who conducts them, the anonymous surveys can ensure that student participants have a forum where they can express their view without feeling the pressure to answer in a certain way. In my experience as a teacher who tries to collect student feedback frequently, I found that students tend to be less open and honest particularly about the things they dislike than in the anonymous surveys I asked them to complete. It is very difficult for both teachers and students to stop inhabiting their status and perceive each other as equals. It is all the more difficult in a societal setup that promotes an unquestioned hierarchy of the elders over the young, of the experienced over the less experienced. I find that, in this context, using anonymous periodical surveys does not only serve the purpose of triangulation discussed in the previous section, but also adds to the participatory character of this research project and constantly draws my awareness to the power relationships in the classroom. Thus, the two periodical anonymous surveys, were administered in the following order: one at the end of the first cycle of the intervention stage and the final one in the post-intervention stage. The surveys were created and administered online through Google Forms and consisted of ten items each, seven close-ended items and three open-ended items all related to the students' views on the critical intervention and its perceived effects on their awareness of social issues and various perspectives (see Appendices I and J for copies of the surveys). A total of 15 participants opted to take part in the survey, the other two participants were either not present at the time when the survey was administered in class or opted not to take it at a later time.

4.5.3.8. Tests

In order to get a better insight into the participants' level of critical awareness I decided to administer a diagnostic test during the first teaching week of the fall semester, roughly the first week of October 2014. It was a pen and paper test which included a text, with pre-reading and post-reading tasks. The text was reproduced from an article published by Reuters on September 25th, 2014. The article was titled "Qatar pulls out of women's basketball over hijab row" (see Appendix E for a copy of the test) and it focused on the Qatari Women Basketball Team's decision of

walking out of the basketball competition at the Asian Games in South Korea as they had not been allowed to wear the Islamic hijab or headscarf during the game. The questions prompted students to read the article critically by interpreting the decision of the Qatari players and to question the neutrality of the information given in the article by looking at the writer's point of view and establish whether it was biased or fair.

The purpose of the test was to establish the students' level of critical literacy before the start of the intervention thus providing a starting point for the critical curriculum. A total of 17 students took the diagnostic test.

The progress test was administered at the end of the first cycle of the intervention stage and it followed the same structure as the diagnostic test but focusing on the issue of beauty associated with fairness and the crippling effects of this belief in the Indian society (see Appendix G for a copy of the test). This test served to measure the students' level of critical literacy after the first stage of the intervention. All the 17 participants took the progress test.

The final, post-intervention test followed the same structure of the diagnostic and progress test while tackling the topic of the buzz created around a Women Driving activist in Saudi Arabia (see Appendix H for a copy of the test). This test served to inform the overall impact of the intervention on the student participants in correlation with the other data collection procedures. The final test was taken only by 7 out of the 17 participants as it was administered at the end of the academic semester when attendance is typically low due to final exam preparation.

All the tests were researcher-created (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007) and served to look at attitudes, beliefs, opinions vis-à-vis the topics presented and the way they were presented in the respective medium, i.e. the text's positioning and agenda. The tests did not aim at measuring language ability or reading skill level.

4.5.4. Ethical considerations

I have decided to discuss research ethics in a separate section of this chapter as I consider it fundamental to the critical paradigm and the action research design used in this particular study.

Altrichter et al.,(2005) state that there are three ethical principles to be followed in action research:

- a) Negotiation, meaning that the research techniques can only be used after being negotiated with those concerned i.e. the participants. Participants have the right not to take part in the research if they consider that the research methods are invasive or do not protect their privacy and confidentiality. Thus the participants' identity was protected through the use of pseudonyms and anonymity of the responses provided.
- b) Confidentiality. The data collected are the property of those who generate it, thus, it cannot be disseminated without their permission. The participants have the right to comment and alter the final research report before being disseminated to audiences.
- c) Participant control. Those who participate in the research have control over it. This principle is directly linked with two principles above.

The standard informed consent forms in both English and Arabic available in Appendices B and C encompass all these principles in order to protect the privacy and the dignity of the research participants and to create a bond of trust between the participants and the researcher. My experience as a researcher has shown me that establishing this initial trust bond before collecting data is not only essential to the ethical dimension of the study but is also essential to the quality of participation in the research project. Students are willing to provide you with extra information knowing that you are safeguarding their wishes as participants. In addition to the informed consent form, the research ethics form approved by the University of Exeter Ethics committee ensured that ethical considerations were clearly stated and participants' anonymity and confidentiality was maintained. The form is available in Appendix A.

4.6. Reflecting on the data - Data analysis

In action research reflecting on the data during the collection process is essential (Burns, 2010). This will invite early reflections on the possible outcomes of data interpretation as well as keeping an esthetical distance from the intervention, in other words compartmentalizing the teacher role and the researcher role.

4.6.1. Data analysis methods and procedure

The data obtained through the various collection methods was analysed according to the general principles outlined in the above-mentioned stages, however, the specificities of the data analysis of each method are mentioned below. During the

coding process certain elements of pattern analysis were used in order to look for commonalities in the discourse and certain elements of dilemma analysis in order to look for contradictions in discourse were employed (Altrichter et al., 2005). Thus, similarities and differences were drawn between categories available in the data collection methods used in the pre-intervention stage, then those used in the intervention stage and thirdly, those used in the post-intervention stage.

The analysis procedure followed Hatch's (Hatch, 2002) inductive analysis model:

- a) *Step 1.* The data was transcribed, read and analysis frames were identified.
- b) *Step 2.* Domains were created based on semantic relationships discovered within analysis frames.
- c) *Step 3.* Salient domains were identified and were assigned a code.
- d) *Step 4.* The data was re-read and the salient domains were refined and relationships within the data were identified.
- e) *Step 5.* Decisions were made to select the data that supported the refined domains and as well as examples that did not fit or countered the relationships identified within the domains.
- f) *Step 6.* The analysis within domains was completed.
- g) *Step 7.* Themes were sought across domains.
- h) *Step 8.* A master outline of the relationships within and between domains was created.
- i) *Step 9.* Data excerpts were selected to support the elements in the outline.

Nvivo 10 screenshots of a coding sample samples are available in the Appendix N while a full copy of an interview transcript is available in Appendix O.

4.6.1.1. Focus groups and interviews

The data collected through these two methods was summarised and reviewed in order to provide easy access to the data later in the analysis process and to establish a clearer connection with the research questions (Miles & Huberman, 1994). All the data was audio-recorded and transcribed in Nvivo 10 software. The reading and selection of the data followed, through the development of categories and codes in Nvivo 10. In coding, the inductive method was followed (Altrichter et al., 2005), where the categories or themes were chosen after scrutinising the data. Thus, several descriptive and process codes were generated (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). The data was organised according to the stage of collection in the

study, i.e. pre-intervention, intervention and post-intervention. Interviews and focus groups were used as data collection methods at all stages of the intervention.

As the analytical process started with the data collection process, keeping theoretical notes as an analysis tool was particularly useful as it allowed me to keep the research focus in mind as well as brainstorm ideas on how the data should be presented.

4.6.1.2. Tests

The content of the tests aimed at challenging students to go beyond the mere comprehension of a text and consider its positioning while exploring alternative points of view. These instruments were an additional means of assessing the students' initial level of critical literacy as well as its progress as a result of the critical intervention. The data obtained was, similarly to the data obtained from interviews and focus groups, transcribed and coded in Nvivo10. The categories obtained as a result were compared and consequently merged or subordinated to already existing categories obtained from other data sources which focused more on students' experiences with critical literacy and critical pedagogy throughout the intervention. Relationships within the data obtained from the three tests as well as interviews and observations were subsequently identified.

4.6.1.3. Classroom observations and research diary

The classroom observations were recorded in-action and were complemented by the research diary observations on action. Similar to the above mentioned methods, the data yielded during the classroom observations was transcribed and coded in Nvivo10. The classroom observations served as an important source of examples of data that supported the relationships within domains mentioned above. In addition to the classroom observation data, the research diary data served to corroborate the above examples and enhanced the reflective aspect of the data analysis processes.

4.6.1.4. External Observations

The External Observations data was transcribed, coded and analysed within the framework of the other data sources. The external observation data was particularly important for Step 5 of the analysis procedure, where the relationships that did not

fit the relationships found within the analysis domains were found. The external observation data brought in an objective layer to the analysis process.

4.6.1.5. Surveys

The data obtained during the two surveys was the only quantitative element to the body of qualitative data obtained through the varied methods employed during the intervention. The data obtained through Google Forms was analysed in Google Sheets and then the response frequency for each close-ended question was transferred to Excel2014 in order to generate graphs and charts. The number of participant responses was too low to be significant from a statistical perspective hence statistical packages such as SPSS or R2 were not used. The qualitative data obtained from the open-ended responses was included in the Nvivo10 project data along with the other qualitative data sources, coded and analysed according to the criteria mentioned above.

4.7. Validating the findings

In section 4.5.4 I discussed at length the question of trustworthiness, credibility and confirmability of this intervention. Although action research data cannot be tested in the traditional sense found in positivist research designs, its interpretation can be tested to a certain extent by testing the findings once again against the derived categories. To this effect I decided to do the process in reverse and look first at the categories and then at the data that substantiates them. Another very important method of data analysis that derives from the democratic character of action research discussed all throughout this chapter is communicative validation. I had decided earlier that my application of this method would consist in comparing my interpretations of the analysis with the experiences of my participants as well as the opinions of my third party observers. The main purpose of this method was not necessarily to validate the findings (although that is its primary role) but to challenge myself to face “differences of opinion and explain them” (Altrichter et al., 2005, p.44)

4.7.1. Trustworthiness, credibility and transferability

As defined by Guba and Lincoln (1985 in Scott & Morrison, 2005) the validity criteria for interpretivist research study focuses on four aspects:

- j) Credibility, where the participants agree that the researcher included their representations of reality
- k) Transferability, where the readers of the research could agree that the) conclusions of the research study are related to their own settings
- l) Dependability, where the researcher had been able to identify his/her effects during the field work and disclose them
- m) Confirmability, where the analysis is grounded in the data and the conclusions drawn from the data are logical and useful

Burns (2010) provides a series of practical guidelines which helped me in my endeavour to obtain trustworthy, reliable findings and which are elaborated in the following sub-sections:

4.7.1.1. Keeping the pedagogical focus in mind

As laudable as critical awareness raising might be, at the end of the day the module where I conducted the critical intervention was an English language module hence, enhancing students' language abilities remained a goal throughout the critical intervention. This point was included in the focus group discussions and the anonymous surveys carried out during the intervention and post-intervention stage. The data collection procedures ensured that students' voices were heard and taken into account. As Somekh, (2006) quoting Wardsworth (2001) contends: an evidence of trustworthiness is the portrayal of the community of participants in equal measure, namely transferring the representation from the I, in the person of the action researcher, to we or us, in the collective voices of the researcher and the participants.

4.7.1.2. Using more than one source of information

As mentioned earlier in the triangulation section, I used different data collection methods, as this helped me analyse students' views on the intervention through various lenses (Burns, 2010). Also, the inclusion of external observations during the intervention ensured an added level of objectivity as it helped highlight other perspectives which I might have overlooked during the intervention. The selected participant interview method provided me with additional insights into my role as a teacher/researcher and a reconsideration of my own agenda as well as the classroom dynamics that unfolded during the classroom interactions.

4.7.1.3. Immersing myself in the data

Action research presupposes that the researcher wear the practitioner's hat and vice versa, thus, the time spent with the data in order to see emerging themes and categories has to be guided by "thoughtfulness, openness and reflection" (Burns, 2010, p. 143). I endeavoured to re-read my data, to go back to the literature and to the research questions as well as discuss my findings with my participants and fellow-teachers. I hence strove to re-fine my analysis and ensure it was sound and trustworthy.

4.7.1.4. Maintaining objectivity and perspective

It is often difficult in action research to maintain objectivity and gain perspective as my dual role of teacher/researcher implied an immersion in my research context hence an emotional attachment to my data and my research objectives. However, a way to counter that was to introduce the external observations mentioned earlier to carefully examine the "discrepant cases" (Burns, 2010, p.133). The selected participant interviews were a means of looking closer at the discrepant cases, namely students that showed an exceeding enthusiasm for the critical intervention and students who displayed resistant behaviour. Furthermore, I tried my best to provide a rich description of the context and provide specific details of the research story in order to maintain an honest, open approach to the data analysis.

4.7.1.5. Focusing on practical theory

The principle of practicality is of paramount importance in action research hence I endeavoured to keep this in mind when taking classroom decisions, whether it meant steering the module in the direction required by students as a result of their voice as well as their silence or showing availability for students to discuss their opinions out of class. Relatedly, I strove to explain in detail, in the analysis and discussion chapters, the contribution that this research has made to my deeper understanding of my teaching context (Burns, 2010).

4.8. Challenges of the study

The current study focused on implementing a critical pedagogical intervention in a second language learning classroom in higher education and it was guided by the

belief that it does not suffice for an educator to accept and conform to the status quo but bring about a change in the students' life-long skills development through exposure to critical awareness and critical literacy. This action research study involved a group of undergraduate students taking up a reading skill based English module and the implementation of multiple data collection methods. The study is deeply entrenched in its context as findings do not aim at generalizability beyond it but rather at opening the door to the possibilities of critical literacy in the region. The challenges of this endeavour were obvious to me even before embarking on this endeavour, as a critical pedagogy intervention always poses certain risks, among which unresponsiveness from the participants, opposition from the administration etc. could be listed. The risks were enhanced by the multiple sources of data which I found, at times, difficult to manage. The data gathered was indeed considerable hence the analysis process involved my having to possess a selective ability while trying to distance myself emotionally from the it. Additionally, students' initial low-level of questioning ability meant that I had to develop a meta-language, the "eternal why" as my students called it, and encourage them to gradually adopt a questioning frame of mind. Furthermore, this critical course was not supported by other courses hence some students were taken aback by this demanding, high-risk, collaborative classroom setting where they had to shift from their role of passive observers to contributors and co-creators of the course (Perumal, 2008).

4.9. Limitations of the study

As any other research study, this one has its limitations. The first one is that it cannot fully satisfy the aim of an action research study in terms of bringing about a significant change in the students' mind-set regarding critical issues at home and around the world. In order for this to happen, a longitudinal, critical ethnography design study would be more appropriate. My aim here was to expose students to a critical mind-set which would help them gain critical literacy skills not just for the English language reading class but also for their other subjects inside and outside their academic setting.

A second limitation would be my dual role of teacher/researcher which, although important according to most action researchers (Carr & Kemmis, 2004; Mcniff, 2000; Burns, 2010), can lead to a certain amount of bias. To counter this, I decided

to introduce third party observation as a data collection method and to acknowledge openly my involvement throughout the different stages of the study hence embrace a dialectical view of rationality (Carr & Kemmis, 2004).

These limitations considered, I believe the research aims could be met through this particular research design and in this particular span of time as the findings are not generalizable but particular to the specific research context.

4.10. Summary

In this chapter I presented the research design of the present study as well as my motivation for choosing this design and the research methodology employed in the study. In addition, I have provided a description of the research methods employed at the three stages of the critical intervention as well as data analysis procedures. I have also presented the principles that I followed in ensuring the catalytic validity of my study as well as its challenges and limitations. In the next chapter I will present the findings of the research study.

5.CHAPTER V: PRESENTATION OF DATA

In this chapter I first re-iterate the purpose of the critical literacy intervention while keeping in mind the research questions:

1. What were the students' views on the critical literacy intervention?
2. What factors supported or hindered the development of a critical literacy intervention?
3. How did the critical literacy intervention help improve students' critical awareness?

Secondly, I re-state my role in the critical intervention and provide a reference to the structure of the critical intervention. Thirdly, I present the thematic analysis of the data as revealed at each stage of the intervention: pre-intervention, intervention and post-intervention.

5.1. Data presentation and illustration

I designed this critical intervention in order to find out whether or not there is scope for critical literacy in English language courses in Oman and whether students could engage with it while learning various language skills. The critical literacy intervention was not an end in itself but rather a means to the achievement of language skills, student engagement with a critical curriculum and student appreciation of it. This intervention also aimed to be an eye opener for students by raising critical awareness and paving the way for critical literacy skills.

While in this chapter I present the findings obtained through the intervention, a detailed discussion on these findings is included in the following chapter.

I had decided earlier on a possible list of topics that I would propose to and negotiate with students (see Figure 4, chapter IV).

The data collected in the pre-intervention stage helped refine these choices and at the same time helped me become more aware of how students could be engaged with critical literacy. The pre-intervention stage data is presented in great detail in this chapter as it motivated the choices that were made later in the intervention stage.

5.2.Data analysis

The data was audio-recorded, then transcribed and coded with the assistance of Nvivo 10 software. The major themes and subthemes that emerged during the coding process are presented following the intervention stages highlighted in Figure 6, p.59.

5.2.1. Pre-intervention stage findings

The pre-intervention stage consisted of interviews with teachers who had formerly taught the module as well as students who had taken it as part of their degree plan, the diagnostic test completed by the students who would take part in the intervention as well as the first focus group. Figure 7 below presents the data sources quoted to support the pre-intervention stage findings.

Figure 7

Pre-intervention stage data sources quoted in section 5.2.1.			
Teacher interviews with:	Students who took part in Focus Group 1	Students interviewed	Students who took the diagnostic test
Alma	Rashida	Sara	T1
Said	Manar		T2
	Amel		T3
			T4

5.2.1.1. Findings derived from the teacher and student interviews

a. A curriculum gap in the module

Prior to having interviewed students and teachers, I had looked at the module outline and materials and identified several areas of concern such as a lack of materials and mostly a lack of consistency in the teaching approach. Although this module had been present in the English major degree plan for some time, there were no clear records as to what had been done prior and what the module consisted of. This assumption was corroborated by the teachers and students interviewed, some saying published materials were needed, others that a completely different approach was necessary. All participant names quoted here

are pseudonyms, in accordance with the ethical considerations presented in Chapter IV (section 4.5.5.).

When giving feedback on the module, in general, Said, one of the tutors who had taught it stated that:

“The X module was really fantastic but it has to have a design book for that because the material was scattered and I was not able to collect it and Dr Z gave me only a small book which I was not able to understand.”

The tutor stressed on the fact that the students’ language skills were good however, they needed to be directed with the aid of a structured curriculum:

“They would be guided with some material and they come up with flying colours. I’m one hundred percent sure of that.”

One of the students interviewed, Sara, supported the view that the course was lacking in structure and direction:

There were no hand-outs, no books... It was only given some words to the students and that’s it. It was not that much. So we didn’t discuss about the words consistently...The teacher I think that was the first year for him in this college and I think he was shocked by the fact that there is no hand-outs for this module. He must to arrange everything by himself.

In addition to the above mentioned gaps in the curriculum, tutors had mentioned a significant gap in students’ ability to think critically about certain issues that came up in their reading material. Thus, Alma, one of the teachers that had taught the module stated that:

“Students don’t have critical thinking because they are very poor in reading, inference, reading between the lines, they cannot have this kind of critical analytical way of thinking: what happens, why. At the most they can see the basic, the surface level, they don’t have the deep understanding of the text...”

Said corroborated her view:

“Reading between the lines students are not able to cope up with because they are not up to that level. Supposing that you give them something which is very higher they are not able to do that.”

Alma also mentioned the fact that, in general, the curriculum offered in the programme is mostly focused on language skills and has nothing to do with the social reality of the students:

“Alma: Yes because it's completely cut-off from what they have done in level 0. Level 1 and above is completely cut-off from the natural environment.”

Some of the students that had previously taken the module and who were interviewed during a focus group discussion, shared the same view.

“Rashida: Basically if they (students) learn it and it has something to do with their lifestyle it's easier for them to learn...Whereas if there is something that has nothing to do with the way they live then they won't be interested and it won't be easier for them to know.”

Thus, most of the participants were able to identify gaps in materials, curriculum and student abilities or skills which had to be addressed and which helped inform my decision to adopt an action research design for this critical intervention.

b. Students' abilities and needs

In spite of all the gaps mentioned before, one tutor, Said, spoke about the students' high level of proficiency in English language and about their impressive vocabulary:

"They were already above my expectations, what I expected they were even more than that because I was asked to judge their performance on a debate in another module. I did not expect my students would talk like that, defend their suggestions. Beautifully done in the class. So what I expected they turned out to be more.”

Alma also spoke of the students' ability to perform when given the chance to work independently:

“So maybe when they do it by themselves this multiple perspective comes automatically. I give them a text and then I tell them you are going to be the person who is critiquing it so whatever you want to critique go ahead and critique it...So let the learner be the one who decides on certain things but like I said the teacher is there to guide and to motivate them.”

c. The need for a reformed critical curriculum in English language modules

Alma's question in the above quote was the question I posed to tutors and students equally. I asked for their suggestions in creating a curriculum that would involve students and a teaching and learning approach that would improve their language skills while enabling them to problematize certain issues and to see the link between their classroom learning and their lives. The majority of them emphasized the need for contextualised material. Alma said:

“Whatever literature they are doing there has to be related to the Omani environment and context. See how that is related see how does literature influence

the Omani literature. For example the story of the ship of the Sultan going to America with the spices, how is that related to present time?"

The students (Manar, Rashida and Amel) who had previously taken the module also commented on this aspect:

"Rashida: Basically if they learn it and it has something to do with their lifestyle it's easier for them to learn...It doesn't matter as long as it has something to do with the culture, something maybe about religion, something about racism, stuff like that they would be interested in. Something about Oman's culture and if it has similarities or differences but stuff like space I don't think they would be interested.

Amel: Even if it's not something related to your culture or your nation, if it is something related to humanity, maybe something about Cecenia or Burma they would be interested."

It is evident from the above quotes that contextualised material does not only refer to materials or topics pertaining to the Omani society but issues of interest to students or controversial issues that would generate debate and discussion.

Both teachers and students emphasized the importance of promoting tolerance through a critical curriculum. Alma said:

"You need to have varied activities so that they understand each other's cultures. Give them an example of India itself, see there are so many religions in India but they are all tolerant to each other so give them some good example and there are some very good verses in the Koran which show men are equal and so the teacher can do that..it's important because they are going to live in the world even outside the country. "

Said concurs:

"Because being critical enables them to get the ability of how to judge the people, at least they know what is good and bad but that critical perspective should be there in the text also so that they can implement in their day to day life also."

Rashida, Manar and Amel also provided suggestions as to what they thought might work in this module by reflecting on their life experience and how this module could help students in dealing with day to day life issues:

"Rashida: Frankly speaking yes because it gets people speaking, it would increase their vocabulary.

Manar: They can talk about their opinions, having what rights in what place this would lead people to speak about what they really want and that is what it is

supposed to be about.”

I asked the interviewed students to suggest some topics that could help future students see the relevance of the course to their daily lives:

“Rashida: Religion would be a very big topic. The misunderstanding of religion.

Manar: like some Islamic terminology especially it has a huge misconception in America.

Amel: about women, rights of women.

Manar: Maybe the topic could be the excessive rights given to men and not to women.

Rashida: That would be interesting. Racism as well.... because I've been here and I've noticed a lot of racism.”

The students' opinions when asked about the effects of this curriculum were surprising to me due to their steadfastness and decisiveness. They drew my attention to the very important aspect of learning English in a meaningful way that could be relevant to students' lived experiences and how this could bring about a change in students' perception of their social realities, a problematization of the prescriptive views they held:

“Amel: because showing facts will change somebody's thinking

Rashida: but it might open a door.

Rashida: if a lecturer brings such a topic they might go home and research about it.

Amel: and they would have a knock on the head of like I was wrong..

Rashida: I was wrong and yeah. Everyone has an image of something and once you give them the true image, they might change their mind.

Manar: it would be a turning point for them.”

Manar, a very vocal and outspoken student, saluted the idea of a critical approach as it would broaden the students' horizons and anchor them in their lived realities:

“Manar: This course sounds like an amazing idea because these people need to have their eyes opened. You can't stay in the dark for too long, you can't expect everything to be candy canes and Christmas. You have to accept the hard facts of reality and you have to move on.”

The interviews conducted in the pre-intervention stage were crucial for me in terms of the decisions I took when proceeding with the diagnostic test and later during the intervention stage. I thus decided to focus first and foremost on materials that would

portray social issues from the Gulf region and Oman in particular. I was surprised to find out that most of the student participants interviewed in the pre-intervention stage had a clear idea of what criticality entailed which the teacher participants failed to grasp at first or found too difficult to tackle (see above quotes). This showed me that there are many opportunities for research regarding the introduction of critical literacy in teacher education in my context, however, this is beyond the scope of the current study.

5.2.1.2. Findings derived from the diagnostic test

The diagnostic test was an important tool in assessing the would-be participants' level of critical literacy, in other words how familiar they were with text questioning strategies, if they possessed an awareness of the author's agenda and multiple points of view and if they envisaged alternatives to the point of view presented in the article.

a. Participants' level of critical literacy

The article presented in the diagnostic test was titled “Qatar pulls out of women’s basketball over hijab row” (see Appendix E for a copy of the test) and it focused on the Qatari Women Basketball Team’s decision of walking out of the basketball competition at the Asian Games in South Korea as they had not been allowed to wear the Islamic headscarf (hijab) during the game. The questions prompted students to read the article critically by interpreting the decision of the Qatari players and to question the neutrality of the information given in the article by looking at the writer’s point of view and establish whether it was biased or fair. The answers on the tests were anonymous hence the responses are presented here according to the number on the test:

Some students limited themselves to copying the answers from the text while others showed evidence of critical awareness. Thus the majority of students considered the Qatari players’ decision an act of bravery. As the tests were anonymous, the quotes below bear the number of the test they were taken from.

T1: “Heroes.../ They refused to remove the hijab because they believe in it and they know that is the right thing to do. Even if that means dropping out of competition. They opened the chance for women to play with the hijab in the future.”

They also thought the article presented the issue in a balanced, fair manner while discussing FIBA (Federation of International Basketball and Athletics regulations while, at the same time, presenting the Qatari players' decision as a daring act:

T4: "I think the FIBA's point of view represented when they say that all players should have their rights and freedom to wear the hijab.

T2: "It is the right decision took by them because hijab is Muslim woman's identity and she cannot leave it.

Interestingly enough, when asked if they thought the article's positioning would be different, were it published in a British or American newspaper some of them said they didn't think so."

T5: "Because all countries respect women and what she want and wear. I don't think if they would write different from the real one because the conversation is generally to all people and even if they change that would be useless. It won't bring sense to the reader."

The responses on the diagnostic test served as additional evidence to the views expressed by students in the focus group, namely that they were ready to embrace critical pedagogy in their classrooms and that they were able to express personal opinions when it came to issues that concerned their lives. This being said, their strong support for the Qatari team's action was expected as they did possess a very strong sense of right and wrong/ black and white idea when it came to the hijab issue.

5.2.1.3. Findings derived from Focus Group 1

In the first focus group the proposed module outline was discussed with the students. The sixteen lessons to be covered within a period of fifteen weeks were centred on topical themes presented in Figure 4 listed under generative themes. I had made it clear to them that this was just an outline and it did not mean it was set in stone as we, as a learning community (Vibert, Portelli, Shields, & LaRocque, 2002), were free to divert from it at any time. Thus they had the right to contest it and to tell me at any time whether they were unhappy about the process.

When this outline was presented to the students they accepted it and did not voice out any resistance to it nor intention to amend it. To my repeated questions about the relevance of these topics to their lives, to their personal interests and to their comfort level they kept saying “sure, no problem” or “it’s okay miss.” Although I did not find this very encouraging, I decided to proceed nevertheless hoping that during the process they would be able to relate their experiences to the themes discussed hence play a more active role in their choice and approach.

