



“... I am no longer sitting down and waiting for others to come and develop my instructional skills ...”: **The Nature of Self-directed Professional Development by EFL Teachers in Saudi Universities**

Submitted By

Sana Alzahrani

*To The University of Exeter as a thesis for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Education*

In September 2019

This thesis is available for Library use on the understanding that it is copyright material and that no quotation from the thesis may be published without proper acknowledgement.

I certify that all material in this thesis which is not my own work has been identified and that no material has previously been submitted and approved for the award of a degree by this or any other University.

Signature:

Abstract

This thesis explores the nature of Self-Directed Professional Development (SDPD) pursued by university English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers in Saudi Arabia with a special emphasis on investigating the impact of one model of SDPD ‘Virtual Community of Practice’ (VCoP) through WhatsApp on teaching practice.

Due to the exploratory nature of this study, an interpretive epistemological stance was adopted informing two designs in two stages. In the first stage, a sequential mixed-methods design with two phases was implemented, starting with a quantitative phase employing online questionnaires, followed by a qualitative phase using semi-structured interviews to gain a comprehensive understanding of the nature of SDPD at the macro-level of the EFL context in public universities, in terms of its models, type of activities and reasons behind pursuing this form, as well as the challenges that inhibit teachers from practising it. A total of 260 participants from 13 Saudi universities completed the questionnaire and 14 of them participated in interviews. Quantitative data were analysed through SPSS to get descriptive data, and qualitative data were analysed thematically.

In the second stage, a holistic case-study design was adopted to gain deep insights into the micro-level of SDPD through investigating the nature and impact of one model of SDPD, ‘a self-directed VCoP’, via WhatsApp on EFL university teachers’ teaching practice in one Saudi university. Participant online observation was carried out for six months followed by semi-structured interviews with nine participants. Qualitative data from both methods were analysed thematically.

The findings of the mixed-methods stage revealed that although EFL university teachers employed both individual and collaborative SDPD, they tended to favour individual rather than collaborative activities. The findings also showed that SDPD enhances teachers' autonomy, self-empowerment, motivation, confidence and professional identity. Moreover, key reasons (e.g. personal, academic, administrative) for pursuing SDPD were identified, as well as the challenges and limitations of both types of offline and online SDPD. The findings of the case study showed that self-directed VCoP via WhatsApp positively impacted on teachers' practice, themselves and their students. Most importantly, using an informal medium of communication e.g. the first language of teachers, 'Arabic', demonstrated a significant impact on EFL teachers' learning and communication.

Revealing the effectiveness of SDPD as an alternative approach to teacher's PD, the thesis concludes by indicating a need to devote equal attention to SDPD (as both a term and a concept) as an aspect of the formally acknowledged form of in-service PD. It also makes a number of significant recommendations, and highlights implications, to improve the policy and practice of SDPD for policymakers, teachers and researchers.

Dedication

To the river of generosity ... the source of giving ... the sun of glory
to my father Khader

To the source of compassion ... the truth of word ... the love of dedication ...
to whom gave me the purity of friendliness ...
to my mother Azza

To the love of my life ... the mountain I rely on ... the partner of my success ...
the source of motivation and dedication ...
to my husband Yasir

To the joy of my life ... to whom planted happiness in my life ...
to my daughter Sadeem

To my brothers, sisters, relatives and friends who supported
and encouraged me all way through ...

To all of those who prayed for me ...

To you all, I dedicate this work

Acknowledgements

Conducting this research project has been among the most meaningful experiences and unforgettable moments in my life. Through this experience, I encountered a number of special people who contributed to the success of my PhD journey. First, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my first supervisor, Professor Salah Troudi, for his endless support, encouragement, thoughtful guidance and care. Without his insightful advice this thesis would not have been completed and I would not be the competent researcher I am now. Many thanks go to my second supervisor, Dr Hania Salter-Dovrak, for her assistance in improving the findings and discussion chapters.

My appreciation goes to my university, King Saud University, for granting me a full PhD scholarship and for their cooperation throughout the journey of data collection. Special thanks go to my participants (EFL university teachers) who took part in this study and supported me with their time, participation and feedback.

My sincere and deep gratitude belong to my husband, Yasir, who stood by my side and sacrificed everything, including being 1,000 miles away from me and my daughter during the last four years for the sake of completing this thesis. My special and loving thanks go to my little daughter, Sadeem, who has sacrificed a lot of time and joy. Without their support and sacrifices this dream would not have come true.

My special thanks go to my parents, Khader and Azza, who supported me all the way through with their care, support and prayers. Special thanks go to my sister, Nouf, and my brother, Saud, for accompanying me on this journey. Heartfelt thanks go to my friends, Nada, Chaima, Mona, Sahar and the rest of my family for their endless support and encouragement.

List of Content

Chapter 1: Introduction	17
1.1 The problem and rationale for the study	18
1.2 Purpose of this study	22
1.3 Research questions	23
1.4 Potential significance of the study and contribution to knowledge	24
1.5 Thesis organization	27
1.6 Summary of the chapter	28
Chapter 2: Context of the Study	29
2.1 Introduction	29
2.2 Background to the general education system in Saudi Arabia	29
2.3 Background to the higher education system in Saudi Arabia	30
2.3.1 Process of enrolling in higher education	31
2.3.2 Public universities in Saudi higher education	33
2.3.3 Private universities in Saudi higher education	34
2.4 Place of English Language Teaching in Saudi higher education	34
2.4.1 Profile of EFL teachers in higher education	35
2.5 Background to PD for teachers in higher education	38
2.5.1 Aims of PD in Saudi Public Education	39
2.5.2 PD for EFL teachers in higher education	40
2.6 Summary of the chapter	42
Chapter 3: Literature Review of SDPD	43
3.1 Introduction	43
3.2 Adult learning theories	44
3.2.1 Self-directed learning (SDL)	45
3.2.2 Definitions of self-directed learning	47
3.2.3 Assumptions of Self-directed learning	48
3.2.3.1. Self-direction	48
3.2.3.2 Learner autonomy	50
3.2.3.3 Problem-centred/goal-oriented	51
3.2.3.4 Experience/knowledge-based	51
3.2.3.5 Intrinsic motivation	52
3.2.4 Dimensions of SDL	53
3.2.5 SDL in relation to professional development	54
3.3 The concept of professional development (PD)	56
3.3.1 Professional development for language teachers (TESOL) ...	57
3.3.2 Empirical research on the PD of EFL teachers in Saudi higher education	58

3.4 Self-directed professional development (SDPD)	60
3.4.1 Definition of self-directed professional development	62
3.4.2 Importance of SDPD for language teachers	64
3.4.3 Concepts related to SDPD	66
3.4.3.1 Teacher's autonomy	66
3.4.3.2 Teacher's self-empowerment	68
3.4.3.3 Teacher's efficacy	69
3.4.3.4 Teacher's professional identity	69
3.4.4 Models of individual SDPD	70
3.4.4.1 Reflective teaching	71
3.4.4.2 Keeping reflective journals	71
3.4.4.3 Self-evaluation	72
3.4.4.4 Attending PD programmes and workshops, and participating in seminars	72
3.4.4.5 Reading books and papers	72
3.4.4.6 using online resources	73
3.4.4.7 Action research	73
3.4.5 Models of collaborative SDPD	73
3.4.5.1 (Informal) teacher discussions	74
3.4.5.2 Peer observation of teaching	74
3.4.6 Empirical research on SDPD	75
Chapter 4: Literature Review of Virtual Communities of Practice (VCoP)	81
4.1 Introduction	81
4.2 Sociocultural perspective and SDL	81
4.3 Communities of Practices (CoP) and SDL/SDPD	83
4.3.1 Characteristics of CoP	85
4.3.2 Communities of practice and professional development	86
4.4 Virtual Community of Practice (VCoP) and SDPD	87
4.5 WhatsApp as a medium of VCoP	89
4.5.1 Empirical research on VCoP	90
4.6 Summary of the chapter	97
Chapter 5: Methodology, Research Design and Procedures	98
5.1 Introduction	98
5.2 Research questions	98
5.3 Paradigmatic stance	99
5.3.1 Interpretive paradigm	100
5.3.2 Ontological and epistemological assumptions	100
5.3.3 Methodological assumptions	103
5.4 Research design	106
5.4.1 Stage one: Interpretive mixed-methods research	107

5.4.2 Sequential mixed-methods design	110
5.4.2.1 Implementation	112
5.4.2.2 Priority	113
5.4.2.3 Integration	113
5.5 Data collection methods used in the mixed-methods stage	114
5.5.1 Questionnaire	114
5.5.1.1 Designing a researcher-developed questionnaire	117
5.5.1.2 The validity and reliability of the questionnaire	118
5.5.1.3 Piloting the questionnaire	119
5.5.1.4 Reliability of the questionnaire	121
5.5.1.5 Administrating the questionnaire	122
5.5.2 Semi-structured interviews	123
5.5.2.1 Modes of semi-structured interviews	125
5.5.2.2 Interview schedule design	126
5.6 Stage two: Case study design	128
5.7 Data collection methods used in the case study stage	132
5.7.1 Online observation	132
5.7.2 My positionality within the case study	134
5.7.3 Procedures of conducting online observation	135
5.7.4 Semi-structured interview	136
5.7.4.1 The interview (two) schedule design	136
5.7.4.2 Piloting the interview (two) schedule	137
5.8 Participants (i.e. the study sample)	138
5.9 Data analysis	142
5.9.1 Quantitative data analysis	142
5.9.2 Qualitative data analysis (Thematic analysis)	142
4.9.2.1 Data preparation	143
• Phase one: Familiarising myself with the data	144
• Phase two: Generating initial codes	146
• Phase three: Searching for themes	146
• Phase four: Reviewing themes	147
• Phase five: Defining and naming themes	147
• Phase six: Producing the report	148
5.10 The quality of the research	148
5.10.1 Validity	149
5.10.2 Reflexivity	151
5.11 Ethical considerations	154
5.11.1 Accessing participants	154
5.11.2 Issues related to participants	155
5.11.3 Informed consent and withdrawal right	155
5.11.4 Institutional ethical approval	156
5.11.5 Privacy, confidentiality, data storage and disclosure	157

5.12 Challenges and limitations of the study	157
5.13 Summary of the chapter.....	159
Chapter 6: Findings of the mixed-methods stage	160
6.1 Introduction	160
6.2 Information about the questionnaire	160
6.2.1 Participants' profile	160
6.3 Nature of SDPD activities	162
6.3.1 Individually initiated SDPD activities	162
6.3.2 Reasons for adopting individual SDPD activities	164
6.3.2.1 Freedom of decision-making (control)	164
6.3.2.2 Time flexibility	165
6.3.2.3 Convenience and comfort of learning	166
6.3.2.4 Focusing on the self	168
6.3.2.5 Enhancing self-confidence	169
6.3.3 Models and activities of individual SDPD	170
6.3.3.1 Reflective teaching and Action research	171
6.3.3.2 Reading books and papers and consulting social media platforms, blogs, or social media platforms	172
6.3.3.3 Attending conferences and workshops and joining PD programmes	173
6.3.3.4 Self-evaluation and self-observation	173
6.3.4 Collaboratively initiated SDPD activities	175
6.3.4.1 Reasons for adopting collaborative SDPD activities	175
6.4.1.1 I like to learn through social interaction	175
6.4.1.2 It provides me with multiple views and perspectives	177
6.4.1.3 It is externally motivating	177
6.4.2 Types and models of collaborative SDPD	179
6.4.2.1 Informal teacher discussions	180
6.4.2.2 Informal peer observation and informal peer coaching	180
6.4.2.3 Informal communities of practice (CoP)	181
6.5 Reasons for pursuing SDPD with respect to the contextual factors	182
6.5.1 Personal reasons	182
6.5.1.1 Teacher autonomy and empowerment	182
6.5.1.2 Teachers' professional identity	188
6.5.1.3 Teacher motivation	189
6.5.1.4 It fits learning style and needs	192
6.5.1.5 Teacher self-evaluation	194
6.5.2 Academic factors	197
6.5.2.1 To improve my knowledge	197
6.5.2.2 To conduct research	198
6.5.2.3 Contributing to curriculum development	199
6.5.2.4 The Introduction of a New Curriculum	200

6.5.3 Administrative reasons	201
6.5.3.1 Teacher evaluation report	201
6.5.3.2 Obtaining administrative positions	202
6.6 Challenges and Limitations of SDPD	204
6.6.1 Challenges pertaining to offline SDPD	205
6.6.1.1 Time issues	205
6.6.1.2 Geographical mobility	208
6.6.1.3 Lack of institutional support	209
• Lack of moral support	209
• Lack of financial support	211
• Lack of political support (flexible work policies).....	213
6.6.1.4 SDPD means nothing when you apply for a job	214
6.6.1.5 The low quality of PD content	215
6.6.1.6 A lack of job stability and security	216
6.7 Challenges pertaining to online SDPD	218
6.7.1 It is time consuming and sometimes distracting	218
6.7.2 Validity of online content	219
6.7.3 Misunderstanding of online discourse	221
6.7.4 I need to protect my privacy	221
6.8 Summary of the chapter	222
Chapter 7: The Findings of the Case Study Stage VCoP	224
7.1 Introduction	224
7.2 The importance of WhatsApp as a context for learning	225
7.2.1 The nature and content of activities used in the VCoP	225
7.3 Reasons for implementing a VCoP via WhatsApp	227
7.3.1 Allows collaborative learning	227
7.3.2 Ease of accessibility and use	230
7.3.3 Informality of environment	232
7.3.4 Informality of Language	233
7.3.5 Level of engagement in WhatsApp discussions	238
7.4 Limitations of using WhatsApp as a setting for a VCoP	239
7.4.1 Less participation	240
7.4.1.1 Lack of experience and TESOL knowledge	241
7.4.1.2 Negative peer pressure	242
7.4.1.3 Lack of discussion skills	243
7.4.1.4 Lack of nonverbal cues in online discussions	243
7.4.1.5 Changing topic	245
7.4.1.6 Large number of WhatsApp groups	246
7.4.1.7 Low level of students' English proficiency	247
7.4.1.8 Absence of discussions in exam and vacation periods	248
7.5 The impact of the VCoP (via WhatsApp) on teaching practice	250
7.5.1 The impact of the VCoP via WhatsApp on teaching practice	252

7.5.1.1	The acquisition of knowledge	252
7.5.1.2	Refreshing teaching styles	253
7.5.1.3	Learning about student learning	253
7.5.1.4	Using it as a teaching/learning sources	254
7.5.2	The impact of the VCoP via WhatsApp on the teachers	255
7.5.2.1	Teachers' professional identity	255
7.5.2.2	Teachers' attitudes towards learning	257
7.5.2.3	Teachers' motivation	259
7.5.3	The impact of the VCoP via WhatsApp on the students	261
7.5.3.1	Enhancing students' understanding of the subject matter ..	261
7.5.3.2	Enhancing students' motivation	263
7.5.3.3	Enhancing students' attitudes towards learning English ...	265
Chapter 8:	Discussion of the Research Findings from both Stages	267
8.1	Introduction	267
8.2	SDPD and individual learning	267
8.2.1	Individual SDPD and teachers' control/autonomy	267
8.2.2	Individual SDPD and stress-free environment of learning	269
8.2.3	Individual SDPD and reflection	270
8.2.4	Individual SDPD and teacher's personal traits	271
8.2.5	SDPD and teacher self-awareness	272
8.3	SDPD in relation to the social context	275
8.3.1	SDPD and collaborative learning	275
8.3.2	Virtual communities of practice (VCoP)	278
8.3.2.1	The impact of VCoP on teachers	280
8.3.2.2	The impact of teachers' VCoP on students	281
8.3.2.3	VCoP and the informality of the language of communication	282
8.4	SDPD with respect to the political dimension	283
8.4.1	SDPD and the policy system	285
8.4.2	SDPD and the Saudi higher education employment system	288
8.4.2.1	<i>Acknowledgement</i>	288
8.4.2.2	<i>Lack of job security</i>	288
8.5	SDPD and educational research in Saudi higher education	290
8.5.1	Implications of Saudi 2030 Vision for SDPD in higher education .	292
8.5.2	Enhancing universities' autonomy	292
8.6	SDPD Among other Approaches to Teacher PD	294
Chapter 9:	Conclusion, Contributions and Implications	297
9.1	Introduction	297
9.2	The Main Findings of the study	297
9.3	Contribution of the Research	300
9.3.1	Theoretical contribution	300

9.3.2 Practical/pedagogical contribution	303
9.3.3 Methodological contributions	304
9.4 Implications and recommendations for practice	305
9.5 Implications and recommendations for policy makers	308
9.6 Implications for the current economic reforms in Saudi Arabia	311
9.7 Implications for the role of women in leadership in Saudi universities....	312
9.8 SDPD Bridges the Gap between Theory and Practice	314
9.9 Study limitations and recommendations for future research	314
9.10 Reflection on my PhD journey	316
References	319
Appendix (1)	343
Appendix (2)	349
Appendix (3)	351
Appendix (4)	353
Appendix (5)	361
Appendix (6)	370
Appendix (7)	371
Appendix (8)	372
Appendix (9)	373
Appendix (10)	381
Appendix (11)	382
Appendix (12)	387

List of Figures

Figure 4.1: The use of social media platform by Saudi population in 2016	90
Figure 5.1: The overall interpretive design, including the two stages	106
Figure 5.2: The design of the first stage of the study ‘sequential mixed-methods’	111
Figure 5.3: The sequential design employed in this research	114
Figure 5.4: The qualitative case study design	131
Figure 5.5: The random sampling table	140
Figure 5.6: Analysis framework	144
Figure 6.1: Distribution of participants based on gender	161
Figure 6.2: Distribution of teachers according to length of teaching experience	161
Figure 6.3: Type of SDPD (individual, collaborative or both)	162
Figure 6.4: Frequency of pursuing individual and collaborative SDPD activities	163
Figure 6.5: Aspects of time flexibility	166
Figure 6.6: Frequency of adopting individual SDPD activities	170
Figure 6.7: Frequency of adopting collaborative SDPD activities	179
Figure 6.8: Frequency of importance of teacher’s autonomy	184
Figure 6.9: The importance of teacher’s self-empowerment in adopting SDPD	186
Figure 6.10: Importance of teachers’ professional identity	189
Figure 6.11: The match between the SDPD characteristics and individual learning Styles.....	192
Figure 6.12: Importance of research in pursuing SDPD	198
Figure 6.13: Importance of evaluation reports	202
Figure 6.14: Purposes of SDPD	203
Figure 6.15: Reasons for pursuing SDPD according to level of importance	203
Figure 6.16: To what level do you agree that time constitute an inhibiting factor for pursuing SDPD?	205
Figure 6.17: The level of agreement concerning the issue of funding	211
Figure 6.18: The challenging pertaining to offline SDPD	217
Figure 7.1: Shows two screenshots A&B of a sample of the teachers’ daily WhatsApp discussions, and my translation of the Arabic in the first screenshot	229

Figure 7.2: Online features of VCoP via WhatsApp	232
Figure 7.3: WhatsApp screenshots C&D showing the use of both English and (informal) Arabic and my translations of the teachers' Arabic comments.....	234
Figure 7.4: WhatsApp screenshot E showing the use of transliteration, code-switching and informal Arabic	236
Figure 7.5: A WhatsApp screenshot (F) showing the use of Emojis	244
Figure 7.6: A WhatsApp screenshot showing the reply feature	246
Figure 7.7: Impact of the self-directed VCoP via WhatsApp on teaching practice	251
Figure 7.8: Photograph of a teacher's notebook documenting key notes taken from the WhatsApp group	255
Figure 7.9: WhatsApp screenshots G of teachers' discussions regarding the use of mind maps and my translation for their Arabic comments	262
Figure 7.10: WhatsApp Screenshots H&I of Teachers' Discussions Regarding Enhancing Students' Motivation and my Translation for their Arabic Comments	265

List of Tables

Table 5.1: The relationship of the mixed-methods design and research methods to the research questions	127
Table 5.2: The relationship of the case study design and research methods to the research question	138

List of the Abbreviations and Acronyms used in this thesis

No.	Acronym	What does it stand for
1.	PD	Professional Development
2.	CPD	Continuing Professional Development
3.	SDPD	Self-directed Professional Development
4.	EFL	English as a Foreign Language
5.	ELT	English Language Teaching
6.	L1	First Language
7.	L2	Second Language
8.	TESOL	Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages
9.	MoE	Ministry of Education
10.	MoHE	Ministry of Higher Education
10.	VCoP	Virtual community of Practice
12.	SAAT	Scholastic Admission
13.	GAT	General Aptitude Test
14.	GPA	Grade Point Average
15.	GED	General Education Development
16.	SNTTP	Saudi National Transformation Programme
17.	DELTA	Diploma in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages

Chapter 1: Introduction

“We are not school teachers to join training courses to improve our teaching, being seen in such courses and workshops shakes our reputation as faculty members.”