5.2.1.4. Conclusions on the pre-intervention stage

Although students seemed ready to embrace this critical approach and showed an interest in it, the teachers I had interviewed earlier were over-focused on training students in terms of skills although, strangely enough, according to Said, the level of English proficiency and analytical thought of the students he had taught, could allow the possibility of critical approaches to be explored.

Another important insight I gained from the interviews with the teachers as well as the students was that this module was more of a blank slate that needed a lot of work as there were no materials, no online resources. Said recommended that a textbook should be used in order to teach students more vocabulary and to give them a sense of structure. Rather than seeing this as a problem, I saw it as an opportunity which allowed me to teach students critical literacy while addressing the English language skills of reading, writing, speaking and vocabulary building which were required for the successful completion of this module as outlined in its learning outcomes.

5.2.2. Intervention stage findings

Figure 8 below shows the data sources quoted to support the intervention stage findings which are presented in this section according to the structure of the intervention stages and cycles illustrated in Figure 6.

Figure 8

Intervention stage data sources quoted in section 5.2.2.				
Teacher interviews with:	Students who took part in Focus Group 1&2	Students who took the diagnostic test	Students who responded to Survey 1&2	Students interviewed
Aisha (external observer)	Zahra	T9	S 1	Zahra
	Rawyia	T5	S 2	
	Adnana	T4	S 3	
	Manar	T8	S 4	
	Munira		S 5	
	Badryia		S 6	
	Maryia			
	Fatma			
	Zahra			

A. Cycle 1

Based on the preliminary findings presented above, first cycle of the intervention stage commenced at the beginning of the fall semester.

The topics and activities changed outlined in Figure 4 changed with time according to students' feedback expressed during the focus groups and the surveys but also though their silence and resistance to engage in further discussion on the respective topics. These elements of resistance and silence but also an expression of enthusiasm and high level of emotional attachment shaped the second cycle of the intervention. Thus, the high level of interest topic presented in the diagnostic test led to a discussion regarding different perspectives on the hijab and Islamic dress issues where students read various articles on the topic and finally engaged in a debate on Islamic symbols in schools. Similarly, student interest in women's issues led to further explorations of the status of women in the region through articles and videos. The course was also run on an e-learning platform where

students could voice their opinions in various forums as well as gain easier access to the materials used in class (see Appendix L for classroom materials reference list and Appendix M for screenshots of Moodle activities that supported the intervention)

5.2.2.1. Findings from the Focus Group 2 and Survey 1

a. Students' views on the critical intervention and the factors that aided its development

Students admitted to having appreciated the things they had learnt during the course. Their comments were mainly focused on two benefits: a development in language skills and a development of new ideas and perspectives. Although I discuss these two aspects in separate sections they are closely interwoven as shown in the students' testimonies.

b. Language skills development

The mid-term or intervention stage survey revealed that the majority of students thought the intervention had had a positive impact on their language skills development. The surveys were entirely anonymous hence no pseudonyms but numbers S1, S2 standing for Student 1 or Student 2 etc. are provided alongside feedback excerpts:

Figure 9
Intervention Questionnaire - Aspects of Language Learning

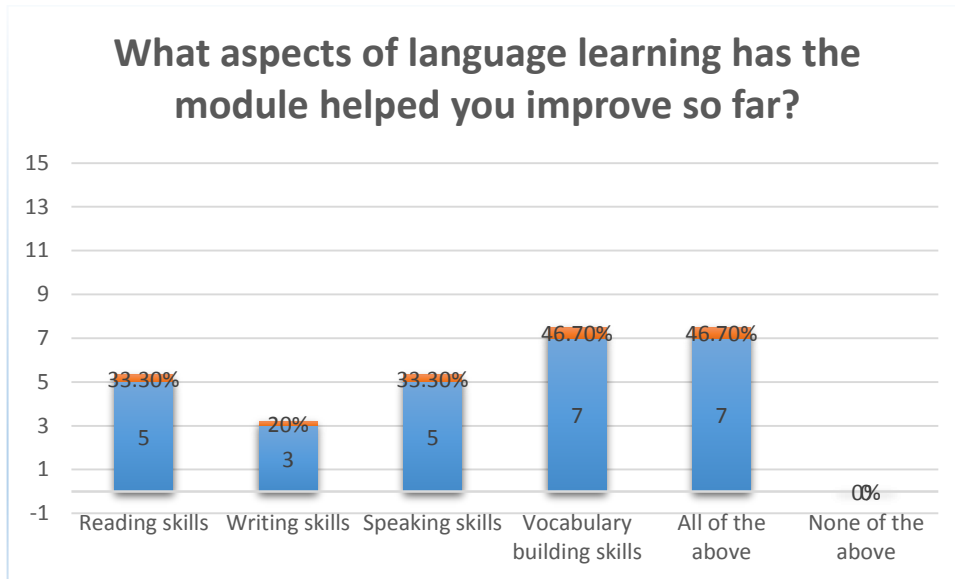


Figure 8 shows that the majority of respondents considered the intervention as having had a holistic benefit on their skill improvement with 7 out of the total 15 respondents stating that it had improved all their language skills. To support this, when asked what their general impression of the module was, one student replied that:

S1: "I think this module is very important to improve our skills in different area."

Other students focused more on vocabulary skills development as the module essentially aimed at improving their vocabulary building and reading skills:

S1: "It is very interesting and I learnt many words that I did not know before. And I use this word in every day when I speak."

S2 also placed an emphasis on the development of vocabulary along with speaking skills:

"It is good and practical module I learned many new words and improved my speaking."

S3 added her improvement of reading skills as a result of having taken this module:

"It is good module for English students especially. Students can improve their English skills in this module, especially vocabulary and reading skills."

Students 4 and 5 (S4 and S5) mentioned language skills development in tandem with critical skills:

S4: “My general opinion about the module is taking vocabulary indirect way. By talking and reading about issues that we face it this time or affect us as a women or human been.”

S5 also contended that the module provided her with opportunities to understand real-life issues and voice her opinions about them.

S5: “Because learning in this module improve our language skills and other skills come with it. Also this module talks about real social issues that we face it every day which help us to explain our opinion honestly.”

As seen in the above excerpts students mentioned the skill development aspect in direct relation to the aspect of interest and enjoyability as being the main gain of this experience. The second quote also refers to the important aspect of having the freedom to voice one’s opinion as students’ freedom to voice their views freely and openly is part and parcel of participatory forms of learning (Shor, 1992).

In the focus group one of the students, Zahra, reiterated this opinion:

“One of them is the environment that we discussed, like a friendly discussion we didn't feel this is the teacher, it's just like one of us. You ask the questions you didn't enforce us because you want our opinions to come freely. The other one, is the topics that you choose. It's related to us as women, as girls, to our identity. It's related to our society. This is what I really find it is very useful in this class. I learn vocabularies a lot of them but indirect way. I didn't learn it in that direct boring way which I faced in all modules.”

Her testimony covers not only the importance of skill development but how these can be acquired within what Kincheloe (Kincheloe, 2008) calls “participatory, affective, situated, multi-cultural and problem-posing pedagogy” (p.231). The dialogic aspect of this form of learning is also emphasized in her excerpt.

c. Bridging the classroom-society divide

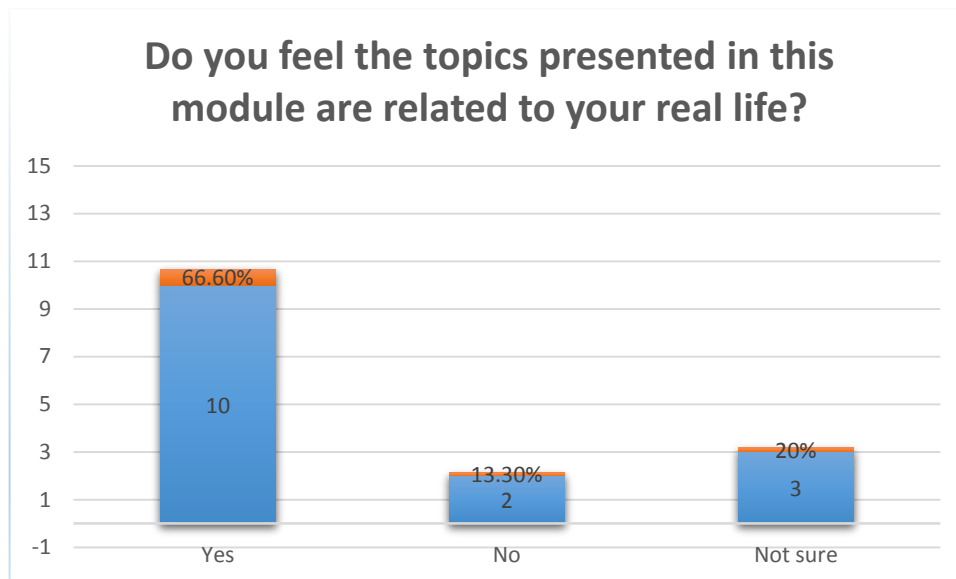
Several students mentioned, both in the survey and the focus group, that this particular class helped them become more in-tune with the world outside their classroom and its often harsh realities. S1 mentioned in the final survey how this took place:

“Because, I learn how to use different perspective in many different topics or issues and I like the way the teacher was teaching us, because she show us many

interesting videos and many topics. Some of the topics feel me sad but in the same time I discover a new word and new information.”

This particular question in the survey questionnaire also yielded an overall positive response:

Figure 10
Intervention Questionnaire - Topics



The students that responded with yes felt compelled to give details with regards to the motivation for their choice:

S2: “I found it useful because I get to what is happening over the world and why they are happening.”

S3: “I say yes, because all issues are from our society and it is related to the real life, so it is good to explain these issues and find some solutions for it.”

S4 provided a very detailed, rather enthusiastic answer to this question:

“It makes me talking from both my heart and brain and that’s what real learning is about. Its helps me thinking about the issues the reasons and how to solve it
Feeling relief when we discuss about things we should talk about it more all that and improve our English at the same time.

What more can we ask for?

I get out from this class feeling different, thinking about things I didn’t used to think about, look at life from different angles.it simply makes me grow up!! And open my eyes. it’s the first time I get from a class thinking about each word and can’t wait to

know what we are going to talk about in the next class...”

As seen in the above testimonies, students perceive the critical class in terms of its enjoyability, usefulness to their skill development but also to its having raised a higher degree of awareness of various points of view and perspectives.

In the focus group, Zahra and Badriya provided additional evidence for the above statement:

Zahra: “We talk about many subjects which interest us and which are important because it's happen nowadays and it affects us by way or other.”

Badryia mentioned the same thing but re-stated her increased level of awareness by acknowledging her and her fellow class mates previous by-stander, uninvolved attitude in matters of concern to their society:

“Yes miss, I think the topics are really interesting because these topic this situation happen in our society and we don't discuss it. We only just listen about it and we say this is not our problem.”

Manar, another student who took part in the study, admits to an increased level of awareness in terms of her increased knowledge about the world as a result of her being able to relate to what was taught in class:

“Also the kinds of issues it is all related especially about the woman, about our society. Because of this module I get the knowledge about something that I didn't know before.”

Undoubtedly, contextualization of the critical materials used is key for establishing or building up a learning community and getting a positive response to any pedagogical strategy. However, this is all the more necessary in the case of critical pedagogical approaches as its ultimate goal is to nurture questioning hence engaged citizenship and community membership (Shor, 1992; Hinchey, 2004).

Relatedly, questioning brings about an expansion of one’s thinking and one’s horizons that goes beyond knowledge and what is considered the accepted view to a different perspective, often leading to a questioning of one’s previous perspective and often, its discarding altogether. Thus, the development of critical awareness or what Freire called conscientization was, as seen in the above testimonies and in the evidence provided below, the biggest achievement of this intervention. My observations support this view as evidenced in the following subsections.

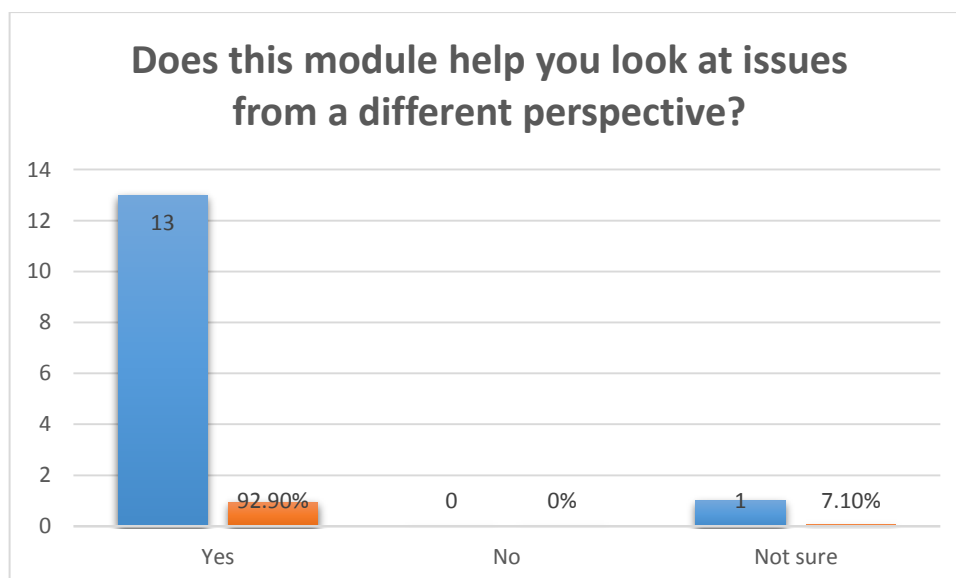
d. Developing critical awareness

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the students' ability to relate to the material presented paved the way of their developing a critical awareness of their lived realities and the outside world in general whilst engaging in a language course and developing a higher proficiency in their language skills. This critical awareness came primarily from exposure to different perspectives or different facets of a problem through reading of various articles or watching audio-video material on the same issue. It was my contention that if we were talking, for example, about women's issues in Oman or the Gulf region we should be also talking about women's issues in other parts of the world. Similarly, I wanted my students to put themselves in the Others' shoes so to speak, by understanding an issue that they felt strongly about, such as banning of hijab in public places in countries like Turkey or France, from the opposing point of view.

i. Awareness of various perspectives

Thus, if students admitted earlier to seeing the connection between their lived reality and the classroom, they also admitted to having engaged with various, new perspectives. The chart below shows the staggeringly positive response to this particular question in the mid-term student survey.

Figure 11
Intervention Questionnaire – Different Perspectives



The students who answered yes provided evidence to support their view:

S1: "... I have to mention also the topics we take make me think about how the other think and gives me better understand to them."

S3: "As I mentioned before, this module make us much closer to a lot of international issues in different angles. So I liked the teaching strategies and the way that the lecturer trying to make us understand the discussion."

In the focus group Badria and Zahra provided similar points of view:

Badriya: "Also this issues make us talk from the heart and talking from the heart is different than talking from the mind. Also it helps us know what other people think about hijab not just us. We know what we know how things are but we don't know how other people see us and that make us know how people look at us."

Zahra: "Also the kinds of issues it is all related especially about the woman, about our society. Because of this module I get the knowledge about something that I didn't know before."

This awareness of the various perspectives and ability to determine the hidden agenda behind certain perspectives was evidenced in classroom discussions. One of the topics discussed in class was the school fire incident in Saudi Arabia which caused the loss of the life of 15 female students. The rescue efforts in the school were prevented by the Religious Police on the basis of the fact that the students were not wearing their modest dress, the abaya, which is obligatory for all women residing in Saudi Arabia. One of the articles presented was an opinion article from the Los Angeles Times and another, more factual, from The Telegraph (both references are provided in Appendix L). Some of the students were able to identify the one-sidedness of both articles and expose the agenda behind them. Thus, when I asked why the perspective of the Religious Police is not present in the article, Zahra mentioned:

"I think they did not mention that because the newspaper itself, The Telegraph right, they did not have enough knowledge about Islam, the Middle East or they try to make the readers of the newspaper think about some specific idea."

Zahra was able to provide a critical analysis of the other opinion article published in the LA Times:

"I hate this article even more....in the last page she (referring to the author) talks about the Muslims in the Middle East, yani in general like they all let them abuse the

woman. She also say the woman they cannot work they cannot drive. She didn't mention that only in Saudi Arabia. She didn't mention that other Arab countries in the Middle East they give the women them right.”

Another student, Badriya, was able to give a critical analysis of the video she had watched along with her class mates from “*60 minutes Australia*” talking about how multiculturalism, with a focus on multi-faith aspects, was deemed a failure in some societies such as Britain due to a wave of extremist views and how, by contrast, in some societies like Australia it flourished. The video presented testimonies of various individuals in these societies, some embracing either an extreme religious or nationalist view while others countered that with a moderate, humanistic discourse. Referring to a particular scene in the video where one Muslim scholar was portrayed physically abusing children at a Koranic school, she mentioned:

“Saying that I'm Muslim is totally different than acting like one. The video shows a Muslim man beating young children. Literally in Islam you should respect the young people and not treat them like that.”

Rawyia, another student provided her own analysis after watching the video:

“Miss I think when we talk about the religion we should give any people freedom to choose. If you have your identity, like the way you talk, the way you react, you believe that is ok but you cannot force them on others because it is not easy. Someone is Christian it is not easy to come in Islam and behave like this. Because if you do like this then the first thing that come in their mind is that what they say in the media is true. And it's not correct because Islam is really different than what they want to show in the world. Because in Koran there is one ayat (verse) that in the world there is many people just to know to each other.”

I have to mention that the depth of this analysis made me think how critical pedagogy manages to bring out the best in students when they are able to relate the content to their own lives and how language ability does not represent a barrier in expressing their depth of thought.

I experienced the same light bulb moment when, after reading an article from Times of Oman (reference available in Appendix L) regarding the prospect of imposing a quota for women to access top positions in order to support gender equality in board rooms in companies in Oman, I asked students, in teams, to decide whether they are for or against the quota and provide supporting arguments for their choice. The article provided multiple points of view from various individuals, either members

of the business community or the society at large. Zahra gave again an in-depth analysis against the quota, her team being the only one who provided a counter quota position with supporting arguments:

“We are not supporting the quota at all. We find three main reasons: the first reason is that people employment should be based on high performance and their qualities not based on gender.

The second reason: maybe the percentage of women will become more than men so that will make a lay-off to the men.

Also the jobs may go to those who don't deserve it and will have no performance in the actual workplace and that will make disadvantages for these companies or ministries.”

Adnana, another student and her team countered Zahra and her team's view, supporting the view presented in the article with arguments from the very article itself:

“We support the quota because if the woman she is professional she should be given a chance to work so she can improve herself. Also they should be equal between males and females in the society.”

Zahra found the above view problematic saying that:

“Ok miss, I will not go for this comments. I will not accept anyone gives me a job because I am woman. I want they accept me because my skills, my qualifications. If they accept me because I am a woman, this reason will make me feel like I am less than a man. I will not want someone employ me in his company or anywhere because I am woman. And the way how I will be equal to the man when there is no quotas, when they see your skills, your qualifications like I said before. I mean if they just employ me 'couse I am a woman for me is like make me less than them.”

Although this lesson was not intended as a debate, the exchange of points of view and various perspectives was refreshing and kept the mood lively and interesting. Needless to say, I was provided with further insight into students' depth of thought, some students' resistance and into the classroom dynamics and power relations, all of which I will explore in depth in the following sections.

As mentioned earlier, these debates and discussions provided a platform for problem-posing and questioning thus generating an awareness of various points of view in most of the 18 students who took part in the study. The majority of students expressed this awareness freely in the questionnaire survey but only few voiced it

out in the focus group. During the classroom activities students experienced various levels of participation and resistance which I will discuss in detail later.

Few students reached, however, the higher threshold of conscientization which goes beyond an awareness of various points of view and translates in fact in a change in one's perspective, an ability to put oneself in the position of the Other (Freire, 1998; Hinchey, 2004)

ii. Change in one's perspective

Several students admitted having experienced a change of the confirmed views they had owned prior to the intervention. The same is valid for myself as I was often times intrigued and educated by the students' perspectives. As Freire put it "whoever teaches learns in the act of teaching and whoever learns teaches in the act of learning" (Freire, 1998, p. 11). Thus, in this particular section, I will be presenting my observations on action in addition to students' testimonies.

In the focus group Badria mentioned the changes this module generated in her mindset:

"Also it helps us know what other people think about hijab not just us. We know what we know how things are but we don't know how other people see us and that make us know how people look at us."

Zahra adds:

"This module it forced me from the beginning to think how the other think and why we should actually really understand the others."

She also mentions that:

"Actually one of the subjects made me understand how others think about me."

Other students mentioned an awareness of various world issues and real-life situations and envisaged opportunities for solutions as a result of the critical intervention. One comment from the mid-term survey illustrates this point:

S 1: "Because all issues are from our society and it is related to the real life, so it is good to explain these issues and find some solutions for it."

In the same survey another student mentioned:

S 7: "I get out from this module feeling different, thinking about things I didn't used to think about, look at life from different angles. It simply makes me grow up!! And open my eyes. It's the first time I get from a class thinking about each word and can't wait to know what we are going to talk about in the next class."

I found more indirect evidence in change in students' perspective during class activities.

When discussing the Saudi Arabia school fire story, some students chose not to express their feelings and opinions in class however they did so after class and I marked their opinions in my diary as I felt their genuine involvement in the topic was worthy of note. Thus, Munira, another student who took part in the intervention said: "...those girls in Saudi Arabia are girls just like me. Those women are just like me so I think why they don't have the same rights? And I always compare between Oman and Saudi Arabia. Here we have full rights Alhamdulillah. Also our religion gives us the rights. And they say in Saudi Arabia that they are in Islam, but they didn't give women their rights" (Research diary/19/10/2014).

Another student, Safyia added:

"Also this mutawaeen, miss, I'm really ashamed of them, that we have them here"

To which Rawyia countered:

"But what we have is different from what they have". (Research diary/19/10/2014)

This heartfelt compassion generated a higher level of awareness and a problematizing mind-set. Both Munira and Rawyia were able to question the confirmed view of religious authority righteousness.

A shift in perspective also happened during a class debate. As we had been discussing the issue of religious wear and its relation to rights as a spin-off from the diagnostic test, I thought it would be a good idea to close the topic with a debate. I borrowed the idea for this debate from Hillary Janks's book "Doing critical literacy" (Janks, 2010). The topic of the debate was "Wearing any markers of religious faith should not be allowed in schools". When dividing the class in two debating teams, the majority wanted to be against the proposition, however, I decided that the more democratic way was to let students pick random numbers which would assign them to one of the teams. The team for the proposition, although reluctant at the beginning, came up with some really interesting arguments. Here are some excerpts from their testimony:

Zahra: “I understand when they say that markers of religious faith are part of identity. But this is not all your identity and your identity changed when you are in school or when at home, in your society so this is my point. I don't understand why you need this identity in school when you are focusing in study and learning things. It is something important than your religion in school.”

Safyia, another participant, who was against the proposition countered her by saying:

“But you know that in our religion, Islam we have some points which are related to our culture, you know that.”

Mariya, another participant, who was for the proposition replied:

“We are not talking about Islam; we talk about all religions... Because students and teachers should be equals. No need to show our religions.”

Adnana who had been the most unhappy with her being in the team for the proposition, gave an interesting argument in favour of the motion:

“There is a point here. If the teachers are from a certain religion maybe they will treat the students in a different way from the other students of his religion. But when all students don't wear the religious markers that will make all students and teachers judge them and treat them equals.”

During the discussion that took place after the debate, she added that:

“Actually this topic makes me understand better why in countries like France and Turkey why they not allowing any markers of religion.”

Although Safyia said in the end that the arguments of the opposing team will not make her change her mind, I felt that, generally, all students had benefitted from seeing things from the Other's perspective, the Other that they normally vilify and consider an agent of persecution against their religious freedoms. Adnana's epiphany, of course, was the most surprising, as she had in many instances

displayed and voiced out her resistance to the topics and the critical approach taken in this module. I will go into further details on student resistance in the following section.

Similar instances of shift in perspective took place during discussions on the topics of beauty and the media pressures on women to be beautiful. During the lesson we analysed the lyrics of the song *Pretty Hurts* by Beyoncé (reference available in Appendix L) and then we engaged in a discussion on the topic of beauty and how the world would be if we didn't consider physical appearance as a criterion of success. This is what Zahra had to say:

“The beauty is to be different, is to be how you are not to be like someone else. When we treat each other not by how this person is beautiful but rather how this person is thinking.”

When I asked what women can do to respond to the societal pressures regarding beauty, Zahra answered:

“Actually Dove has a campaign. I really like it. To be different that is the beauty... Also like the song said, it starts from your house. They should educate girls. They should know you are beautiful and your soul and your brain are the most important not how you look. So we need more like this educating people about the real beauty.”

Her testimony showed her higher level of critical awareness as she was able to think and voice her opinion against the prescribed, generally held views and also problematize the views displayed in the media on various issues.

I, as a teacher/researcher experienced the same elation during one other lesson where we were talking about gender bias. To spark some discussion, I let the students watch a video of a washing powder advert intended for the US market where the male parent, the dad, was the star, speaking about the benefits of this washing powder in cleaning his little girl's clothes (reference available in Appendix L). After showing the video, I asked the students what they thought about the man in the advert. The majority of the students replied that he was okay. I continued with the questioning and asked them if they thought he was feminine because he was

doing what was traditionally considered a woman's job. The majority answered no, he wasn't, and Fatma, one of the participants, added:

"He is a responsible person, helpful, kind... Because he is taking all the responsibility for his daughters because he is doing both women and men jobs."

However, Rawyia had a counter-argument:

"I think miss women do this job much better. Because if you just looked at the house. It is all dirty and the girl's things are all over the place."

To which Fatma replied:

"He is cleaning. Maybe he cleans better than me."

When I asked them if such an advert would be aired in Oman and if people bought the product if they saw it, the students replied:

"Fatma: Yes.

Adnana: No, people would not find it strange.

Badryia: It might be strange to some people because we only see women in these adds.

Fatma: Yeah, like a new thing.

Adnana: Yes, it's a new thing."

The above excerpt suggests that students accept the possibility of this kind of adds airing in the local media although Badriya did mention people might find it strange initially and Fatma and Adnana said it was a new thing. This being said, their tone is one that is open to change and to the possibility of such instances occurring in their clearly defined gender role society. These discussions generated a higher awareness of other, contradictory even perspectives, thus encouraging students to embrace a more critical stance.

Consequently, Fatma and Adnana were able to relate this to their own life experience:

"Adnana: My sister's husband is cleaning and washing and doing everything in the home except cooking because he don't know."

Fatma: my father, when my grandma she travelled, he took the responsibility of the

house. And he does the washing and the cleaning and the cooking because he is the eldest.”

A similar exchange of ideas took place during a subsequent lesson on gender bias. Here I showed the students several pictures with children in atypical play roles (reference available in Appendix L), i.e. little girls playing with tools and little boys playing with dolls. I asked them what they would do if their son asked for a doll to play with. The majority of students said that their reply would be: “It's not for you.”

However, Adnana said:

“Maybe he wants to be like a doctor, to do something.”

I asked them what if their son asked for a cooking set:

“Adnana: It's ok miss.

Badryia: No it's not normal.

Adnana: Yes, it's normal maybe he likes to cook.

Badriya: I would think he is confused.”

Badryia further related her opinion to her lived experience and told us the story of her little cousin who likes to play with dolls and wear little girls' clothes as he is the only male in a family of eight sisters. She expressed worry at his confusion over gender roles and mentioned that it might be detrimental to his development, particularly in a male-dominated society such as Oman. I found her story touching not only because of her emotional investment in this issue, but also because of her ability to read through society's bias when it came to men who were more sensitive or performed tasks that were generally considered a woman's job. I believe her awareness is a first step in challenging this bias and educating Omani men and women to perceive their societal roles as more equal in both family and career aspects.

While Badryia's view aligns more with the prescribed view of specific gender identity and roles in society, Adnana's view leaves room for alternatives.

It is very interesting how Adnana experiences a shift in perspective after, in so

many classes, she had displayed various forms of resistance and leaned toward a more conservative approach, wanting to talk exclusively about topics that are related to the Omani context. In contrast to other students, when asked about their thoughts, whether they found the class boring or not, Adnana replied:

“A little bit... Maybe because it's not here in Oman.”

Her position brings the discussion to the challenges and caveats experienced during the critical intervention which I will develop further in section 5.2.2.5.

5.2.2.2. Findings from the progress test

a. Assessing the participants' level of critical literacy

The progress test was another tool that helped me identify the students' degree of critical awareness after having engaged in critical pedagogy. This test followed the same format as the diagnostic test but the article was on a different topic related to the beauty theme. The article presented in the test was taken from Times of India and focused on the “Dark is beautiful” campaign spear-headed by Indian actress Nandita Das. It aimed at raising awareness about the dangers of the fairness products and the common belief which associates lighter skin with success in Indian society (see Appendix G for a copy of the test).

While reading the students' responses, I was pleasantly surprised by the depth and maturity of their answers. Out of the 17 tests I looked at, only 4 or 5 provided sketchy, comprehension-oriented answers. The majority of them could identify various perspectives and also provide their own analysis of the issue. One of the questions was whether or not this campaign was needed in the first place. Below are some of their responses. The quotes are referred to by the numbers I put on the test after I collected them as, just like the student surveys, I wanted their responses to remain anonymous. I believed making their identity known would have made the students feel that the test is more an evaluation rather than an exercise in reading and providing honest analyses and opinions:

T 9: “I think it's needed because the Middle East and India are obsession by products cream for fairness”.

T 4 provided a stronger point of view:

“I think it’s needed. Because in India, there are darker skin than the whites. So, they all think that the beauty is to be white and that is absolutely wrong. So, they strongly need to repair those wrong thought on their minds.”

The students were not only able to comprehend the issue presented in the article but also provide their own perspective on it.

Another question in the test was if they thought the article would be different if it were published by a newspaper like The Times or The Guardian and to explain why the student on test 10 answered:

T 10: “Yes I think so because these issues related to India society, the other can’t understand it well. Also in the West they think having dark skin is a sign of beauty”.

I was impressed by this student’s analysis and the way she applied the tools she had acquired in class during our discussions on beauty and its different conceptualizations throughout the world.

T 5 gave a similar response:

“Yes, because it always depends on the society and how the people think or deal with it.”

T 4’s response was more incisive, referring to the bias and lack of ethics of the press:

“Yes, because not all the press can change anything by their mood without care about the right and wrong. Especially when it comes about money and bribe.”

Another question I had posed in the test was whether they (the students) thought this was relevant to Omani society. The majority of them replied yes it was. Here are some of the responses:

T 10: “Yes I do. Because many Omanis thought the fairness is sign of beauty. And in the market and shops can see a lot of fairness products.”

T 8 referred to a particular effect of the fairness obsession in the Omani society:

“Yes, it is relevant because other Omani men like to marry women with white skin and most of women are using creams to make their skin fair.”

T 4 was the most critical to the societal customs that have established fairness as a sign of beauty:

“Yes, because most women have that wrong thought that the whiteness is a sign of beauty. So, even if they are fair skin really, they still buy products that make them whiter. Also dark women are using foundation creams which are not suitable for their skin colour.”

The final question in the test asked for their own opinion regarding this fairness obsession:

T 5 said:

“In my opinion the complexion doesn’t matter, every person should be on the way he/she are”.

T 4 gave a detailed, well-argued answer:

“I think the beauty is not about how you look, it’s that soul inside your heart which makes you look beautiful. In my view some dark skin people are more beautiful and handsome than the whiter people. Seriously, people should do something about their disabled ideas about beauty.”

T 10 answered along the same lines:

“My personal opinion is I totally agree with this movement and I hope if we have the same in my country. But I think the final choice should be back to the woman by herself to use or not use this fairness cream without pressure.”

It was my observation that students’ depth of analysis and awareness of the issue presented in the article was more present in their answers on the progress test than in the diagnostic test. Among the factors contributing to this increase in awareness

could be their exposure to the topics of beauty and its complexities (as mentioned in the previous sections) but also the increased practice of questioning in which they had engaged prior to the test. Their responses go beyond the arguments provided in the article while showing depth of thought but also personal attachment to the topic. Furthermore, their critical personal opinions show an unexpected level of confidence and a desire for change in societal perceptions of beauty.

A. Challenges and caveats of Cycle 1 of the Intervention stage

5.2.2.3. Findings from Focus Group 2, Survey 2, first external observation and research diary

The majority of students responded positively to the critical intervention, however few students displayed various forms of resistance either embodied by silence, lack of interest and overt displays of boredom through engagement in alternative topics of discussion or overt lack of interest and suggestions for alternative topics. Another caveat was a lack of required language tools to tackle the critical material students were exposed to as well as students' inability to express critical views. According to Seas (Seas, 2006) student resistance comes from the students' having internalized confirmed, normative views in mass education and mass culture and their lack of exposure to various points of view throughout their education. This leads to a limited spectrum of topics of interest hence lack of experience in critical discussion and acceptance of the status quo.

a. Student resistance

One example of student resistance was Adnana's suggestion to engage in topics that are directly related to the Omani context. Her example shows in fact a limited interest spectrum as the topic we were talking about was about the Saudi Arabia girl school fire incident which, in fact, presented elements that were topographically, geographically and culturally related to the Omani context. In spite of this, I found her response encouraging, as she gave me suggestions and I addressed the issue by presenting the ensuing topics, materials and activities in direct relation to the Omani socio-cultural context.

Introducing topics which were directly related to the Omani society did not necessarily yield more enthusiasm from the students who had displayed resistance in the first place. This was particularly the case of one article in the Times of Oman (reference available in Appendix L) which tackled the issues of Omani women being

allotted a quota in top positions. My research diary entry from 6/11/2014 supports this:

“When discussing the text on Omani women demanding more slots in top positions lots of guidance was needed. Possible factors for this might be the lack of reading at home and the expectations for teachers giving the information and allowing students to take a back seat in class.”

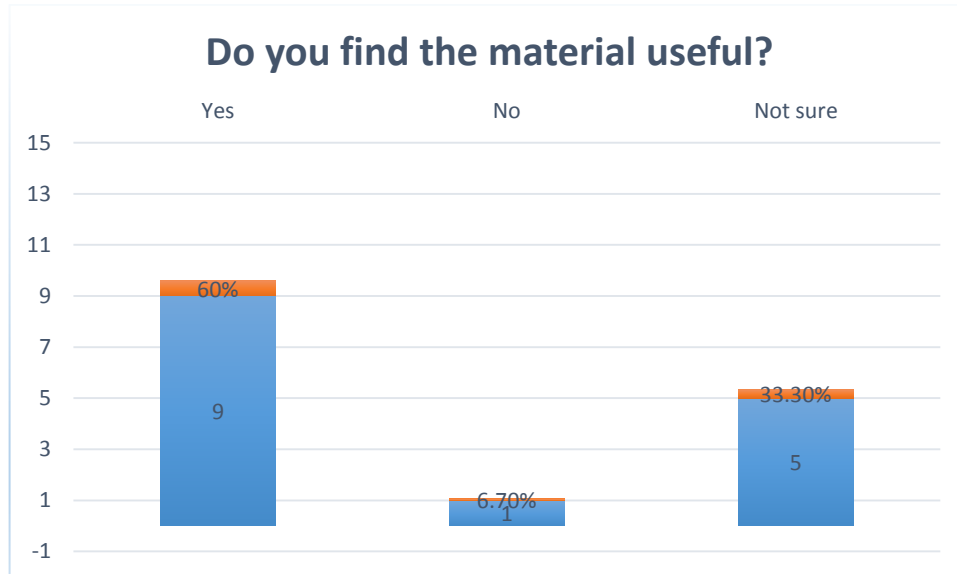
Shor (1992) mentions the above as one of the leading factors of student resistance to critical pedagogical approaches. He states that the traditional schooling system has provided students with little experience in engaging in diverse critical discussion and that makes them feel awkward and uncomfortable.

Thus, students displayed reluctance in leaving the role of listener and observer to take the active role of problem-solver, discussant and contributor (Perumal, 2008). Not many students are willing to take the risk of stepping up and showing their true beliefs and opinions. Honesty requires confidence both in one’s thinking as well as one’s linguistic or rather conversational abilities. This is a lot to ask from students who were on the very first semester of their degree programme and this is the reason why maybe many of them were more willing to engage in discussions after class. My research diary entry from the same day supports this:

“We talked at length about the lack of support for women in the community when they want to achieve great heights as this often comes at the expense of having a family. This sparked an increased interest in the topic and further engagement as students started showing their own opinions. Munira, one of the students who had been quiet in class told me that she informed her parents that she wants to focus on her career and not get married and her mother doesn’t agree.” (Research diary 6/11/2014)

Student resistance was also evidenced by the responses to certain questions in the mid-term survey. When asked if they found the teaching approach and material useful 5 out of the 15 respondents, 33.3 per cent of the total placed themselves in the “not sure” mark.

Figure 12
Intervention Questionnaire - Materials



Some of the qualitative feedback provided in the same questionnaire goes to support the resistance displayed by some students during the critical intervention as well as their inability to see an immediate link between this new learning approach and its benefits. In response to the question regarding their general opinion on the module Student 1 mentioned:

“I think it's not interesting because I don't like the topics that are presented during the class.”

Other students, S 2 and S 3 provided suggestions as to how to make the module a better learning experience for them:

“give more issues about oman social life , In addition we need more varity with the way of explanation”

or

“we want diversify in teaching ways.”

Other student suggestions were a lot more specific hence it was easier for me to take them on board.

S 5: “show more real videos and real stories that talk about our life”

or as S 6 mentioned:

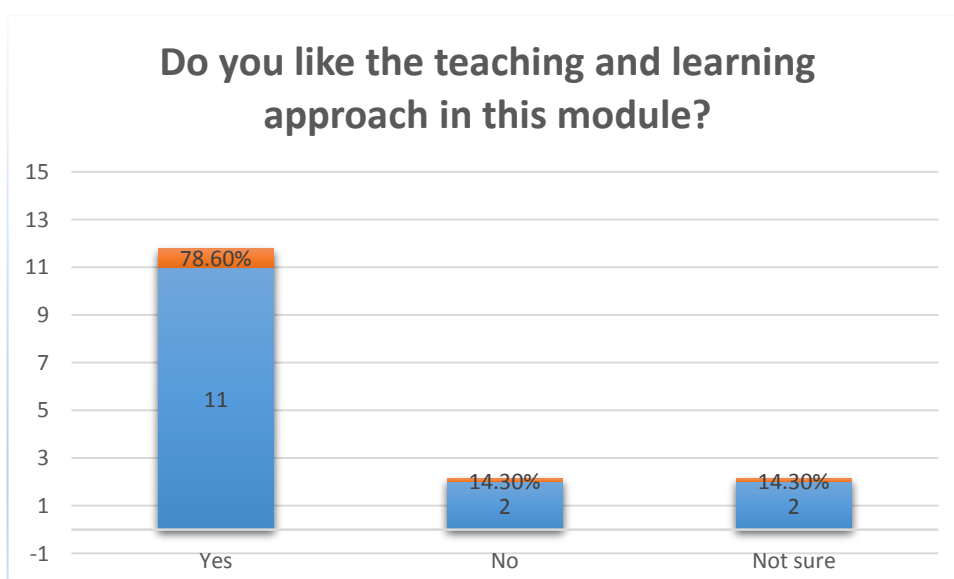
“the only suggested i might say is knowing the topic before the class to make myself ready for it.”

I believe that this survey allowed students to break the resistance that they might initially have had and provided an anonymous forum for their suggestions and opinions. Also it provided me with a better understanding of what they wanted from this journey and made me aware of the fact that, although I could not reach everyone’s interest with this critical approach, I was able to make a difference with the majority of students as can be seen in the data provided in the previous sections. It also allowed me to re-examine my position of authority and my tendency towards teacher-centred power dynamics in the classroom (Cooper & Gause, 2007).

However, the responses to whether they enjoyed the teaching approach and material were leaning more towards the positive rather than the uncertainty side as can be observed in Figure 12:

Figure 13

Intervention Questionnaire - Teaching and Learning Approach



It can also be observed that some students were inconsistent with their responses, on the one hand saying that they enjoyed the overall module but didn't enjoy the module teaching and learning approach.

Another source of student resistance were uncomfortable topics such as the cultural/ethnic groups in Oman discussion which was part of the Multicultural Oman theme. Here students had to confront their own confirmed views directly and this put them in an uncomfortable position. They wanted the discussion on the reasons why members of the ethnic groups in Oman didn't want to intermarry to come to a halt. Asma, Adnana, Fatma, Badryia and Mariya said:

"It is a sensitive topic" after which they started laughing.

Zahra, confronted them, outraged:

"I don't think that if it is a sensitive topic you will laugh actually."

I understood both positions and decided to diffuse the apparent conflict by engaging students in a different task, on a different topic. I was well aware that Zahra was part of a different ethnic group than the other girls but I did not think this was the main source of hostility among them. Zahra was highly confident, outspoken and enthusiastic in class and the others saw her as what Shor calls "the teacher's pet, trying to overshadow the others (Shor, 1992, p.81)". I will explore the theme of classroom dynamics among students in the following section.

Badryia later mentioned to me that:

"Miss about the previous topic, groups in Oman. We wanted to talk but it's a sensitive topic. It's about racism black and white, it's a sensitive topic... We are not feeling bad but we are afraid to hurt someone's feelings in class."

I appreciated this input and I felt that they were entitled to protest and swerve the course in the direction they wanted although I did not believe racism was a sensitive

topic to everyone in the class. Zahra's response to it proves this point. It also gave me an insight into how difficult it was for them to go against the confirmed view about this particular topic and challenge their internalized perspective on this issue, but the fact that they had spoken to me about it after class was, to me, a proof of having engaged with criticality. It was also an evidence of their having understood the emotional impact of such a controversial topic on the classroom participants. This led me to re-think my own positioning of wanting to push the critical agenda and engage in normalizing, teacherly acts (Perumal, 2008) or let the student silence function as a restorative force (Bista, 2012) in which students could ponder on their beliefs and especially their feelings on this classroom event. The display of laughter was a form of self-defence and a diversion from the sternness of the topic. It also had the role of belittling it and pushing it aside in the conversation. Thus, I did not think I should pursue this discussion any further hence I did not persist and went further with the new topic.

b. Student silence

Another form of student resistance was student silence and lack of participation in the discussion. Here are a few examples of classroom activities where I experienced this. When asking them to google other articles related to the one about the Saudi Arabia school fire incident and asked them how they were related there was a long silence which invited a lot more elicitation from my side after which Adnana answered:

“Long silence....

Adnana: the websites are totally different from the title. Some of them are news.”

Another instance was while discussing the homework for the same topic. I had asked students to tell me what would they do if they were the relatives of one of the girls that perished in the school fire in Saudi Arabia. I presented them with some options: a) write a letter to the International press and I asked to see the letter b) write a petition to the government of Saudi Arabia and present it to their classmates c) organize an awareness campaign and provide me with the elements of this. Only Zahra out of all 17 students presented me with the letter to the international press. She explained why she had chosen this option:

“By sending letters or papers. Because if I joined the human rights in my country, I mean in Saudi Arabia I don't think I will do much. Talking to the international press, that I think will make the people know about our case and maybe they can press the government to do something.”

When I asked other students to come forward there was a long silence again:

“I: Next. Who else?”

Long silence...

I: No one else? No one else wrote anything?”

After trying to probe into the source of this withdrawal Adnana mentioned the topic as being a little bit boring as it was not related to Oman (see section 5.2.2.5.a).

During the start-off of the focus group I was again faced with a wall of silence. I asked them what how their experience with this module had been so far:

“I: How was your experience with the module so far?”

Students: silence

I: How was your experience?”

Badryia: It was a wonderful experience something unique or different.

Adnana: Couse we were discussing and there were many topics. Hard topics.”

In the above excerpt, silence is different than the other two instances where it was more about what Shor (1992) mentioned earlier as inexperience with critical diversity or inability to respond to the demanding tasks of such an approach. Here it was more of a display of solidarity and waiting for the other students to step forward and break the silence. This shows how silence can translate into resistance when students abstain from engaging in a public presence that poses many risks (Perumal, 2008), and how students who are willing to take risks can motivate others to do the same. This pointed me to another aspect of the classroom interaction which proved to be a valuable insight into the factors that hindered or contributed to the critical intervention.

- c. Students' low language proficiency, lack of reading habits and experience with critical pedagogy

Student's low language proficiency and lack of reading habits is a possible hindrance to critical pedagogy, according to the external observer, one of my fellow teachers, Aisha. Aisha observed my class on two occasions during the intervention stage. When asked why she thought students did not show more engagement with the topics and activities, after the first class she attended, she provided the following reasons. The words in capitals represent her emphasis:

"Maybe it's lack of practice, what I feel here is that they don't read much. They need to read a lot. I think we should inculcate this habit of reading newspaper articles or have this as part of the regular curriculum. They would at least have the general idea even if they don't understand certain words. So that would help them. Because our students **THEY DON'T READ, THEY DON'T WRITE**. They're not interested in what is happening in the world. I think we should all have this current issues, have one class in a week where they all just read newspapers and discuss"

She also mentions the students' low language proficiency as constituting a barrier to their engagement in class discussion.

"I thought that although the topic was interesting I felt that their level they have this language barrier. The vocabulary that was used in the article I think they were finding it difficult to comprehend. I know you helped them, and you guided them. You tried to give some clues and hints but again especially the main idea. They couldn't understand certain words I felt the vocabulary was challenging. But otherwise the topic was interesting and they were all involved in that... I felt they could have done far better if the article had been simplified."

The topic exploited during the lesson she had observed was related to an incident that had happened in Saudi Arabia which led to the expulsion from the country of an Emirati male for being too handsome (references available in Appendix L). The reaction of an all- female class when showing pictures of the victimized fellow were naturally enthusiastic however they faced challenges when looking at the main ideas and points of view of various articles on the topic. The articles were mostly

internet-based pieces such as blog comments and forum posts as the news went viral on the web. It is true that initially students struggled with the articles, however, in the second part of the lesson, they were able to share critical views on the topic. When I asked why he had been deported from Saudi Arabia, students replied:

“Because he was very handsome and women fell for him.”

Also when I asked the students if the article assigned to their respective team was for or against him they said:

“Hanan: Against him. As a human he should have the right to be where he wants to be.

Badriya: B: The article is not against him and is not in his favour.”

When I asked if they thought this incident would help this man’s modelling career

Badriya replied:

“Yes because people will ask why he was deported and made people love him more.”

Aisha’s earlier analysis was fair as I had myself perceived the students’ language abilities as being a hindrance to their engagement with the module. I asked Zahra whether she felt this was the case or not:

“I agree with that but what I don't agree, is they can actually fix these problems by themselves. Actually before we start this semester we have big meeting with the HOF and they said something don't be lazy you have to build myself by yourself. Don't expect your teachers to build your knowledge or to learn you. I mean it's different now from the school. I feel they didn't understand that yet. I mean you can ask your teachers to help you but you cannot expect them to do everything.”

Thus Zahra’s quote attributes lack of engagement to lack of interest and drive rather than low language ability. As mentioned before, I felt this lack of drive is due to an instrumental conceptualization of the teaching and learning process hence a lack of experience with critical pedagogy. Zahra supported this view:

“Actually this topic that they mentioned conversation versus grammar it is not an easy. Really. But they just look at the first layer of the topics. That's why they thought it is easy. But even in the debate it was yes, I disagree, but they didn't give you facts to prove their points.”

Here, she had referred to one of Adnana's comments saying that in another class the topic of the argumentative essay was more interesting as it posed the question what was more important conversation or grammar. The topic for the argumentative essay in my class had been “how would the world be if all women were leaders” which Adnana had deemed uninteresting.

Zahra had also mentioned earlier the negative side of this topics and that they are really deep which students, in her view, couldn't cope with. She also mentioned that she was somehow advantaged during the course as she used to read (see current section, point d).

B. Changes implemented in Cycle 2 as a result of the challenges faced in Cycle 1 of the Intervention

5.2.2.4. Findings from Focus Group 3, Survey 3, Zahra's interview and second external observation

a. Changes in the topics and diversion from the initial plan

The challenges as well as the suggestions listed above made me realize that not only familiarity with the topics, but also with the teaching strategies was important for students. I thus decided to introduce more team work into the classroom activities and also word games and quizzes as this was essentially a vocabulary building module. I knew the majority of students were interested in design whether it was fashion design or interior design hence I decided to bring this topic to the classroom. After showing them pictures, I asked them to identify the different design styles and asked them which ones they liked best (picture references are available in Appendix L). Then I asked them to think how the college could be re-designed. Adnana and Fatma were the most keen to provide suggestions in this exercise:

“I would change everything in it. The tables, colours, everything. I would put something simple. No need for all these huge tables. Like College X. College X is modern. Everything is new.”

Then she continued speaking about the room we were in:

“I don't like this room because the computer faces the wall because we want to focus with the teacher... The first thing I want to change the colours, the door colours. It's like a hospital miss.”

Adnana identified a new redesigned college as a source of motivation for many students:

“Because they would like the buildings. It will motivate them. They will come every day maybe to the college.”

I asked them to take on board a little project as homework meaning they should work in groups on a drawing or a picture of their re-designed classroom. I gave them two weeks to complete the project and told them that the best ones will be taken to the dean as the college was currently developing different design plans for a new building. Unfortunately, none of the teams followed through with this project. Nevertheless, I felt this lesson was a breakthrough in the critical intervention development as one of the students who had experienced resistance, Adnana, was able to open up and contribute to the class. In addition, in the final post-intervention survey, one of the students, S 3 mentioned the topic of design being one her favourites.

b. Interview with Zahra and insight into classroom dynamics

In order to further my understanding of student resistance and student silence, I thought it was important to gain more first-hand insight into classroom dynamics hence I decided to include two more data collection instruments in the intervention, namely an interview with Zahra who had been the most enthusiastic contributor and active agent in shaping the critical discourse in the classroom and Adnana who had displayed resistance in various instances. Zahra willingly provided me with the interview however Adnana kept postponing the event until I finally decided that this

represented a source of pressure for her which would lead her to further resistance and absenteeism from the class hence I gave up the prospect.

Zahra provided me with some interesting insights in the classroom dynamic. I had noticed during class several instances where Zahra was seen as the “teacher’s pet” out to outshine the others through her responses. She mentioned this to me in the interview:

“I don't have a freaky personality. I'm just a normal girl who really wish to have another colleagues/mates to discuss with her because truly I have different views about many things rather than them. Why they didn't discuss with me. They didn't feel this is something that is related to them? But we are still in the same society in the same class. So actually I don't know.”

When I asked why some students were withdrawing from the discussion she mentioned:

“They sit quietly because they didn't think this is related for them. We have this even in Arabic I mean. It happens in Arabic also and the other modules I mean when teachers ask us to do something, or do this or do that they just write it or read it as fast as they can and that's it. It stopped there... You have to get these skills now you will not have a chance at the future to get all these skills. And the discussions it's one of them I mean.”

I asked her whether she thought that implementing this approach in different modules at the same time would help break this resistance and she said:

“Yes I believe that. But what I find the negative sides in these topics, it's really deep. You asked a questions wch it's need to think before you said your opinion. I mean it touch you in inside but what I feel is that my classmates they didn't get how deep is this question [...] I feel I am the only one who wants to discuss. I tried sometimes just to didn't say anything because I feel the others maybe I take the chance from them so maybe it's better if I stay quiet but I feel if I stay quiet no one will say anything. “

Her quote shows the classroom dynamic that I experienced in a few instances which brought me to the realization that students lacked, as mentioned earlier, the necessary experience and the necessary language skills or prior reading to tackle some of the critical tasks successfully. Some students were stuck in what Shor calls the “Siberian syndrome” (Shor, 1992) where they had internalized a certain perspective on the teaching and learning process where the teacher is responsible for the choices made in the classroom as well as the success or failure of the educational endeavour. The depth of thought Zahra talked about earlier, however, does not only pose a challenge to students due to their teaching and learning conceptualizations but also due to their lack of confidence in their language abilities and their lack of exposure to reading on the respective issues. As Kincheloe (Kincheloe, 2008) says, they see knowledge instrumentally, as a means to an end which is often directly related getting a job and making money. English classes are particularly the victim of this kind of thinking as they are not optional but come from the imposition of English as a Medium of Instruction policy which is dominant in higher education in Oman (see chapter II for more details).

This is where Zahra admittedly distances herself from the class. When I asked her why she had found the module interesting she told me:

“Because I used to read. I mean it's my hobby.”

However, she mentioned that before this module, she used to read things that confirmed her perspectives rather than challenged them:

“So in this module I feel there was a lack of knowing these issues which I know now because always when I read something I choose to read about I choose something in my sides. This module it forced me from the beginning to think how the other think and why we should actually really understand the others.”

d. A jigsaw reading approach that would allow more student choice

Another strategy that I decided to adopt in order to generate more student engagement was jigsaw reading where students would choose to read one of the four articles provided, sourced from current issues of Omani newspapers in English. First, I divided students into groups and provided them with articles published by Times of Oman on different societal issues: adoption, organ transplant, polygamous

marriages and Omanisation (see Appendix L for references). I provided several copies of each article and allowed each group leader to choose one article in consultation with her team after which I asked each team to read the article and provide the main idea. I also asked them to think about why they had chosen the respective article. I asked Aisha to attend and observe this class. The lesson was successful on multiple levels: students were able to discuss, make choices and provide opinions and examples. Aisha's testimony corroborates this:

"They were all involved. I could see they were all discussing, they were sharing their thoughts. It went on very well compared to the previous lesson I *attended*."

When I asked her what she thought as being the reason for this difference she said: "The articles. Could be because they were exposed to this type of teaching for longer time. Because they knew about the main idea they knew about the questions you wrote on the board: why do you think this was presented in the newspaper? They are used to this kind of questioning it seems... At the end of the lesson you asked what other issues should have been published and they were able to *answer*. They were opening up I felt."

Aisha's testimony brought two very important points: the material used raised an interest but also the students' possessed the right tools to engage with the material and the tasks as a result of exposure to critical questioning.

Another possible reason for this change could be the fact that students had a choice in reading whichever article they found most appealing to them and their group members. I felt that, just like in the case of the design topic, students' opportunity to choose, to make their voice heard had a direct impact on their engagement with the critical intervention.

I also felt that the students' testimonies demonstrate an ability to identify critical issues in their society and discuss them with their peers. At the end of the class I asked students to think about other issues in their society which merit newspaper coverage. Here are some of their answers:

Rawyia mentioned a very important and highly debated social issue which however, had not received any media attention due to cultural taboos:

Rawyia: Also miss another issue, about marriage. We have in Islam something called mahar. You should reduce it because some of the people find it difficult because some of the families say we want 6000 or 7000. This is difficult for a person who don't have this.

In addition to this issue and reflecting the prior extensive classroom discussions on women's issues in the region and the world, Badriya added:

Badriya: I think women should be given more freedom. It is true things are changing but they need to change more. In some places villages and all, women don't have so much freedom, they don't even allow them to work still until now. This problem should be talked about.

Rawyia added a similar issue:

Rawyia: There is another issue which is job opportunities. Job opportunities is for men more than women. Yesterday I read one article in one newspaper in Arabic. One girl mentioned that in Batinah there are only 100 job opportunities. Out of the 100, 60 or 70 only for boys. In Wusta region there are 40 job opportunities, 30 for men, 10 only for women. I think this is not fair."