I clearly remember the first lesson I taught as a newly qualified EFL university teacher. I felt somewhat lost, due to the limited guidance and support I had received from the coordinator of the English Department. In fact, all I had been provided with was a teaching schedule with the titles of the required textbooks for each course. When I requested further information, she advised me to ask other teachers teaching those courses. From that moment, I realised that every teacher in this context is expected to be fully prepared and needs to work independently. This drew my attention to the autonomy of teachers even within a centralised education system. Since no one provided me with the specifications and guidelines about what I should do as a novice teacher, and I was given no in-service training, I began to establish relationships with senior teachers in order to learn more about policies and regulations, as well as the teaching and evaluation criteria. However, I found that knowledge tended to be limited to their own experiences.

It is worth noting that, due to the top-down system, no clear regulations and detailed guidelines were set out, particularly regarding teachers' professional development (TPD) and performance. This resulted in the required professional standards being vague and even, to some extent, absent, as in the case of TPD. This helped me to understand why each teacher formulates and follows her own philosophy of teaching. Consequently, I started to develop my own style by consulting online resources for supplementary materials, either from the official accounts of some lecturers on the university website or other sources, including EFL educational websites, teachers' forums, YouTube, blogs,

etc. Reflecting on my teaching practice, I found myself teaching the way I was taught, applying some modifications as a result of my ongoing self-directed learning. It is likely that this pattern of traditional teaching is retained when teachers lack institutional support regarding their professional development (PD).

1.1 The Problem and Rationale for the Study

The impetus to conduct the current study on teachers' Self-Directed Professional Development (SDPD) emanated from my own experience as an EFL teacher in higher education. As a new teacher in a public university, I struggled with teaching English because I had majored in translation and had no educational background when it came to Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL). The fact that I graduated with an honours degree was insufficient to prepare me to teach the English language to a professional standard. Moreover, most of the challenges I initially encountered were due to a lack of firstly, professional support (Musalam, 2003; Smith, 2017) and secondly, a clear educational policy concerning the role of EFL teachers in this institution (Barnawi & Hawsawi, 2017). As indicated above, these appear to be the main triggers for my ongoing Self-Directed Learning (SDL).

Recalling my first struggles with teaching and relating them to my PhD thesis allowed me to gain additional insights into TPD. When I started to read the literature focussing on teacher development, I came across various approaches, forms and models of teacher PD (Bailey, Curtis & Nunan, 2001; Craft 2000; Cranton, 1994; Hondzel, 2013; Johnson: 2009; Joyce & Calhoun, 2010; Kennedy, 2005; Lee, 2015; Richards and Farrell 2005). Among these was the self-directed approach, i.e. the one I had employed for my own professional learning while being unaware of its potentiality and effectiveness. Prior to this extensive reading, I was unaware of the term 'SDPD'. This stimulated me to explore the ways other teachers pursue

their SDL, in terms of their perception and practice of SDPD and its relationship to their teaching practice.

A Deanship of Quality and Professional Development was established in my university in Saudi Arabia in 2010, which began to offer faculty members various workshops, primarily dedicated to the acquisition of generic technological skills. I was frustrated at the lack of a single workshop designed for EFL teachers. This recognition that the needs of EFL teachers tend to be ignored has compelled me to continue my efforts in SDL, in order to sustain my professional growth and become a more effective teacher.

Another factor in this SDL was meeting societal and academic expectations as a university faculty member. Therefore, I consider this thesis as an important work not only for meeting the requirements of a doctoral degree, but also to reveal a shift in my own thinking towards the critical role of EFL university teachers in their own PD.

Interestingly, the lack of formal professional support in my department has led to the emergence of an informal Virtual Community of Practice (VCoP). The coordinator of the English section (a colleague who has been given coordination as an additional administrative role) has established an informal WhatsApp group for all EFL teachers in the department as a new means of corresponding, i.e. to pass on important information. As a member of that group, I realised just how important it was as a platform enabling teachers to discuss their educational concerns. I also found it more accessible than any other means for ongoing discussions and I preferred it to corresponding through emails. Eventually, teachers started to discuss various topics, including their teaching problems and practices. They asked questions, posed problems and sought solutions, sometimes through discussing others' perspectives. In addition, I found it very interesting due to the lack of any restriction on the type of topic, the style of language and the method of

negotiating, as well as the timing of the discussions. There was neither a sense of power nor hierarchy in this WhatsApp group. As I mentioned earlier, thinking about SDPD, and how I overcame the difficulties I faced at the beginning of my career, led me to think about this group and the ways it has influenced my practice. It was my experience in this group that led me to explore the literature of PD. This was when I discovered that this WhatsApp group is considered to be a VCoP (Dubé, Bourhis and Koohang, 2006), which could have a positive impact over our PD. Thus, my reading of the literature and experience as a teacher in SDL have led to a number of questions regarding the nature of SDPD undertaken by other EFL university teachers in my context, including identifying the facilitators and inhibitors, and the contribution of this WhatsApp group to overall PD and teaching practices.

The ongoing informal discussions with colleagues regarding the role of teachers in SDPD, revealed similar views regarding the facilitators and inhibitors of the PD within this context. The professional reputation of each faculty member appears to be a significant factor preventing teachers from pursuing formal PD. In fact, my daily discussions with colleagues often revolved around the quotation at the start of this chapter: *“we are not school teachers to join training courses to improve our teaching, being seen in such courses and workshops shakes our reputation as faculty members.”*

Practically speaking, as PD is an element of teacher’s lifelong learning, university teachers should not feel professionally down when pursuing PD. However, this view might be due to the nature of the society of Gulf countries in general, and Saudi Arabia in particular, which places university faculty members in a very high social position, i.e. regarded as the most knowledgeable experts in their fields. Moreover, while PD (e.g. programmes and workshops) is common for EFL school teachers, it is not a common practice for university faculty members

in the Saudi context. Therefore, the act of asking for any form of PD could be seen as jeopardising their academic status (Althobaiti 2012; Khan, 2011). This could reveal the lack of formal PD opportunities, unlike in mainstream schools, where teachers are able to continually receive support and develop their pedagogical knowledge and skills. Personally speaking, this was one of the main reasons leading me to pursue SDPD on an ongoing basis, in order to develop and improve my teaching practice. Moreover, university faculty members tend to be self-directed learners, who dislike revealing their weaknesses, particularly when it comes to teaching, since they do not see themselves primarily as teachers but as highly educated experts in their fields (Cranton, 1994). As mentioned above, this attitude may be culturally related, as the culture of PD is not very widespread in the Saudi higher education context. Becoming a faculty member has encouraged me to search independently for new information to expand my teaching knowledge, which has had a positive impact on my teaching practice, performance and confidence, i.e. content and pedagogical skills.

However, it should be noted that the Professional Development (PD) of EFL teachers in Saudi Arabia remains under-researched. Although a number of studies have been conducted regarding the PD of EFL teachers, these attempts have been deemed superficial and are still in their early ages (Althobaiti 2012, Alharbi, 2011; Albahiri, 2010; Khan, 2011; Sywelem, 2013). The majority of these studies have criticised the status of EFL teachers' PD in Saudi Arabia in general (Alharbi, 2011; Sywelem, 2013) and in higher education in particular (Alasmari, 2016; Alshahrani, 2017; Assalahi, 2016; Althobaiti, 2012; Khan, 2011; Farooq, 2016). Some point to the weakness of the educational policy in carrying out fundamental reforms (Alharbi, 2011; Alshamrani, 2012), while others argue that the designing, planning and implementation of PD programmes remains in its early ages and requires substantive and collaborative efforts (Alshamrani, 2012; Alghamdi & Li Li, 2011).

There is still considerable research to be undertaken into the area of SDPD. Mushayikwa (2011) stated that the lack of research pertaining to SDPD infers a large number of gaps in the understanding of this phenomenon. Moreover, Smith (2017) argued that the local context determines “a need for research to rethink the role of teachers in their professional learning” (p. 1). The current study therefore focuses on addressing this gap, through an exploration of, and the provision of insights into, this PD approach in general and the EFL university context in particular.

This thesis is based on the assumption that the centralised higher education system in Saudi Arabia lacks sufficiently robust regulations to support EFL teachers’ PD, and that a teacher can play a major role in his/her PD. This study therefore explores the nature of the SDPD of EFL university teachers as an alternative approach for teachers to develop themselves in an independent manner.

1.2 Purpose of this Study

This research was stimulated by a belief that, as adult learners, EFL university teachers are capable of taking the initiative when it comes to their PD, irrespective of whether they have received an adequate formal (pre or in-service) PD. This leads to a need to understand the nature of SDPD, particularly within my own context. This research therefore focuses on the nature of SDPD in the context of university EFL (including its types, models, characteristics and PD context), as this is rooted in the application of adult learning theories promoting teachers’ autonomy and efficacy, as well as the empowerment in their self-development. Moreover, much previous research into SDL has decontextualised and depoliticalised this phenomenon (Brookfield, 1993; Candy, 1991). In response, the current research considers the influence of socio-political and socio-economic factors, including the ways these encourage (or prevent) teachers from pursuing this form of learning. Most importantly, the study

investigates the relationship between SDPD and teachers' practice by investigating the impact of one specific model of SDPD (i.e. self-directed VCoP via WhatsApp) on their practice.

It should be emphasised that the purpose of this research is not to undermine the role of structured formal PD, which is capable of contributing to EFL teachers' professional development. Instead, it focuses on examining the potential of SDPD as an effective alternative approach to teachers' independent learning within the university EFL context. In addition, this research seeks to raise teachers' awareness of their critical role as 'active learners', including the ways SDPD can enhance and sustain their professionalism.

As noted above, this study is underpinned by interpretive philosophical assumptions and therefore does not seek to problematise the current situation, but rather to emphasise participants' different experiences. It also considers the implications of the findings vis-à-vis the context of EFL teachers in Saudi higher education institutions, along with teachers' abilities and needs. The aim of this study is to provide recommendations on how the implications can inform the wider educational discussion of EFL teacher PD in higher education, both practically and theoretically.

1.3 Research Questions

The research questions are as follows:

1. What is the nature of the SDPD initiatives pursued by EFL university teachers in a Saudi university context?
2. What are the factors that contribute to the SDPD of EFL teachers in Saudi universities?
3. What are the underlying factors potentially hindering EFL teachers in Saudi universities from pursuing SDPD?

4. How does participating in a Virtual Community of Practice (VCoP) through a ‘WhatsApp group’, as a form of SDPD, relate to EFL university teachers’ teaching practice?

1.4 Potential Significance of the Study and Contribution to Knowledge

I have established that little (if any) research has empirically examined the nature of SDPD pursued by EFL university teachers (including its impact on their practice), particularly in relation to the influence of socio-political and socio-economic factors in the Saudi context. Thus, the significance of the current study lies in the originality of its contribution to several areas of knowledge.

This study explores the nature of teachers’ SDPD in light of current theories of adult learning (i.e. self-directed learning) deemed an appropriate subject of debate in relation to teacher development. Kennedy (2014) argued that PD literature is “fragmented and under-theorised” (p. 689) and called for holistic collaborative endeavours to enhance the understanding of teachers’ professional learning, as well as creating an evidence based-platform capable of informing policy and practice. This study will therefore contribute to the theorisation of an otherwise unrecognised form of PD. Mushayikwa (2011) highlighted that the majority of research into PD limits itself to the investigation and evaluation of formal, structured and other-directed methods, rather than informal, self-directed and non or less-structured interventions. Mushayikwa (ibid) also confirmed that an improved understanding of SDPD as a form of informal PD can be gained through studying how it can take place. In response to Mushayikwa’s critique, the mixed-methods stage of the current research would give insight into teachers’ experiences of SDPD, including how they are influenced by the surrounding context. In response to my observation that research into SDL tends to decontextualise and depoliticalise this phenomenon (Brookfield, 1993; Candy, 1991), this study will identify the

contextual factors both encouraging and preventing teachers from pursuing SDPD, particularly in the absence of sufficient institutional support for teachers' PD within the Saudi university EFL context. It is thus hoped that this study will illuminate a comprehensive understanding of SDPD in this context. In addition, it is anticipated that the discussion of the facilitators and inhibitors of SDPD will inform policy and practice, as well as raising awareness of the underlying factors potentially contributing to the effectiveness of teachers' SDPD.

Although language teachers require a very special form of professional learning, much previous research into SDPD has been conducted within contexts other than EFL (Djarmiko, 2011; Govender, 2015; Lopes & Cunha, 2017; Mushayikwa, 2011; Porter, 2014; Weir, 2017). In addition, little research has dealt with the other-directed formal PD of EFL teachers working in Saudi higher education (Alasmari, 2016; Alshahrani, 2017; Assalahi, 2016; Farooq, 2016), while little (if any) has been undertaken within the context of the SDPD of EFL university teachers. This study will therefore enrich the knowledge base concerning SDPD in the EFL context, particularly in relation to Saudi higher education. Moreover, the implications of the above mentioned studies appear to be limited to policymakers, educators, and administrators of the Ministry of Education, rather than being applicable to teachers themselves (Alghamdi 2015; Alshahrani, 2017; Althobaiti, 2012; Khan, 2011; Alharbi, 2011; Albahiri, 2011). Therefore, the findings of the current study will also make a significant contribution to the knowledge base of teachers, as well as those engaged in teacher development. This will thus support the role of the EFL teacher within the university context.

The term 'SDPD' is relatively new and has not yet been widely employed in the literature. Mushayikwa (2011) and Lopes and Cunha (2017) argued that little research has yet been made into SDPD as an approach enhancing the practice of teachers. In response to these calls, I have adopted a qualitative case study as the second stage of this research, in order to investigate the

impact of a specific model of SDPD on EFL teacher practice. The current case study focuses on establishing a deep insight into the nature of a self-directed VCoP via WhatsApp, as a model of SDPD, in terms of its potential, limitations and (most importantly) the impact of EFL teachers' VCoP on their teaching practice. Although a number of existing studies have examined the use of WhatsApp as a learning tool, both within the Saudi context (Alenazi, 2017; Alsolamy, 2017) and internationally (Cansoy, 2017; Hayward and Ward, 2018), none have made an in-depth examination of the impact of WhatsApp as a self-directed VCoP on teaching practice. Instead, they have focused on the effectiveness of WhatsApp as an online context for teachers' learning, including the type of knowledge produced and its potential and limitations as an other-directed, rather than a self-directed, VCoP. These empirical studies have tended to approach this aspect through content analysis (Alenazi, 2017; Cansoy, 2017). Therefore, this case study will contribute to the body of literature into self-directed VCoP in the context of EFL, as well as informing practice through offering significant implications and recommendations.

Moreover, the significance of this study lies in raising awareness of the self-directed approach in relation to teachers' own learning, with the aim of promoting their autonomy, efficacy and self-empowerment (Candy, 1991; Merriam, 2001; Mushayikwa & Lubben, 2009). Accordingly, this will enable teachers to satisfy their professional needs and increase their understanding of their abilities and roles when it comes to their own professional growth.

1.5 Thesis Organization

This thesis is composed of nine chapters, as set out below:

Chapter One is an introductory chapter, outlining the problem and rationale of the study. In addition, it highlights the study's significance and defines the research aims, questions and approach.

Chapter Two contextualises the study, through the introduction of background information regarding the key aspects of the context of the research. Firstly, it gives an overview of Saudi education system, including both general and higher education. Secondly, it provides an overview of the status of English language teaching in universities in Saudi Arabia, including a profile of EFL teachers. It concludes by describing PD for teachers in higher education with a special emphasis on the PD of EFL teachers.

Chapter Three presents the stance of the current research, which informs the theoretical framework of the study. This includes a critical discussion of the relevant literature focussing on teachers' SDPD in terms of conceptualisation, features and models. It also highlights the importance of this approach vis-à-vis teacher professional learning.

Chapter Four outlines the theoretical and conceptual frameworks underpinning virtual communities of practice (including WhatsApp as a medium of VCoP), along with a discussion of the relevant literature.

Chapter Five discusses the paradigmatic stance underpinning the current study, including justifying the choice of research methods. It also provides a detailed account of the participants, alongside the research methodology, design and methods of data collection and analysis. In addition, it discusses the ethical considerations adhered to throughout the research.

Chapter Six presents and interprets the findings of the mixed-methods stage, focussing on the data gathered by online questionnaires and semi-structured interviews.

Chapter Seven presents and interprets the findings of the case study, as derived from the data gathered from online participant observation and semi-structured interviews.

Chapter Eight presents an in-depth discussion of the findings reported in chapters six and seven, in light of the current literature, as well as the research questions and the context of the current study.

Chapter Nine discusses the research contribution and its implications, as well as offering recommendations for effective SDPD for EFL teachers, both in the international context and that of Saudi Arabian universities. The chapter concludes by highlighting areas of further research and presents a personal reflection upon my research journey.

1.6 Summary of the Chapter

This introductory chapter presented an overview of the subject of this research. It highlighted the lack of PD required by EFL teachers working in Saudi universities. The chapter focussed on the need to conduct the current study, in order to explore the nature of SDPD initiatives undertaken by Saudi EFL university teachers. It further outlined the research problem and the rationale for the current study, along with the purpose and the research methods, followed by the significance of the research and its contribution to knowledge. Finally, it concluded by providing a brief overview of the nine chapters that make up this thesis.

Chapter 2: Context of the Study

2.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a detailed account of the context in which this study took place. At the outset, in order to highlight the uniqueness of the higher education system in Saudi Arabia, an overview is required for the reader who knows little about the Saudi education system (general education and higher education). This is followed by a brief description of public and private higher education institutions. Subsequently, the place of English Language Teaching (ELT) in Saudi Arabia is discussed, with a particular focus on teaching English within higher education. Special attention is also paid to the profiles of EFL teachers in higher education. This chapter concludes by giving an overview of PD for teachers in Saudi Arabia in general, with an emphasis on PD for EFL teachers in higher education, highlighting current limitations.