The issues mentioned above are all critical issues that can be discussed and exploited in another critical literacy course and I was really impressed with their ability not only to identify these issues but to look at how talking about them or covering them in the media could bring about potential change in the society.

As Zahra put it:

"Actually the first step for change is that they wrote that and mentioned it in the newspaper that means there is a problem and there is an issue and that became the awareness of the people who know about these issues. Maybe it takes time but I believe it will change because now we live in a small village (global village)"

I believe that the above quotes corroborate Aisha's impression that students had

gained experience in tackling demanding and diverse critical perspectives and a general critical outlook on their individual and community lives. In the post-intervention stage students commented on the difference this course made in their outlook.

Teaching and learning are volatile processes hence some classes and some materials may have had more impact than others not necessarily due to the factors mentioned earlier but also due to possible extraneous factors such as assignment pressure from other courses, personal life interference, momentum and last but not least the time and place of the class. However, these factors are beyond the scope of this paper as they represent the focus of a lengthier longitudinal study.

5.2.2.5. Insights gained from the challenges faced in Cycle 1 and the changes implemented in Cycle 2

a. The importance of student choice

Student choice is closely related to the themes of student resistance and student silence that I encountered during Cycle 1 of the critical intervention. The lessons learned from resistance and silence allowed me to problematize my own identity as teacher and the democratic nature of the critical intervention. The catalytic value of these challenges lies in the insight that critical pedagogy is not inherently free of imposition and that student choice does not occur naturally but has to be given the space and the means to become and transform. Student choice is the embodiment of student voice expressed either through a discourse of conformity resistance or the absence of either.

Kumaravadivelu's principle of possibility and Mochinski's principle of mutuality which lie at the middle level of this study's critical framework pyramid (see Figure 2, p28) underpin the above insights. Teachers' and students' subjective identities are constantly re-constructed and transformed in the course of classroom events while student choice reflects the crossroads of the critical journey.

b. Experience in dealing with criticality

When I asked Aisha whether, from her point of view as a teacher, she deemed the critical approach useful or futile she said:

“Yes, it is useful. It is exposure and even it will help them connect like if you give an article which is not even related to their country but they at least can connect and

respond well. Maybe they would improve their vocabulary. They would try to find more.”

The concept of exposure that Aisha talks about or experience with criticality is important due to its relation to the principles of access/diversity/domination and design which define this intervention as students’ ability to problematize, deconstruct and reconstruct discourses is an ability that can be developed with time. The critical awareness and the change in perspective themes discussed above do not only show an ability, a skill of deconstructing and reconstructing a particular discourse but also a desire to engage emotionally with these processes and allow their transformatory effects to unfold. Zahra’s interview insights do not only reflect the importance of exposure but also the willingness, the agency of the students in engaging with the critical intervention.

c. Emotional classroom dynamics as an unexpected finding

When developing the critical framework for this intervention, my focus was on the main tenets of critical pedagogy and critical literacy as well as post-method pedagogical principles and strategies. However, I found myself into uncharted territory when dealing with the emotional collective dynamics of the classroom and by emotional collective dynamics I mean my own emotions as well as those of my students.

According to Ahmed (2004a in Benesch, 2014), emotions are not unintentional but they are about something, they involve a direction towards objects, “such that those objects become sticky” (Ahmed, 2010, p.44 in Benesch, 2014, p.106). Thus, objects such as the hijab, women in the workplace, female beauty and skin fairness were a few of the sticky objects in the present study. They generated a range of emotions such as hate (Zahra’s testimony above in section d.i.), indignation (Badryia’s testimony in the afore mentioned section), sadness, excitement which eventually translated into compassion and solidarity (Munira’s testimony in section d.ii). These are discussed at length in chapter VI, section 6.2.1. Although the nature of these “sticky objects”, generative themes (see Chapter III, section 3.2.3.1.) lends itself to an emotional response, the emotional intensity and complexity that resulted from examining these range of issues and their relationship to their sticky objects was a surprise for the students as well as myself. One of the most relevant examples, was the design theme as an unexpected sticky object which generated a negative emotional response towards the students’ learning facilities (see section 5.2.2.4.a.)

The implications of this finding are discussed further in chapter VI, section 6.2. Another aspect of this surprise was the “dynamics of affectivity” (Albert-Chrane, 2005, p. 492 in Benesch, 2014, p.96) that unfolded in the classroom in the various instances where students were displaying the emotions that they experienced towards various topics. One of these instances is described in section 5.2.2.3.a. where Badryia stated that inter-ethnic marriages in Oman was a sensitive topic and she didn’t feel free to discuss it in class. The fact that she expressed this and did not just settle for silence represented “an instance of movement” (Benesch, 2014, p.97), passing through a place that neither rejects her beliefs nor opens up to new ones. This movement is proof of an emotional dynamic that moves towards compassion and solidarity, ultimately paving the way for a change in perspective. Lastly but not in the least important, I realized that as the intervention was progressing I had grown accustomed to regarding my students’ work as well as our day-to-day classroom interactions through the lens of affect where meaning-making could be “joyful, sorrowful, conflictual or insightful” (Grey, 2009, p.124 in Benesch, 2014, p.99). This created an environment of friendship and excitement evidenced in a student’s testimony in Survey 2 (section 5.2.2.1.d.ii.) where she mentioned that she gets out of the class feeling different and thinking about each word and excited at what would come up in the next class.

All of these emotions had a transformative effect on both students and myself opening up new perspectives on the topics discussed and ultimately providing an alternative way of acquiring language skills. This experience allowed students to have a say in how they wanted to learn, to display their agency and become subjects of their learning in an ongoing process of deconstructing and reconstructing normative discourses (Benesch, 2014). This is further discussed in chapter VI, section 6.1.2.2. and section 6.2.

5.2.3. Post-intervention stage findings

Figure 13 shows the data sources quoted to support the post-intervention stage findings discussed in the following sub-sections.

Figure 14

Post-intervention stage data sources quoted in section 5.2.3.	
Students who took part in Survey 3	Students who took the final test
S1	T1
S2	T3
S3	T5
S10	
S5	
S6	
S7	
S8	
S4	

5.2.3.1. Findings from Focus Group 4, Survey 4 and the Final Test

The post-intervention stage consisted of a final focus group, a survey and a final test (see Appendix H for final test copy). Participation in the final test was limited due to low class attendance. The same can be stated in the case of the final survey as it recorded a lower response rate, 11 compared to 15 in the mid-term survey. The low attendance in the final week of the course is a common phenomenon among graduate students at this institution as they take on the pressure of the upcoming examination sessions.

The survey consisted of a number of questions regarding their experience with the module, what they had learnt, what they liked best. A full copy of the survey is available in the Appendix J section of this thesis.

a. Students' views on the critical intervention and factors that aided the development of the critical intervention

i. Language skills development and enjoyability of the experience

The first question on the survey referred to their general experience with the module. Here is some of the feedback the students provided:

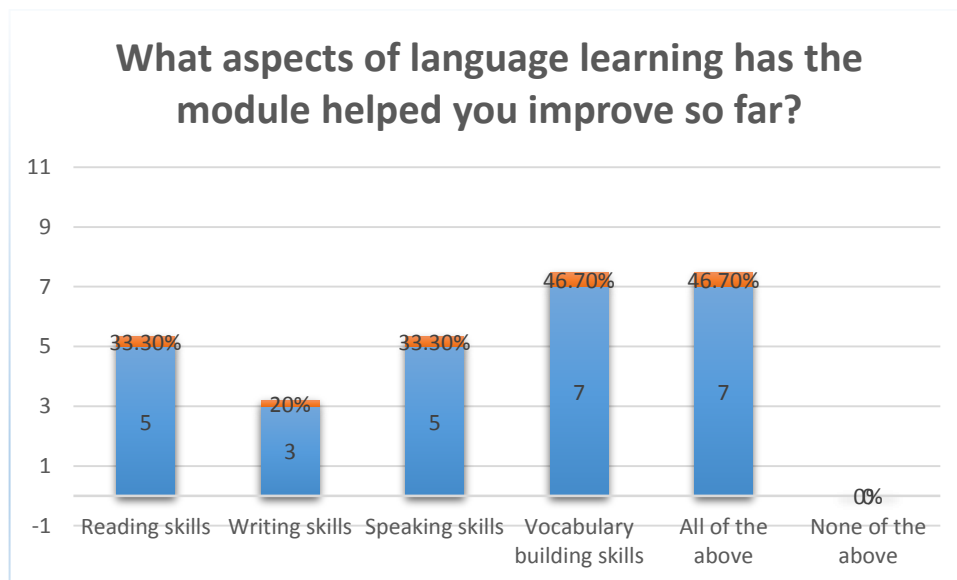
S 10:“knowing new academic words and the writing style of the academic argumentative essays. also, I learn more about listening, arguing skills and more about the issues that happened in the out side world.”

S 2 also mentioned having experienced an improvement in all the four language skills:

“I improved my reading, speaking and writing skills and now i am able to speake about current problems and situation”.

The responses presented in Figure 13 below support these statements:

Figure 15
Post-Intervention Questionnaire - Aspects of Language Learning



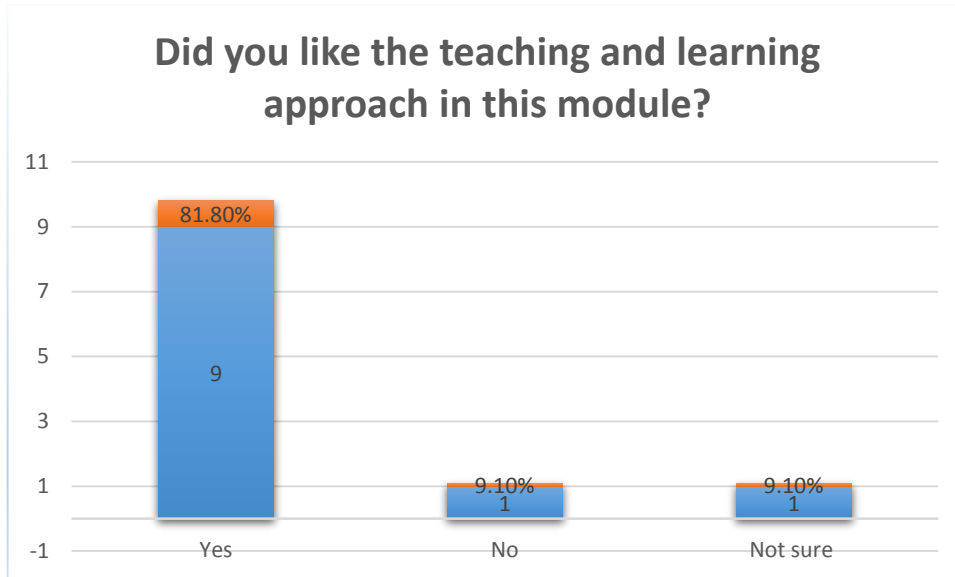
Another student, S 7 spoke about the enjoyability aspect of the module:

“it was so interesting and I enjoyed every minute of it; it was both fun, useful, and educational.”

The responses presented in Figure 14 corroborate this statement:

Figure 16

Post-Intervention Questionnaire -Teaching and Learning Approach



As can be seen here, 9 out of the 10 respondents admitted having enjoyed the teaching and learning approach. I believe this aspect of enjoyment contributed to the emotional attachment they experienced mentioned in the above open-ended question response.

a. Bridging the classroom-society divide

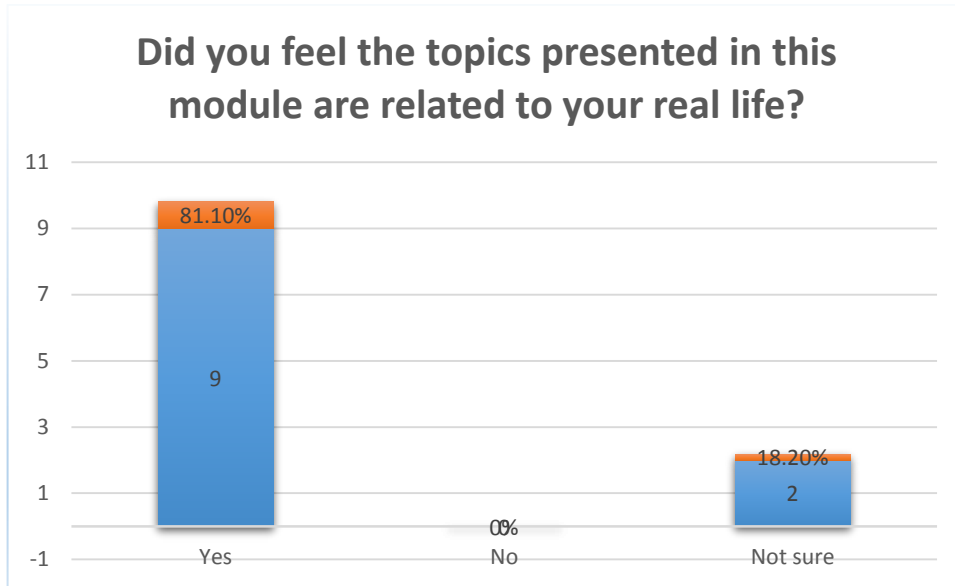
The overarching theme of the feedback they provided was that the module presented them with everyday societal issues which, they felt, were directly related to their lives and their experiences:

S 10: "Because the issues were somehow close and related to our society. Moreover, the lecturer did her best to make us realizing what she talk about and to understand the purpose of what she give us to argue about."

S 2:"because all the topics we studied are truly happening in our lives"

As seen in Figure 15, the majority of students admitted to seeing the relevance of topics to their real lives.

Figure 17
Post-Intervention Questionnaire - Topics



- a. Critical awareness development
 - i. Awareness of various perspectives

Other students mentioned an increased awareness about world issues:

S 5: “knowing the issues that are happening in world, speaking skills and learned many new words”

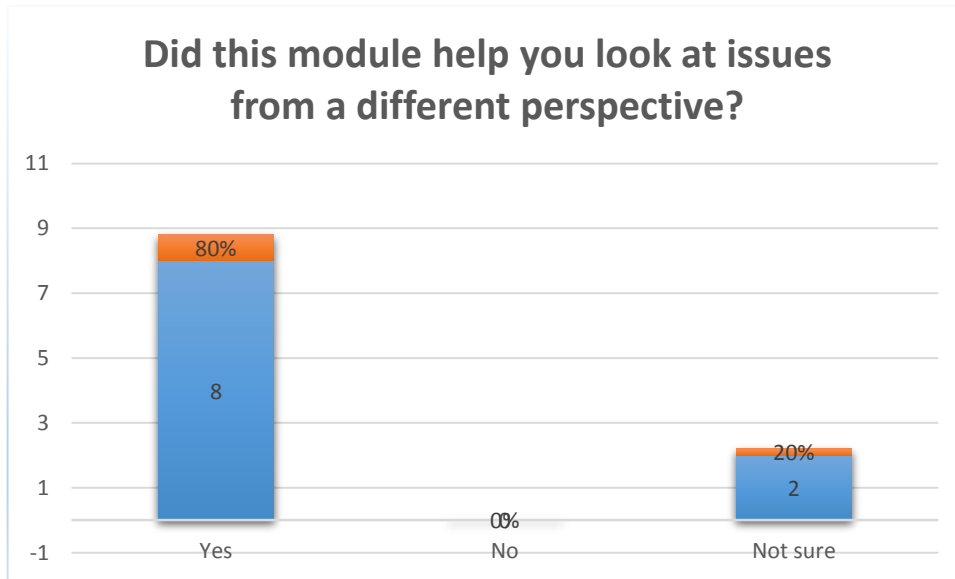
S 6: “in my opinion I see it was a good module, and I had more knowledge about world issues.”

Other students mentioned an increased awareness of critical perspectives and their increased ability to deal with this diversity of opinions and the communication problems it entails:

S 7: “I knew the problems and issues that are happening in the world and I learned how to solve it. Also it gave us experience about solving the problems.”

The results in Figure 16 tallied from the responses to scale type questions, corroborate the qualitative feedback provided:

Figure 18
Post-intervention Questionnaire - Difference in Perspective



Thus, 80 percent of responses showed that the module had a positive impact on students' learning and enhanced their awareness of critical perspectives.

ii. Adopting a different perspective

Student 9 mentioned having experienced a shift in perspective, and made reference to her having developed a more tolerant, compassionate view towards different issues:

“It was such amazing experience that I had in this semester ,from this module I learned that not to judge for some issue in my opinion, and give us confident to speak and represent my thought and ideas in front of my class mate .”

S 8 mentions classroom interaction as a source of knowledge (Kincheloe, 2008), where the learning process is designed and re-designed collaboratively by peers.

“This module was quite interesting because it's includes many of social issue that we are facing every day. Also the class mate give different opinions with different perspectives which give us whole view about that issue that we discuss.”

One student made direct reference to an increased sense of critical awareness through exposure to different perspectives:

S 10: "because it makes me feel it first then think about it from different angles then talk and that's what real learning is about"

iii. Student resistance vs. student emotional attachment to the topics discussed

Similar to the mid-term survey results, in the final survey there was one student who overtly showed her resistance to the critical intervention:

"I think it's not that much useful for us, because the topic which have been discussed was not good and helpful for us and actually I didn't like it."

However most students mentioned the topics and the lessons they liked best:

S 4: "all topics are good for me but I like more the topic that related to women because it means me and I should know about issues and problems that face her."

Another student, S7 mentioned:

"the topic I like most was "acid attack and design, there is no topic I didn't like"

One of the students mentioned one topic that she disliked as well:

"The most topic that I like is " beauty" because it show us that the beauty is not the importance thing in our life if there is no morals. but the most topic I don't like it was about the driving I thing it is not suitable for us and it was boring."

iv. Assessing students' critical literacy skills

The final test was completed only by 7 out of 17 students due to low attendance in the final week of the course. The article featured in the test was about a Saudi female activist who had been jailed for driving. What is worth noting about the student responses is the fact that, when asked whether they felt this issue was related to them, they invariably answered no as they felt that in Oman women are

given their rights and they condemned the Saudi policy (there isn't an actual law that states this) that doesn't allow women to drive. A copy of the final test is available in the Appendix H. The tests were anonymous hence the quotes are presented by the number marked on each test after collecting them from the students.

The student who took test number 7 acknowledged the complexity of the problem and the unfair treatment of women in Saudi Arabia:

"I think this issue is very complicated because the women has the right to drive if she hasn't someone who can help her or to drive her actually. On the other hand the Saudi governement prevent them not to drive with unknown reasons. In my opinion I think the issue is completely against the women in Saudi Arabia and it's not fair."

T 3 provided a general critical opinion of the Saudi society:

"I think women in Saudi Arabia should have that right. But men are the masters there. So women cannot do anything about that because they are already prevented from all their rights...Here in Oman we have all the rights, alhamdolillah."

These responses show how students reflect on this problem-posing question by adopting a critical stance towards what they deem a blatant infringement of women's rights.

Their answers in the final test shows their confidence in engaging in a critical analysis of a social issue. When looking back at the results of the diagnostic test, I could see that the answers were rather comprehension oriented and only few of them were analytical. I felt this changed during the progress and the final test as the students had gained more experience with critical questionning and as they had, admittedly, learnt how to see things from a different perspective. The responses in the final test correlate with their responses in the final survey and the focus group. The student participants had not only gained a deeper insight into multiple perspectives on different world issues but also an increased confidence in their

language abilities to express those insights. Their responses collected with all these three instruments also showed a level of emotional maturity and attachment to the subject matter. This was complemented by their ability to explain why such an attachment exists as well as their ability to display compassion for the plight of others.

5.2.3.2. Concluding comments on the critical intervention

The findings presented in this chapter show that the students who took part in this intervention self-reported an increased awareness of different perspectives on various issues related to their lived realities while others reported a shift in the perspectives they had prior to the intervention, a deeper understanding of other views. The majority of students self-reported an increase in all the four major English language skills as a result of the intervention. Two surprising findings that resulted from this study are discussed below.

a. Resistance as a form of curriculum negotiation

Resistance in the context of this study although perceived as a challenge had a defining role in the changes made in the Cycle 2 of the intervention. It was a catalyst for engaging in adopting a more negotiated curriculum and it illuminated the fact that critical pedagogy is not inherently democratic and transformatory (this is further discussed in chapter VI, section 6.3.).

b. Emotional attachment and its role in the intervention

As mentioned above, although some form of affect was expected when dealing with such “hard topics” as one of the students called them, the emotional dynamic that was created and its catalytic value in the conscientization process was an unexpected finding. Its transformatory power, for both myself as a teacher/researcher/participant as well as the student participants, lies in the empathic provocation (see chapter VI, section 6.2.1.) generated by the themes discussed, the stickiness of the objects analysed but also in the environment of friendship, collaboration and excitement created among participants. This resulted in feelings of compassion and solidarity which paved the way for a higher level of awareness which was, ultimately, the goal of this intervention.

5.3. Summary

In this chapter I have presented a thematic analysis of the data collected through multiple data sources such as interviews, focus groups, class recordings, surveys, critical literacy tests during the three intervention stages. I have also presented the participants views on the intervention as well as examined the factors that encouraged the development of the critical intervention. Furthermore, I have examined the challenges faced during the development of the critical intervention. The chapter presented an analysis of data which indicated a perceived impact on the development of critical awareness in the student participants. In the following chapter I will discuss the data in relation to my readings, the context of the study and its impact on the participants.

6. CHAPTER VI: DISCUSSION OF KEY FINDINGS

In the previous chapters I have attempted to provide an insight into the possibilities critical literacy offers in English language education and how it may lead to both teacher and student empowerment through a development of critical awareness. In the present chapter I will discuss the findings of the study in light of my readings and my experience with critical literacy in an attempt to illuminate key aspects that could reveal the possibilities of this pedagogy and inform future studies in the field, particularly in similar contexts. I will discuss the students' views and attitudes towards the critical intervention as well as the factors that contributed to its development and the factors that limited its implementation. Most importantly, I will discuss the transformative aspects that were highlighted by the students as a result of their participation in the critical intervention and the shift in perspective some of them experienced. I will also focus on the transformatory aspect of resistance experienced by some students which resulted in a creative retailoring of the course and an increased emphasis on negotiated curriculum and provided a platform for student voice.

6.1. Discussion of key findings

6.1.1. Laying the ground- readiness for the critical intervention

6.1.1.1. The teacher-participants

This intervention started as a project where possibilities of development of a critical awareness were envisaged and sought. It all started from a desire to improve upon an existing course that had witnessed a turnover of teachers who did not get the chance to develop a particular framework, philosophy or materials for it. However, this apparent limitation represented an opportunity for me to introduce the possibility, "the dream" (Simon, 1987, p.371) of something that could engage both myself and my students into an exploration of our world and of ourselves in relation to it. When presenting this possibility project to teachers and students who had taught or attended this module previously, their visions of the future were, not surprisingly, quite different. Although the teachers who had taught it acknowledged the high language ability level of the students, they didn't envisage the possibility of their going beyond the surface level of knowledge (see chapter V, section 5.2.1.)

The reasons for this lay in their belief that students would not be able to cope with the demands of a critical curriculum mainly due to poor reading habits and a general preference, particularly in secondary education, for rote learning as well as an inability to question authority (Al Issa, 2007; Al Issa & Al Balushi, 2012). A study by Alazzi and Chiodo (2004 in Samaranghe, 2014) on school kids in Jordan revealed that 80% had not been exposed to critically-oriented skills in their curriculum due to an overemphasis on the prescribed curriculum on the part of the teachers and a learner focus on grades. Similarly, in Oman, Al Issa (2007) citing Al Balushi (1994) reveals the highly passive role of students in secondary education and a formal teaching methodology excessively focused on memorization of facts. Al Issa (2007) also reveals teachers' lack of freedom to develop their own materials and implement learner-focused teaching strategies as being detrimental to the stimulation of student interest in the EFL classroom hence resulting in lack of motivation for learning English. This apparent lack of questioning present in the Omani educational context is seen by the teachers interviewed in the pre-intervention stage as a deterrent to the implementation of a critical curriculum. Nevertheless, when teachers were presented with the possibility of critical pedagogical applications such as materials, topics and techniques they showed openness towards them and emphasized the centrality of the learner in the education process (see chapter V, section 5.2.1.2). In the same vein, Al Issa (2007) pointed out the importance of syllabus flexibility and teacher freedom and advocates a progressive/humanist model of education as the way to promote critical and analytical thinking among Omani students (see chapter II, section 2.1.4).

6.1.1.2. The student-participants

The students interviewed prior the intervention, students who had taken the course in the previous semester, were able to suggest some generative themes (Shor, 1992) that were related to the students' lived realities but also, interestingly, themes that would appeal to their humanity and their shared beliefs. Thus, students presented me with perceptions of social justice which are universally shared (Wallace, 2003).

The student participants' answers on the diagnostic test administered in the pre-intervention stage corroborated these views. Students were able to express critical opinions when dealing with an issue that was directly related to them, such as, for example, the issue of the right to wear hijab while taking part in sports competitions.

Students demonstrated awareness of concepts such as “women’s rights”, “Muslim women’s identity” in relation with the wearing of the hijab. This increased awareness was, in my view, the direct result of the participants’, all Muslim hijab wearing females, having perceived the issue as being personal or directly related to their identities, hence it served to nourish a confirmed view widely held by Muslim women that they are persecuted due to their public display of religious faith such as the wearing of the hijab. I, on the other hand, challenged what I perceived to be a taken-for-granted perception of reality, hence introduced a debate inspired by an activity from Janks (2014) where the topic was: religious symbols should not be allowed in schools. The students who were for the topic admitted that they had experienced a change of perspective hence they perceived the issue of the hijab and religious symbols as more multi-faceted and more open to interpretation. Thus, I followed the argument developed by Reagan & Osborn (2002) whereby critical curriculum development in the foreign language classroom should start from the context of the world and the self in relation to the world through problem-posing which “involves constructing units around questions, units, concerns, puzzles” (p.73) related to language and its contexts. I thus used resources that were embedded in the students’ world and their conceptualization of their own expression of identity. This was the motivation behind the choice of topic for the diagnostic test where the issue of the hijab’s legitimacy or illegitimacy in professional sports was under question (see Appendix E for a copy of the test). Similarly, Williams (Williams, 2008) in her study which attempted to re-make Freire’s cultural circles used hip-hop culture as a generative topic for critical interrogation as it was part of the collective discourse, hence the collective identity of the United States youth. Relatedly, in Oman, a recent study by Busaidi & Sultana (2015) reports the benefits of having introduced an English translation of an Arabic short story, *The Doum Tree of Wadi Hamid*, in stimulating affective involvement hence promotion of critical thinking skills. The study reports how learners were able to relate the main themes of the story to their daily lives.

It is important to mention here that, although in the beginning, I intended, in a rather teacherly manner, or more research-design tuned mind-set, the development of critical intervention to be more linear, it turned out to be, as I shall discuss further, a more organic, exploratory experience where the participants expressed their voice

through the available platforms: discussions, surveys, as well as through their silence and resistance.

6.1.2. Students' voices – between silence and provocation

While students did not challenge or pose any resistance to the proposed critical project, I considered their quiet acceptance as part of their expressing their views on the intervention. Their silence was part of having their voice heard hence, the initial critical project, changed over time and the whole critical endeavour became much more fluid and organic with themes deriving from one another like in the case of the hijab issue proposed in the diagnostic test which led to a series of lessons on the topic. The same topic however led to various forms of resistance, such as silence or outright contestation of the importance of the theme. The students' responses were filled with emotion and a sense of "empathic provocation" (Mills, 2002, p. 123).

Through empathic provocation students are challenged to examine and justify their personal values paving the way to an increased awareness of their positioning and perspectives vis-à-vis various world issues. Empathic provocation can produce feelings of shock, awe, anger, frustration, pity and shame. Although these feelings are traditionally viewed as negative attitudes that impede the teaching and learning process (Mills, 2002), they result in an emotional involvement with the issues presented hence generate an increased sense of awareness and a desire to take possible actions toward change. Mill's study (2002) starts from the contention that in order for students to think critically, they must be provoked to think. His role-play exercise during an ethical parenting course which allowed parents who were in favour of corporal punishment to put themselves in the punished children's shoes and say how they felt, resulted in parents' experiencing a powerful sense of empathy hence realising the "dubious nature of corporal punishment" (p. 127). This tension between empathic provocation and the path to an increased sense of awareness, marked by a desire to explore the unknown, has been a prevalent element in the critical project I and my students embarked on and is supported by their views and my observations presented in chapter 5. According to Sedgwick (2003), teaching and learning has a "reparative" role (Sedgwick, 2003 in Chinn, 2011, p. 19) where both painful and pleasurable emotions were interwoven into a nourishing experience for both teacher and students. Chin further argues that even

the discomfort produced by feelings “can be a pedagogical tool, unmooring us from our uneasy anchors ”(Chinn, 2011, p.17).

6.1.2.1. A reconceptualization of the Domination/Access/Diversity/Design framework

The above mentioned emotional tension was also reflected in the way the course evolved from my initial intention of exposing dominant discourses and increasing students’ access to diverse perspectives in an attempt to re-design the course curriculum.

While this initial conceptualization reflected in the conceptual framework inspired by Janks (Janks, 2010) and represented rather as a linear model in Figure 1, it did not manifest in the same way during the critical intervention. Thus, unlike Janks’s model (Janks, 2010; see Figure 1), the study revealed that issues and domination and access were not primordial to my students’ experience. My critical classroom prioritized issues of diversity and design which in turn gave rise to questions about domination and access. In his study on the implications of implementing a flexible curriculum in Oman, Al Issa (Al Issa, 2007) stresses the importance of placing the student at the heart of the educational process by giving him/her the space to voice out his/her opinion and participate in the shaping of the teaching and learning experience. He contends that it is important that teachers and students experience more freedom to design and re-design tasks and materials in the pre-university Omani education through more flexible curricular provisions which currently does not happen. He points out the “domination of a fixed and mandated syllabus which prevents student from thinking analytically and critically” (Al Issa, 2007, p.201)

During the critical intervention, students were exposed to a diversity of perspectives and were given the chance to take part in the curriculum decisions. They admitted this as having a great impact on their psyche and the way they viewed the world. They talked about this experience as a coming of age ritual, an eye-opener as a result of which they became more aware of the world around them and its issues. Thus my experience as a teacher/researcher is more closely related to Wallace’s contention (Wallace, 2003) that critical pedagogy is considerably more difficult but also more necessary with privileged groups as identities are in fact multiple, complex and contradictory. As a consequence of this, some students found themselves alienated from the critical discourse and responded through various forms of resistance. An example of this was some of the students’ reaction material

on the fire in a girls' school in Saudi Arabia. Some students although, admittedly identified themselves as Muslim women and admittedly interested in women's rights issues as stated in the first focus group, they felt alienated by the whole issue and suggested that we talk more about Oman as they refused to identify themselves with the women in Saudi Arabia in any way. It was a case of perceiving differences as "difference hardened into essentialism" (Wallace, 2003) and stereotype. Silence was embraced as a form of resistance to my having provided access to what I presumed to be a dominant discourse on radical Muslims. Thus, as Wallace (Wallace, 2003), Lesley (Lesley, 1997) and Ellsworth (1989) point out a discourse of difference can take the form of a discourse of dominance even though it goes against the mainstream conceptualisation of dominance. The above arguments serve to point out the fact that power, dominance and access are not as neatly delineated as initially conceptualised in critical literacy theory (Janks, 2010; Janks, 2014; Akbari, 2008; Pennycook, 2006; Shor, 1996) but rather cyclical and dynamic. On the other hand, my experience did not translate into a feeling of disempowerment and alienation shared by Ellsworth and Lesley. Tension and silence acted as catalysts for a re-design of the critical approach and ultimately for a re-negotiation of power among students themselves and between myself and the students. Thus, diversity did not mean to the students what I initially conceptualized as being a diversity of materials, views and perspectives but rather a diversity of options and the ability to express that in multiple ways. As a result of this diversity, students experienced, as stated in the findings chapter, a shift in perspective and an increased level of awareness, but also a feeling that the classroom powers were shared, without a sense of enforcement, where freedom of expression was possible (see Zahra's comment, chapter VI, section 3.1).

6.1.2.2. Students' voices and the emotional complexities of classroom negotiation

In the context of a critical project student voice takes a prevalent role (Giroux, 1997; Taylor & Robinson, 2009; Vibert, Portelli, Shields, & LaRocque, 2002). The reasons for this lie at the heart of critical pedagogy epistemology which, in turn, rely on the countering of what Freire. The reasons for this lie at the heart of critical pedagogy epistemology which, in turn, rely on the countering of what Freire (Freire, 1998) calls the concept of "banking education" with a pedagogy of possibility and hope which promote emancipation and democratic participation (Taylor & Robinson,

2009). Thus, through the process and practice of conscientization, students turn from objects, recipients of education to subjects displaying agency and engaging in negotiated forms of learning in the classroom (Taylor & Robinson, 2009). Student voices are heard during an education process that encourages reflection, dialogue and action on issues that concern students' lived realities (Fielding & Mc Gregor, 2005 in Cook-Sather, 2006)^[OBJ]Cook Sather (2007)^[OBJ], as straightforward as the above statement may seem, student voice and its place in the ESL classroom is a complex construct as students' identities vary, hence their classroom experiences would be very different as well.

Thus, while Zahra admitted to having felt a sense of empowerment provided by the classroom environment and the fact that the teacher was perceived as an equal, allowing students' opinions to come freely (see chapter V, section 3.1.), other students used silence to express resistance and to get their point across. I explore the topic of student silence more in the following section.

Contradicting and oftentimes conflicting student voices were part of the interweaving dialogue in the critical classroom, an integral part of the day to day classroom negotiations, successes and challenges. Most importantly, they created opportunities for the continuation and development of critical pedagogy in the classroom. Thus, students' debates on various topics represented opportunities of student voice inclusion in the classroom decision making process, opportunities for negotiation and for expressing various emotions: anger, distress, indifference, excitement. The students' emotional labour during these often heated debates and negotiations led to critical reflection and a reassertion of their voice and their contribution to the critical intervention (Yanuzzi & Martin, 2014). As a result, I and my students had the opportunity to engage with the unfamiliar and translate ourselves in various versions of teacher/researcher/participant in my case and as co-interpreters and co-explorers of classroom complexities in the case of my students. Students' voices thus reflected the emotional complexities of the critical classroom while presenting possibilities for critical awareness development and growth.

Similarly, Busaidi & Sultana, (2015) in their study on critical thinking through translated literature in the Omani EFL class, evidence the range of emotions experienced by participants when dealing with the English translation of an Arabic short story. Thus one of the student participants, in his reflections on the text avows

the level of emotional attachment he/she experienced when one of the characters, an old man, called a younger man “my son”, by stating that “this is truly an Omani practice” (Busaidi & Sultana, 2015, p. 19). He/she further adds that when reading the word “Sheikh” in an English text he/she could not understand it for a moment but then he/she “realized what it was and felt a kind of happiness and closeness with the text and the story” (Busaidi & Sultana, 2015, p.19). On the other hand, in the same study, one participant points out his/her shock at one of the practices presented in the text, namely the practice of worshipping a dead holy man by saying “This is idol worship” (Busaidi & Sultana, 2015, p.19). However, he further states that reading about this practice exhorted him to research more about it to discover that such practices are common in some areas in the Islamic world, such as Asia or Morocco.

The findings in the above study thus demonstrate the emotional labour involved in critical reflection and understanding of various perspectives.

6.2. Catalysts of critical pedagogy: emotion, awareness, possibility and compassion

6.2.1. Language, sticky objects and emotion

The critical study I discuss here was carried out as part of an ESL vocabulary and reading module which had a module outline and learning outcomes centred on the achievement of language skills. Thus, the functional aspects of language were the main reason for the respective module’s presence in the curriculum. As mentioned in chapters II, IV and V, the module was more of a blank slate, with both teachers and students who had been involved in it mentioning the need for a reconceptualization and refocus of it. While the teachers’ perspectives were rather functionalistic (see Chirciu, 2014) with an enhanced focus on students’ linguistic abilities and the methods through which they can be enhanced, the students’ perspectives called for an inclusion of what Shor (Shor, 1992) identified as generative themes (see chapter IV for a discussion on generative themes). Sara Ahmed’s (2010 in Benesch, 2014) sticky objects were inherent to these generative themes (see chapter III, section 3.2.3.1.) and did not only serve to generate response but were a great source of emotional labour which led to the complex emotional dynamics that served as a catalyst for the critical intervention.

Kincheloe (2008) also emphasizes the emotional aspect of such themes or objects as “they engage the fears, anxieties, hopes and dreams of both students and their teachers” (Kincheloe, 2008, p.11).

The students interviewed in the pre-intervention stage of the study mentioned the role of emotionally charged, controversial topics as they would appeal to the participants’ humanity and hence capture their interest in the taught material (see Chapter V, section I.3.). They saw these topics as a vehicle for language functions hence an indirect method of improving language skills.

During the intervention the student participants reiterated this opinion, as they emphasized the impact this intervention had on their language skills. What is interesting about this is that they viewed their emotional attachment to the topic as being directly linked to the improvement of their language skills. During the intervention mid-semester survey, one of the students emphasized the link between the heart, the emotional side of learning and the mind, the cognitive side of learning in her experience with this course (see chapter 5, section 5.2.).

Similarly, Zahra, one of the participants interviewed talked about her experience of having learnt vocabulary in an indirect way and as a result, feeling a relatedness to the topics discussed as they dealt with her identity as a woman and her society. She also mentioned that this way of teaching and learning represented an antithesis to a feeling of boredom generated by the mechanical teaching of language items experienced in other classes. This goes against the mainstream belief that knowledge is divorced from feeling or affect (Kincheloe, 2008). It also goes against prior beliefs that in order to become a successful language learner a certain level of intelligence or aptitude is necessary (Gardner, 2001 in Ross, 2015). Language learners are seen as social actors, who are not only moved by static and more quantifiable constructs such as motivation but rather by an emotional investment in their learning (Norton Pierce, 1995 in Charalambous, 2013).

Studies by Pavlenko and Dewaele (Dewaele & Pavlenko, 2002 in Charalambous, 2013) show that bilingual individuals perceive one language as being the language of proximity and the other the language of distance. The language of proximity is the one related to lived experiences, to memory, to affect, while the language of distance is related to functionality, to professionalism, to a clearly defined purpose hence it is reserved for specific areas of one’s life. While these studies capture the psychological dimensions of second language acquisition processes, they fail to

capture the socio-cultural dimension of emotional attachment to learning another language. English has a functional role for many students, being the language of their academic studies or rather, a language of imposition (Auerbach, 1993) hence their emotional attachment to the language comes from their experiences with it, and its contribution to their identity building. This is the reason why relatedness to the material and the bridging of the classroom-lived reality gap through the provision of affect-laden experiences was perceived by the students as being an effective way of learning a language. Their testimonies show that they felt they had experienced a holistic improvement of their language skills while at the same time gaining more knowledge about different world issues and how to tackle them. Some of them also mentioned that this module was an eye opener and an antidote to indifference through the empathy, compassion and solidarity that it stirred in their hearts and minds. I will discuss these at length in the following section.

6.2.1. Empathic provocation, compassion, solidarity, possibility

The critical pedagogical intervention myself and my students embarked on and our exploration of critical literacy and critical awareness are anchored in the sphere of possibility. Here I argue that possibility is according to Simon (Simon, 1987) “a particular moral project, a particular “not yet” of how we might live our lives together” (p. 372). From a pedagogical perspective, possibility also reflects the positions discussed above and theorized in chapter IV of this thesis, namely the subjectivity of the teacher/researcher along with the subjectivity and positioning of the student participants (Kumaravadivelu, 2003a). However, the findings of this study showed me that possibility moves beyond issues of dominance and power which rose during the classroom encounters or experiences providing, through its essentially forward looking nature, a change in perspective and a new interpretation of one’s lived reality.

Michell’s (Michell, 2006) study with a group of Brazilian students at an international school in Sao Paolo presents findings along the same lines. During a Fringe Literature course he taught at the above mentioned school, Michell wanted students to compare the mainstream media with the alternative press on the American intervention in Iraq. He mentions the transformation of a particular student as a result of this course, stating that the student managed to problematize the increasing appetite for violence present in the virtual world and how this cannot be

transferred to war-like situations (in particular reference to the Abu Graib revelations which took place in the post-Iraq war period). Michell observes how the student “began to question the world and what he took for granted” (p.17) as result of critical literacy.

More recently and closer to the context of my study, Chandella’s (Chandella, 2014) study on the implementation of dialogic reading with 20 female students attending an English literature course at a higher education institution in United Arab Emirates, reports that, while challenging each other’s perspectives, students experienced a shift in their own perspective. One particular student remarked that the class discussions on the literary pieces gave her an opportunity to learn about different views and it helped her grow.

Thus, the students in this critical intervention avowed a shift in perspective which did not only evidence their increased sense of awareness of the world and its various social issues but also an increased display of empathy and compassion.

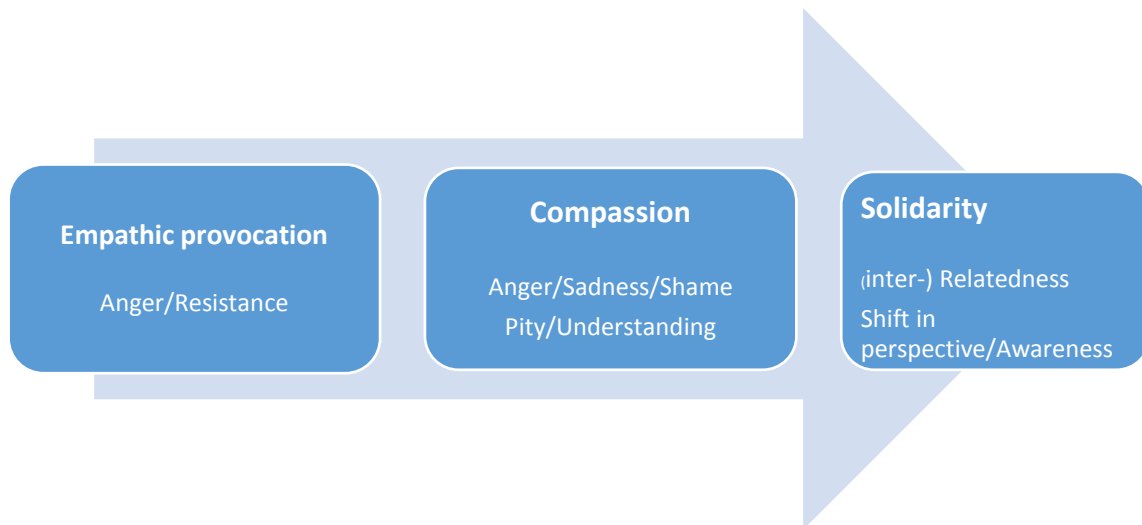
Bracher (Bracher, 2006) states the importance of developing a pedagogy of sympathy and compassion by contending that a pedagogy of emotion or affect is the key to promoting social justice. Although, unlike Bracher, I cannot proclaim my firm belief in emotion as being the key to promoting social justice, my experience as a teacher/researcher in this study has shown me the catalytic value of emotions when engaging with multiple texts and multiple perspectives. The data presented in chapter V shows, in fact, the stress students put on emotions while expressing their views regarding their experiences with criticality. Words like “sad”, “feeling”, “relate” occurred consistently in students’ contributions to the focus groups and surveys (see chapter V, section 5.2.). Here the emotional weight of the testimonies does not only stand as evidence for the students’ positive reaction to the course but also shows their affective involvement in the course and, most importantly, their awareness of this involvement. As Freire (Freire, 1998) puts it: “the more I acknowledge my own process and attitudes and the reasons behind these, the more I am capable of changing and advancing from the stage of ingenuous curiosity to epistemological curiosity.” (p. 56). In fact, this curiosity sparked by emotion is evident in Badryia’s testimony (see chapter V, section 5.3.2) where she mentions her excitement to know what is going to happen in the next class, what the discussion is going to be about.

Freire (1998) mentions the value of emotional attachment to issues of social justice by considering the example of having acknowledged the dangers of smoking: “In other words, in addition to the knowledge I have of the harm smoking does to me, I now have through the consciousness I have acquired of this harm, a sense of legitimate anger. In addition, I have a sense of joy that I was able to get angry because it means that I can continue to live a while longer in the world. The kind of education that does not recognize the right to express appropriate anger against injustice, against disloyalty, against exploitation and against violence fails to see the educational role implicit in the expression of these feelings.” (p.60)

The consciousness-raising illustrated above cannot be attributed only to the nature of topics which were meant to lead to an “empathic provocation” but also to an overall emotional attachment to the critical issues discussed. This emotional labour resulted in compassion and solidarity. Compassion, in the context of this study, involves a set of emotions that sum up to a shift in the perception of the plight of others as being close to one’s own experience and understanding, which can eventually develop into altruism and action-oriented solidarity (Zembylas, 2013). Although, unlike Zembylas’ Greek-Cypriot context, fraught with perceptions of the Turkish immigrants as being the enemies, my own students did not possess the baggage of post-conflict and post-division trauma, the issues discussed impinged upon their identity as Muslim women. This drove them to speak against the essentialist discourse whereby Muslim women are generally portrayed as oppressed and subservient, irrespective of the differences among Arab countries (see chapter V, section 5.2.2.4., a). It has also led them to be equally critical of certain unacceptable practices that Muslims engage in in the name of Islam, such as corporal punishment of children (see section V, section 5.2.2.4., a). This altruism mentioned by Zembylas (2012) or solidarity in the words of Freire (Freire et al., 2014) was thus the result of this deep emotional involvement with issues that students perceived as having a direct relation with their lived experiences. Solidarity embodies a higher level of awareness, a desire for action or an impetus for changing the Others’ circumstances hence it goes beyond provocation, empathy, and compassion and presents the possibility of it being transferred into moral projects at the individual level, such as a complete shift in perspective of the other and his/her/their circumstances, but also into community actions which serve

to change the Others' situation. The various levels of emotional engagement are represented in Figure 19.

Figure 19
Scale of Emotional Engagement



Students went from empathic provocation which is associated, according to their testimonies, with feelings of anger, (Zahra's testimony, chapter V, section 5.2.2.4, a) to a critical awareness of how the world or others viewed them.

In the same vein, Badryia's reaction of anger and protest against the way Muslim teens were treated at a Koranic school, portrayed in the *60 minutes* video (see Appendix L for a list of resources), led to her feeling compassionate regarding their situation and asserting that this is unacceptable in Islam (see chapter V, section 5.2.2.4, a). However, some of them went even further by not only expressing compassion to the suffering of others but also solidarity with their situation like in the case of Rawyia who asserted that freedom of religion is paramount. To support her argument, she quoted a verse from the Quran stating that religious diversity exists in the world so that people can strive to know each other better. She also mentioned that changing one's religion is not an easy feat hence conversion cannot come by force which is what Muslim hardliners are trying to do.

Rawyia did not only demonstrate an increased critical awareness but also solidarity with others at a human level, beyond identity and religious differences. Her example also shows how important it is to understand the one-sidedness of certain arguments portrayed by various media and the generalizations that these can fall prey to as a consequence of traumatic events.

Her statements show the emotional labour from the stages of empathic provocation through compassion to solidarity with the victims of the incident, while displaying mixed feelings of anger, sadness, shame or disgust to a sense of relatedness, understanding and solidarity.

Figure 17 represents the stages of emotional attachment with the issues presented during the intervention, which, in turn, reflect the transformatory process of empathic provocation (Mills, 2002). Thus students are challenged to examine and justify their personal values while engaging in a caring inquiry (Mills, 2002).

The emotional correspondents of the critical transformation stages above (Figure 17) move from the more visceral emotions of anger and resistance to the arguments presented in the texts discussed, to more complex, less reactionary mixed feelings of anger and sadness. They further develop into feelings of pity but also an understanding of the situation and a more complex holistic approach of the issue where the analytical aspects of thinking interlock with the emotional aspects of feeling.

The figure shows this process as an evolution from visceral emotions generated through empathic provocation to an increased awareness that is marked by compassion and solidarity. The process is complex and not necessarily as linear as presented in the figure above. As Kincheloe (Kincheloe, 2008) put it “a critical complex epistemology is dedicated to using both the logical and emotional dimensions of the human mind in research, knowledge production and pedagogy.” (p.223). He argues that the ability to explore and exploit our imagination and feelings is essential to human evolution. He quotes Gramsci’s perspective (Gramsci, 1988) that critical practitioners should possess the ability to connect their emotions to their critical analyses.

Furthermore, the value of the emotional impact in the transformative process of awareness formation derives from its inter-relatedness. Although affect is individualistic in nature, it achieves its transformatory dimension through a process of interaction and negotiation within the dynamic space of the classroom (Chinn, 2011). Thus, our feelings emerge in social interactions in the dynamics of relatedness. Zahra’s and Adnana’s contradicting arguments on the topic of quotas for women in high positions is an example of display of affect in the dynamic space of the classroom (see chapter 5, section 5.2.2.5.).

The same emotionally charged negotiation took place in the case of the debate on the religious symbols in the classroom. During this exchange, Adnana admitted having moved from resistance to a shift in perspective stating that she understood the view of countries that took a more secular approach and banned religious symbols in public places (see chapter 5, section 5.2.2.5.).

I believe this evolution from resistance to understanding the position of the other is the result of the ambivalence of empathic provocation through emotional attachment as well as knowledge discovery. Thus, most students admitted knowing things they hadn't known before taking the course, however, not all of them reached the end of the continuum presented in Figure 13 as shown in the following section.

6.3. A critical approach on deterrents of critical pedagogy

In this section I will discuss the implications of student resistance to the critical intervention but, before I engage in the complexities of the afore mentioned construct and its classroom avatars, I wish to explain the title of this section and how a perceived deterrent to the critical intervention I and my students took part in, did not represent a hindrance but an opportunity for transformation.

Resistance can be defined as a reaction that is meant to shield the resisting party from unwanted shifts or attempts to change the latter's perceptions and understanding (Kopelson, 2003 in Seas, 2006). The complex reality of the classroom in which a multitude of individual realities and ideas interact makes resistance as a natural occurring phenomenon that can lead us, in Kincheloe's (Kincheloe, 2008) words, to "epistemological explosions" (p. 231), which, in turn, allow us to understand various other, at present unfamiliar, perspectives. Thus, I wish to argue, that as a result of this study, my perspective of student resistance has shifted from initially viewing it as a deterrent, to a catalytic event in which the possibility of change in classroom life and the participants' consciousness can occur.

Resistance can take various forms from refusal to engage with the material, take part in the classroom dynamic to cynical critique of the material, silence, playing dumb or getting by (Shor, 1992). Resistance to a proposed curriculum has its root primarily in the high expectations about student participation (Perumal, 2008). Although student readiness for the critical intervention was, as shown earlier,

present at the onset, the classroom dynamic and the variety of student identities and student experiences led to instances of resistance in its various forms.

One reason for student resistance in this particular study can be attributed to intellectual saturation and emotional disengagement with the issues presented. Adnana's reaction to the reading lesson focused on the topic of the Saudi Arabia girl school fire demonstrates not only a saturation with the topic but also an ensuing emotional disengagement and distancing from it (see chapter V, section 5.2.2.5.). She consequently requested that course materials be more focused on the Omani society.

Another reason for the manifestation of student resistance was a possible lack of experience with critical literacy as well as language limitations in expressing one's point of view. Additionally, an overall lack of reading habits among Omani students (Weber, 2013; Al Mahrooqi and Risse, 2014) has a direct impact on the two factors mentioned earlier. Corson (1999 in Samaranghe, 2014) also mentions the impact of reading on thinking as ESL students even at university level need to internalize concepts through inner talk.

To evidence this, Zahra, the student who showed the highest level of involvement in the course, mentioned that she loved to read (chapter V, section 5.2.2.6, d). Aisha, the external observer, also mentioned lack of reading as a detrimental factor in the process of critical literacy that she witnessed while observing one of the classes (chapter V, section 5.2.2.4.)

The lack of experience with critical literacy is another possible reason for student resistance. As Perumal (2008) states, the participation and collaboration inherent to a critical classroom requires students to move from "a private presence in the classroom (and few or no risks therein) to a public one, with many risks" (p. 382). Shor (1992) also contends that students have learnt their habits of resistance during the years spent in the mainstream schooling system hence they carry them to the critical classroom, having internalized a resistance to authority in schooling. Zahra's comments regarding her classmates' resistance range from an explanation regarding the lack of depth necessary to tackle critical topics to her being angry at the fact that students do not apply themselves enough hence do not strive to take a more active role in the class. She also mentioned their lack of interest in the topics due to their emotional distancing from them. She added that this happened in other classes, including the Arabic class (see chapter V, section 5.2.2.4). Thus, her

testimony serves to emphasize that language, in her view, is not the most significant source of student resistance in the critical classroom. Contrary to this, language was seen as the main cause for lack of engagement in the class by the external observer, Aisha and the teachers interviewed in the pre-intervention stage. Similar instances of resistance were reported by Chandella (2014) in her study on dialogic reading with female students at an Emirati university. She portrays silence as a form of resistance that was caused, according to students' testimonies, by the "the difficulty of language combined with reluctance to discuss the topics with a male teacher" (p. 323).

In Oman, Al Mahrooqi and Risse (2014), struggled with student resistance to certain literary texts such as Milton's *Paradise Lost* based on the students' perceived lack of relevance of the text to their daily lives and due to its linguistic challenges.

Similarly, texts like Eudora Wetty's "The Little store" was considered too boring as "nothing happens" (p.171). This brings the attention the English language education secondary and tertiary curriculum in Oman, where Omani culturally appropriate materials and tasks are responsible for its inward looking approach and lack of engagement with various other cultural perspectives. This raises the question of when and how or how often a shift in pedagogical approach to issues/topics that are outward looking is appropriate in the English language classroom.

Another dimension of resistance pertains to negotiating identity politics. Gause (Cooper & Gause, 2007) reports his experiences as an African American tenured faculty member at a Southern US university and how he came to the realization that students' resistance to critical pedagogy reflected their inability to negotiate their ideological politics in terms of engaging in critical content delivered by a black instructor. Similarly, LaDuke (2009) reports instances of resistance in a group of majority White female pre-service teachers enrolled in a multicultural issues course. The students not only refused to engage with the content that portrayed instances of inequalities in the schooling system through displays of silence but also refused, through verbal affirmations, to acknowledge that inequitable conditions existed in school education systems in the first place. In the UAE, Chandella (Chandella, 2014) stated that, in several instances students, felt intimidated and were unable to negotiate the prescribed views they held. Other students mentioned that some issues were too personal to be discussed in class. I experienced the same sense of withdrawal when dealing with what my students called a "sensitive topic", namely

the issue of racial or tribe discrimination in Oman where Badryia stated that they, herself and the other girls wanted to talk but they were afraid not to offend anyone (chapter V, section 5.2.2.6, a).

The above comments serve to emphasize the complexity of student resistance and student voice in the critical classroom. Our identities, as teacher/observer, in Aisha's case, as involved student, in Zahra's case or as teacher/researcher in my case, collide with students' various identities and expectations. If in Aisha's case, the main objective of a language class was to improve language skills, in Zahra's case the purpose was also to gain insight and think about new perspectives on various topics. However, other students' purpose was to take the course and move up a step in attaining their certificate which would enable them to get a better job in the future (Shor, 1992). My critical agenda was driven by a sense of purpose, dotted with normalizing, teacherly acts that could be, according to Cook-Sather (2007), interpreted as impositional stances, however, I believe all of the above arguments fit the complexities of the critical classroom.