2.2 Background to the General Education System in Saudi Arabia

The structure of the education system in Saudi Arabia is divided into: general education and higher education. In Saudi Arabia, the Supreme Committee for Education, headed by the king – the highest authority on the educational ladder – is in charge of passing legislation and establishing broad guidelines for all types of education (Alshahrani, 2016). The Ministry of Education (MoE) chiefly oversees both the general and higher education systems. General education is funded by the government and is thus free for all students, including non-Saudis. It comprises four levels of pre-university education: (1) pre-primary education, (2) primary education, (3) intermediate education and (4) secondary education. It is noteworthy that pre-primary education (kindergarten), offered to children aged three to five years, is optional. Thus, children at the age of six can enrol in compulsory primary school without undertaking pre-primary education (MoE, 2019).

In 2010, a new project was launched by King Abdullah for General Education Development (GED). Since then, a wide range of schools across the country have been chosen to implement this project. Now, teachers have to have a satisfactory level of professionalism to meet the requirements of this project, which has led the MoE to establish a number of PD centres across the country to develop teachers professionally, including EFL teachers. In spite of all these notable attempts to improve the status of PD within Saudi general education, all these initiatives are still considered to be in their early stages and thus require further efforts for significant development (Mansour, Heba, Alshamrani, & Aldahmash, 2014).

2.3 Background to the Higher Education System in Saudi Arabia

In order to sustain creating a more professional and educated generation, the Saudi government has made great efforts to set principles and guidelines for higher education. Indeed, being the largest oil-rich country in the Middle East with an oil-dependent economy has led to the domination of government-funded higher education institutions. This, in fact, reflects the largest amount of public expenditure that has been allocated to these institutions (Barnawi & Alhawsawi, 2017). Accordingly, many tertiary institutes and public universities were opened across the country. In spite of the dominance of public higher-education institutions, private institutions also exist. However, public universities and institutes outnumber private ones (MoE, 2019). Yet, with the current rapid political and economic changes taking place in the country since the coronation of King Salman bin Abdulaziz and the launch of the Saudi National Transformation Programme (SNTP¹) in 2016, the government is working on changing the country from being economically oil-dependent to non-oil-dependent through diversifying its economic resources. This has resulted in the government reducing the governmental

¹ SNTP is an economic plan set out by the government to achieve governmental operational excellence as part of achieving the Saudi 2030 vision.

expenditure on higher education and transform it to be self-funded (2030 vision, 2019). To achieve this aim, plans have been developed to privatise Saudi public universities by changing current bureaucratic systems to more autonomous ones. Although these plans are still in the preparation phase, they will be implemented in the foreseeable future. Privatising and autonomizing universities, according to Alkhraif (2018), would create a competitive educational environment where each university seeks to (1) achieve international excellence; (2) provide (unique/ advanced) high-quality programmes; (3) attract international students; (4) attract international competencies (i.e. highly qualified members to work in the universities or take part in their research projects); (5) form international partnerships; and (6) develop their self-funded resources. By achieving these aims, it is hoped that the quality and output of public higher education institutions will improve.

2.3.1 Process of Enrolling in Higher Education

The process of enrolling in higher education in Saudi Arabia is rigid and predetermined for all students. After completing their secondary education, students are encouraged to attend university (public or private). In either case, they can apply according to the level of their GPA, SAAT and GAT results in secondary school and some placement tests, administered by the university, for the speciality they want. Since the reform of the education system by King Abdullah in 2010, all undergraduates have had to study and pass a foundation-year programme. This programme was established to offer intensive English courses, focusing on teaching basic English-language skills to all students, regardless of their major. Given this situation, all undergraduates must study English and make sufficient progress during their first year of the university to get accepted for the major they chose. This requires providing ELT of high quality. The MoE does therefore pay particular attention to improving the quality of higher education by developing new policies to satisfy the requirements of the workforce and keep up

with the world's leading higher-education institutions. (Barnawi & Alhawsawi, 2017) (this will be discussed further in section 2.4).

It is acknowledged that the higher-education sector has recently witnessed unprecedented educational reforms, resulting in an unparalleled expansion of higher-education institutions. Given this, to date, high ratios of staff and students enrolment have been recorded, as well as a huge number of campuses being planned (Habbash, 2012). According to recent reports by the MoE, in the last two decades, 25 public universities and 15 private universities were founded, which reflects the educational revolution in the country. This revolution was a consequence of the sustained efforts made by both the government and private sectors to improve higher education (MoE, 2019). Comparing the situation in the present day to 50 years ago, an unprecedented jump is noticed, not only in infrastructure and an expanding generation of educated young people, but also in intellectual capacity. To explain, the supreme authority in higher education has taken further steps to improve the entire sector intellectually by granting Saudi nationals full-scholarship opportunities to complete their post-graduate studies in the best universities around the world. A good example of this is the King Abdullah Scholarship Programme, which was launched by a royal decree in 2005. The programme has in fact paved the way for young Saudis to attend the world's leading academic institutions. Another crucial step is granting all Saudi faculty members full scholarships to complete their postgraduate studies abroad. Being a Saudi faculty member, I was one of those who took the opportunity and went overseas, to the UK, to pursue my PhD in Education. Despite all of these efforts, there is still a consensus that further improvement is needed in the areas of research in higher education and the PD of staff members (Alsagri & Almohaimed 2017; Assalahi, 2016; Khan, 2011).

2.3.2 Public Universities in Saudi Higher Education

Unlike the case in most developed countries, where undergraduate and postgraduate programmes are not free and can be quite expensive, in Saudi Arabia, public higher education institutions, including universities, are typically provided free of charge for Saudis; thus, the rate of those who apply to go to university is very high. According to a recent report by the Saudi Press Agency (2019, Jane), more than 87 per cent of high school graduates will be accepted by public higher education institutions in 2019. This reflects the government's keenness to educate young Saudis by offering them the opportunity to have a university education. The main aim of this support from the government is to prepare and produce a more qualified and professional generation (MoE, 2019). In consequence, a wide range of higher education institutions have been established to accomplish these goals. While these institutions vary in the capacity, potential and range of programmes provided (e.g. either offering both under and postgraduate programmes, or undergraduate programmes only, as is the case for newly established universities), they all strive to achieve the same goals, i.e. providing quality education and assisting students to obtain high-level academic degrees in various fields.

It is important to note that all of these universities adhere to the regulations issued by the Higher Education Council for Universities in Saudi Arabia. In a novel attempt to decentralise higher education to some extent, major plans have been prepared but are still under review to privatise public institutions and allow each of them to enjoy academic, administrative and financial autonomy (MoE, 2019; Vision 2030, 2019).

As mentioned above, it is worth noting that enrolling in a public university for free requires the student to be a Saudi national. As an instance of government support to public universities, students at these universities are offered a monthly salary of around £234. On the other hand, non-Saudi students can enrol in public universities under two conditions: (1) for free if they

are granted local scholarships; or (2) paid in case they do not have scholarships.

2.3.3 Private Universities in Saudi Higher Education

Private universities are educational institutions, funded by the private sector, that aim to contribute to higher education through providing high-quality education programmes. Moreover, private institutions enjoy administrative autonomy, i.e. the absence of external control over internal authorities as seen in the case of public universities. This, according to Baharmz (1999), contributes to the success and innovation of these institutions. Although they enjoy financial, academic and administrative autonomy, they are meant to be in alignment with the general orientation and guidelines set by the government. The aim of these institutions is to (1) support the higher-education sector without placing further financial pressure on the government; (2) support public universities through easing the pressure, raising their efficiency and creating strong competition that drives them to improve their performance. Being private, Saudis or non-Saudis, have to pay similar tuition fees and are subject to the same entry standards. As these institutions primarily depend on students' tuition fees as part of their financial resources, they tend to offer very high-quality education to attract more students (Baharmz, 1999; MoE, 2019).

2.4 Place of English Language Teaching in Saudi Higher Education

To meet the requirements of globalised markets, English Language Teaching (ELT) receives special attention within Saudi higher education. Moreover, although the MoE strives to preserve the place of Arabic as the main language of instruction, a growing trend towards using English as a medium of instruction by higher education institutions is noticed. This is because Saudi undergraduates have been found to lack communicative skills in English when joining industry (Phan & Barnawi, 2016). In other words, local businesses complain that Saudi higher

education institutions produce manpower with low English language proficiency, which forces them to hire non-Saudi workers who are more proficient in English.

In response, the MoE has made several attempts to promote ELT and enhance the linguistic communicative competence of Saudi undergraduates. First, English is endorsed as a compulsory subject in all programmes offered by Saudi universities. Second, the Foundation-Year Programme (intensive English courses) was designed to prepare students and enhance their English proficiency enough to enrol for significant majors, especially those that require extensive use of English. Another programme was launched by the MoE in 2015; called ‘Education of Career’, aiming to teach particular specialised English courses, such as English for Academic Purposes, English for Specific Purposes and English for Occupational Purposes (Barnawi & Alhawsawi, 2017, p. 200). In addition to these attempts, Barnawi & Alhawsawi (2017) mention that the MoE contributes to promoting ELT:

[...] by encouraging local higher education (HE) institutions to enter into partnerships with overseas universities, by positing English as a fundamental tool for academic knowledge production and dissemination, by adopting international curricula in both public and HE sectors, by opening branch campuses, by offering joint programmes, and by franchising international programs to local people. (pp. 200–201).

As can be seen, all of these reforms and projects are meant to enhance the standing of ELT in higher education, showing the importance of English in higher education and indicating the huge efforts made by the government in this domain.

2.4.1 Profile of EFL Teachers in Saudi Higher Education

As English is widely used as a medium of instruction and taught as a compulsory subject in almost all higher-education institutions, there has been a growing need, as never before, for

qualified EFL teachers. In fact, this compelling need initially led to recruiting non-Saudi EFL teachers in most of these universities to deal with the shortage of Saudi EFL teachers in higher education. The majority of foreign EFL teachers were either English native speakers or non-native English speakers, from Pakistan, India, and some Arab countries (Khan, 2011). However, recruiting foreigners was subject to some strict conditions, e.g. considering their qualifications, professionalism and age.

In general, the employment of EFL university teachers differs according to whether one is a Saudi national or not. While the recruitment of Saudi EFL teachers is subject to the regulations and policies of the Ministry of Civil Service (MCS), non-Saudi EFL teachers are hired with annual contracts according to regulations and policies in the latest version of the 'Regulations of The Higher Education Council and Universities', issued by The Higher Education Council of Universities in 2007. However, no clear regulations are officially issued for recruiting Saudi EFL teachers other than the general terms for hiring university faculty members in general. Alenazi (2014) investigated this matter and states that:

I have enquired at the Ministry of Higher Education as well as consulted its website (www.mohe.gov.sa), and have also made enquiries of two universities (King Saud University and Alqassim University) and of many members of the Recruiting Committees (henceforth RCs), who are the real decision-makers when it comes to hiring EFL teachers. No written regulations besides the ones referred to above are available, if they exist. To my surprise, a number of recruitment committee members did not know that these written regulations existed. (p. 7)

From my experience, the process of recruiting faculty members in Saudi universities follows a set of official procedures and goes through multiple stages. As mentioned above, although non-Saudi candidates must satisfy certain requirements, no strict conditions are placed on Saudi

candidates. The only prerequisite for Saudis to be EFL teachers is to have a degree with a high GPA in any English-related major (e.g. education, translation, applied linguistics, English literature). The minimum qualification required to apply is a bachelor's degree. If candidates satisfy this requirement, they can move forward to the next stage and take a written test; once they pass, they may have an oral interview to determine their suitability for the job. In the final stage, members of the college council decide whether to approve applications or not based on the points obtained by each candidate. It is worth noting that the College Council is the highest authority that can select and approve recruitment applications in accordance with the guidelines and policies set by the Supreme University Council based on the regulations issued by The Higher Education Council of Universities in 2007.

It is important to note that by implementing the educational reforms, a new policy was issued by the Ministry of Labour called 'Saudisation of the workforce', which is based on replacing non-Saudi workers, including teachers, with Saudi ones in both government and private sectors. Fortunately, by the time this policy was introduced, a considerable number of Saudis with bachelor's and master's degrees in English, with excellent grades from top institutions, were there to take the jobs. These, in addition to postgraduates (MA and PhD holders) from the King Abdullah Scholarship Programme, from the world's top universities, have contributed greatly to meeting the shortage of Saudi EFL university teachers.

Although having Saudi EFL university teachers in all Saudi public universities is a necessary and forward strategy, not all of them are fully qualified to teach English (Khan, 2011). What has made the situation challenging, from my point of view, is the new policy of 'Saudisation'. This policy has in fact led university administrations to stop renewing huge numbers of contracts of foreign qualified EFL teachers, lecturers and professors and replacing them with Saudi ones (Alsounaidi, 2002). Although these kinds of reforms are nationally beneficial, I

think it would be more practical if they were applied gradually or within a certain range, and at least find a better way to prepare new teachers. Alabbad (2009) mentions in his research that this situation has led universities to hire some unqualified Saudi teachers. What he means by unqualified is teachers who lack TESOL knowledge and experience.

Having Saudi faculty members with reputable degrees is a great achievement of the latest educational reforms; however, at the same time, it poses a serious problem since most of the EFL teachers who teach English courses in the language programmes offered by English departments, e.g. diploma programmes, the Foundation-Year Programme and English bachelor-degree programmes, do not necessarily specialise in TESOL. From my experience as an EFL teacher, those who have graduated with a degree in English literature or translation lack TESOL content and pedagogical knowledge, since they have never studied TESOL teaching methods. Consequently, such teachers are teaching in the way they were taught. Thus, the absence of any theoretical and practical understanding of English teaching results in ineffective teaching, which, in turn, affects the output of these language programmes (Khan, 2011).

On the whole, the lack of professional teachers directly affects the quality of ELT in Saudi higher education (Khan, 2011). Therefore, I believe that the only way to address this existing problem is by facilitating effective PD approaches for all EFL university teachers, which have to be compatible with their current needs and abilities.

2.5 Background to PD for Teachers in Saudi Higher Education

With the increasing demand for competent English language users, having high-quality English education in Saudi Arabia becomes more necessary than ever before (Barnawi & Phan, 2014). Given that the Saudi education system is still centralised, the education of teachers is dictated

by the Ministry of Education. That said, this is not to state that PD is not available in Saudi universities context. In fact, being a staff member in one Saudi university, I have received some structured PD workshops, but these are entirely aimed to generic skills objectives instead of addressing teachers' needs according to their disciplines.

When looking at the current literature, I found very little research about the PD of EFL university teachers. Research into PD is comparatively recent within Saudi higher education (Mansour et al., 2014). The existence of PD programmes and the attempts made to encourage such programmes in the higher-education sector (universities) lag behind those designed for schoolteachers in general education. On reviewing the existing literature, I found that most of the research undertaken in this area has focused on the development of schoolteachers, and only a few studies (to the best of my knowledge) have examined the PD of EFL university teachers. The studies conducted by Alasmari (2016), Alshahrani (2017), Assalahi (2016) and Farooq (2016), concerning one approach to EFL university teachers' PD, which is a formal institutional other-directed approach. Given this situation, it becomes apparent that Saudi EFL university teachers need to explore other methods and approaches, which is the intention of the current study (this will be discussed further in Section 3.3.3).

2.5.1 Aims of PD in Saudi Public Education

To improve the quality of teaching and boost teachers' professional development, an educational reform project called the King Abdullah Project for the Development of Public Education 'Tatweer' was launched in 2012. Since then, the MoE has established several training centres and set out some broad aims for its programmes to achieve. First is bridging the gap between teacher pre-service training and actual teaching practices. Second is enabling teachers to gain the necessary experience and knowledge regarding new educational trends and approaches to teaching. Third is enhancing teachers' creativity through continuous evaluation

of their skills. Fourth is supporting teachers through providing them with the required consultation they need. Last is encouraging teachers' productivity.

2.5.2 PD for EFL Teachers in Saudi Higher Education

To enhance the quality of EFL teaching and learning in higher education institutions, English departments in Saudi universities are becoming more enthusiastic to improve the quality of their output. Thus, they often make their faculty members take advantage of the existing PD opportunities in order to maximise the quality level of teaching in these institutions. However, looking at the available institutional PD opportunities for EFL teachers, most of them are dedicated to mainstream school EFL teachers, and a few are designed for EFL university teachers. In spite of this, little is known about the nature of PD for EFL teachers in the Saudi higher-education context, which thus requires further investigation (Alshahrani, 2017; Assalahi, 2016).

Furthermore, to satisfy the requirements of the local workforce's needs and achieve the policymakers' objective of attaining all-round quality, a number of initiatives have been introduced by the MoE to provide a professional atmosphere for university teachers to develop professionally. For example, it has increased the funding for PD and encourages all public universities to establish 'quality and development' deanships, departments and centres to regularly evaluate the professional status of university teachers and provide various PD opportunities for all university academic staff members. On the one hand, Khan (2011) states that a number of universities have taken advantage of this support by inviting international professional experts to deliver some workshops and train university teachers. In addition, public universities have started allowing faculty members to attend advanced PD courses and conferences abroad. However, from my experience, when I applied to attend a PD course abroad, I found that such opportunities are limited to Saudi professors and senior lecturers,

which means that language teachers, teaching assistants and lecturers are not able to benefit from this initiative. On the other hand, regarding the local PD provided internally to university teachers in the form of PD workshops and seminars which are general in scope and content, I have not attended such a workshop, or a programme designed specifically for EFL teachers. Hence, although all these initiatives are noted and appreciated, a special attention has to be given to the PD of EFL teachers in this context.

So, in order to describe the context of PD for EFL teachers in higher education, I consulted the official websites of the MoE and some public universities, as well as previous research. Unfortunately, I did not find sufficient information to represent the types of PD offered to, or developed by, EFL teachers in Saudi universities (Alasmari, 2016; Alghamdi & Li Li, 2011; Althobaiti, 2012; Assalahi, 2016; Khan, 2011). Accordingly, no studies, to the best of my knowledge, have investigated the nature of SDPD pursued by EFL teachers, as an alternative approach to PD in the Saudi university context, in order to develop their teaching practice. Therefore, investigating PD within EFL context becomes an utmost necessity against the background outlined in this chapter. In that, the failure of the existing institutional PD programmes to address the specific needs of EFL university teachers; i.e. TESOL content and pedagogical knowledge, engendered the need for exploring alternative approaches to PD employed by EFL university teachers. This was particularly, highlighted by Assalahi (2016) claiming that although SDPD is considered an effective form of PD, he believed that it has no strong foreground to flourish in this context due to the centralisation of Saudi university system and the culture of compliance. It is to be noted that Assalahi (2016) did not explore the use of SDPD amongst his participants, but the generation of data revealed little evidence on the use of SDPD by few participants. Given his focus on structured PD, he did not draw conclusive arguments on the importance of SDPD for EFL university teachers. Therefore, further exploration of this approach to PD is required and of a particular significance to the context of

this study.

2.6 Summary of the Chapter

This chapter has delineated pivotal aspects vis-à-vis the immediate context of the current study. This chapter has also attempted to provide a comprehensive account of the higher-education system, ELT and EFL teachers' PD within higher education in Saudi Arabia. A detailed discussion of the theoretical framework along with previous research on SDPD is presented in the next chapter.

Chapter 3:

Theoretical Framework and Literature Review of SDPD

3.1 Introduction

In the first section of this chapter, I aim to establish the theoretical and conceptual framework that underpins this study; namely to explain how self-directed professional development SDPD is informed by adult learning theories. Since little is known about the use of adult learning theories in teacher professional development (TPD), the overarching themes within this body of literature will demonstrate the need for a professional development (PD) that supports teachers as adult learners. Initially, this chapter starts with a discussion of the three major adult learning theories, with a special emphasis on self-directed learning (SDL), being the main theoretical framework underpinning this thesis as it promotes teacher autonomy and agency in PD. This will be followed by a brief discussion of its assumptions, dimensions, and its relation to TPD. In the second section, a brief discussion of professional development will be presented, including a review of research on PD in TESOL in the Saudi higher education context. In the last section, I provide a conceptualisation to SDPD to establish a linkage between SDL and other related concepts, such as teacher autonomy, teacher self-empowerment, teacher efficacy, and teacher professional identity to ground the study in appropriate literature. To meet these objectives, I will review previous work that has explored the concept of SDPD in the field of education. In that, the overall aim of this chapter is to examine the concept of SDPD through the lens of SDL.

3.2 Adult Learning Theories

Adult learning theories have contributed to our understanding of how and why adults learn. The first contributions to this field, according to Caffarella (1993, p. 27), were influenced by the work of “Houle (1961), Tough (1967, 1979) and Knowles (1975, 1980).” Conceptualising adult learning, a variety of theories and related concepts have emerged and flourished in the last century, such as andragogy, transformational learning theory (TLT), and self-directed learning (SDL) (Merriam, 2001). The term andragogy was proposed by Malcolm Knowles (1968), as opposed to pedagogy, to label ‘adult learning’ and distinguish it from child schooling (Merriam, 2001). Knowles (1980) defines andragogy as “the art and science of helping adults learn” (p. 43). Steinke (2012) states that “andragogy explains what needs to be taken into consideration when teaching adults” (p. 55). Knowles (1973) suggests six major assumptions of andragogy: (1) learner autonomy and self-directedness; (2) understanding the motive behind why and what to learn; (3) valuable previous experiences of the learner; (4) readiness for developmental tasks to evolve with social roles; (5) immediate interest in applying what was learned; and (6) the responsive aspect of both internal and external motivators. However, some scholars claim that these characteristics are not confined to adult learners and can be found also in some young learners. Merriam, Mott and Lee (1996) contend that some young learners may possess some of these characteristics, such as independence or being internally motivated to learn. This counter argument led Knowles (1980) to shifting the criterion of distinguishing between the two approaches of learning to the nature of the learner, being either self-directed or teacher-directed (Merriam, 2001, p. 6).

The debate around ‘andragogy’ as a theory of adult learning has attracted significant attention. In essence, opponents and supporters for this notion started a discussion around its validity as a theory or a merely set of principles about adult learning. Andragogy has been categorised by

Davenport and Davenport (1985) under different labels, such as a theory of adult learning, theory of adult education, theory of technology of adult education and method, a technique, or a set of assumptions about adult education. However, Hartree (1984) rejects the idea of andragogy as a theory and Knowles (1989) agrees that “andragogy is less a theory of adult learning than a model of assumptions about learning or a conceptual framework that serves as a basis for an emergent theory” (as cited in Merriam, 2001, p. 5).

Another influential theory of adult learning is the transformational learning theory, developed by Jack Mezirow (1991). This theory emphasises the social constructivist nature of adult learning, constructivism being “an orientation which holds that the way learners interpret and reinterpret their sense experience is central to making meaning and hence learning” (Mezirow, 1994, p. 222). This theory indicates that adult learners learn and construct knowledge (i.e. change their thinking, beliefs or behavioural practices) due to engaging in critical reflection on their learning experiences, which takes place in a social context, leading to their transformation. Linking transformational theory to SDL, Caffarella (2000) argues that one goal of SDL is to foster transformational learning. However, in the current study, I adopt SDL, being influenced by the assumptions of andragogy and leading transformational learning, as the main theoretical framework to contribute to the understanding of SDPD, which will be discussed in detail later in this chapter (see Section 3.2.4).

3.2.1 Self-Directed Learning (SDL)

SDL is one of the most influential theories of adult learning. However, it is not confined to adults but can also be observed in young learners (Merriam, 2001). Knowles (1975) perceives that adult learning must go beyond the transmission of knowledge to help adult learners in directing their own learning, thus assuming that, as adults grow, so too does their capacity and need to be self-directed. Therefore, instead of being directed or taught by others, as is the case

for passive learners in pedagogical learning settings, self-directed learners are fully involved and have the ability to identify their defects and what they need to learn. Consequently, they work independently to improve their competencies or develop new skills. SDL was developed after the failure of andragogy to stand as a theory contrasted with pedagogy to distinguish adult learning from young learning. This contrast was based on the assumption of motivation being linked to or determined by age, which was later critiqued on the grounds that there are some young learners who are independent and motivated by curiosity to learn, while there are some adult learners who are dependent on others to structure and motivate their learning (Merriam, 2001). Responding to this criticism, Knowles (1975) shifted the focus from age to the characteristics of the learner as being self-directed or other-directed.

According to Candy (1991), SDL is assumed to be the approach of learning most commonly pursued by adults throughout their lives, which I argue to be true. In addition, when people receive insufficient formal learning, as is the case for teachers in this study, SDL is presumed to be the most prominent method to supplement their learning (Smith, 2017). Above all, Mezirow (1985) argues that SDL is an orientation that raises people's awareness of the idea that they are the originators of their own thinking and feeling, which, in my view, reflects the essence and uniqueness of this theory and all other concepts informed by it.

Research into SDL flourished from the early 1980s to the end of the 1990s; then, the interest of research in this area diminished through shifting the focus to other areas, such as transformational and critical learning, and the socio-political context of adult learning (Merriam, 2001, p.1). On the other hand, during the last two decades, research on teacher development vis-à-vis adult learning has increased, which perhaps reflects a paradigm shift in approaches to PD. However, there is little empirical research pertaining to the use of self-

directed learning theory in teacher professional development (TPD); thus, it is hoped that this study will contribute to this body of literature.

Although a number of adult learning researchers have investigated SDL, highlighting its potentiality, Brookfield (1984, 1993), the first scholar to interpret the critical and political aspects of SDL, criticised adult educators for depoliticising and decontextualising the concept of SDL by ignoring the critical influence of culture and social structures. Brookfield (1993) emphasised that SDL carries two political dimensions: control and power. Here, Brookfield (1993) conceives SDL from a critical perspective, where it affords the learner with full control over their learning, empowering them. These critical features appear to be absent from other types of learning, particularly those based on transmission approaches. Thus, SDL can be seen as an effective approach to learning that appreciates the primary agency of the learner.

3.2.2 Definitions of Self-Directed Learning

As the concept of SDL continues to evolve, it appears to be impossible to capture the essence of the concept in a single absolute definition. Jarvis (1992) points out that, although the term SDL occurs frequently in the adult education literature, “it lacks a precise definition” (p. 130). Thus, I will review the existing definitions to present a comprehensive description of what is meant by SDL in this study.

Approaching the multifaceted construct of SDL from different perspectives has resulted in a variety of terms, such as self-education, self-instruction, independent study, individual study, self-teaching, and self-directed learning (Kerka, 1999; Glickman Gordon, & Ross-Gordon, 2010; Manning, 2007). However, this study is interested in the concept of SDL, which Knowles (1975) defines as “a process in which individuals take the initiative without the help of others in diagnosing their learning needs, formulating goals, identifying human and material

resources, and evaluating learning outcomes” (p. 18). Another definition of SDL was provided by Kerka (1999), who relates the concept to the characteristics of the learner as being an “autonomous, independent individual who chooses to undertake learning for personal growth” (p. 1). In this study, however, I have adopted Porter’s (2014) comprehensive definition, which encompasses both the SDL as a process and in relation to the characteristics of the self-directed learner. He puts it as:

a purposely chosen and consciously engaged self-initiated learning in which the learner assumes primary responsibility and control in identifying learning goals; choosing and planning the learning resources and activities; carrying out and managing the learning, including determining where and when to learn as well as the pace, sequence, and depth of the learning; and evaluating the learning experiences. (p. 16–17)

Porter’s definition clearly captures all principles of SDL, in which the self-directed learner is viewed as a proactive actor that recognises, decides, plans, implements, and evaluates the entire learning process. As indicated above, it is necessary to highlight that the assumptions of SDL are influenced by the principles of andragogy (Merriam, 2001), which will be discussed below.

3.2.3 Assumptions of Self-Directed Learning

To establish a theoretical understanding of SDL and, accordingly, SDPD, it is necessary to first introduce the assumptions underpinning SDL. These are: being influenced by the principles of andragogy, self-direction, and learner autonomy; and being goal-oriented, problem-centred, knowledge-based, and driven by internal motivation.

3.2.3.1 Self-direction

From a psychological perspective, Knowles (1975) insists that adult learners have a profound need to be self-directed, stating that “as the human grows, his or her self-concept tends to shift

from being fully dependent on others to be more self-directed as an essential sign of maturing” (p. 84). Merriam (2001) supports Knowles’ argument, indicating that, provided adults can manage their own lives, they are capable of managing their own learning. It is important to highlight that the independent self-concept found in the adult learner can direct adult learning in terms of orientation, content, and pace. Candy (1991) refers to self-direction as “the independent pursuit of learning without formal institutional structures” (p. 441). Although SDL is mostly performed without institutional support, such support is recommended for the sustainability of SDL (Brockett and Hiemstra, 2018). However, it is worth noting that occasionally, adult learners may lack self-directedness, for example where they are new to the work environment, or exist in an environment where they do not need to take responsibility for their learning (Steinke, 2012). Nevertheless, research into teachers’ professional learning has suggested that self-direction is perhaps the predominant trait that motivates teachers to take the lead in their own learning (Lopes & Cunha, 2017; Porter, 2014; Smith, 2017; Steinke, 2012).

As part of being self-directed is the ability to be selective, this trait could simply demonstrate the increasing individual differences among learners. Manning (2007) has argued that, as people’s age increases, their individual differences also appear to increase. Unlike young learners, adults perform better and prefer to engage in the type of learning that they choose for themselves (Zepeda, Parylo & Bengtson, 2014). In agreement with this, Illeris (2004) clarifies that “adults best learn what they find subjectively meaningful, either because it is something they want to learn or because it is something they experience as important or necessary for them to learn” (p. 227), a view with which I agree, as an adult learner. Thus, selecting the context, content, method, and duration of learning are examples of the selective decisions adult learners can make.

3.2.3.2. Learner Autonomy

SDL promotes the primary responsibility of the learner. In this context, the autonomy of the learner refers to “the independence and the will to learn” (Chene, 1983, p. 38). While Knowles (1975, 1980) assumes that most adults are autonomous learners, Caffarella (1993) highlights that self-directed learners prefer to control their own learning rather than be controlled by others. This indicates that autonomy is more related to self-directed learners than adult learners as not all adult learners are autonomous and self-directed, particularly those who are accustomed to being ‘fed’ information and knowledge (Steinke, 2012).

When adult learners take charge of their own learning, this entails taking all decisions concerning each strand of the learning process (Little, 2009). More specifically, autonomous learners assume primary responsibility for designing, implementing, and evaluating their learning endeavours (Caffarella, 1993). From a critical perspective, autonomy implies that adult learners are agents of their own learning; thus, autonomy is closely relevant to self-direction in learning and these concepts are sometimes referred to interchangeably within the educational context (Brookfield, 1993; Chene, 1983).

It has been argued that having full responsibility for learning leads to greater success in learning; Knowles (1993) explains that:

one immediate reason [for this] is that there is convincing evidence that people who take the initiative in learning (proactive learners) learn more things, and learn better, than do people who sit at the feet of teachers passively waiting to be taught (reactive learners).
(p. 21).

However, although research has acknowledged that the success of learning depends primarily on oneself rather than on others (Caffarella, 1993; Little & Dam, 1998), in certain

circumstances, adults may need others to direct their learning (Knowles, 1984), though this does not seem to contradict the fact that learner autonomy contributes to success in learning.

3.2.3.3 Problem-centred/Goal-oriented

Adult learners tend to be goal-oriented through addressing existing problems or developing new skills to enhance their performance when needed. Knowles (1975) assumes that SDL is naturally problem-centred and goal-oriented. However, this may not be true for every adult learner. This assumption (that learning is undertaken to solve an existing problem or achieve a goal), in my view, represents a trigger for learning. In agreement with this, MacKeracher (2004) explains that the desire to address real-life problems is what drives adult internal motivation. This reveals how SDL assumptions are interrelated.

Furthermore, Knowles (1980) claims that SDL is life-task centred, demonstrating a tendency to change social roles, stating that “self-directed learning assumes the learner’s readiness to learn what is required to respond to his or her social life demands.” (p. 84). As a result of being goal-oriented, Knowles (1980) argues that self-directed learners are attentive to the immediate application of knowledge. From my experience as an EFL ‘self-directed teacher’, I tend to apply what I have learned immediately in my classroom. Moreover, what drives me to learn is often the desire to achieve personal professional goals, such as improving teaching practices, differentiating teaching styles, and solving teaching problems.

3.2.3.4 Experience/Knowledge-based

In the field of adult learning, there is a consensus that learners’ existing experiences and knowledge constitute a fundamental source of learning (Caffarella, 1993; Knowles, 1975, 1980, MacKeracher, 2004; Smith, 2017). Indeed, Knowles (1980) emphasises that “self-directed learning values individuals’ previous experience for further learning” (p. 84). The

strength of this reservoir of knowledge and experience is twofold: it enables the learner to utilise previous knowledge to understand the new, or to use a former experience as motivation to address an existing problem and learn more about it. This indicates that adults are motivated to think/reflect while learning in light of their existing expertise and previous experience. Therefore, adult learning should be based on past experiences, knowledge, and practices. However, Knowles (1980) acknowledges that on certain occasions, learners' experiences might not be relevant, especially when the learner has no past experience in 'the subject matter' or when the learner is motivated by external factors to conduct learning. From my own experience, I have found that my previous knowledge and experience not only motivated me to learn, but also facilitated my learning and understanding of new knowledge through drawing links between what I learn and what I practise in the classroom.

3.2.3.5 Intrinsic Motivation

Motivation plays a critical role in both initiating and sustaining individual efforts towards learning and achieving cognitive goals (Garrison, 1997). Garrison (ibid.) further explains that motivation contributes to the success of learning. Whether SDL is driven by internal or external motivation is a matter of debate among SDL scholars. Unlike young learners, Knowles (1975), Merriam (2001) and Manning (2007) emphasise that self-directed learners are mostly internally rather than externally motivated to pursue learning; there may be an external stimulus for learning, yet the primary motive is the individual themselves. Knowles et al. (2005, as cited in Merriam, et al., 2007) stress that "intrinsic motivation is more effective than extrinsic motivation" (p. 84). On the other hand, Kerka (1999) emphasises the importance of external motivation from the context and argues that SDL is not only driven by internal motivation but also by external motivation, as in the case of collaborative SDL. Supporting this view, Lopes and Cunha (2017) argue that internal motivation may not be enough for self-directed learners,

particularly when learning takes place over a long period of time; thus, external motivation from the surrounding context is required to maintain learning efforts.

Knowles et al. (2005) argue that success, value, volition, and enjoyment represent key motivating factors for adult learners. Looking at this from the perspective of teacher's development indicates that, for as long as teachers have constantly emerging and evolving needs and interests, they will remain consistently motivated and will perform better in their own learning. Similarly, AL-Ghatrifi (2016) insists that the strong link between teacher's needs and their desires to meet these needs shapes their PD. From my own experience, I agree with AL-Ghatrifi's (2016) argument that the need to improve my teaching practices, enhance my students' learning, and develop my professional identity constitute internal triggers to pursue SDPD. Hull (2015) argues that although teacher motivation is deemed essential and is a challenge related to the quality of teaching, little has been written about it. Thus, in this thesis, I attempt to contribute to the literature through highlighting the role of teacher motivation in their SDPD.

Now that I have discussed the assumptions that underpins SDL, I move to present the dimensions of SDL and how it relates to this study.

3.2.4 Dimensions of Self-Directed Learning

The huge focus given to the individualistic approach of SDL has led researchers to recognise the effect of social context through considering the collective ideology of SDL. The enquiry into whether SDL is an individual or collective approach has attracted much scholarly attention. While Brookfield (1984) criticises the focus of research on the individualistic ideology of SDL and its ignorance of the social context, Brockett and Hiemstra (1991) and Caffarella (1993) indicate that the trait of self-direction in learning does not necessarily isolate the learner from

surrounding resources. Rather, learners often seek the assistance of others, directly or indirectly, either in the form of people, such as colleagues, experts and family members; or materials, such as books, videotapes and magazines. Moreover, they highlight that a self-directed learner may choose to attend an educational workshop or a course in a formal setting. Thus, their learning cannot be purely individualistic but also collective, depending on the learner's needs and potential.

Similarly, Kerka (1999) argues that SDL is based on two dimensions, individualism and collectivism, explaining that the collectivist component is manifested in the social construction of knowledge, which represents a fundamental dimension of SDL. Merriam and Caffarella (1999) confirm this, stating that no one can be entirely autonomous in all situations. This indicates that, on some occasions, learners need to learn and build knowledge collectively through social interaction. It should be noted that enhancing collective SDL does not challenge the ideology of individual SDL but perhaps challenge the limits of the individual mind (Fischer and Sugimoto, 2006). This suggests that the dimensions of SDL are interdependent. Linking this to the epistemological assumptions (social constructivist) underpinning this research, both dimensions are compatible with these.

3.2.5 Self-Directed Learning in Relation to Professional Development

With the expansion of the literature on TPD, scholars have begun to consider what is appropriate for teachers as adult learners and what is not (Smith, 2017; Zepeda et al., 2014). This reflects a remarkable shift in the focus of PD researchers, who have become more aware of the critical role teachers (as adult learners) can play in their learning. As SDL relies primarily on the learner, when it is adopted by teachers they become the driving force behind their professional learning; in other words, they become aware of their responsibility in regard to identifying the areas that need to be developed and to work autonomously to address these

areas. Moreover, as SDL appreciates the characteristics, needs, and interests of teachers as learners, it appears to lead to a more flexible and effective form of PD, namely SDPD. As such, Zepeda et al. (2014) argue that TPD should be informed by “the principles of adult learning theory” (p. 295). Likewise, Steinke (2012) stresses that implementing SDL as a primary source of teacher learning would benefit not only teachers but also schools to develop a new generation of teachers who can enhance their competence via self-direction, previous experiences, and cultural background. Comparing this to the dominant pedagogical models of structured PD, Lopes and Cunha, (2017) and Mushayikwa (2013) argue that in pedagogical contexts little learning takes place, because the educator or the trainer is the one who does the hard work rather than the teacher, i.e. the teacher’s role is no more than that of a passive learner. In contrast, in SDPD, the teacher becomes a proactive learner responsible for their own PD and the role of others (e.g., people, materials) is purely facilitatory (Smith, 2017; Steinke, 2012). Thus, the principal assumption of this study is that EFL university teachers are fully responsible for identifying, deciding, planning, implementing, evaluating and controlling their PD in light of their existing knowledge and experience.