Thus, in this complex dynamic, I found that my constant reflection on action as documented in my research diary allowed me to translate or interpret myself while, at the same time, supporting students in interpreting or translating themselves. This process was particularly useful in the case of student silence where what was initially perceived as a form of resistance (Perumal, 2008) was in fact an opportunity to engage with a different perspective on the critical intervention.

6.3.1. A critical perspective on student silence

As mentioned earlier, silence is usually perceived as a form of resistance in a collaborative, student-centred, dialogic-oriented and democratic classroom (Perumal, 2008). Silence appears when there is a gap between the teacher's expectations of student response and the length of time the student takes to give a response (Bista, 2012). Silence thus takes a more prominent role in the context of classroom participation which, in Holliday's (1997) view, can represent a highly ethnocentric, technical discourse of power. Hagayoshi's study (1996 in Holliday, 2005) describes how silence is in fact a form of resistance to the participation-oriented regime of the classroom (see chapter 3, section 3.4.4.). Relatedly, LaDuke (2009), in her study with a predominantly white female group of pre-service teachers, gives an account of silence as a form of resistance to answering questions on facts regarding students of colour which she interprets as the

participants' inability to problematize their prescribed views on multicultural and racial issues. However, she also mentions that "no individual in class was a constant resistor or a constant acceptor of the content" (p.42). As a result of this constant renegotiation, the participants in the course had developed a critical awareness directed in particular to racist acts they had witnessed or heard. She thus evidences the catalytic function of resistance as it triggers a constant renegotiation and reconstruction of classroom knowledge. Similarly, Chandella (2014) points out the transformatory power of silence as "it was helpful in provoking response" and paradoxically, it "added an enriching dimension of participation" (p.325).

The silence that I experienced during the critical intervention was both challenging as it triggered my teacherly, normalizing behaviours (Perumal, 2008) and liberating, transformatory, as it allowed me to question my own positioning in the critical classroom and thus relate to my students in a way that was not impositional. Thus, I was able to allow students to take a real active role in co-authoring the course direction. Furthermore, silence provided me with an insight into the classroom dynamic and helped me understand the students' varied identities and classroom roles. An example of this complex dynamic was Zahra's perception of her peers' silence as emotional disengagement and also a lack of language and communication skills that were required to tackle the depth of the topics discussed in class. As the most active student in class, she distanced herself from others while experiencing a sense of alienation from the other students' motives for attending the class.

On the other hand, it was also silence that brought the design topic in the curriculum which, although I did not perceive as being very critical, marked a turning point in Adnana's (the student who had displayed various forms of resistance) journey during the course. Thus, the design choice topic led into a critical discussion of whether the college really has the best interests of students at heart. She was able to open up and express her views freely. During the final survey, one of the students even mentioned this having been her favourite topic. The decision to include a topic which I thought was not critical in nature but possessed a high potential for generating student interest was a cathartic experience for me in the sense that I realized that normalizing, teacherly behaviour is not the only way of

dealing with silence and that in fact silence can be just as valuable as voice when engaging with criticality.

Silence was thus multivalent in my critical classroom as one of its merits was to “give voice to the marginalized students” (Armstrong, 2007 in Bista, 2012, p. 77). The marginalised students in my class were also the students who felt could not express their opinions for fear of upsetting others when talking about ethnic groups in Omani society (see Appendix L for reference) or students who felt more freedom in expressing their opinions outside the classroom arena when dealing with such an emotionally charged topic as the school fire incident in Saudi Arabia that caused the death of at least 15 female students (see Appendix L for reference).

The values of silence in this critical intervention can be associated with a culture of silence that is deeply rooted in the students’ psyche and is a by-product of a predominantly teacher-centred pedagogy that students had been exposed to during their schooling. It is also associated with students’ values of self-control and their power to foster the ability to listen and form a carefully constructed internal discourse that would not be berated or exposed to ridicule by others (Bista, 2012).

The multivalence of silence during this critical study was an indication of the possibilities that open once the students become co-interpreters of the perspectives presented in the classroom and can provide ample possibilities for future research and interpretation (Cook-Sather, 2007).

Silence offered me the possibility to re-examine my own emotional attachment to my critical agenda and face my own resistance to change, challenge my own positioning, understand and accept the diversity and dynamics of student experience and acknowledge “the social, cultural, cognitive and political economic actions these dynamics could make possible” (Kincheloe, 2008, p.233).

6.4. Possibility, possibility and possibility

I believe the key finding of this critical study was the possibility critical literacy can engender in terms of raising awareness of various perspectives which in turn leads to the possibility of developing compassion, a sense of growth, of connectedness, an emotional coming of age.

The majority of students who took part in the study admitted having experienced either an awareness of various perspectives on different societal issues or a complete shift in perspective. Having started from the principles laid down in the

framework for a pedagogy for critical literacy in Chapter III, section 3.2.2, this intervention moved beyond identifying positioning stances and multiple perspectives and provided both students and teacher alike an opportunity to take “risks, to struggle with ongoing relations of power, to critically appropriate forms of knowledge that exist outside of their immediate experience and to envisage versions of the world which is “not yet”- in order to be able to alter the grounds upon which life is lived” (Simon, 1987, p.375)

Furthermore, the designing and re-designing forces that formed during the classroom interactions provided the climate for change and for future explorations of possibility. They also allowed emotions to surface and provide further opportunities for growth and awareness. This study offers opportunities for further research into critical pedagogies of possibility, into the emotional value attached to knowledge and the politics of student resistance, voice, silence and participation. There is also further opportunity to research the multivalence of the teacher/researcher/participant role and the transformatory impact of critical pedagogies on these roles.

6.5. Summary

In this chapter, I have discussed the findings of my study in light of the conceptual framework set out in the literature review, my readings and my experience with the critical intervention. I have discussed the students’ views on their readiness for the critical intervention which stand in opposition with the teachers’ views on the possibilities critical pedagogy may offer in the English language classroom. I have highlighted the importance of empathic provocation through critical generative themes and its role in the transformatory potential of the critical intervention. I have also highlighted the multivalence of silence and resistance and their problem-posing potential as well as their ability to provide a platform for marginalized student voices. Finally, I have discussed the possibilities critical pedagogy can engender in terms of language ability, critical awareness raising and transformatory power. I will further develop these ideas in the final chapter of this thesis by highlighting the implications of the study and providing recommendations for future research.

7.CHAPTER VII: SUMMARY, CONTRIBUTIONS, IMPLICATIONS

In this chapter I will summarize the key findings emerging from my thesis and I will discuss the implications of these findings in terms of student readiness to embrace critical pedagogies, the possibilities for a negotiated curriculum and providing a platform for student voice and student experience. I will also discuss the implications of my research for favouring transformation versus quantification and measurement in EFL/ESL contexts and shifting from a culture of learning outcomes to one that includes learning narratives. Furthermore, I will present recommendations for future research with regards to the opportunities offered by a negotiated curriculum and dialogic approaches to teaching and learning in raising awareness of the possibilities that critical pedagogy presents to EFL/ESL faculty and in raising the profile of emotional education within English language education. I will also discuss the possible limiting effects of EMI imposition in terms of first language alienation. Finally, I will conclude with reflections on my personal journey during this research project.

7.1. Summary of key findings emerging from the research study

The findings in my research project can be presented in three broad categories: readiness for critical intervention, emotional attachment and its contribution to language skills, compassion and critical awareness, resistance and silence as possibility.

Readiness for the critical intervention

The findings in the critical study I and my students embarked upon illuminated the fact that students generally possess the willingness and the interest in critical pedagogies and are keen to engage with various forms of critical literacy. The students interviewed in the pre-intervention stage also felt that this module was a good idea as it would raise student interest and it would help them connect language learning with their lived realities. Contrary to this, the teachers interviewed in the pre-intervention stage showed limited or no awareness of critical pedagogy. Furthermore, they also contended that the students' language skills level did not permit them to engage with what they, as teachers, perceived as being a higher order thinking skill level. However, when prompted, teachers could envisage possibilities for a critical approach to English language education.

Affect and its contribution to language skills, critical awareness development, compassion and solidarity

The study also illuminated the importance of affect in language skills development and in critical awareness development. The student-participants avowed an increased development of all the four language skills as a result of the critical intervention. They also mentioned having become aware of multiple perspectives and being able to see things from various points of view. Emotions were stirred as a result of empathic provocation where students were asked to re-examine and justify their personal values while engaging in caring enquiry (Mills, 2002). As the topics presented in class were related to the students' gender, revolving around issues that affected women in the region or in the world, issues that dealt with their interests or their national or religious identities, they were more prone to induce an emotional attachment and result in a release of various negative and positive emotions. This, in turn, resulted in a feeling of relatedness and compassion with the situation of the actors involved in the material presented in the module. The study thus illuminates the importance of affect in critical pedagogy and its catalytic value in the process of critical awareness development.

As a result, some of the participants experienced a shift in perspective, developing an avowed feeling of solidarity for the Other. This solidarity took the form of vocal classroom protest against actions that were perceived by students as contrary to their religious, family or humanitarian values.

Resistance and silence as possibility

Some participants in the critical intervention displayed various forms of resistance, the most prominent one being an engagement in silence. This aspect of the intervention proved illuminating in terms of teacher-student power relations and classroom dynamics as well as student participation in designing and re-designing the critical intervention. Thus, while silence represented at times a form of resistance entrenched in student emotional disengagement with the topic due to possible intellectual saturation, lack of experience with critical pedagogy, lack of experience in engaging with an in-depth analysis of an issue or perceived low language proficiency, it also represented an opportunity, particularly for the teacher/researcher to relinquish power and disengage from normative, teacherly acts while allowing students to co-author the direction of the course. Furthermore, silence was also an opportunity for students from the margins, the students who

valued self-control, focus and restraint, to form an inner, carefully crafted response to a topic and consequently make their voice heard outside the classroom arena.

7.2. Contributions of the study

7.2.1. Theoretical contribution of the study

I believe this study's most important contribution was to show that critical pedagogy is very much anchored in the art of possible, and is the inherent production of classroom interaction. The model highlighted in the critical framework (Chapter III, section 3.2., Figure 2) had a guiding role, however, the intervention evolved organically shaped by students' participation and contributions. This, I believe, shows the transformative role critical pedagogy played not only in the participants' consciousness but also at the operational, day-to-day classroom event level. The challenges faced during this winding road journey dotted oftentimes with participant resistance and silence had a transformatory role and ushered in new possibilities for classroom materials and practice. To paraphrase Kincheloe's (2008) critical pedagogy definition, stated in chapter III, section 3.1.1, with my own reflection upon the outcomes of the current study, critical pedagogy is a constant reconstruction of educators' work through the empowerment of students, thus the students are not merely the objects of the action but, along with the teacher, subjects in the critical process.

7.2.2. Pedagogical contribution of the study

The pedagogical contribution of this study ties in with its theoretical contribution mentioned above. Pedagogical decisions, although primarily shaped by the teachers' will are constantly negotiated and re-worked according to the students' will but also according to the evolution of the critical process. Shor's generative themes (see chapter III, section 3.2.), topical and academic themes lost their clear delineation and inter-merged during the critical process. Thus topical themes, such as the topical theme presented in the diagnostic text (see Appendix E) became a generative theme that was exploited in later sessions. Similarly, the academic theme of plagiarism became upon critical questioning a generative theme and gave rise to a critical questioning of the mainstream, test-oriented English education system. The study brings a pedagogical contribution to this effect as it shows that critical methodological guidelines are entirely classroom context

dependant. Furthermore, critical pedagogy or critical endeavours have not yet been attempted in the Omani higher education system hence, due to its lack of precedence, I believe the study made a distinct contribution in this area and may serve as reference and, I hope, inspiration for future research.

7.2.3. Methodological contribution of the study

Action research methodology fits the organic evolution of the critical pedagogical intervention, mentioned in the above sections, through its “generative transformational processes” (Mcniff, 2002, p.36; McNiff & Whitehead, 2000). The study is, so far, the first in the Omani higher education ELT context whereby critical pedagogy was implemented through an action research design and where student-participants had a direct role in the design and re-design of the pedagogical process. The flexible, non-linear, reflection-oriented action research design helped shape this project of possibility and will, I hope, give rise to other action research endeavours in the area of criticality and student involvement.

7.3. Implications of the study

7.3.1. Students' views on critical pedagogy

The findings of the study generally show that critical pedagogy although perceived by some as a high-risk endeavour for teachers and students alike is worth trying in an English language learning classroom as the students' views generally reflected a positive attitude towards it. The findings of the study also showed that critical literacy can be used a springboard for the teaching of English language skills as the majority of the students who took part in the study admitted having experienced an improvement in all four English language skills.

Furthermore the empathic provocation generated by the topics presented served to develop an emotional attachment (Mills, 2002) to the topic which, in turn, led to the feelings of compassion and solidarity lying at the heart of critical conscientization (Freire et al., 2014). The role of emotions in knowledge building especially in the context of second or foreign language learning has to be acknowledged and explored further as it can have a major contribution to the education process (Kincheloe, 2008).

7.3.2. Possibilities for a negotiated curriculum and a platform for student voice

The possibilities that critical pedagogy offers in terms of negotiated curriculum and opportunity for student voices to be heard are not to be neglected. Students wish to take an active role in authoring the course of their learning and will make apparent their choices even through opposition, resistance and silence.

It is important to note here that critical pedagogy is not automatically democratic or immune to imposition hence careful observation and reflection from the part of the teacher/researcher on the course of classroom events is mandatory if dialogic teaching and learning is to really replace the banking model of education (Freire, 1998).

Student voice is oftentimes not heard in the student feedback forms, classroom discussions or forums but quite often in silences, retreats, after class dialogue. It is important for us teachers to become more aware of the possibilities silence offers us and it is unfortunate that all too often we get wrapped up in the political discourse of classroom participation (Holliday, 1997). Also, it is important to perceive the classroom life as a flow of events where student and teacher identities collide and where normalizing and regulating, teacherly acts (Perumal, 2008) alternate with student agency, ownership and voice.

Critical pedagogy cannot be viewed as a prescribed recipe that can be applied to any context or setting equally. In fact, critical pedagogy is not linear and straightforward as it is shaped and reshaped by the classroom forces and its actors (Kincheloe, 2008).

This study has revealed that critical pedagogy dwells under the auspices of possibility and is constantly informed and transformed by its authors' and its participants' contributions.

7.3.3. Favouring narratives over learning outcomes in English language education

Critical awareness development or what Freire called critical conscientization is the result of processes of transformation which are entirely context dependent hence cannot be standardized, multiplied and exported. It consists of a melange of "democratic teacher authority, student codevelopment, meaningful subject matter, critical thinking and creative adaptation to local conditions" (Shor, 1992, p. 246). It all starts with exploring problems that are meaningful to participants and continues with reflection, critical literacy skill practice and continued dialogue. Silence is also

part of dialogue as it serves to illuminate varied student positions and identities vis-à-vis the subject matter. Silence invites a constant re-examining of teacher authority and triggers opportunities for codevelopment. These elements form evolving classroom narratives where teachers and students design and re-design the learning process. They are the building blocks of transformation which cannot be translated into canons of universal excellence (Shor, 1992).

Thus, critical English language education, although informed by an academic linguistic discourse, does not take place or evolve from standardized processes or techniques but is indirectly shaped by the constant communication and negotiation that takes place in the classroom arena. It is a constant dance between the familiarity of language norms and the uncharted terrain of new knowledges and discourses that appear from the themes explored or the subject matter discussed. Thus, along with the linguistic vocabulary, a critical metalanguage of questioning and critique takes shape which provides participants with the exploration tools necessary to move forward in their discovery process. This is not and cannot be a standard discourse with one form as it is in fact an in-process invention, an idiom known to the members of the newly formed critical classroom community (Shor, 1992).

This idiom can contribute to the perception of English language as a one of proximity and not of distance as it becomes the language of experience and transformation.

7.4. Recommendations

This research study has illuminated possibilities for further research in a number of areas. Although, these possibilities were made evident during the data analysis and discussion process they are beyond the scope of this research study hence deserve to be duly explored through further research.

7.4.1. Investigating possibilities for codeveloped English language curricula

Giving students a voice is not only a matter of allowing them to express their opinions democratically in the class but also allowing them to contribute to course development hence including materials and strategies that are rooted in their realities and their experience. This means that the English language teaching classroom has to leave behind its illusions of neutrality and engage with the

students' culture and society including its political and religious aspects. The ESL/EFL curriculum in Oman and elsewhere must not lose sight of the fact that, for students to learn a language, a proximity needs to be established and that can be achieved if the language, foreign and alien as it is, provides opportunities for emotional attachment, that is, in the words of one of the participants, learning with the heart and the brain. Thus, ESL/EFL education has to provide experiences which are rooted in students' lived realities but also that resonate with their emotions at a more general, human level. It is important to understand that English language education, especially on Foundation programmes and lower levels aims to provide students with a whole set of study and self-organizational skills hence can no longer claim a neutrality from all that has to do with the real-life problems students face and wish to receive guidance for, through their education process.

7.4.2. The need for an increased teacher awareness of the possibilities of a critical pedagogy

The findings of the study also illuminated teachers' limited awareness of critical pedagogy, its principles and its possibilities in the English language classroom. Teachers often get entangled in a mainstream EFL/ESL discourse where neutral standardized materials and pedagogies seem to hold the answers to students' linguistic problems. Thus, more research is needed into different implementations of critical pedagogy in various ELT contexts as this can impact teacher training programmes and the conceptualization of ESL/EFL curricula. Critical pedagogy is often associated with higher levels of language ability as it often encompasses higher order thinking skills hence more research is needed in the possibilities offered by critical pedagogies at lower levels of ESL/EFL education. Also, more guidance and support is needed for EFL/ESL teachers who operate within institutional mainstream-oriented restrictions in their respective contexts, particularly in Oman and the Gulf, as well as encouragement to explore what forms of critical pedagogy are suitable for their classrooms. An academic environment built on trust, collaboration and dialogue is necessary for teachers to feel safe upon embarking on such endeavours. At the moment, in the Omani ESL/EFL context the issue of cultural sensitivity has become so predominant that expat teachers, in particular, steer away from any discussion that could touch upon what could be perceived as a controversial, emotional labour intensive topic. Fear of chastisement from decision-

making entities or worse, non-renewal of contracts, currently represent major deterrents for critical pedagogical endeavours.

7.4.3. Opportunities for emotional and social education

The study has also raised the need for further exploration of the emotional impact of critical topics and the resulting awareness of multiple perspectives. An EFL/ESL education that is in the service of caring, compassion and solidarity needs to be further explored. Emotions and provocations have generally been left out of the purview of academia as they were considered detrimental to the knowledge building process (Mills, 2002). Second and/or foreign language education needs to be more inclusive with regards to the emotional aspects of learning, of classroom dynamic building and the emotional consequences of being exposed to a provocative discourse (Zembylas, 2012).

The students' emotional attachment or lack of it in the ESL/EFL learning process needs to be further explored while keeping in mind the impositional aspect of English education in Oman where the EMI policy is still associated with "discourses of social progress, economic and technological advancement, global communication and trade" (Troudi & Jendli, 2011, p.3). Although the students that participated in this study had opted for an English degree hence their expectations and motivation were different from the majority of students who have no other choice but to study English in order to succeed in their academic endeavours, the module where the intervention was carried out possessed an inherent element of imposition as it was a further preparation, post-foundation, no credit module which served to provide additional skill input necessary for tackling an English major. Thus, the impositional aspect of these type of courses and their curricula deserves further exploration in terms of students' attitudes and emotions associated with them.

7.4.4. A further exploration of silence

Silence has generally been associated with unsuccessful classroom events, lack of participation and ultimately lack of student engagement and teacher failure to seize students' attention. This ethnocentric, mainstream discourse of participation (Holliday, 1997) dominates teachers' conceptualizations of classroom interaction hence silence has, so far, been given little merit during the education process (Bista, 2012). The current study has revealed that silence is multivalent and can

present several opportunities for problem-posing during the critical process. Thus, further exploration of its valences is needed in order to understand its potential and its place in critical pedagogy.

7.5. My journey as a teacher/researcher

As mentioned in earlier chapters, in the spirit of my role as teacher/ researcher I could not escape a desire for linearity and organization in spite of being well aware of the fact that this stance defies the democratic principles of critical pedagogy. As Wallace (Wallace, 2003) contends, the inherent assumption of a pedagogical intervention is authoritarian in nature and to take a critical position vis-à-vis dominant discourses and educational practices in promoting some readings over others is bound to put the teacher in a normative position. My drive for a critical agenda, although informed by student readiness, had initial authoritarian elements, however, it became increasingly negotiated as students voiced out their opinions in support or against it or displayed various forms of resistance and lack of participation. This was a tension that I welcomed as I too, found myself in a different role, namely that of participant-observer to the classroom events, and I also learnt to explore and challenge my own prescriptive views about what a successful classroom represents or what it actually means to become a critical educator. Thus, although, as seen in chapter III, my initial plan was to include more generative themes in the classroom, the students, the classroom, newly formed ethos and instances of resistance steered the intervention in different directions and allowed it to develop rather organically, with topics and activities growing from one another.

7.5.1. A critical look at critical pedagogy and critical literacy

My reflection on classroom life and events represented an integral part of the critical intervention. Reagan & Osborn (2008) emphasize the teacher's decision-making role while stressing the importance of reflective practices in the classroom-decision making processes. Reflective practices take into account the questioning of the teacher's own routine professional behaviour or what Shor (1996) calls "teacherhood" (Shor, 1996, p.29). During the critical intervention, I constantly found myself torn between my own teacherhood, my desire to drive my agenda forward and my wanting to be a critical democratic teacher in a setting where critical inquiry was not part of students' experience and, in fact, was in antithesis to their

expectations and preferences. On the other hand, as mentioned in chapter IV, a critical stance should not be mistaken for a laissez-faire approach (Freire, P. & Macedo, D., 1999) hence the teacher has a responsibility to “inaugurate a critical-democratic project” (Shor, 1996, p.19). The above tension was captured in the observations recorded in my research diary where I stated, the volatile, high-risk nature of this approach:

“Some students found it interesting, some not. I found that not all students have a propensity or interest in challenging things and would prefer more neutral topics. This is something to be exploited in the second focus group. The theme of identity was to bring into focus their lived reality and and world and find bridges between that and the modern issues of our time. Of course having a class formed entirely of female students led the discussion towards feminism oriented topics such as rights of women and so on. Although I kept asking after every class if these topics were okay or they would like to talk about something else. They only resumed to say they were okay. One student....wanted more topics about Oman. I felt that there was too much imposition from my part so I decided to conduct the survey at this point...”
(Research Diary, 27/10/2014)

The above quote is not only a snapshot into forms of resistance students engaged in at times but also a snapshot of my feeling torn between my own agenda as a teacher/researcher and my desire to inaugurate the above mentioned critical democratic project and to allow this critical democratic project and its transformative forces to unfold. My experience with this project has taught me to accept this tension as part of the transformative purpose of the intervention and that, in spite of my desire to come up with a neatly arranged plan, I should let students take ownership of the course even if it meant not approaching controversial, critically generative topics or issues.

This tension and the ensuing critical reflection have shown me that power in the classroom cannot be perceived as something that the teacher holds and decides to impart to students (Johnston, 2011) but rather something that circulates among students and teacher alike (Gore, 1992 in Johnston, 2011). It also clearly showed that critical literacy and critical pedagogy do not come about in an orderly fashion (Lesley, 2001) and they are very much subject to the dynamic forces of human interaction that are at work in space and time. Similarly, teacher power and authority do not manifest or are challenged or changed in a progressive, smooth

manner but are rather, as Ellsworth (2013) put it, anchored in “the essentially paternalistic project of traditional education” (p.99). While Ellsworth (2013) and Lesley (2001) felt a deep sense of alienation while met with student’s silence or resistance to their own forms of critical pedagogy, I felt that tension and silence were opportunities for renewal and recalibration. I also felt that, through the intense reflective processes they engendered, they represented opportunities for questioning and critical experiences. This had a direct impact of my teaching philosophy but also on my personal critical awareness level.

7.5.2. My personal journey

The journey with this research project has been long, oftentimes arduous and filled with self-doubt. However, I consider myself privileged to have come this far as I feel that, through this research, I have been transformed from a teacher who regarded students in terms of how they performed in class or on tests and a teacher who, having grown up in a highly undemocratic educational setting, as Romania used to be two decades ago, had a strong attachment to power and control, to an educator who sees possibilities in every classroom and every student. Embarking on a critical journey was an exciting thing, as my expectations from classroom interactions were high and I often came out of the class feeling elated and/or frustrated. I understood that being an educator means accepting the volatility of the classroom environment and exploring the varied identities that make up students’ personalities and attitudes to learning. I believe that this intervention was also an antidote to my stereotypical, “shy and collected” view of my Omani female students. Their personalities and their experiences brought a wealth of knowledge to the classroom and to my own teaching and living experience. I learnt that, unknowingly, I was locked in an Othering type of mental discourse. This intervention helped me understand it and critically examine it. Thus, I have learnt to allow myself to be constantly surprised by my students and to step in my classroom with an open mind.

The critical topics that we tackled in class had an emotional value for me as a woman, as a mother and an educator of women. It was fascinating to experience the students’ reactions to the issues discussed and see them experience the same emotional intensity I had felt when thinking and preparing the course material. This research has increased my conviction that by touching the hearts and minds of all

involved, teachers and students alike, education can bring about a shift in perspectives and, in the long run, promote a more tolerant, understanding world. This is a legacy I will continue to build for my daughter and for the women and men I will continue to teach and learn from, through my research and other educational endeavours.

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APPENDIX A

MSc, PhD, EdD & DEdPsych theses.