In summary, this section has explored how PD (SDPD) has been informed by SDL. In light of the definitions, dimensions, and characteristics of SDL presented in this section, in addition to the paradigm shift in the nature of adult learning towards SDL, SDL seems to be the most well-grounded form of adult learning that could inform TPD (Smith, 2017; Steinke, 2012; Zepeda et al., 2014). Reviewing SDL enabled an understanding of one of the main theories of adult learning. Nevertheless, Merriam (2001) has called for further research into SDL that could contribute to the field of adult learning as well as adult education practice. Similarly, Brockett (2009) stresses that “many gains could still be realised through expanding the scholarship on self-directed learning” (p. 11). Therefore, further empirical research is needed to understand

the practicality of SDL in TPD in general, and in PD in an EFL context in particular, which is the intention of the current study.

3.3 The Concept of Professional Development (PD)

In the field of teacher education, numerous attempts have been made to explain the multifaceted concept of PD. To understand what PD means, I will review some established definitions of the term. In a broader sense, teacher development refers to “the process of continual, intellectual, experiential and attitudinal growth of teachers” (Lange, 1990, p. 250). The concept of PD has received considerable attention in the literature of TESOL and been referred to by various terms, such as professional development (PD), in-service education and training, career development, staff development and lifelong learning; and in education in particular, it is interchangeably used with the term continuing professional development (CPD). However, in this study, I will use the term PD to refer to EFL university teachers’ ongoing/in-service PD. Nevertheless, the overall focus will be on one kind of PD, teachers’ SDPD, and this will be discussed in detail in the subsequent section.

The term PD can be understood in various ways according to the context in which it is used. In this study, I will define it in relation to teacher education perspectives. According to Day and Sachs (2004), PD includes “all the activities in which teachers engage during the course of a career, which are designed to enhance their work” (p. 3). In other words, this definition refers to ‘typical’ formal or ‘other-directed’ PD programmes and workshops that have been designed and delivered by outside organisations. Desimone (2011) provides another definition, in which PD refers to the experiences, interactions, and activities teachers engage in to develop new knowledge and skills; improve their instructional practices; and contribute to their social, emotional, and personal growth (p. 28). Desimone (2011) here highlights the role of social interaction in teachers’ overall development, while Day and Sachs’ (2004) definition reflects

‘behaviourist transmission theory’, highlighting the role of systematic and structured learning activities that are tailored to enhance teachers’ performance in classrooms, Desimone’s definition is much more comprehensive, and perhaps covers almost all models of PD (i.e., transmission, transitional and transformative) according to Kennedy’s (2005) framework of PD. Adopting both definitions in this study, I will use the concept of PD to refer generally to any professional learning endeavour a teacher engages with, with the intention of achieving professional improvement.

3.3.1 Professional Development for Language Teachers (TESOL)

Language teaching is complex and thus requires a special type of PD to enable teachers to grow professionally (Richards & Farrell, 2005). Considering the context of learning TESOL knowledge, Richards and Nunan (1990) argue that this professional knowledge depends mostly on how it is learned, where it is learned, and how it is used. Indeed, this comprehensive view appreciates not only the content of knowledge but also the context, the way of learning, and how the knowledge is applied in practice.

Richards and Farrell (2005) highlight that the necessity of PD stems from the fact that knowledge in the field of language teaching is continually changing and that teachers must keep up to date with emerging theories and practices, a view with which I agree. In addition, Lee (2015) indicates that learning a foreign language is unlike other subject matters, particularly when it occurs outside its original context, as the case of my participants. This means that learners within classrooms, in most cases, are exposed only to the linguistic input of EFL teachers, involving the oral and written content of the language. Furthermore, other interested parties, such as policy-makers and administrators, should also pay more attention to language teacher development to facilitate the provision of quality teaching (Lee, 2015).

To understand the types of knowledge EFL teachers should aim to develop, Day (1991) explains that TESOL knowledge is composed of four types: (1) content knowledge (i.e. knowledge of what to teach ‘the subject matter’); (2) pedagogic knowledge (i.e. knowledge of generic teaching practices, strategies, beliefs); (3) pedagogic content knowledge (i.e. how to teach specific content, e.g. EFL in various ways, so students can understand it); and (4) support knowledge (i.e. knowledge of other disciplines that inform the teaching approach) (p. 3-4). Mastering these areas is crucial for EFL teachers, so they can identify aspects that require further development.

Moreover, in order to understand the complexity of teaching, an understanding of self must be developed. Teachers need to self-assess their own competencies and performance independently through the use of a variety of self-assessment tools (Airasian & Gullickson, 1997). These tools, according to Richards and Farrell (2005), involve self-monitoring, reflection on certain teaching incidents, and journal writing. However, self-assessment may not always be sufficient to guide teachers, especially when they require formal supervision or consultation (Roberts, 1998, as cited in Raza, 2010).

3.3.2 Empirical Research on the PD of EFL Teachers in Saudi Higher Education

Although there is a growing body of literature regarding the PD status of EFL teachers in the Saudi general education context, little research has been conducted concerning the PD of EFL teachers in a Saudi higher education context. To the best of my knowledge, only four such studies have been conducted, by Alasmari (2016), Alshahrani (2017), Alssalahi (2016), and Farooq (2016). Although the profile of EFL teachers in Saudi higher education was briefly described in the previous chapter, I will review in this chapter the major studies that have been conducted in this context.

This body of work was a mix of qualitative and survey-based research. Three of them have explored the perspectives, attitudes, perceptions, experiences and practices of EFL teachers in relation to institutional PD. Alshahrani (2017) and Alssalahi (2016) reached the same findings that teachers held negative perceptions of the structured PD due to the top-down policy, a culture of compliance, a lack of teachers' involvement in the design of PD opportunities, and a lack of teachers' voices and autonomy. That said, Alshahrani's (2017) findings showed that the teachers valued CPD, and were aware of its importance. Furthermore, Alasmari (2016) found from his survey-based study on a 121 EFL teachers that teachers were concerned about the limited institutional support for implementing classroom activities, and the indigenisation of both PD activities and the follow-up activities. A finding that Alssalahi and Alshahrani also highlighted from their qualitatively generated data. This study also revealed a notable finding regarding the power of social interactions in facilitating the continuity of PD. Overall, Alasmari (2016) argued that urgent attention is required regarding the institutional policies and support for PD in Saudi universities. In agreement with this, Alshahrani (2017) and Assalahi (2016) reported a number of challenges that impeded teachers PD, such as: (1) lack of time, (2) lack of autonomy, (3) excessive workloads, (4) inadequate provision of CPD activities, (5) unsupportive work conditions, and (6) lack of institutional support in terms of funding and policy.

Quite differently from these studies, Farooq (2016) conducted a study to evaluate the effectiveness of a PD programme designed according to language teachers' needs, knowledge, skills, and experience of English teaching at one Saudi university. The findings generated from a survey with 100 teachers revealed a positive impact of this programme on teachers' academic and pedagogical competences as well as on students' achievement. In that, this finding highlights the effectiveness of the needs-based PD programme in enhancing language teachers'

attitudes towards PD and improving their teaching practice. In that any form of structured PD that is based on teacher's needs and interests is more effective than those neglect such needs.

It is clear that all the reviewed studies highlighted the importance of teacher involvement, collaborative learning, and institutional support for effective PD, and these findings are in alignment with the theoretical underpinnings of the current study.

However, based on the literature, although these studies are recent, they are not in alignment with the orientation and progress of theory and practice in PD. Therefore, it would be better if these researchers have given attention to non-traditional pedagogical (self-directed) forms of PD as well as the use of online platforms to facilitate effective PD, which reveals a gap in the current literature in the Saudi higher education EFL context. To address this gap, the current study attempts to explore the nature of self-directed forms of PD with a special emphasis on the use of online platforms for developing professional learning opportunities through social interaction.

3.4 Self-Directed Professional Development (SDPD)

As indicated above, with the increasing limitations of traditional PD approaches, and the development of theories informing teachers' learning, research has shifted its focus from transmissive approaches to more practical ones, particularly those that can address such limitations. SDPD is a form of PD that places the teacher in control of the whole learning process; thus, it is found to eliminate the dominant limitations found in traditional PD, such as the lack of teachers' autonomy and agency. This section will therefore shed light on the features, definitions, importance and models of SDPD, concluding by reviewing empirical research on this area, revealing the gap this study attempts to address.

It is important to distinguish between other-directed and self-directed PD. Other-directed PD refers to any formal or structured (top–down) activities that are organised, imposed, controlled, and evaluated by external agents to bridge the gap between teachers’ knowledge and skills and the level required by the institution (Raza, 2010; Roberts, 1998). In formal, other-directed activities, teachers pursue learning without taking any part in (i.e., make decisions regarding) choosing, planning, and implementing the learning process. By contrast, self-directed, less structured or bottom–up activities initiated by teachers themselves. However, it is important to indicate that, according to Brockett and Hiemstra (1991) argument that a self-directed learner can participate in any structured activity, SDPD activities may include attending some formal events or programmes provided they are not imposed on the teacher, but rather where the teacher decides on their attendance, for example attending a specific PD programme based on their own interests and needs.

This study assumes that teachers’ tendency to pursue SDPD is influenced by the theory of SDL (Cranton, 1994). Unlike pedagogical forms of other-directed PD, the assumptions of SDPD do not rely on the transmission approach of teacher learning through which knowledge is transmitted from educators and trainers to teachers and where teachers are less autonomous (i.e., existing as passive learners), but rather on the assumption that knowledge is constructed by teachers themselves through various sources of knowledge (Kennedy, 2005).

Similarly, as mentioned in Section 3.2.1, the current research on TPD shows a shift towards self-directed approaches (Hondzel, 2013; Steinke, 2012). This shift can be attributed to (1) the constantly changing nature of (language) teacher’s specific professional needs that requires continuous learning (Avalos, 2011; Richards & Farrell, 2005); (2) the critical role teachers can play as agents of change in both learning and teaching (AL-Ghatrifi, 2016; Govender, 2015); and (3) the learning characteristics of teachers as adult learners (Smith, 2017). In this way,

SDPD views teachers as adult learners who are fully responsible for their professional learning. Mushayikwa and Lubben (2009) highlight that many researchers may overlook the fact that, in the absence of formally structured PD programmes, teachers continue to engage in PD. This views the functions of SDPD as complementary to the formal, other-directed PD.

3.4.1 Definition of Self-Directed Professional Development

Being an under-researched topic, particularly in the context of TESOL, it is not known precisely what types of SDPD activities teachers engage in and how these activities relate to their teaching practice. Thus, it is crucial to conceptualise what is meant by SDPD and examine its grounding in the principles of SDL and the sociocultural perspective. Therefore, I will review a set of definitions to reach a comprehensive operational definition for the current study.

In a broad sense, Van Eekelen, Vermunt and Boshuizen (2006) define the term SDPD as any PD opportunity that is internally initiated and controlled by teachers themselves. Most importantly, SDPD activities are not necessarily recognised by the institution as a form of the acknowledged PD; thus, this issue will receive further attention in this research. As Raza (2010) explains, SDPD covers:

efforts [that] can be spontaneous and are not necessarily formally organised, and often are frequently unacknowledged by the work context as part of formal CPD. This apparently is a point of debate/discussion among TESOL professionals for whom informal CPD forms a major part of their career development. (p. 46)

Mushayikwa and Lubben (2009) define SDPD as “professional development arising from teachers’ own initiative, i.e. the process is internally determined and initiated” (p. 376). Porter (2014) defines it as PD that incorporates principles of SDL and which empowers teachers, providing them with “an internal locus of control that ensures that (they) continue to build

understanding of teaching and learning” (p. 42–43). Based on the above definitions, in this study, SDPD is defined as:

A form of PD that is informed by principles of SDL, which, in turn, empowers teachers, raises their internal and external motivation towards learning, and promotes their autonomy and full responsibility for planning, controlling, and evaluating their own learning independently from their institutions, thus advancing their understanding of both learning and teaching.

Being informed by the principles of SDL, in SDPD teachers are assumed to take the primary responsibility for their personal learning endeavours (Brockett and Hiemstra, 1991). Regarding their characteristics, Porter (2014) suggests that teachers who pursue this form of development must possess:

a willingness to learn, a willingness to identify learning needs, initiative, self-efficacy, self-regulation, persistence, reading and researching abilities, problem-solving skills, intellectual curiosity, and interest in their content area. They are intellectually mature, reflective, perceptive, self-motivated, and organised. (p. 54)

Although all these characteristics are deemed essential to the effective pursuit of SDPD, Porter (2014) neglected to identify the willingness to interact socially with others as a critical characteristic of self-directed teachers, which should also be highlighted.

In the EFL context, Mann (2005) considers SDL as the core of language teacher PD. Moreover, Lee (2015) argues that adopting SDPD enables EFL teachers to understand their teaching needs, stating that it helps them “to understand and address specific pedagogical needs and challenges they encounter in their own particular classroom and school context, which lead to ongoing professional growth” (p. 94). In light of the limited research on SDPD in the EFL

context, the current study aims to further investigate the nature of SDPD whether being pursued individually or collaboratively in the context of EFL teachers.

3.4.2 Importance of Self-Directed Professional Development for Teachers

As the aim of PD is to enhance teachers' effectiveness in all spheres of teaching, as informed by the principles of SDL, SDPD is recognised as a successful and effective form of PD due to its flexibility and potential to: (1) satisfy teachers' professional and learning needs, (2) promote reflection, (3) address teaching problems, (4) compensate for the absence of formal PD, (5) be practised formally and informally, (6) be practised individually and collaboratively, and (7) activate the role of the teacher.

First, SDPD tends to be preferred by teachers due to its flexibility and effectiveness (Ferrara, 2009). Ferrara (2009) conducted a study on 24 educators and found that over 95% of participants preferred SDPD because they could have more input in the design, implementation, control, and evaluation of their PD (as cited in Porter, 2014, p. 44). Second, SDPD is found to recognise the needs, interests, and learning characteristics of teachers as adult learners (Fraser-Seeto, 2015). This is perhaps due to its potential and suitability among all other forms of PD to adapt to the characteristics and needs of teachers as learners as well as its flexibility and accessibility to all teachers, regardless of their status (novice or experienced) or the support they might receive from their institutions. Third, it has been found that teachers adopting SDPD rely heavily on learning 'through the self' and engaging with critical reflection and analysis to determine their objectives and needs and, consequently, plan their short and long-term goals (Govender, 2015; Lee, 2015). Fourth, Mushayikwa and Lubben (2009) note that SDPD appears to be a practical solution for teachers who work in underprivileged or less developed environments, where limited or no PD opportunities exist. Although this might be a considerable trigger for adopting SDPD, it appears also to be prominent in more privileged

environments where teachers recognise their critical role in their PD, assuming their responsibility of their professional learning and change, as a matter of choice (Govender, 2015; Weir, 2017). Furthermore, Lee (2015) emphasises its importance in cases where the structured PD programmes fail to address language teachers' actual needs, as was the case for the participants in this study. Moreover, it is important to note that SDPD promotes learning in both formal and informal contexts (Raza, 2010). In this regard, Johnson (2009) argues that practising professional learning in an informal environment would relieve language teachers from the pressure of formal evaluation, resulting in better-sustained learning. Similarly, in SDPD, teachers no longer have to learn within the constraints of a specific time and place. SDPD also promotes both individual and collaborative learning based on the potentiality and needs of teachers themselves. While some teachers prefer to work individually, others evolve more in supportive and collaborative contexts, where PD is facilitated through social interaction (Villages-Reimers, 2003). The other critical aspect of SDPD is that teachers become more involved; in other words, they do not exist as passive learners who are fed what to learn and how to learn, but become active learners who have the freedom to decide, plan, choose, and implement their learning.

Referring back to Fogarty and Pete (2004), the critical qualities of SDPD include being sustained, job-embedded, interactive, collegial, and integrated, demonstrating that it fulfils the requirements of effective PD.

It is worth noting that most of the above-mentioned aspects of SDPD may never exist in the pedagogical structured forms of PD, demonstrating the potential uniqueness of this approach. Fraser-Seeto (2015) highlights that there is a need for “further investigation into the factors that impact the ongoing effectiveness of self-directed professional development” (p. 10), which

the current study aims to address. The above aspects of SDPD make it clear why this type of learning is seen as more efficient than other types.

However, in spite of the advantages outlined above, it has been found that when SDPD is practised individually for a long period of time, the teacher may lose interest in learning and thus require external motivation through the surrounding context (Lopes and Cunha, 2017). This issue, in my view, highlights the critical role of facilitators, such as administrators and colleagues who can establish a positive environment for SDPD within the workplace/institution.

3.4.3 Concepts Related to Self-Directed Professional Development

In order to advance the understanding of SDPD and its impact on teachers' practice, I will now review a number of concepts related to SDPD that can function either as a trigger or a consequence of SDPD, namely: teacher's autonomy, teacher's self-empowerment, teacher's efficacy, and teacher's professional identity.

3.4.3.1 Teacher's Autonomy

SDPD promotes teacher's autonomy: it allows teachers to take full responsibility for their own development. Although teacher autonomy is considered a recent interest, as it co-exists within the concept of learner autonomy (Ramos, 2006), identifying what it means and how it is continually applied within formal settings, such as schools and universities, is another issue of concern. This section will discuss teacher's autonomy within the frameworks of SDL and SDPD. Little (1995) defines teacher autonomy as a teacher's "capacity to engage in self-directed teaching or professional action" (p. 178). This definition emphasises teachers' involvement in and responsibility for their own development through reflecting on and analysing their actions while teaching. Ramos (2006) concurs with Little's definition, adding

that teachers' autonomy refers to their awareness of "the reason, the time, the place, and the way they can acquire pedagogical skills and updated knowledge as part of their teaching practice" (p. 189). This definition relates teacher autonomy to SDPD, as it reflects teachers' capability of improving their teaching practices through controlling the learning process according to their needs, interest, and potential.

Undoubtedly, teacher's autonomy is of great importance to learning as it supports teachers to be more productive, i.e., to act immediately towards fulfilling constantly changing teaching demands. As opposed to the dominant restrictions imposed on teachers by their administrators, school regulations, curriculum requirements, and students' needs and expectations, Ramos (2016) argues that autonomous teachers view "themselves as autonomous professionals, free from control exerted by colleagues, administrators, the institution or the educational system and able to decide and take action on their own" (p. 188). This indicates that self-directed teachers can make decisions and implement actions independently when required. It is important to highlight that the possession of considerable institutional knowledge is another important component of teacher autonomy, as it allows teachers to address existing problems and challenge institutional barriers in acceptable ways (Chene, 1983).

Based on this review, it can be understood that teacher autonomy is developed through experience, observation, understanding, reflection, and evaluation. In practice, it entails the teacher's readiness for continuous learning, adaptation of required negotiation skills, and critical reflection on both the teaching process and the teaching environment. Not only this, it also drives teachers to develop their own teaching to improve students' learning and achievement. Accordingly, autonomous teachers will be more self-directed in their PD since they have the capacity to identify gaps and work towards filling them effectively.

3.4.3.2 Teacher's Self-empowerment

As mentioned earlier, the self-empowerment of teachers appears to be a critical outcome of SDPD, based on the assumption that teachers have the potential and skill to improve their teaching conditions (Tannehill and MacPhail, 2017). In this way, teachers become more independent and empowered to make decisions and take actions regarding their development when necessary. Short (1994) supports this view and defines teachers' self-empowerment as a process through which teachers develop the competency to take responsibility for their own development while addressing emerging problems. It is apparent that the prevalence of formally structured forms of PD, as well as top-down policies, have produced powerless teachers who, accordingly, play a less efficient role in their own development as indicated above in the studies of Alsalahi (2016) and Alshrani (2017). In another study by Mushayikwa and Lubben (2009) that aimed to identify the factors that drive teachers in deprived areas to adopt SDPD, the researchers found that teacher empowerment was one of the top influencing factors. After adopting this form of PD, teachers became more empowered, and a significant increase in teachers' self-confidence, self-esteem, and self-respect was observed. Mushayikwa and Lubben (ibid) highlight that "by empowering teachers, professional developers encourage them to take the initiative in identifying and acting on their own individual needs" (p. 375). Thus, it can be understood that SDPD leads to teachers' self-empowerment, which, in turn, facilitates the identification and satisfaction of their ongoing professional needs.

In addition, Sugrue (2011) argues that collaborative learning leads to teacher empowerment, which means that practising collaborative learning, as a form of SDPD, empowers teachers. Hence, it is clear that a teacher's autonomy and empowerment are interrelated and shape one another (Tannehill and MacPhail, 2016).

3.4.3.3 Teacher's Efficacy

The teacher's efficacy appears to be an underlying force driving SDPD, and may function as an internal motivator towards self-direction in learning. Seifert, Newbold and Chapman (2016) support this claim, indicating that learners require a certain amount of self-efficacy in order to learn. In the context of teaching, enhancing teacher efficacy could be achieved through establishing peer-networking, such as forming communities of practice, or facilitating peer coaching, peer-mentoring and tutoring to share experiences, knowledge and skills, and to solve existing problems (Mushayikwa and Lubben, 2009). According to Mushayikwa and Lubben (ibid), who investigated the motives for teacher's SDPD, teacher efficacy depends primarily on two elements: professional efficacy and classroom efficacy. More specifically, on the one hand, enhancing the teacher's professional identity, career position, and professional networking appears to rely on 'the professional efficacy' of the teacher. On the other hand, (1) improving subject content knowledge, practical knowledge and professional skills (e.g. to improve classroom interaction, implement new teaching approaches and use a variety of techniques for assessment); (2) improving pedagogical content knowledge to make adapted subject content more relevant to the local context; and (3) enhancing students' performance, attendance and participation, are related to 'the classroom efficacy' (see Figure 2). This classroom efficacy appears to drive teachers to adopt SDL in cases of a changing curriculum or when teachers need to extend the curriculum's application (Mushayikwa and Lubben, ibid). Thus, the teacher's efficacy is a crucial force for initiating and sustaining their SDPD.

3.4.3.4 Teacher's Professional Identity

In the context of teachers, professional identity is a concept that is related to SDPD. Investigating of the role of SDPD in the development of teachers' professional identity is considered a relatively recent area of research on language teacher education, an area that is

concerned primarily with the role of teaching and learning experiences, as well as contextual factors influencing teachers' practice and identity (Duff & Uchida, 1997). Alkhatib (2013) defines teachers' professional identity as "the meaning and understanding teachers give to their professional work, roles, and themselves as teachers" (p. 20). Teacher identities are not unitary, fixed, and stable but fluid and changing according to the surrounding context (Gee, 2001). Coldron and Smith (1999) claim that part of teacher identity is given, and part is achieved. The achieved part, in my view, could be secured through the pursuit of SDPD. Wenger (1998) concludes that developing teacher identity involves "the opening of one's identity by exploring new ways of being that lie beyond our current state" (p. 264). Most importantly, Mushayikwa and Lubben (2009) find that developing teachers' identity drives teachers to initiate SDPD as a critical element of the professional efficacy that teachers seek to achieve through SDL. However, research in this area is still minimal; therefore, further research is needed, particularly in the context of EFL (Crandall & Christison, 2016).

3.4.4 Models of Individual SDPD

Individual models refer to any activity that is initiated, planned, implemented, and evaluated by the teacher her/himself. It is important to note that seeking assistance from others while pursuing individual SDL does not contradict its assumptions, as it is based on the learner's own decisions, needs, and interests, which could be in the form of people or materials or even joining a self-help group, a workshop, or a course in a formal education programme (Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991; Caffarella, 1993). Raza (2010), Lee (2015) and Bailey et al. (2001) identify the following as commonly used forms of individual SDPD activities: reflective teaching; writing a reflective teaching journal; self-evaluation, action research; reading books and papers; attending workshops, courses, and conferences either off or online (as a personal choice); and consulting online resources.

1. Reflective Teaching is considered one of the most effective PD activities for language teachers (Freeman, 2016). It relies, according to Richards and Nunan (1990), primarily on the teacher to improve her/his classroom practice by thinking about previous teaching practices and how to find alternative means to achieve her/his goals and purposes (p. 202).

Reflection is now widely acknowledged as an essential component of many second language teacher education programs worldwide, because as Freeman (2016, p. 208) maintains, reflection offers a way into the less “accessible aspects of teacher’s work.”

In spite of its effectiveness, the professional practice of reflective teaching is not a straightforward process; it requires time and several phases. Stanley (1998, p. 586) describes the five stages of reflective teaching as:

(a) engaging with reflection, (b) thinking reflectively, (c) using reflection, (d) sustaining reflection, and (e) practising reflection. The phases do not represent a sequence that is followed but rather moments in time and particular experiences that constitute a particular phase. (as cited in Bailey et al., 2001 p. 39)

2. Writing Reflective Journals is a SDPD activity that can be practised either on or offline. While some researchers perceive it as a model by itself (Lee, 2015), others consider it an embedded part of reflective teaching (Stanley, 1998). Although I lean more towards Stanley’s view that it is an embedded part of reflective teaching, writing reflective journals on a regular basis can help language teachers to reflect on and evaluate their teaching practice (Richards & Farrell, 2005). In agreement with this, Lee (2015) emphasises its effectiveness as form of SDPD because it helps teachers to (1) identify classroom-related problems; and (2) evaluate the decisions they make in the classroom. This, in my view, reflects its practicality in improving not only the teaching practice but the conditions related to classroom management.

3. Self-Evaluation is seen as a SDPD activity that helps teachers to develop a better understanding of their teaching in that it allows teachers to assess their teaching performance through monitoring themselves to reveal their strengths and weaknesses (Lee, 2015). Furthermore, self-evaluation can be used as an embedded tool for other forms of critical reflection (Bailey 2001; Lee, 2015). Language teachers can carry out self-evaluation using various different evaluation tools in multiple ways: (1) by themselves through audio- or video-recording of classroom observation (Richards, and Farrell, 2005); (2) by their students, through teacher evaluation forms (Richards and Lockhart, 1996); (3) through feedback from colleagues through peer observation; or (4) through compiling a teacher portfolio (Lee, 2015).

4. Attending or Taking Part in Any PD Opportunities, for example PD programmes, courses, workshops, conferences, and seminars (whether off or online), out of personal choice is considered an SDPD activity. Attending structured PD opportunities is not the only way that teachers can initiate their own activities. For example, Lee (2015) highlights that initiating local (school-based) seminars as a self-directed form of PD has two benefits, it: (1) allows teachers to play proactive roles in addressing existing teaching problems in their context; and (2) promotes the autonomy of TPD where it becomes tailored to addressing specific pedagogical needs. It is apparent that initialising self-directed seminars or workshops is effective. However, in my view, I believe that this kind of activity is demanding (in terms of time, effort, and commitment) and is not feasible where there is a lack of collaborative effort or if the institution's policy does not support self-directed initiatives. Furthermore, Lee (2015) emphasises that presenting papers at conferences is an effective SDPD activity that keeps the teacher engaged in PD through learning more about their teaching practice.

5. Reading Books and Journal Articles is considered a common form of SDPD. Bailey et al. (2001) emphasis its importance and potential in expanding the conceptual understanding of

teaching as well as providing the terminology for discussing that kind of knowledge. Desimone (2011) suggests that curriculum materials can be used as another source of PD, particularly if they are designed to be ‘educative’ (p. 29). Reading is also found to suit teachers who prefer to learn individually, in private; in particular, introverted learners tend to use this method over other activities that demand a social presence (Jensen, 2015).

6. Using Online Resources can be a tool for and source of both individual and collaborative SDPD for teachers. Interestingly, assumptions of online learning are in consistence with those of SDL. In this regard, Gerber et al. (2017) explain that, “learning in online social worlds often allows for agency, self-direction, and collaboration” (p. 163). This means moving the context of teacher’s learning to the online context not only allows but promotes and facilitates SDPD.

7. Action Research is considered a successful model of PD that contributes to bridging the gap between theory and practice due to its ability to allow teachers to critically interrogate their practice to improve their teaching and learning (Taylor, 2017). McNiff (2017) defined action research as “a practical form of enquiry that enables anyone in every job and walk of life to investigate and evaluate their work” (p. 9). It can be conducted individually and collaboratively (McNiff, 2017). As teaching is constantly changing based on the demands of the specific context in which it takes place (Hargreaves and Fullan, 2000), action research as a PD approach can assist in adapting to these changes.

3.4.5 Models of Collaborative SDPD

In this study, the term ‘collaborative SDPD models’ refers to any self-directed activity that is based on social interaction and involves more than one participant. Porter (2014) stresses that collaborative learning as an approach to SDPD can result in meaningful experiences that may contribute to changing and improving teachers’ learning and practices. Although there are a

variety of terms and labels in the literature referring to the same concept, I will review two of the common forms of collaborative SDPD, namely informal teacher discussions and peer observation, (Raza, 2010).

1. Informal Discussions among Teachers, according to Desimone (2011), represent a new trend in PD emphasising learning through social interaction, discourse, and a community of practice. Tannehill and MacPhail (2016) support this view, highlighting that ‘small group discussions’, as a form of SDL, prove its effectiveness in positively impacting teachers’ teaching, development, and attitudes towards teaching in disadvantaged schools where there is limited support, poor economic conditions, and students with challenging behaviour.

2. Peer Observation of Teaching is regarded as a collaborative PD activity that can be practised formally and informally (Bailey et al., 2001). Ali (2012) defines it as “the process by which university instructors provide feedback to colleagues on their teaching efforts and practice” (p.16). This means that, when it is initiated informally and self-directedly, it becomes a SDPD activity. To be effective, Baily et al. (2001) highlighted that this type of activity should be implemented with respect, empathy, and honesty so that teachers can benefit from the constructive feedback obtained. Sullivan, Buckle, Nicky and Atkinson (2012) examined the use of peer observation by 20 faculty members as a constructive developmental, but not evaluative, tool to improve the quality of teaching. The findings showed that peer observation is a useful approach that enhances the teacher’s PD, critical ability, and the quality of their teaching. Teachers valued the process of this model and perceived it as being non-threatening, which is important for its effectiveness, according to Bailey et al. (2001).

On the other hand, evidence from research reveals that peer observation of teaching is not easy to conduct and thus requires special training, which can be offered by the institution even if the observation is conducted self-directedly. In the EFL context, Shousha (2015) investigated the

use of peer observation of EFL university teachers in Saudi Arabia, administering a questionnaire to 13 EFL teachers (observers and observees). The findings showed that, although peer observation contributed to developing and enhancing teachers' self-reflection, self-confidence, and knowledge-sharing regarding teaching method, EFL teachers were found to be in need of institutional support, such as training to develop their observation skills, particularly on techniques for providing feedback.

3.4.6 Empirical Research on Self-Directed Professional Development

As research on SDPD is fragmented and the term 'SDPD' is not widely used in the literature on TPD, it is important to note that the studies reviewed in this section come under two titles either SDPD or SDL in PD. I reviewed journals, including the British Education Index, Education Research Complete, Eric, ProQuest, and the grey literature; beyond this, I searched Google Scholar for further empirical studies. Across this strand of literature, researchers explored SDPD in relation to different themes. These included, factors, lived experiences and perceptions of teachers across different subjects in relation to SDPD. This has been conducted using different methodologies but mostly qualitative in nature. The following studies represent an example of on these themes respectively.

First, adopting a grounded theory methodology, Mushayikwa and Lubben (2009) investigated the factors that drive teachers in deprived environments in Zimbabwe to engage in SDPD. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 55 science and mathematics teachers. The findings revealed seven factors motivating teachers to pursue SDPD: (1) teacher's professional identity; (2) the necessity of PD; (3) the necessity of teacher networking; (4) the need to improve subject content knowledge; (5) the need to acquire practical knowledge and skills; (6) the need to adapt new materials to improve teaching; and (7) the satisfactory outcome of addressing their needs. Although this study was limited to one method, namely interviews, in

another study Mushayikwa (2013) carried out a large-scale survey to examine the ways in which science and mathematics teachers use ICT resources as means of SDPD. In this later study, questionnaires were distributed to 259 teachers. Although the results demonstrated that 60% of teachers encountered difficulties accessing ICT for their PD, a positive impact of the use of ICT on teachers' SDPD was recorded. The findings indicated that the teachers who used ICT in their development were relying on three main resources: (1) Microsoft Word for creating instructional materials; (2) web-based sites for downloading learning materials; and (3) email, for establishing networks with peers and PD organisations. However, this reliance on Word, websites, and email for constructing knowledge and establishing networks of teachers is still found but is not as common as it was previously, especially with the revolution of social media platforms available on smartphones, which will be investigated in the current study. Moreover, although Mushayikwa is considered to be among the first to conduct empirical research on SDPD, it was highlighted that similar research must be conducted in different settings to validate the results in other contexts, which is the intention of this study.

Adopting a phenomenological approach, Porter (2014) explored the lived experiences of religious educators through adopting SDPD for certification projects in the United States. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with seven educators. The findings revealed that SDL can be adopted to individualise educators' experiences of PD to meet their learning needs and interests. The findings also showed that personal characteristics and contextual factors impacted the educators' understanding and experiences of the programme processes, requirements, and expectations. Improvement in educators' practices was observed, indicating the effectiveness of this form of PD. Collaborative learning was found to be practical to improve teachers' learning and practice. Additionally, personal and contextual factors were found to be the main factors that influenced teachers' decisions to adopt SDL. On the other hand, lack of time and exhaustion were identified as found the main challenges that impeded

educators in some instances from completing their SDL. Although this finding shows that the influence of context is not always positive, the contextual influence is limited to two factors, time and exhaustion; thus, this critical area requires further investigation to develop a fuller understanding of other contextual factors, which this study aims to achieve.

Next, adopting a phenomenological approach, Weir (2017) explored the experiences and perceptions of mathematics teachers towards the pursuit of SDPD. Individual and focus-group interviews were conducted with ten teachers in Canada. The findings revealed that SDPD (1) was an effective form of teacher learning; (2) led to transformational thinking and practice; (3) provided teachers with autonomy and empowerment through control (of time, context, and content) of their PD; (4) resulted in learning experiences that were meaningful to both novice and experienced teachers and their students; (5) enhanced teachers' reflective practice; and (6) allowed flexibility of practice by formally and informally facilitating ongoing learning. It is important to highlight that Weir's (2017) examination of SDPD adopted transformational learning theory, whereas the current study examines it through a SDL lens, which could lead to a different understanding.

Recently, researchers have started to explore SDPD from critical perspective. For example, acritical narrative study by Govender (2015) investigated how teachers, as "initiators of change" through the pursuit of SDPD, take responsibility for change and for their own learning. Life-story interviews were conducted with five schoolteachers in South Africa. The data was analysed adopting a multidimensional framework, and findings revealed that taking responsibility for their own professional learning contributed to enhancing teachers' agency and enabled them to be transformative intellectuals. This corroborates the finding of Weir (2017) that SDPD is a transformative activity. Moreover, Govender (2015) found that, when collaborative learning is not feasible, teachers' learning becomes functional and thus prompts

teachers to learn individually for the sake of becoming an expert in the subject matter (p. 493). By doing so, teachers transform their learning and teaching.

Furthermore, a longitudinal case study was conducted by Lopes and Cunha (2017) investigating the tools and conditions that mediate SDPD. The study involved action research in three cycles over a period of ten years, focusing on one physical sciences teacher who sought to, self-directedly, enhance the quality of her teaching practice to impact teacher–student interactions and thus enhance the quality of students’ practices and engagement in experimental works (p. 264). Multimodal data was collected from the teacher and students pertaining to the teaching practices, student activities and outcomes, and student–teacher interaction (p. 264). The results showed that the focused SDPD in teaching practice through the use of multiple tools enhanced the quality of the teacher’s practice and positively impacted students’ learning. The authors concluded that for effective SDPD to take place, the teacher’s learning should be intentional and focused. However, the findings showed that the will of the individual teacher alone may not be sufficient for them to remain committed to PD over a long period; thus, it is recommended that administrators act as facilitators by providing an environment that is conducive to SDPD. The findings also suggest that action research with long cycles is needed for improving teaching practice. Although the findings of this study were drawn from one participant, the novelty of the findings can be attributed to the multiple sources of data as well as the period of time over which data was collected, being ten years.

As can be seen from the above review, all of the previous studies agree on the effectiveness of SDPD as a form of teacher learning, and they identify some of the drivers of its adoption. However, Lopes and Cunha (2017) highlighted the critical issue of ‘internal motivation’ being insufficient for guaranteeing the continuity of SDPD; in other words, the possibility that the teacher (alone) may lose interest in SDPD over a long period of time, a factor that was

overlooked by the other five studies. This, in my view, emphasises the role of context in SDPD through activating the role of collaboration between administrators and teachers to ensure the continuity and effectiveness of this form of learning.

Methodologically speaking, in regard to the reviewed studies, all adopted various qualitative approaches, except for the study by Mushayikwa (2013), which was conducted from a scientific position. Moreover, as rigorous qualitative research depends on the use of multiple sources of data to increase the depth and quality of the findings, while the studies by Mushayikwa and Lubben (2009), Porter (2014), and Govender (2015) were limited to one method, namely semi-structured interviews, only two studies used multiple sources of qualitative data, those by Weir (2017) and Lopes and Cunha (2017). Moreover, as the previous studies were either purely qualitative or purely quantitative, none employed a mixed-methods approach to collect both types of data in one study, the approach that is adopted in this study.

Contextually speaking, on the one hand, reviewing the international research into SDPD, none of these studies was conducted in the EFL/TESOL context. Although Govender (2015) did not mention the specialty of teachers, the other studies were conducted in other contexts, such as religion, physical sciences, science, and mathematics. This reveals a lack of empirical research on SDPD in the EFL/TESOL domain specifically, a gap which it is hoped the current study will address. On the other hand, looking at the local research on the SDPD of EFL teachers in the Saudi context, all of the research I have uncovered has focused on the traditional, institutional, other-directed PD as mentioned in Sections 3.3.3, and no study (to the best of my knowledge) has examined the nature and impact of SDPD in relation to the sociocultural context of the university EFL education in Saudi Arabia. Thus, the current study is expected to contribute to the literature on SDPD in general and the EFL university context in particular. In addition, as the participants of previous studies were educators and schoolteachers, no study

examined the pursuit of SDPD by university teachers, which is the focus of this study. Hence, the current study attempts to explore the nature of SDPD activities, and the facilitators and inhibitors of SDPD.