Graduate School of Education

Certificate of ethical research approval

MSc, PhD, EdD & DEdPsych theses

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

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

Your name: Alina Rebecca Chirciu

Your student no: 610045799

Return address for this certificate: str. Abatorului, Nr 1A, Bacau, jud. Bacau, Romania

Degree/Programme of Study: Professional Doctorate in Education –TESOL (part time)

Project Supervisor(s): Salah Troudi

Your email address: arc213@exeter.ac.uk

Tel: 40234586582

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

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

Signed: Alina Rebecca Chirciu

Date: 21/09/14

Chair of the School's Ethics Committee
updated: March 2013

Certificate of ethical research approval

TITLE OF YOUR PROJECT:

Reading beyond the lines: a case of critical literacy in the Sultanate of Oman

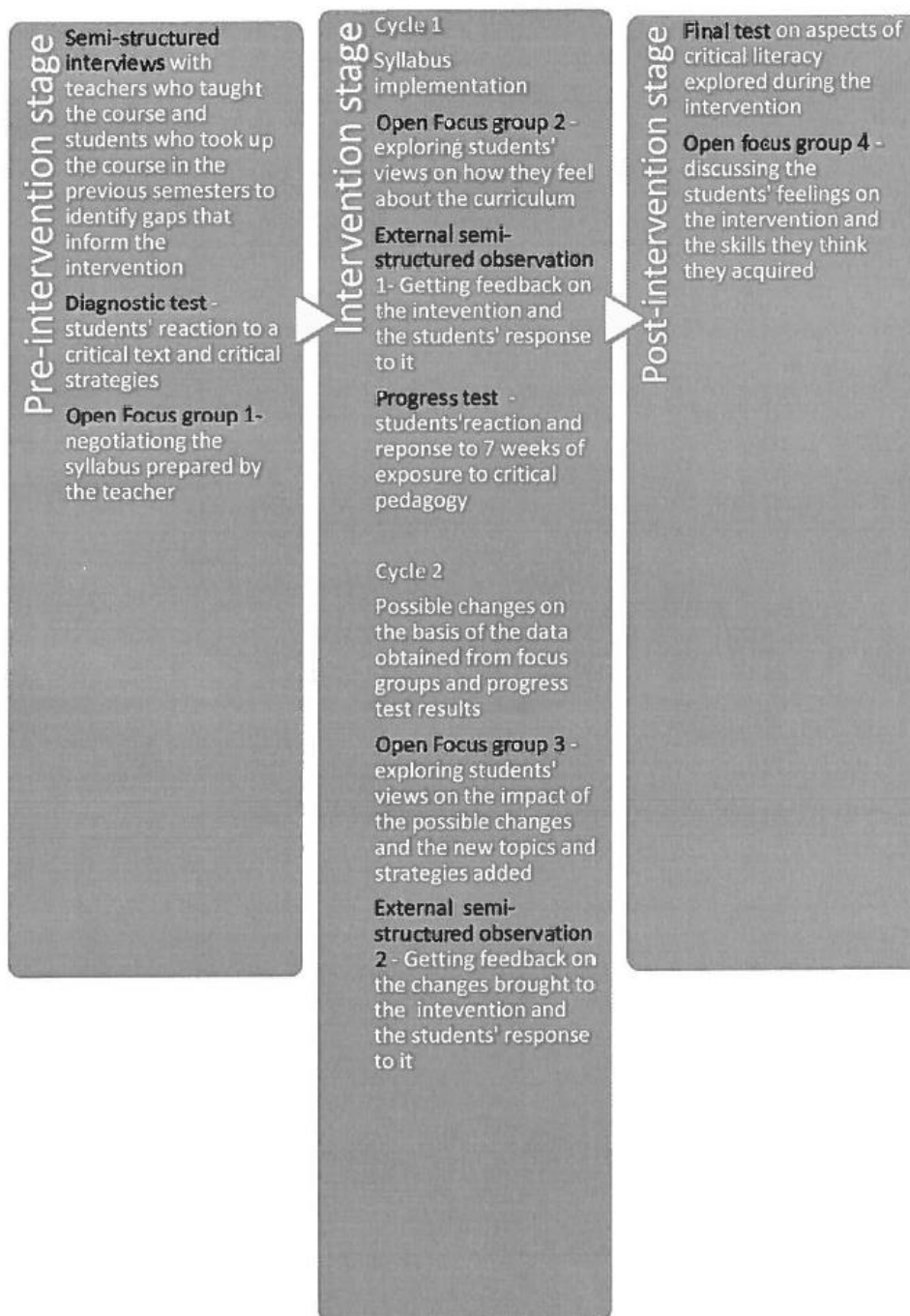
1. Brief description of your research project:

My research project focuses on the implementation of critical literacy strategies in an English language classroom at a private college in the Sultanate of Oman.

The purpose of this study is to implement and explore critical literacy in English as a Second Language (ESL) course whose purpose lies mainly in improving reading skills. The research methodology implemented is action research with a pre-intervention, intervention with two iterative cycles and post-intervention design. The purpose of the intervention is to develop an initial critical awareness in students and thus allow them to look at texts in a manner they had not engaged in before through questioning and deconstruction.

Thus, the proposed research will look into different aspects of a critical literacy intervention, namely 1) the students' views on the intervention, that is the way they respond and engage with the proposed curriculum and materials 2) the teacher/researcher's view on the intervention based on observation and reflection 3) the factors that hindered or supported the critical literacy intervention and finally the manner in which the intervention helped improve students' critical awareness.

The present study falls into the critical research paradigm hence an action research methodology was the appropriate choice as it calls for multiple data sources hence provides multiple perspectives into the researched phenomenon. A summary of the data collection methods and the intervention stages can be seen in the figure below:



The data will be collected during a fourteen week period mainly during the course delivery hours English Reading module (pseudonym used) which range from 2-4 per week and which serve to help students enrolled in the English Studies Programme at Capital Private College (pseudonym used) in the Sultanate of Oman improve their language skills in order to progress to higher levels.

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

The target population includes 12 Omani students enrolled in an English studies programme at Capital Private College. The students are females with ages between 18-20.

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

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

All the participants in this research project are above 18 years old hence they will be asked to sign an informed consent form themselves. In addition to this, a letter of request for permission to collect data and an informed consent form will be forwarded to the Head of the English Department.

4. anonymity and confidentiality

The names of the students as well as the college I have selected are not mentioned in the research paper and the participation in the research project is entirely voluntary. All participants are promised anonymity and confidentiality hence the collected data will not be shared with a third party as I will personally handle the transcription of the recordings.

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

I chose an action research methodology that relies on multiple data collection methods. The rationale for this lies in the fact that this methodology fits perfectly in the critical paradigm which underpins the research study. Also it fits the scope of the study as a pedagogical intervention to address a problem or a gap in the curriculum and explore potential solutions for it.

Prior to the intervention, I will conduct interviews with tutors who taught the respective module as well as students who took it to identify the gaps in the previous curriculum as well as get an overall insight into the students' and tutors' reaction to critical pedagogy.

Consequently, I will design a diagnostic test which I will distribute in the second teaching week in order to identify the students' critical literacy skills/critical awareness level. The diagnostic test will be based on different critical literacy strategies listed in the literature particularly in Janks et al., (2014). During this stage, I will also conduct an initial focus group discussion in which I will present the proposed curriculum to the students, where different critical texts are tackled and ask for their opinions and suggestions.

The main rationale for using a focus group interview prior to the intervention is to gain more insight into how students would feel about the curriculum but also to offer them the option to participate in the curriculum design, to contribute to topics studied and materials to be tackled in class.

During the intervention I will continue to use focus groups to continue exploring students' views on the proposed curriculum and also to assure them of their continued involvement in the classroom decision making process and in the curriculum negotiation.

I chose the focus group as a method of data collection not only because it is more practical, but also because by definition a focus group is a gathering of individuals who have common characteristics and possibly share common interests. Therefore, I considered that it might be much easier for the

participants to express their views on the topic in an enjoyable atmosphere with other students their age. Given my experience as a practitioner with these particular age groups, I strongly believe that students feel more comfortable and relaxed in a focus group discussion as they share their opinions with peers, not only with the interviewer.

Accordingly, the focus group discussion will not cause any harm to the participants first of all because the participation is voluntary, secondly because it will take place in a familiar setting (in the class with their tutor). Since critical pedagogy can deal at times with sensitive societal issues it is important for students to establish rapport with their tutor and feel assured that their identity is protected and confidentiality ensured. Also the students who do not wish to participate in the research can choose to participate in the discussion; however their opinions will not be used for research purposes.

The focus group discussions will also provide me with an insight into what the progress test should include in order to establish whether students have improved their critical literacy skills or not. As all the above mentioned ethical protocols will be followed, I firmly believe that this method will not cause students any harm as expressing their opinions in a group especially at this stage makes them feel more secure and confident.

As the research study will be conducted during the class time of the above-mentioned module for which I am the sole tutor, in order to reduce bias, I believe it is important to add a third perspective on the intervention and bring in an external observer. The external observer will be given an observation chart which would include several criteria he/she would be looking at in order to assess the progress of the critical literacy intervention. The external observer will sign an informed consent similar to the other research participants in addition to which he/she will have to also sign a non-disclosure consent agreement meaning that he/she cannot use the information obtained during the observation period in any way. This measure ensures that all data obtained during the intervention is confidential and exclusively in the possession of the researcher.

Finally, in the post-intervention stage I will organize one final focus group and administrate one final test to collect the overall views of the students on the intervention and also to assess whether there has been a progress in their critical literacy skills or not.

Another data collection method that I will be using during all the stages of the intervention will be the researcher's diary in which I will record my observations of the classroom events at all stages of the intervention. This diary will be recorded electronically on a mobile device that is password protected hence the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants will be maintained.

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

I will digitally record the focus group discussions and will store the data in my personal computer. The recordings will be deleted from the recording device and they will not exist anywhere other than my personal computer. My computer is password protected and the data will be stored in a password protected folder.

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

It is not the case for the current study.

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

There are no exceptional factors related to this study as the topic is not sensitive at all. Therefore, there are no other factors which may raise other ethical issues.

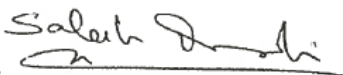
This form should now be printed out, signed by you on the first page and sent to your supervisor to sign. Your supervisor will forward this document to the School's **Research Support Office** for the Chair of the School's Ethics Committee to countersign. A unique approval reference will be added and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

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

This project has been approved for the period: Oct 2014

until: Oct 2015

By (above mentioned supervisor's signature):



date: 24/09/2014.....

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

GSE unique approval reference: D114/15/06.....

Signed: 
Chair of the School's Ethics Committee

date: 24/10/14.....

APPENDIX B



GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

Title of Research Project:

Reading Beyond the Lines: a case of critical literacy in the Sultanate of Oman

This project is currently supervised at the University of Exeter, Graduate School of Education. The research paper has as main purpose the implementation and exploration of critical literacy strategies in an English language classroom in the Sultanate of Oman. In order to achieve the aims of this project, I will have to collect data during the class hours of one of the English language modules. The data consists of tests, questionnaires, and focus group discussions which will show the English students' abilities to analyze and discuss different texts critically. Classroom discussions will be audio-recorded and analysed by the researcher. All tests and student work will also be collected and kept by the researcher.

Participation in this project is voluntary, meaning that the participants can choose at any point of time not to allow the researcher to use data generated by them. The voluntary participation in the research project does not imply class absenteeism or lack of participation in classroom discussions.

CONSENT FORM

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

I understand that:

-there is no compulsion for me to participate in this research project and, if I do choose to participate, I may at any stage withdraw* my participation and may also request that my data be destroyed;

-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 the participant)

.....
(Date)

.....
(Printed name of participant)

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

Contact phone number of researcher(s):

Alina Chirciu

Email:

alina.chirciu@gmail.com

arc213@exeter.ac.uk

Phone: 0096896472410

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

OR

Dry Salah Troudi-DirectorEdD TESOL Dubai
Graduate School of Education, University of Exeter
Email: S.Troudi@exeter.ac.uk

* when research takes place in a school, the right to withdraw from the research does NOT usually mean that pupils or students may withdraw from lessons in which the research takes place

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

APPENDIX C



GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

Consent Form Arabic

موضوع البحث : قراءة ما وراء الخطوط : حالة القراءة النقدية في سلطنة عمان.

هذا المشروع البحثي تحت إشراف جامعة أكستر مدرسة الدراسات العليا للتعليم. الهدف الأساسي لهذه الرسالة البحثية هو تنفيذ و
إستكشاف الإستراتيجيات القراءة النقدية في الفصول الدراسية للغة الإنجليزية في سلطنة عمان.

للوصول للهدف المرجو من هذه الدراسة سوف أقوم بتجميع معلومات خلال الساعات الدراسية لأحد الفصول الدراسية للغة
الإنجليزية. وهذه المعلومات سوف تكون عبارة عن إختبارات و أسئلة و مناقشات ، لإظهار مقدرة طلبة اللغة الإنجليزية لتحليل و
مناقشة مختلف النصوص بطريقة نقدية . المناقشات في غرف الدراسة سوف تسجل صوتياً لتحليلها عن طريق الباحث. جميع
الإختبارات و أوراق الطلبة المتعلقة بالدراسة سوف تجمع و تحفظ عن طريق الباحث.

المشاركة في هذه الدراسي هي تطوعية ، أي بمعنى أنه بإمكان المشارك في هذا البحث و في إي وقت شاء التوقف من سماح
للباحث من إستخدام المعلومات التي قدمت للباحث في هذه الدراسة.

المشاركة التطوعية في هذا البحث لن تتعرض لسجلات الحضور أو قلة المشاركة في نقاشات الفصول الدراسية.

نموذج موافقة

لقد تم إعلامي بالكامل بالأهداف المرجوة من هذا البحث.

لذا فإنني فهمت التالي:

1. أنني لم أجبر على المشاركة بل تطوعت بالمشاركة، مع أنني إخترت المشاركة في هذا البحث فبإمكاني في أي مرحلة*الإنسحاب من المشاركة و إنه يحق لي المطالبة بالتخلص من جميع المعلومات التي قدمتها في هذا المشروع.
2. يحق لي من رفض أن تنشر أي معلومات متعلقة بي.
3. كل المعلومات التي تقدمت بها في هذا البحث سوف تستخدم فقط لصالح هذا البحث و ما يتعلق به من مقالات منشورة و تقديمها في المآتمرات أو محاضرات تعليمية.
4. كل المعلومات التي قدمتها سوف يتعامل معها بسرية تامة.

التاريخ:

إسم المشارك:

توقيع المشارك:

نسخة واحدة من هذا النموذج تعطى للمشارك بالبحث و صورة أخرى للباحث

إذا كانت لديكم أي إستفسارات أو أسئلة بخصوص هذا المشروع الرجاء الإتصال :

ألينا كرتشو

alina.chirciu@gmail.com

arc213@exeter.ac.uk

الهاتف 0096896472410

أو

د. صلاح طرودي مدير برنامج EdD TESOL، دبي

جامعة أكستر ، مدرسة الدراسات العليا للتعليم

S.Troudi@exeter.ac.uk الإيميل

* خلال القيام بالبحث في المدارس و في الفصول الدراسية، حق الإنسحاب من البحث لا يعي إنسحاب الطلبة من حضور الحصص التي يقام خلالها البحث.

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

APPENDIX D



GRADUATESCHOOL OF EDUCATION

Consent Form Head of Department

Title of Research Project: ***The art of possible: experiences of critical pedagogy at a higher education institution in the Sultanate of Oman***

This project is currently supervised at the University of Exeter, Graduate School of Education. The research paper has as main purpose the implementation and exploration of critical literacy strategies in an English language classroom in the Sultanate of Oman. In order to achieve the aims of this project, I will implement an action research methodology with a pre-intervention, intervention with two iterative cycles and post-intervention design in one of the modules taught in the English studies programme in the department you represent. In the pre-intervention stage I will interview former students who took the respective module and tutors who taught it. I will also administrate a diagnostic test and conduct a focus group discussion with the students currently enrolled in the respective module. During the intervention stage I will conduct two focus group discussions and a progress test and finally in the post-intervention stage I will conduct another focus group discussion and a final test in order to assess the level of critical awareness and the critical literacy skills students have gained as a result of the intervention.

The participation to this project involves allowing me to collect the above mentioned data in the department you represent. I will be available at the contacts given below, should you require more information regarding the project.

CONSENT FORM

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

I understand that:

-there is no compulsion for me to participate in this research project and, if I do choose to participate, I may at any stage withdraw* my participation and may also request that my data be destroyed;

-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 the participant)

.....

(Date)

.....

(Printed name of participant)

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

Contact phone number of researcher(s):

Alina Chirciu

Email:

alina.chirciu@gmail.com

arc213@exeter.ac.uk

Phone: 0096896472410

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

OR

Dr Salah Troudi-DirectorEdD TESOL Dubai

Graduate School of Education, University of Exeter

Email: S.Troudi@exeter.ac.uk

* when research takes place in a school, the right to withdraw from the research does NOT usually mean that pupils or students may withdraw from lessons in which the research takes place

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APPENDIX E
Diagnostic test

Preview the article below:

1. What do you think it is about?

2. In your opinion, what does the expression "hijab row" refer to?

3. Do you think wearing a hijab interferes with a Muslim woman's ability to compete in professional sports?

Qatar pulls out of women's basketball over hijab row

17th Asiad is being run under the slogan: 'Diversity Shines Here'

Reuters

Published: 11:48 September 25, 2014

INCHEON, South Korea: Qatar have pulled out of the women's basketball competition at the Asian Games in South Korea after they were denied permission to wear the Islamic headscarf, an official with the Qatari delegation told Reuters on Thursday.

The Qatari players had been asked to remove the hijab before their group game against Mongolia on Wednesday but refused, leaving Incheon organisers no option but to declare a forfeit.

Under International Basketball Federation (FIBA) rules, Article 4.2.2 dictates players cannot wear "headgear, hair accessories and jewellery".

'Diversity'

With no sign that the rule would be relaxed ahead of their next scheduled match against Nepal, Qatar decided not to go ahead with all their remaining games at the 17th Asiad, which is being run under the slogan: 'Diversity Shines Here'.

"We have decided not to take part in the remainder of the Asian Games women's basketball competition," an assistant with Qatar's National Olympic Committee told Reuters by telephone.

Competition at the Asian Games is conducted under the regulations of sports' international governing bodies, meaning athletes in other sports are free to wear the hijab.

All four bronze medal-winning rowers of Iran's lightweight women's quadruple sculls team wore hijabs on Wednesday, while Kuwait's Najlaa I M Aljerewi and Iran's Aghaei Hajiagha Soraya wore them in the triathlon and badminton events on Thursday.

Basketball remains one of the exceptions, though FIBA said earlier this month it had held discussions on the issue and was introducing a two-year 'testing phase' on what players can wear, though that would only apply at national level.

The Olympic Council of Asia (OCA) issued a statement on Wednesday saying: "The right of the athletes must be the highest priority."

Sports federations had a duty to protect athletes and "allow them to exercise their right of freedom of choice with dignity," OCA director general Husain Al-Musallam added in a statement.

Source: Gulfnews.com

Consider the above text and answer the following questions:

1. How are the Qatari players represented in the text: are they victims or are they heroes? Please explain your choice with arguments from the text.

2. What is the writer's point of view? Do you think he/she is biased or fair? Explain your choice with arguments from the text.

3. Is the FIBA's (International Basketball Federation) point of view represented in the text or excluded?

4. Do you think the Qatari players took the right decision? Why or why not?

5. Do you think the article would have been written differently if it had been published by another newspaper such as The Times or The Guardian? Please explain why.

APPENDIX F

Semi - structured General Interview Questions

- 1) What was your experience with this module?
- 2) What reading material would you use in the English language modules?
- 3) What does it mean to be critical in academic reading?

Additional questions for tutors

- 4) What do you think the students lack/expect/ need in this module?
- 5) Do you think being critical is important while teaching English?

Additional questions for students

- 4) Were your expectations for this module met?
- 5) Do you think it important to be exposed to texts and topics that are related to your social reality/ to the real world?

Note: these questions are indicative only. Other questions will arise from the flow of the conversation.

APPENDIX G

Progress Test

1. Read at the title and the caption below. What do you think is the purpose of the article?

2. How do you feel after reading the title? Do you think the topic is relevant to you?

Dark is Beautiful' movement takes on India's obsession with whiter skin

Indian actress Nandita Das is the face of the 'Dark is Beautiful Campaign,' which helps spread the message that women shouldn't have to lighten their skin to feel good about themselves. Das says the pressure to be pale has nearly driven some women to suicide.

MUMBAI - Looking to find a husband, make friends, and get ahead at work? Then you need to have lighter skin. That's the all-pervasive message in India, and it's something that one actress is fighting to overturn. The new poster girl of the "Dark is Beautiful" campaign, Nandita Das, has called out India's obsession with fair skin -- a prejudice she says has driven some young women to the brink of suicide. "Magazines, TV, cinema -- everywhere being fair is synonymous with being beautiful," Das told AFP.

Described as having "dusky" skin as opposed to a fair complexion, the 43-year-old is well used to Indian preoccupations with color, and not just in the film industry, where she has refused requests to lighten her skin for roles. "How can you be so confident despite being so dark?" is a question regularly asked of Das, who has preferred to star in

unconventional, issue-based films but says she would struggle to get ahead in mainstream Bollywood movies.

'Beauty beyond color'

In May, Das became the face of the Dark is Beautiful campaign, launched in 2009 by activist group Women of Worth to celebrate "beauty beyond color". Her backing has helped to generate increasing debate in the media, but the response has underlined just how ingrained the preference is for fairer skin, which has long been associated with higher social classes and castes. "I started getting tonnes of emails from young women pouring their heart out about how they were discriminated against. Some wanted to commit suicide because they couldn't be fair," she said.

Das found her own photograph had been lightened by a newspaper even for a feature on the campaign. When looking for a nanny, she was told one candidate was "good, but quite dark". Amid such pressures to be pale, India's whitening cream market swelled from \$397 million in 2008 to \$638 million over four years, according to market researchers at Euromonitor International. Skin-lightening products accounted for 84 percent of the country's facial moisturizer market last year, their report shows.

The bias facing darker-skinned women was raised again in September when an Indian-origin woman, Nina Davuluri, won the "Miss America" contest in the United States. "Had she been in India, far from entering a beauty contest, it is more likely that Ms. Davuluri would have grown up hearing mostly disparaging remarks about the color of her skin," said an editorial in The Hindu newspaper. "She would have been -- going by the storyline of most 'fairness' cream advertisements -- a person with low self-esteem and few friends." Aspiring grooms often state in their adverts their preference for a fair bride, while nearly all women's profiles describe their complexion as fair or so-called "whitish". Ekta Ghosh, a fashion designer in Mumbai who specializes in wedding wear, said the message that only fair is beautiful had been passed down to Indian girls for generations. "Parents, relatives, they all keep saying you should do something to lighten your skin tone," she said.

India's mass market whitening pioneer was "Fair & Lovely", launched in 1975 by Hindustan Unilever and now selling in a range of other countries where pale skin is desirable, across Africa and the Middle East as well as Asia. Indian consumer group Emami later came up with "Fair and Teen" for girls and "Fair and Handsome" for men. Promoted by Bollywood superstar Shah Rukh Khan, the latest advert shows him tossing a tube of the cream from the red carpet to a young male fan.

Dark is Beautiful has launched a petition against the "irresponsible" video and its message that "fair skin is a prerequisite for success". So far more than 15,000 people have signed up in protest, but Khan has not responded. "You're telling people they're just not good enough," said Das, who describes whitening cream adverts in general as "so regressive and derogatory". Fairness cream producers suggest they help to boost users' confidence, although both Emami and Hindustan Unilever declined to comment for this article. Not everyone, however, is convinced such creams are even effective. Receptionist Parch Chawing, 28, said she had been using Fair & Lovely products for three years "out of habit", but was yet to see noticeable results. "There have been no side effects but no change either," she said.

Das believes whitening cream developers did not create Indians' color bias and insecurities, but have "cashed in" on it, creating a "vicious circle". While men's fairness products are gaining ground, the actress says women and girls still face far more pressure over their skin tone, which she puts down to a general lack of respect and inequality. "Until we let women have the same space as men and treat them as human beings, all this will carry on."

1) How is Nandita Das represented in the text? Is she a hero or is she a victim?

2) What is the writer's point of view? Do you think he/she is biased or fair? Explain your choice with arguments from the text.

3) Is the Fairness cream producers' point of view represented in the text or excluded?

4) Do you think this campaign and the publicity for it is justified or needed? Why or why not?

5) Do you think the article would have been written differently if it had been published by another newspaper such as The Times or The Guardian? Please explain why.

6) Do you think this article is relevant to the Omani society? Why?

7) What is your personal opinion regarding this whitening/fairness obsession?

APPENDIX H

Final Test

3. Read the title and the caption below. What do you think is the purpose of the article?

4. How do you feel after reading the title? Do you think the topic is relevant to you?

Fears for female Saudi activist jailed for defying driving ban

London: The family of a Saudi woman being held in custody for attempting to drive her car in defiance of the country's ban on female drivers has been told that her detention has been extended for a further 25 days.

The worried relatives and friends of Loujain Al Hathloul, who has been in custody in Saudi Arabia since December 1, have not yet been told what charges the 25-year-old faces.

They are fearful authorities could be intending to make an example of her, after becoming frustrated by low-level campaigning by activists against the ban on women driving. To date few women who flouted the ban have been held for more than a few days.

Hathloul, driving from the United Arab Emirates, was deliberately defying the law when she was blocked and forced to stay in her car at the border crossing with Saudi Arabia for an entire day. The French literature graduate had taken part in an online campaign against the driving ban last year, posting a video of herself driving home from Riyadh airport.

She also made waves on Saudi social networks several months ago by posting a video of herself with her face and hair uncovered, in defiance of her country's ultraconservatives.

At that point Hathloul's father was admonished by the ministry of the interior, which forced him to sign a pledge not to allow her to drive again. Her uncle was also asked to release a statement denouncing her actions.

Hathloul's campaign has brought her thousands of online admirers. Among them is Eman Al Nafjan, author of the popular Saudiwoman blog.

"I don't care how cliched it is, she really is like a breath of fresh cool air in this hot desert climate," Nafjan said.

Another woman, UAE-based Saudi journalist Maysaa Alamoudi, who went to support Hathloul, had also been arrested, a friend said, claiming that Alamoudi had not intended to cross onto Saudi soil, but was tricked into doing so and then arrested by armed guards and taken into custody along with her friend.

"Maysaa just came to the border to help and support Loujain and to bring her food, when she heard that she had been trapped there with her passport confiscated," said the friend, who has requested anonymity because of threats the family had received. Hathloul's father and brother have also been detained.

Activists said border officers stopped Hathloul as soon as they saw her at the wheel and asked her to wait until they received orders from their superiors. Hathloul posted details about her long confinement in her car, taking pictures of the low temperature readings overnight and of her supplies of water.

Her driving licence "is valid in all GCC countries", a reference to the six-nation Gulf Cooperation Council which includes Saudi Arabia. Six hours into her wait she said she was "optimistic". "If someone brings me a horse or a camel to the border, maybe then I'll be allowed to pass." she joked. Then: "The customs [department] have no right to prevent me from entering, even if in their opinion I am 'a violator' because I am Saudi."

Her last tweet was: "I have been at the Saudi border for 24 hours. They don't want to give me my passport nor will they let me pass."

Once her tweets stopped, users and activists took to Twitter to express worry and to offer support. "She has had a lot of support, but there are also a lot of people attacking her. It's

noticeable those attacking her seem to be using pseudonyms in accounts opened just for this purpose,” said the friend.

During October, dozens of women drove in Saudi Arabia and posted images of themselves doing so as part of an online campaign supporting the right to drive. The interior ministry warned them it would strictly implement measures against anyone undermining what it described as the social cohesion of the kingdom.

Over the past few years several women drivers have been arrested and their cars confiscated, activists say. They include Manal Al Sharif, who helped start the women’s right to drive campaign in Saudi Arabia in 2011 and was jailed for nine days. She was only released after being forced to sign a bail condition that she wouldn’t drive again. “This sentence on Loujain is unprecedented,’ said one activist, “so of course we are very fearful of what it might mean.”

The Saudi interior ministry would not comment on the case.

6) How is Loujain Hathul represented in the text? Is she a hero or is she a victim?

7) What is the writer's point of view? Do you think he/she is biased or fair? Explain your choice with arguments from the text.

8) Is the Saudi authorities' point of view represented in the text or excluded?

9) Do you think the publicity for this issue is justified or needed? Why or why not?

10) Do you think the article would have been written differently if it had been published by another newspaper such as The Times or The Guardian? Please explain why.

6) Do you think this article is relevant to the Omani society? Why?

APPENDIX I

3/2016

Mid-semester Feedback Questionnaire

Mid-semester Feedback Questionnaire

1. What is your general opinion on the module?

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

2. Do you feel comfortable talking about the issues presented in this module?

Check all that apply.

- Yes
 No
 Not sure

3. Do you like the teaching and learning approach in this module?

Check all that apply.

- Yes
 No
 Not sure

4. Do you feel that the topics presented in this module are related to your real life?

Check all that apply.

- Yes
 No
 Not sure

5. Do you feel that the topics presented in this module are related to your real life?

Check all that apply.

- Yes
 No
 Not sure

6. Does this module help you look at issues from a different perspective?

Check all that apply.

- Yes
 No
 Not sure

7. Do you think it is useful talking about current social issues?

Check all that apply.

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

8. Do you find the material and the teaching approach useful?

Check all that apply.