Chapter 4

Theoretical Framework and Literature Review of VCoP

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the theoretical and conceptual frameworks underpinning VCoP via WhatsApp for EFL teachers, the phenomenon being investigated for the case study. So, to locate this case study in the current literature, I plan to shed light on the concepts of Sociocultural Perspective (SP), Community of Practice (CoP) and Virtual Community of Practice (VCoP) as the principal constructs involved. I will also then review the related literature concerning teachers' use of VCoP via WhatsApp, highlighting the gap this study attempts to address.

4.2 Sociocultural Perspective and SDL

Sociocultural theory was founded by Vygotsky, who focused primarily on developing children's cognition to support learning in general, and language learning in particular (Vygotsky, 1987). It challenges the individualistic approach to learning by considering the sociocultural context in relation to the development of cognition. It also has implications for adult learning theories, because it considers the influences of sociocultural context on (self-directed) learning and cognition. Merriam (2011) argues that to understand the nature of adult learning, it is essential to recognise the sociocultural context. Attempting to clarify how the sociocultural perspective relates to learning, Johnson (2009) states, "the epistemological stance of a sociocultural perspective defines human learning as a dynamic social activity that is situated in physical and social contexts, and is distributed across persons, tools and activities" (p.13). Thus, learning is situated in social interaction and mediated by language and culture, which according to Johnson (2009) and Vygotsky (1987) is suggested as being effective,

especially in terms of the development of human cognition. While learning through interaction with others; i.e. depends on others when constructing knowledge, Lave and Wenger (1991) suggest learners gradually develop a responsibility towards their own learning by participating in joint activities. This accords with Johnson's (2009) contention that "a sociocultural perspective emphasizes the role of human agency in this developmental process" (p. 14), which concurs with assumptions of SDL, advocating the role of learner agency in controlling the learning endeavour. Although learning from a sociocultural perspective might lead to the rejection of the notion of learning in isolation, it does consider the impact of culture, language, context, and social interaction on the learning process, and cognitive development either directly or indirectly.

When considering the sociocultural perspective in the domain of teacher's learning, Tasker, Johnson and Davis (2010) argue that the cognitive abilities and skills of teachers can be developed through social interaction with their peers. This, reveals how the sociocultural context contributes to teacher's cognition, learning and consequently their professionalism. Johnson (2009) affirms this, stating that "learning to teach from a sociocultural perspective, is based on the assumption that knowing, thinking, and understanding come from participating in the social practices of learning and teaching in specific classroom and school situation" (p. 31). That is, Johnson here assumes teachers' cognition, as an important element of their learning, develops through their participation in social practices and activities. This, in turn, reflects the vital role of social interaction in teacher's learning, which is the focus of this case study. As teacher's cognition, according to Vygotsky theory, is developed through interaction with the social context, it contributes to their learning through uncovering "the complexities of who teachers are, what they know and believe, how they learn to teach and how they carry out their work in diverse contexts throughout their careers" (Johnson, 2009, p. 26). Therefore, when applying this perspective, learning to teach as a process is understood to be socially

constructed, because teachers' knowledge is developed through their actions and interactions with colleagues, supervisors and students, which take place in multiple social contexts. Linking the sociocultural perspective to SDL, the main theoretical framework underpinning this study, Kerka (1999) asserts that SDL is informed by a collectivist ideology that accentuates and appreciates the human agency present in the learning endeavour. Looking into the SDPD activities informed by the sociocultural perspective, virtual communities of practice appear to be increasingly adopted by teachers, the reasons for which will be conceptualised in the following section.

4.3 Communities of Practices (CoP) and SDL/SDPD

As mentioned above, Lave and Wenger (1991) argue that CoP is rooted in situated learning, whereby knowledge is not only something acquired (received knowledge), but rather something generated through participation in social activities (experiential knowledge). Kennedy (2005) highlights the capacity and potential for CoP to support professional practice and the process of the transformation of teachers. Informed by a sociocultural perspective, the concept of CoP relates closely to collaborative learning, adult learning and PD, as found by Lave and Wenger (1991), is and defined thus:

A group of individuals with distinct sets of knowledge, abilities and experiences, who are actively involved in collaborative processes, sharing information, ideas, interests, resources, perspectives, activities, and above all, practices, in order to build both personal and collective knowledge. (Lave and Wenger, 1991, as cited in El-Hani & Gerca, 2012, p. 1331)

Another definition by Barab, Barnett, and Squire (2002) views CoP as, "a persistent, sustained social network of individuals who share and develop an overlapping knowledge base, set of

beliefs, values, history and experiences focused on a common practice and/or mutual enterprise” (p. 495). Both definitions apparently emphasise the collaborative aspects of learning, through knowledge sharing and building, experiences, beliefs and a commitment to a common purpose based on specific needs and interests. However, Barab et al. (ibid) highlight the sustainability of learning within these communities, something not emphasised in Lave and Wenger’s definition, and which according to Kennedy (2011) leads to success in professional learning. Moreover, both definitions are informed by the sociocultural perspective through which learning occurs, and is facilitated via interactions, thus both definitions will inform my study. The constructivist epistemology of SDL, as understood by Knowles (1980) involves (self-directed) learning being facilitated by previous knowledge and Vygotsky’s (1978) social constructivist theory, whereby learners rely on external forces; i.e. social interaction, culture and language in constructing knowledge. El-Hani and Greca (2012) argue that in CoP, teachers interact with one another to develop themselves through consulting previous knowledge as a way to produce new data or to navigate existing information. Thus, CoP is supported by a combination of theoretical frameworks: adult learning and sociocultural perspectives.

Kennedy (2011) emphasises that the literature of collaborative learning generally does not favour collaborative over independent learning, but rather considers it “a complementary approach” (p. 28). Similarly, Fischer and Sugimoto (2006) argue that CoP challenges the limitations of the individual mind (p. 7). This means that collaborative learning (interaction), as it occurs in CoP, is more likely to generate creativity and enhance individual intelligence and practice, in a way that could not be achieved with individual learning. To explain, CoP creates an interactive and sometimes controversial environment, which prompts teachers to construct and negotiate knowledge. For example, El-Hani and Greca (2012) indicate that CoP encourages teachers’ reflection, inquiry, dialogue and networking, all of which are regarded to be the best conditions for knowledge production. Moreover, Fischer and Sugimoto (2006)

argue that having CoP result in “different and controversial views and bring about new insights, new ideas and new artifacts” (p. 7). This suggests the processes teachers engage with to support knowledge production in CoPs result in multiple views and controversial and critical discussions, leading to creativity and innovation; consequently, enabling teachers to reinvent their teaching practices (El-Hani and Greca, 2012).

4.3.1 Characteristics of Communities of Practice

As research in CoP shows, its applicability as a common tool of PD has distinctive characteristics that set it apart from other types of learning communities as arising in educational communities, in or out of educational settings, and which can be practised formally and informally in online or offline settings (Davis, 2010). Furthermore, Schlager and Fusco (2004) argue that CoP can be a self-directed activity, highlighting that it is “emergent and self-reproducing and evolving entities that are distinct from, and frequently extend beyond, formal organizational structures, with their own organizing structures, norms of behaviour, communication channels, and history” (p. 4). This description confirms that CoP serves an extension of work, and can be practised informally through knowledge-sharing that is based on community members’ needs, potential and interests. However, in this study, I will focus on self-directed CoP initiated online by teachers themselves, when seeking to achieve a common purpose. Interestingly, in CoPs, aims and objectives are set out by the members themselves, according to their needs and interests (Kennedy, 2005). Another feature of significance suggests that participation in a CoP is based on voluntary participation, mutual understanding, trust, and discussions of topics of shared interest (Younger and George, 2013). CoP also helps create a culture of continual development; serving to deconstruct formal relationships and the rigid hierarchy that exists within schools, or between schools and universities (Hargreaves, 1999; El-Hani & Greca, 2012). Nevertheless, Kerno (2008) highlight that the organisational

hierarchy that exists in some CoP constitutes a major challenge, with the potential to affect the nature of communication and interaction in particular communities. This, in my view, suggests that participating in self-directed CoP tends to be less challenging where there is a lack of hierarchy 'power'. Furthermore, Chalmers and Keown (2006) highlight that CoP requires the participation of all community members, which, in my view, could prove challenging. Sometimes, for one reason or another, a teacher might be unable to participate consistently. However, this does not prevent the teacher from benefiting from being in a community, as is the case for the participants in this study. Wenger (2011) emphasise that members of CoP "share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly" (p. 1). First, this description demonstrates the aim of CoP for teachers, which is to develop their practices, knowledge and skills through regular interaction. Second, Wenger highlights 'intentionality' as a critical aspect of CoP, which can trigger the establishment of this learning community.

4.3.2 Communities of Practice and Professional Development

When relating CoP to PD, it has been argued that CoP can function as an effective approach to TPD, as it is considered a powerful stimulus that can assist in improving teaching practices (Alghatrifi, 2016; Althobaiti, 2012; El-Hani & Greca, 2012; Squire-Kelly, 2012; Hajisoteriou, Karousiou and Angelides, 2018; Vanderlinde and van Braak 2010). In the context of PD, Alghatrifi (2016) perceives it as "a group of teachers (about four or five) who meet to discuss their teaching strengths and weaknesses" (p. 77). Good and Weaver (2003) clarified that the effectiveness of learning groups increases when they exist within similar teaching contexts; in particular where teachers are of a similar level educationally, and in terms of age and background, teach the same subjects, and use similar curricular; thus, meaning they are likely to have similar professional needs. Interestingly, the members of the community investigated

in the current study share a similar background, which could lead to effective learning, as highlighted by Good and Weaver. Moreover, Younger and George (2013) indicate that CoP can be based on voluntary participation, to enable individuals to learn collaboratively from each other. Although this might not apply with every CoP, as some are formally initiated, the community in the current study is self-directed, and teachers have participated informally and voluntarily. As such, teachers are ready to learn and generate collective knowledge.

Moreover, Spencer, Harrop, Thomas and Cain (2017) indicate that CoP, as a transformative model of PD, allows teachers to: (1) enjoy more professional autonomy; (2) set the agenda for their own development; and (3) access required means (knowledge and experiences) through actively enquiring within a community. This confirms Kennedy's (2005) typology, which suggests that in transformative PD, the capacity for teacher autonomy increases.

4.4 Virtual Community of Practice (VCoP) and SDPD

Dube et al. (2006) moved the context of collaborative learning in CoP from a physical to a virtual setting, which resulted in the emergence of VCoP. They asserted that "using Information and Communication Technology (ICT) such as the Internet to support their ongoing CoP becomes increasingly VCoP, which frees their members from constraints of time and space" (p. 23). VCoP retains features consistent with the characteristics of CoP, as mentioned earlier, and also takes place in a virtual environment, with two major traits being flexibility and accessibility. VCoP can, when informed by the principles of SDL, be self-initiated and self-directed; i.e. the focus of the current study. VCoP can be practiced through a wide range of virtual platforms, however WhatsApp was selected here as it is the most popular social media platform in the Saudi context in general, and Saudi higher education in particular. However, research in this area is still in its infancy, demanding further investigation, which will hopefully be carried out in this study.

The main characteristics of VCoP are its informality, self-directedness, flexibility, and the lack a hierarchy of relations among teachers in this study, because it emerged naturally and was informed by the premises of SDL. However, according to the literature, a number of aspects were found to contribute to the success of VCoPs. Davis (2010) highlights that the use of technology, acceptance of virtual communication, prior familiarity among community members, sense of belonging, and use of friendly language are key factors for successful VCoPs. This, according to Fischer and Sugimoto (2006), might explain why learning increasingly takes place among groups of people located in virtual communities. In addition, Davis (2010) indicates that learning and trust as a result of community interaction are essential factors for sustaining VCoP, as this was one of the key factors that attracted my attention as a tool to keep engaging with the VCoP investigated in this study. Kantanen, Manninen, & Kontkanen (2014) add the importance of emergent dialogue as a prerequisite to the success of learning in VCoP. Hence, acceptance of virtual communication, accessibility, sustainability, emergent dialogue, friendly language, familiarity among members, trust and achieving a sense of belonging as a group can contribute to the success of VCoP.

It is notable that teachers' virtual learning communities are becoming increasingly used as a context for online TPD (Alsolamy, 2017). This mode of learning arises from the premise that learning occurs and knowledge is generated through virtual interaction and communication among community members. Teachers with various types of knowledge, beliefs experiences and practices come together virtually to negotiate and improve their teaching practices. Therefore, social media has become a major tool when generating online learning communities; accordingly, it facilitates learning, regardless of temporal and spatial constraints (Moreillon, 2015). Thus, this study will focus on self-directed VCoP as it is established informally by teachers themselves as a form of SDPD.

Despite the potential value of VCoPs, they cannot be taken uncritically. In that, like all concepts or theories of learning they have their limitations. For example, the most cited one, according to Kimble and Hildreth (2004), is the difficulty of establishing strong connections, due to the lack of face-to-face interactions, particularly when members are based at different geographical sites and never meet in the physical world. However, it is worth noting that the members of VCoP in the current study work in the same immediate context, meaning they meet with and know one another, and thus are able to develop strong connections. The other major limitation of VCoP is that it involves less participation, as learning takes place in the virtual world (Alenazi, 2017). Therefore, these limitations have to be considered when adopting this model of PD. However, I still think that VCoP addresses some major challenges of CoP, particularly the availability of time and space and flexibility, as will be explained in the following sections.

4.5 WhatsApp as a Medium of VCoP

WhatsApp is an instant messaging application launched in 2009. It permits users to exchange a wide variety of content via smartphones, tablets or computers, including: (1) texts; (2) images; (3) videos; (4) audio files; (5) documents; (6) links to information; (7) sharing of the user's location and contact details; and (8) supporting audio and video calls. It allows communication, both between individuals and group chatting, i.e. all members receive identical content simultaneously. Meanwhile, group chat history is also visible and available to all members, which enables them to participate at any time (WhatsApp Inc., 2019).

WhatsApp is considered the most popular social media platform in Saudi Arabia. The third quarter report by Statista (2017) identified that, in 2017, 73% of the country's 33.55 million inhabitants were actively using WhatsApp. Comparing WhatsApp use with that of other social media platforms, a study by the Saudi Communications and Information Technology Commission (CITC) (2016) concerning the use of social media platforms by the Saudi

population revealed it to be the most popular social media application; i.e. used by 93% of the population, in comparison to Snapchat (34%), Telegram (13%), and Bath (5%). This identifies WhatsApp use to be a powerful trend in social media in Saudi Arabia (Figure 4.1).

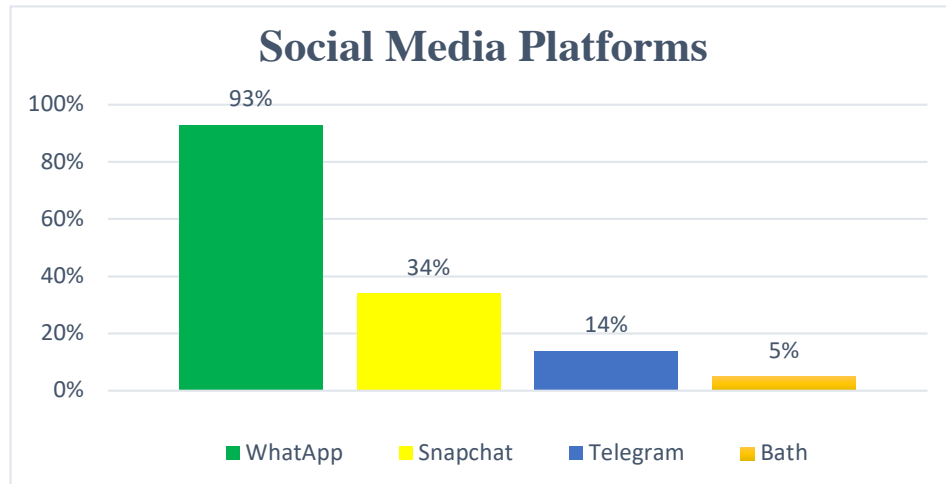


Figure 4.1: The use of social media platform by Saudi population in 2016

Interestingly, growing interest in using WhatsApp has been transferred to Saudi Higher Education, resulting in a huge number of faculty members adopting it for educational purposes. Thus, this popularity was another impetus for choosing WhatsApp other than any other online platform. In the next section, I present the empirical literature on VCoP, including WhatsApp as a context for learning.

4.6 Empirical Research on VCoP

Due to the dearth of studies that investigated the use of WhatsApp as a context for EFL teachers professional learning, this section will draw from studies that are closely related to the characteristics of this specific VCoP. Three themes in the literature were identified as relevant to the VCoP; these are informal learning in CoPs, VCoP of EFL teachers, and VCoP via WhatsApp. Informal communities of practice have been a focus for researchers who aimed to explore its effectiveness on their professional identities and practices and also the challenges

that might result from learning within these communities. Considerable research has underlined the effectiveness of implementing CoP at higher- education institutions in an international context as a way to enable teachers to meet their professional learning objectives (Van Lankveld et al., 2016; Moston, 2008; So and Kim 2013).

For example, in a very recent study, van Lankveld et al. (2016) investigated the effectiveness of informal learning communities when enhancing PD. The findings revealed the effectiveness of these communities exceeds expectations, supporting teachers' capacity to strengthen their professional identities. In other words, these communities allowed teachers to have a dialogic interaction through question sharing, solutions and interpretations. In addition, they expounded teachers' tacit knowledge and expertise and enhanced their sense of belonging.

Another study conducted by So and Kim (2013) explored how informal inquiry, through the medium of a learning community was initiated informally by Korean teachers pursuing PD. Their study focused on establishing the drive that informs individuals' participation in a self-organised learning community, how informal inquiry occurs within this community of learning and what this initiative means to teachers. Findings have shown a self-organised community of learning is more effective as a tool to encourage teachers to keep developing themselves without external support or rewards, because all teachers have a similar status and teaching experiences, which might strengthen their relationships. Another finding is that informal inquiry allows teachers to advance their knowledge in terms of teaching practices and transforms their attitudes towards teaching. This study asserts that communities of learning can also serve to develop teachers' professional identity and autonomy. Communities of learning, according to So and Kim, profoundly contribute to making teachers "reform agents" (p. 105), in order to improve their teaching practice. This finding accords with Cochran-Smith and Lytle's (1999) view that discussing current teaching problems can function as a starting point

prompting further learning. In addition, So and Kim's (2013) study shows a learning community is more likely to endure if it consists of participants with a similar background and vision. However, this is contrary to Cochran-Smith and Lytle's (1999) expectation that a teacher learning community would ideally include teachers with different positions and work experience. In the process, group meetings and the group's online network emerged as useful medium for collaborative inquiry (So and Kim, 2013, p. 113).

Elsewhere, Akinyemi and Rembe (2017) investigated the challenges encountered by teachers in both formal and informal CoP settings in South Africa. Adopting a mixed-methods approach, they distributed questionnaires to 64 teachers, and then conducted follow up interviews with 15 of them. The findings revealed: (1) a lack of time for regular meetings, (2) a lack of permanent meeting space or being in a distant area, (3) a lack of trust among group members, (4) a lack of sufficient material resources, and (5) a lack of institutional support, to be the challenges most affecting teachers' participation. This means that although CoP is considered as an effective model for teachers' PD, its potential challenges have to be taken into consideration in order to make the most of it as mentioned above in the theoretical section. In this vein, VCoPs are now being used as a way to address these challenges and limitations. Therefore, researchers have started investigating its use as a PD model for EFL teachers and other practitioners in other disciplines.