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

9. If in the above question you answered yes, explain why you find it useful and if you answered no, explain why you don't find it useful.

.....

.....

.....

.....

10. What aspects of language learning has the module helped you improve so far

Check all that apply.

- Reading skills
- Writing skills
- Speaking skills
- Vocabulary building skills
- All of the above
- None of the above

11. What suggestions could you give to improve the teaching and learning process in this module?

.....

.....

.....

.....

APPENDIX J

End of Semester Feedback Questionnaire

1. What was your overall experience of this module?

2. Did you find the topics discussed in the module interesting and useful?

Check all that apply.

- Yes
 No
 Not sure

3. Did you like the teaching and learning approach in this module?

Check all that apply.

- Yes
 No
 Not sure

4. Did you feel that the topics presented in this module are related to your real life?

Check all that apply.

- Yes
 No
 Not sure

5. Did this module help you look at issues from a different perspective?

Check all that apply.

- Yes
 No
 Not sure

6. Did you think it was useful to talk about current social issues?

Check all that apply.

- Yes
 No
 Not sure

7. **Did you find the material and the teaching approach useful?**

Check all that apply.

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

8. **If in the above question you answered yes, explain why you found it useful and if you answered no, explain why you didn't find it useful.**

9. **What aspects of language learning did the module help you improve?**

Check all that apply.

- Reading skills
- Writing skills
- Speaking skills
- Vocabulary building skills
- All of the above
- None of the above

10. **What suggestions could you give to improve the teaching and learning process in this module?**

11. **What topics did you like the most and why? What topics did you dislike and why?**

APPENDIX K

External Class Observation Sheet

1. General impression of the class:

2. Do you find students engage with the content presented and the teaching and learning methods?

3. Do you find that students are able to express solid and diverse opinions?

4. Do you find that students are willing to participate actively or do they need guidance from the teacher?

5. Do the students display a wide range of vocabulary and reading comprehension skills?

6. Other observations:

APPENDIX L

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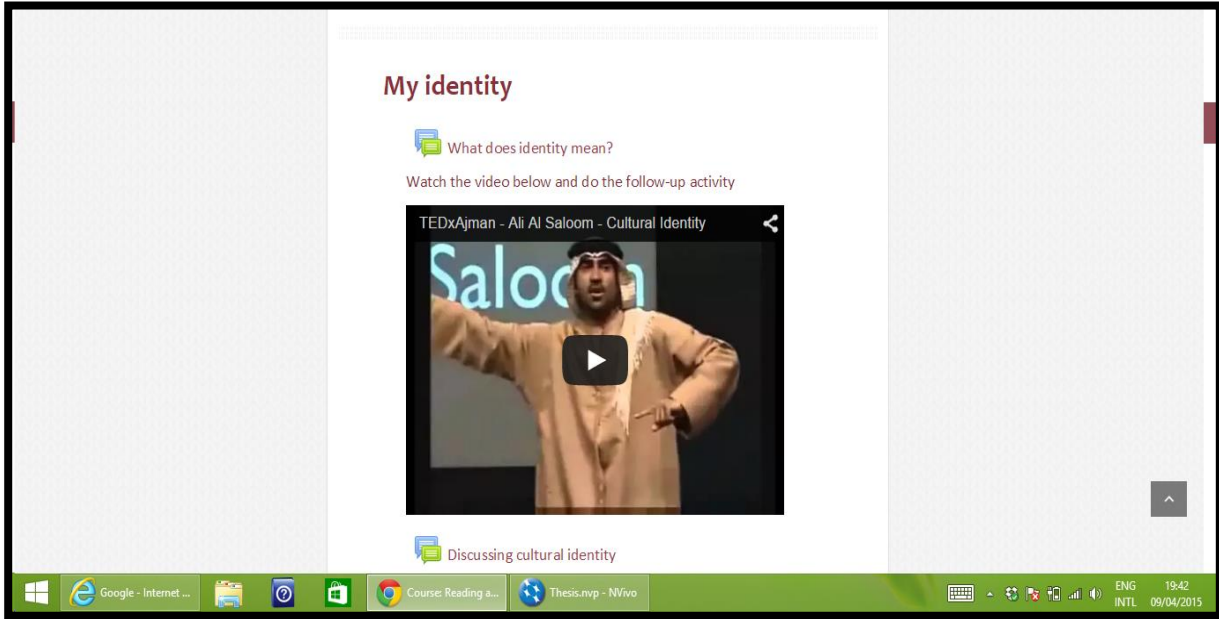
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APPENDIX M

Screenshots of classroom activities on Moodle



My identity

What does identity mean?

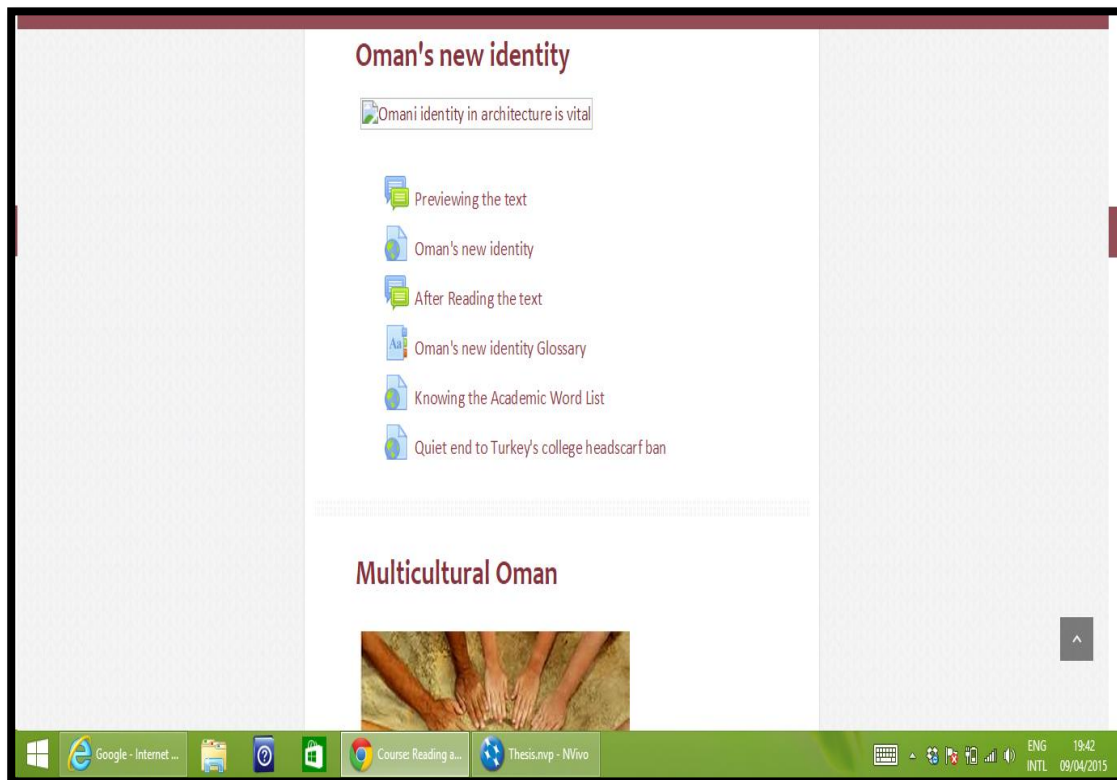
Watch the video below and do the follow-up activity

TEDxAjman - Ali Al Saloom - Cultural Identity

Saloom

Discussing cultural identity

The screenshot shows a Moodle page titled "My identity". It includes a discussion question "What does identity mean?", a video player for "TEDxAjman - Ali Al Saloom - Cultural Identity", and a follow-up activity "Discussing cultural identity". The Windows taskbar at the bottom shows the date as 09/04/2015 and the time as 19:42.



Oman's new identity


Omani identity in architecture is vital

- Previewing the text
- Oman's new identity
- After Reading the text
- Oman's new identity Glossary
- Knowing the Academic Word List
- Quiet end to Turkey's college headscarf ban

Multicultural Oman

The screenshot shows a Moodle page titled "Oman's new identity". It features a text resource "Omani identity in architecture is vital" and a list of resources including "Previewing the text", "Oman's new identity", "After Reading the text", "Oman's new identity Glossary", "Knowing the Academic Word List", and "Quiet end to Turkey's college headscarf ban". Below the list is a section titled "Multicultural Oman" with an image of hands joined together. The Windows taskbar at the bottom shows the date as 09/04/2015 and the time as 19:42.

Women in Oman and the world




- Women rights in pictures
- Women's rights in pictures activity
- Omani women demand more slots in top positions
- Quotas aren't the best way to get more women into boardrooms
- Omani women demand more slots in top positions glossary
- Comparing and contrasting two texts on the same topic

Windows taskbar: Google - Internet..., Course: Reading a..., Thesis.mvp - NVivo, ENG INTL 19:43 09/04/2015

Women in Oman and the world (continued)

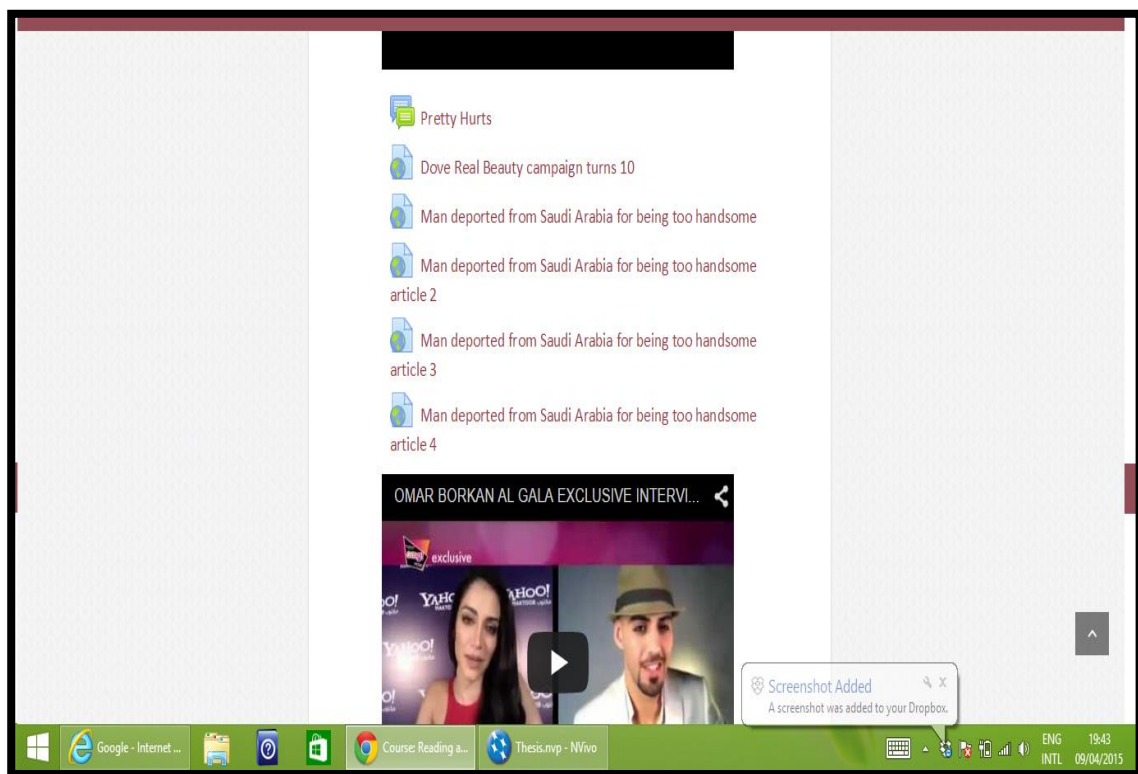
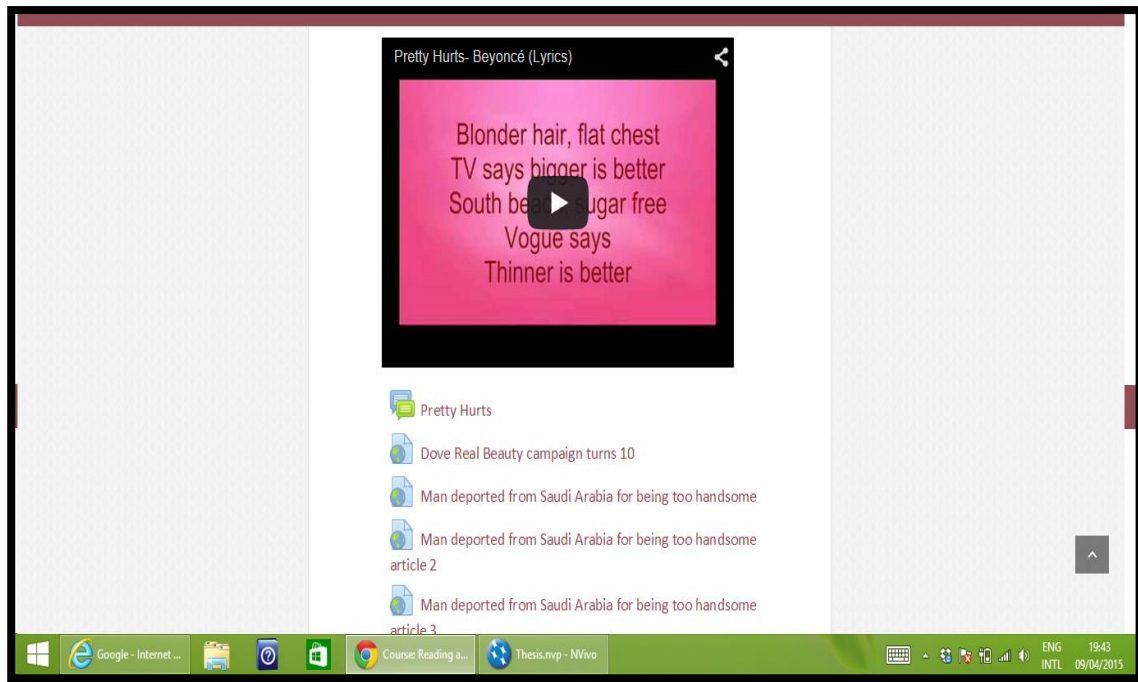
- Gender stereotypes in pictures
- Gender stereotypes in pictures
- Women rights in Oman
- Women rights in Oman
- Women rights in Oman

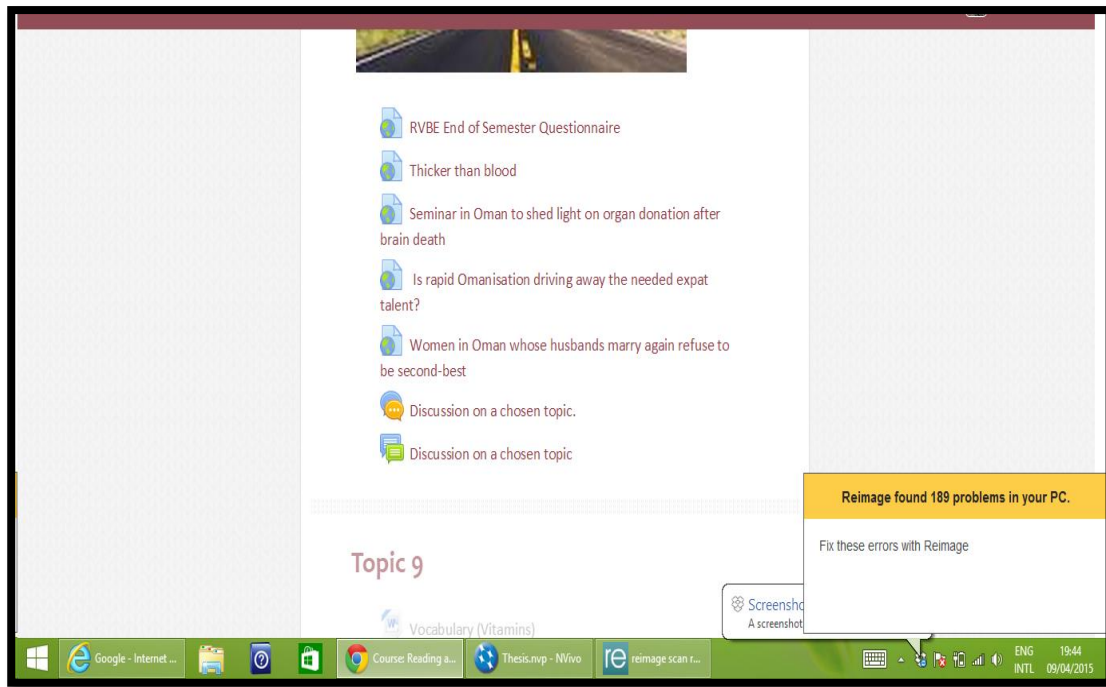
Beauty - a blessing or a curse?



Screenshot Added
A screenshot was added to your Dropbox.

Windows taskbar: Google - Internet..., Course: Reading a..., Thesis.mvp - NVivo, ENG INTL 19:43 09/04/2015





APPENDIX N

Screenshots of Nvivo 10 coded transcripts

The screenshot shows the Nvivo 10 Media Tools interface. The 'Media Tools' ribbon is active, showing options like 'Start Selection', 'Finish Selection', and 'Play Transcript Media'. The 'Sources' pane on the left shows a tree view with 'Internals' expanded to 'Intervention stage'. The main window displays a search results table for 'Intervention stage' with columns for Name, Nodes, References, Created On, Created By, Modified On, and Modified By.

Name	Nodes	References	Created On	Created By	Modified On	Modified By
Class recording 0	0	0	2/11/2015 5:23 PM	ARC	7/26/2015 3:56 PM	ARC
Class recording 1_part 3	0	0	2/11/2015 2:05 PM	ARC	7/5/2015 2:57 PM	ARC
Class recording 10	0	0	2/11/2015 2:05 PM	ARC	7/13/2015 5:40 PM	ARC
Class recording 11	2	12	2/11/2015 2:05 PM	ARC	7/14/2015 3:22 PM	ARC

Below the table is a waveform visualization and a transcript snippet:

1 How do you decide what is beautiful and what is not?
Z: Yeah because I saw a picture of a woman from South Africa. She put a very strange jewelry in her neck. For those people who live there this is sign of beauty. We didn't see that so that is why I think we know what is beautiful.

2 What are the most important features that determine someone's beauty?
M: The eyes.
Z: The face, the body.

3 M: P... ..

The screenshot shows the Nvivo 10 Nodes interface. The 'Nodes' ribbon is active, showing options like 'Reset Settings', 'Select', and 'Text'. The 'Nodes' pane on the left shows a tree view with 'Nodes' expanded. The main window displays a search results table for 'Nodes' with columns for Name, Sources, References, Created On, Created By, Modified On, and Modified By.

Name	Sources	References	Created On	Created By	Modified On	Modified By
change as a result of critical awareness	12	60	2/12/2015 1:29 PM	ARC	8/4/2015 6:17 PM	ARC
curriculum	0	0	2/12/2015 1:04 PM	ARC	7/30/2015 7:26 PM	ARC
factors that helped or hindered the critical intervention	0	0	7/30/2015 7:12 PM	ARC	7/30/2015 7:25 PM	ARC
gap in module scope	4	7	2/12/2015 11:18 AM	ARC	7/30/2015 7:24 PM	ARC

Below the table is a detailed view of a node:

change as a result of critical awareness - 6 references coded [100.00% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 100.00% Coverage

How do you decide what is beautiful and what is not?
Z: Yeah because I saw a picture of a woman from South Africa. She put a very strange jewelry in her neck. For those people who live there this is sign of beauty. We didn't see that so that is why I think we know what is beautiful.

Reference 2 - 100.00% Coverage

How would the world be different if we didn't consider beauty at all?
S: It would be different in a good way.
Z: The beauty is to be different, is to be how you are not to be like someone else. When we treat each other not by how this person is beautiful but rather how this person is thinking.

Thesis.nvp - NVivo

File Home Create External Data Analyze Query Explore Layout View

Go Refresh Open Properties Edit Paste Copy Merge Cut Copy Merge Format Paragraph Styles Editing Proofing

Workspace Item Clipboard Format Paragraph Styles Editing Proofing

Look for: Search In: Nodes Find Now Clear Advanced Find

Nodes

Name	Sources	References	Created On	Created By	Modified On	Modified By
students' views on critical intervention	0	0	7/30/2015 7:11 PM	ARC	7/30/2015 7:24 PM	ARC
language skills development	2	6	7/30/2015 7:14 PM	ARC	7/30/2015 8:06 PM	ARC
vocabulary skills	2	4	7/30/2015 7:15 PM	ARC	7/30/2015 8:14 PM	ARC
reading skills	1	1	7/30/2015 7:15 PM	ARC	7/30/2015 7:53 PM	ARC
conversation skills	1	1	7/30/2015 7:15 PM	ARC	7/30/2015 7:54 PM	ARC
critical awareness development	0	0	7/30/2015 7:16 PM	ARC	7/30/2015 7:26 PM	ARC
students' interest and enjoyable experience	3	7	7/30/2015 7:34 PM	ARC	7/30/2015 8:13 PM	ARC
change of one's point of view	2	7	7/30/2015 7:17 PM	ARC	8/3/2015 3:17 PM	ARC
awareness of the link between the classroom and real-life experienc	3	18	7/30/2015 7:36 PM	ARC	7/30/2015 8:14 PM	ARC
students	0	0	2/12/2015 1:13 PM	ARC	7/30/2015 7:25 PM	ARC
students' inability to read critically or interpret	2	2	2/12/2015 12:38 PM	ARC	2/12/2015 1:33 PM	ARC
students' high level of communicative ability	1	2	2/12/2015 12:35 PM	ARC	7/30/2015 7:25 PM	ARC
student guidance and set curriculum	1	1	2/12/2015 12:44 PM	ARC	2/12/2015 12:52 PM	ARC
critical awareness	1	2	7/5/2015 3:30 PM	ARC	7/30/2015 7:26 PM	ARC
identity	1	25	7/5/2015 3:15 PM	ARC	7/30/2015 7:24 PM	ARC
freedom	1	1	7/5/2015 3:27 PM	ARC	7/5/2015 3:27 PM	ARC
discrimination	2	20	7/5/2015 3:26 PM	ARC	7/29/2015 8:00 PM	NV
cultural identity	2	12	7/5/2015 3:20 PM	ARC	7/29/2015 8:00 PM	NV

ARC: 47 Items

Search the web and Windows

7:53 PM 5/4/2016

APPENDIX O

Sample transcript

So, what did you think of X module? Do you think they provide students with a critical understanding?

A: All these modules are very basic. It seems that they have been created to bridge the gap between Foundation and level 1. It's very basic, in writing we expose them to letters and emails which are not very academic.

Do you think this is enough for BA English students who are expected to take literature modules, who are expected to become journalists and so on?

A: This is what I'm saying it bridges the gap between Foundation and level 0 but it creates a wider gap with level 1 or whatever levels on the BA English programme. So this is a defect here. It is not in alignment with other levels because once they reach level 1 they are going into research skills whereas they did not get anything as such in level 0. So there is a gap so maybe we have to sit together we, at all levels and come up with a solution. We try to revise the learning outcomes so that we can at least narrow the gap between these two levels, level 0 and level 1. Students don't have critical thinking because they are very poor in reading, inference, reading between the lines, they cannot have this kind of critical analytical way of thinking: what happens, why. That in-depth critical thinking, they lack this skill. At the most they can see the basic, the surface level, they don't have the deep understanding of the text which again falls back on lack of vocabulary which does not equip them to understand the text so maybe at level 0 itself we need to do that. What about linking whatever they learnt in the English modules with their social issues?

A: Based on my experience I could see that at level 0 they have this social interaction but as they go to higher levels it's more of kind of thinking within the box because it's more of literature where they are confined to the British literature or the American literature where there it's bringing them inside the box, not asking them to think outside the box, so whatever we are doing in level 0 has to be taken to other levels. Whatever literature they are doing there has to be related to the Omani environment and context. Contextualize the literature there so that it sinks into them so they get familiarized so that at least it brings back the information. Even in Omani culture you have a lot of historical texts but try to incorporate into the

literature. It is not like only level 0, like you said social environment, bring all that context. See how that is related see how does literature influence the Omani literature. For example the story of the ship of the Sultan going to America with the spices, how is that related to present time? So the other levels have to bridge the gap as well. So they have to bring this into their modules so only then we can merge and create a good environment for our students.

For example students in level three are studying wuthering heights which deals with racial and class issues, since Heathcliff was a gypsy. Do you think the teacher should exploit this aspect?

A: Yes they can related to Bedouin life. They already have this abundance of knowledge. Maybe the teacher has to brainstorm them on that. In level 0 they have the opportunity to relate what they learn to their social environment.

How?

A: Like for example in Y module they listen to a variety of speakers, not just native speakers, even Omani speakers. So there they interact they collect pictures from outside their environment, they speak about the topic so they are relating it. I'm not giving them something alien like talk about Harrods in so and so place. Talk about something around, so they really incorporate the environment around whatever they have, their experience, their culture like you said.

But you could impart the same skills by using for example, in listening only native speakers because that is what people think. Why do you use a variety?

I use a variety of tools to make it more authentic. In this country where they are not surrounded by only native speakers they have to get used to these accents and involving the students in collecting materials, involving the students in speaking about what they own, their own properties you know...in that way I'm making them more independent, I give them the freedom to choose their own topics, I give them the freedom to talk about what they feel free about, not something which is in the book and not something which is a content based module, not like a textbook but something which is more related to them. If there is something close to them they will fare better. Try to relate it more to their environment. Skills yes, they are getting the skills but yet there is a gap because the other levels should see now how do we utilize these skills, presentation skills in the other levels...So it should be a continuation, it should be like a give and take.

So should this continuation look like?

A: What are the other levels looking for that should be the main focus? Are they looking at skills or are they looking at content? If it's content, we should look more at content so that the gap should be bridged.

Sometimes the students tell me they're completely cut-off, divorced from the reality, especially in content modules.

Yes, because it's completely cut-off from what they have done in level 0. Level 1 and above is completely cut-off from the natural environment because they are completely so there they also need a revamping of certain things

So maybe when they'd do it by themselves this multiple perspective comes automatically. I give them a text and then I tell them you are going to be the person who is critiquing it so whatever you want to critique go ahead and critique it. So you should have seen the number of students who said, oh this guy said this study indicated this but where is the evidence. So they come out with questions, they critique and then I said now you have done your own critique. Now this is what we are going to be doing with your research article. So let the learner be the one who decides on certain things but like I said the teacher is there to guide and to motivate them. So it is a difficult task for the teacher to plan. How can I motivate my students to be critical thinkers and then relate it to the context whatever you are teaching? Don't you think focusing on their environment could backfire, with them becoming ethnocentric?

A: Now when we do something in their culture they have to work out and see how does this work in the global environment. Like we do in business modules, ok I'm not trying to teach only about businesses in Oman but how this can be improved outward so they have to get that perspective of a wider horizon. We want students to be able to understand. For example, if they can read a text about Oman and understand the words they can see the same academic words on a text about Britain. It depends on what kind of outcome we want, what focus we are putting on. If they have the vocabulary they can say, ok I can read about Oman, I can read about any other country. And they have to see the link also between these two things. For example, if we talk about seatbelts maybe in Oman the age for wearing seatbelts is different than other countries. So first talk about home then the wider horizon.

What would you do, if you had a mixed group of students with different culture and nationalities?

A: You need to have varied activities so that they understand each other's cultures. Give them an example of India itself, see there are so many religions in India but they are all tolerant to each other so give them some good example and there are some very good verses in the Koran which show men are equal and so the teacher can do that.

Do you think it's important for us to take care of this aspect?

A: Yes, it's important because they are going to live in the world even outside the country. They have to go out and work so they need to have this tolerance. If you're working in a company definitely you are not going to work with your own set of people, you have to mingle with others so you have to be tolerant toward all.