For instance, Dowling (2009) investigated the use of VCoP as a way to develop EFL teachers in Thailand through an online website ajarn.com. The overall findings revealed a new trend in TPD, in the sense that teacher development is no longer confined to obtaining received knowledge, but can also result in experiential knowledge being generated and shared by teachers themselves through group reflection on their practices. Therefore, as VCoP compensates for difficulties associated with face-to-face CoPs and facilitates EFL teachers PD,

Dowling (ibid) states, “for EFL teachers working alone in foreign settings, participating in CoPs may be difficult. Fortunately, with advances in information technology, teachers can now join online CoPs” (p.13). He further elaborates on how constructing and transferring knowledge and its resources among EFL teachers with different levels of professionalism in this community, ranging from expert to novice teachers, allows the professional transformation of peripheral/novice teachers.

Another study was conducted by Yue Qi and Wang (2018), who explored the use of VCoP through – WeChat instant messaging app- as a model of PD used by language teachers in China. Qualitative data from group chat interaction, teachers’ reflective journals, and focus group discussions with five language teachers were collected. Content analysis was adopted. The findings showed that mutual engagement, shared repertoire and joint enterprises emerged as the main dimensions of CoP proposed by Wenger (1998). Teachers’ engagement took a variety of forms -synchronously and asynchronously- involving reading and listening, raising questions, responding to others, encouraging one another, caring for and supporting each other (p. 87). Yue Qi and Wang (ibid) also found that this VCoP can empower teachers to form virtual self-led communities. Hence, although these studies were conducted on two different online platforms, they revealed the effectiveness of VCoP for EFL teachers sharing and transforming knowledge and experience.

It is to be noted that these studies have explored VCoP via platforms other than WhatsApp. The use of WhatsApp as medium for learning for higher education practitioners has been explored recently in different contexts. For example, Alsolamy (2017) investigated the use of social networking platforms by faculty members in Saudi universities as educational tools to improve teaching practice and learning styles. Findings revealed WhatsApp to be the most frequently used platform in this context at (88%), followed by (84%) Twitter, (78%) Facebook,

and (63%) YouTube. Alsolamy (ibid) further indicated that unlike other public social networking platforms, WhatsApp is attractive to the majority of the faculty members at Saudi universities, as it allows creation of a private and safe environment for learning. Conversely, Rashidi et al. (2016) conducted a study, examining the level of the privacy offered by WhatsApp to its users in the Saudi context. The findings revealed that, although one group of Saudi WhatsApp users were satisfied with the current level of privacy provided, another group expressed a wish for additional options as a way to control their privacy, particularly as users who are not in their phone lists were able to obtain access without mutual agreement.

Furthermore, Alsolamy (2017) investigated the attitudes, motives, and concerns of faculty members regarding the integration of social networking in Saudi university context. The results revealed that 94% of faculty members supported the integration of social networking sites for educational purposes, believing this would: (1) motivate teachers' learning; (2) enhance their teaching practice; (3) facilitate communication; and (4) promote collaboration through the sharing of thoughts and experiences. However, Alsolamy's study is limited to teachers' perceptions; thus, it is unclear how WhatsApp can enhance teaching practice; i.e. to what extent? And in what ways? His study thus lacks sufficient depth to reveal the practicality of WhatsApp as a medium for teachers' professional learning and teaching practice. Accordingly, it can be concluded that research currently taking place is limited to the integration of social media platforms and education in Saudi Arabia; thus, further research is required to investigate the impact of these social media platforms on teaching practice, particularly those informed by SDL initiatives, which will be addressed by the current study.

Understanding the potential importance of WhatsApp as a virtual learning medium encourages a review of literature investigating its practicality in the context of teachers' SDPD in relation to VCoP. Although the literature of VCoP via WhatsApp is fragmented, and still new, I will

review relevant (local and international) studies that have investigated the use of WhatsApp as a medium of VCoP by teachers, revealing the gap in the literature the current research is attempting to address.

First, Cansoy (2017) conducted a study in Turkey investigating the focus of 12 science teachers' discussions in a WhatsApp group (VCoP), as a form of PD. Cansoy adopted a virtual ethnography approach, observing teachers' discussions over the course of a year, and then analysing the focus of their discussions with a content analysis framework. He found the majority shared knowledge regarding the following key areas: (1) field knowledge; (2) pedagogical content knowledge; (3) in-school teaching practice; and (4) emotional support (p. 291). However, he only adopted a single research method (i.e. a content analysis of teachers' discussions). Thus, his findings were limited to knowledge produced by this type of collaborative learning. He therefore did not deepen his investigation to understand the social phenomenon of VCoP via WhatsApp in relation to other key areas, such as social context and practice. Cansoy (ibid) claimed that knowledge sharing contributes to teachers' practices, based on his observation of the interaction in the WhatsApp group, but he did not elicit the evidence from the teachers' themselves, which reveals a gap in our understanding regarding its impact on their practice. This is consequently addressed in the current study, when conducting interviews intended to elicit teachers' experiences of VCoP, in relation to their practice.

Hayward and Ward (2018) investigated the use of WhatsApp by faculty members in the UK. Two WhatsApp groups were initiated by researchers: in the first, thirty-eight clinical educators were found to be working in different locations across the UK, and were invited to join a VCoP via WhatsApp. A year later, another group was formed locally, including 20 faculty members teaching a new course in the same context. They were unable to meet regularly. A questionnaire was employed with the participants of both groups. The findings showed the effectiveness of

WhatsApp as a means to allow educators to share teaching experiences, ask questions, and keep in touch with medical school faculty members, particularly those with different specialities, in the case of geographical dispersion. On the other hand, the huge number of the participants in the larger group found it somewhat difficult to contact all members. In addition, the participants reported that overload among the WhatsApp group affected participation, as the individuals were members of several groups. Although Hayward and Ward (*ibid*) investigated VCoP via WhatsApp, their study was not of a self-initiated group, but was established by the researchers; thus, it cannot be classified as a self-directed activity. In addition, the findings were limited to one method (questionnaire), wherein the current study examines qualitative data through online observation and semi-structured interviews, for triangulation and complementation purposes.

Alenazi (2017) undertook a further study within the Saudi university context, intending to investigate the extent of engagement of twenty-six mathematics pre-service teachers in an ‘other-initiated’ (i.e. set up by the researcher) WhatsApp group, as a VCoP for learning. Conducting content analysis of WhatsApp chat, and thematic analysis of the interviews, the findings revealed an unsatisfactory rate of participation (i.e. 57%), due to the following factors: (1) negative peer pressure; (2) atypical usage of WhatsApp as a context for learning; (3) difficulties with certain types of posts; and (4) the absence of an instructor to regulate learning (Alenazi, 2017, pp. 4–5). However, as this VCoP was designed and introduced by an outsider ‘researcher’, who played the role of a non-participant observer, it cannot be classified as a self-directed activity. The current study, therefore, examines VCoP from the perspective of self-directed learning; i.e. the group initiated by teachers themselves, with the researcher also being an insider, i.e. an original group member. Moreover, Alenazi (*ibid*) focused on the process of learning within the online context, rather than its impact on teachers’ practices, as addressed in the current study.

All the reviewed studies about the use of WhatsApp as a context of VCoP were in areas other than English. Thus, English (EFL) will be the context herein. It is also important to note that the VCoP in all of the previous studies was other initiated (by the researchers), rather than self-initiated by the teachers. Consequently, this means that my approach to study VCoP via WhatsApp is different from the other discussed studies, in the sense that the WhatsApp group in the current study is informally self-directed/initiated by teachers themselves and myself (the researcher) as an original member. Methodologically speaking, Alenazi's (2017) use of interviews meant he could evaluate the effectiveness of utilizing WhatsApp independently as a learning platform, but he did not explore its impact on teachers' practice, which is the primary focus of the current study.

4.7 Summary of the Chapter

This chapter identified the theoretical and conceptual framework and previous research regarding the use of VCoP via WhatsApp. The following chapter will present the methodology adopted when conducting the current study.

Chapter 5

Methodology, Research Design and Procedures

5.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodology adopted for the current study. Firstly, there is an examination of the philosophical assumptions underpinning this research, i.e. ontology and epistemology. Secondly, there is a discussion of the chosen designs and data collection methods for each design. Thirdly, there is a presentation of the participants, sampling techniques, analysis frameworks, quality issues and ethical considerations. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the research challenges and limitations.

5.2 Research Questions

As indicated in Chapter One, the principal aim of this study was to understand the nature of SDPD pursued by EFL university teachers in Saudi higher education, including: (1) the models used; (2) reasons for their adoption; (3) the challenges faced by teachers; and (4) to understand how EFL teachers from a specific Saudi university view their participation in one VCoP via WhatsApp, as a form of SDPD, in relation to their teaching practice. To achieve this aim, I adopted an interpretive exploratory approach, employing two distinct designs to explore this phenomenon in Saudi higher education institutions, enabling me to present the big picture through the use of different types of evidence.

The current study therefore focussed on the following questions:

1. What is the nature of the SDPD initiatives pursued by EFL university teachers in a Saudi university context?
2. What are the factors that contribute to the SDPD of EFL teachers in Saudi universities?

3. What are the underlying factors potentially hindering EFL teachers in Saudi universities from pursuing SDPD?
4. How does participating in a virtual community of practice (VCoP) through a 'WhatsApp group', as a form of SDPD, relate to EFL university teachers' teaching practice?

5.3 Paradigmatic Stance

All research is required to be underpinned by ideological assumptions, known as a paradigm, which guides the design and informs the methodological choices (Crotty, 1998). Johnson and Christensen (2017) stated that a paradigm is “a worldview or perspective about research held by a community of researchers that is based on a set of shared assumptions, concepts, values and practices” (p. 31). Most importantly, it provides a theoretical justification for the adoption of specific methodologies, including how these relate to the outcome of the research (Cohen, Mannion & Morison, 2018). This indicates firstly, the researcher's position concerning the nature of knowledge; secondly, 'what' and 'how' this knowledge can be known; and thirdly, the procedures through which this knowledge can be obtained (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 108). Paltridge and Phakiti (2015) argued that these presuppositions exist in all research whether or not they are explicitly stated. However, Cameron (2011) emphasised that the paradigm(s) informing a research design should be fully understood and explicitly stated within the research itself (p. 100). As the current research strives to understand the nature of SDPD pursued by EFL university teachers, and the impact of one model (VCoP) on teacher practice, its philosophical underpinnings are consistent with the interpretive paradigm.

5.3.1 Interpretive Paradigm

This study falls within the exploratory interpretive paradigm. It focusses on fully comprehending the nature of the experience of EFL university teachers practicing SDPD in general, and the impact of VCoP via WhatsApp (as one model of SDPD) on teachers' practice in particular. This paradigm was primarily based on an understanding of social phenomena and interpreting actions from individual points of view (i.e. emic accounts) as they occur naturally in the social world. Pring (2015) stated that human beings are creative and create personal subjective meanings concerning their experiences while interacting within their social context. Therefore, the adoption of an interpretive approach infers an interpretation of socially constructed meanings through interaction with the social world (Crotty, 1998).

The current study interpreted the SDPD initiatives developed by EFL teachers at Saudi universities from the perspective of teachers, in order to explore the meanings attached to this phenomenon. This resulted in interpretive philosophical assumptions being considered the most appropriate to inform the methodology and designs of this study. Furthermore, interpretive research is distinguished by its flexibility and potential to examine the complexity of a constructed reality (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). This allows the researcher to produce thick contextualised descriptions of the studied phenomenon, while at the same time reflecting the rigour of interpretive research. Hence, the adoption of the interpretive paradigm is compatible with the intention and purpose of the current study.

5.3.2 Ontological and Epistemological Assumptions

Blaikie (1993) noted that ontology refers to the “claims and assumptions that are made about the nature of social reality, claims about what exists, what it looks like, what units make it up and how these units interact with each other.” (p. 6). It can therefore be regarded as the starting

point for both the theoretical and methodological frameworks of research (Grix, 2002, p. 177). However, this is not the case with every research. Pragmatism, for example, employs questions as the starting point for defining and determining the research approach (Cohen et al., 2018).

In addition, interpretivists acknowledge multiple realities, i.e. they view reality as being diverse and situated in individuals' minds. The main ontological assumption of the present study is that EFL university teachers hold their own views, experiences and actions regarding SDPD. The role of the researcher is therefore to interpret the meanings produced by teachers, to offer a meaningful and thorough interpretation of this phenomenon (Crotty, 1998). Despite working within the same context and using identical resources to develop professionally, teachers interact in distinctive ways with the phenomenon of SDPD and thus do not share the same experience, instead developing relative experiences (Grix, 2004; Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

In this sense, this research is positioned within a relativist-constructivist ontological assumption (Paltridge & Phakiti, 2015, p.17). This stance holds that socially and discursively constructed meanings attached to identical phenomena differ in accordance with each individual's interaction with reality. This view considers that subjective knowledge consisting of various interpretations of a single phenomenon can simultaneously represent and determine the research epistemology.

Epistemology forms a theory of knowledge referring to "the relationship between the knower and what can be known" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 37). Paltridge & Phakiti (2015) described interpretive epistemology as "attempts to know things are inherently and unavoidably subjective" (p.18). This therefore views knowledge or meaning as mind-dependent, indicating the distinct meanings generated by different individuals, which can only be obtained through interaction (Crotty, 1998). Jonassen (1991) examined knowledge from a constructivist epistemological perspective, viewing it as "a process of actively interpreting and constructing

individual knowledge representations” (p. 5). This constructivist position can therefore be seen as a departure from the positivist stance aiming to find one absolute truth, instead focussing on appreciating constructed knowledge arising from individual experience. The interpretive approach thus facilitated my own interaction with my participants, so as to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon under investigation.

This study represents constructed meanings through the participants’ personal descriptions, stories and, as well as the language employed to articulate these experiences (Garrick, 1999). This assumption indicates that (as an active participant in the process of acquiring and generating knowledge) the researcher is required to establish a positive rapport with the participants in order to acquire comprehensive knowledge (Bryman, 2016; Creswell & Poth, 2018). I therefore adopted a subjectivist-constructivist epistemological stance, in which knowledge is gained and constructed through interaction. This was due to the assumption that interaction would enable me to gain access to participants’ actions, experiences and interpretations of their SDPD. Having considered these lines of thoughts, the rationale for adopting this position relates to the exploratory nature of this study. However, it is important to note that the use of a mixed-methods design during the first stage of this project does not contradict the interpretive epistemological stance, as the aim of the study was to understand and document the nature of SDPD of EFL university teachers (i.e. presenting-reality).

According to the presumption of the complexity of this social phenomenon, the current study examines two kinds of knowledge (i.e. subjective and intersubjective), focussing on two levels of interpretation: (1) teachers’ interpretation of their SDPD initiatives (i.e. their emic accounts), resulting in subjective knowledge and my own interpretation (i.e. etic view), as the researcher, of their interpretations, resulting in intersubjective knowledge. (2) Minimising my own subjectivity by relying on multiple sources of qualitative data (for a more in-depth discussion

of the quality measures of this research, see Section 4.7).

5.3.3 Methodological Assumptions

Creswell and Clark (2011) stated that methodology refers to “the philosophical framework and the fundamental assumptions of research” (p. 4). Punch (2014) contended that a methodological theory denotes the philosophy behind research methods (p. 14), i.e. the adaptation of a methodological approach that best fits a research problem either theoretically or practically. The choice of the most appropriate methodology enhances the rigour of an inquiry (Bryman, 2016; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). However, this is not an easy task and needs to be determined in relation to other essential elements, i.e. the philosophical stance, research purpose and questions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Thus, a researcher needs to consider all of these elements prior to embarking on a specific methodology.

As noted previously, the current research project is informed by interpretive exploratory dimensions. This led me to adopt two interpretive designs. The concept of SDPD considers that, as adult learners, teachers learn in a self-directed and distinctive manner, according to their learning characteristics and potential. This therefore indicates that their learning experiences (SDPD) differ from each other. Therefore, interpretive methodology was considered the most appropriate approach, as it appreciates such distinctiveness and complexity in teachers’ learning realities. Furthermore, the overall interpretive methodology was based on the current lack of interpretive studies in this area, particularly when it comes to the context of Saudi higher education EFL. Candy (1991), a key figure in the field of SDL, advocated the adoption of the interpretive approach when studying the phenomenon of SDL, stating that:

In order to acknowledge the unique features of self-directed learning in its various manifestations, what seems called for is a research orientation that emphasises individuality, that acknowledges situational variability, that takes account of the apparently random and serendipitous nature of human affairs, and that, above all, gives due prominence to the fact that people are active choosers and participate actively in the creation of the social world of which they are a part. The interpretive approach, it is suggested, offers such an orientation [...] some of the very features that are distinctive about self-directed learning, and that accordingly appear as paradoxical or problematic, could potentially be overcome by the adoption of research perspective that explicitly allows for such features rather than ignoring or denying them. (pp. 437 - 438).

Candy (1991) therefore suggested that interpretive assumptions are more congenial to those underlying SDL, i.e. the main theoretical framework of SDPD. In accordance with Candy (ibid), this approach facilitated the purposes of the current study by establishing: (1) learners' views on SDL; (2) learners' purposes when it comes to its adoption; (3) learners' attitudes; and (4) autonomous learning and the development of personal autonomy (p. 456).

Raza (2010) indicated that, philosophically speaking, SDL as a form of PD entails a personal construction of knowledge, experience and stimulus (p. 47), emphasising that this theoretical framework enables an exploration of teachers' personal teaching practices. This suggests the interpretive approach as the best fit for approaching this study. The interpretive constructivist approach allowed me to understand and describe in detail EFL university teachers' perception of SDPD, including considering the social context within which teachers pursue this form of learning. This type of inquiry therefore enabled me to cultivate an in-depth understanding of teachers' actions and interactions with respect to their SDPD (Richards & Morse, 2013). In

particular, it generated evidence through the teachers' words and texts, as well as their own interpretations.

The following section presents a detailed description of the designs employed in this research.

5.4 Research Design

The selection of a research design entails an understanding of the philosophical assumptions underlying the specific type of research (Merriam, 1998). Schwartz-Shea and Yanow (2012) viewed research design as referring to “the basic structure of a research project, the plan for carrying out an investigation focused on a research question that is central to the concerns of a particular epistemic community” (p. 16). In addition, a design provides the rationale for the choices made by the researcher (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012, p. 17). Watkins and Gioia (2015, p. 3) stated that “methodology is a lens through which research is examined”. Furthermore, a research design consists of the procedures for data collection, analysis, interpretation and the writing of data (Creswell & Clark 2011, p. 58). Thus, if methodology is the theory behind the research, the design consists of the framework set by the researcher to answer the research questions.

As discussed above, the interpretive philosophical assumptions, together with the exploratory nature of the inquiry and the research questions, led to the adoption of an interpretive exploratory methodology consisting of two designs, i.e. mixed-methods and a qualitative case study. I did not find it straightforward to select the overall design, going through several stages and extensive search to confirm its appropriateness to the overall purpose of the study. My choice was confirmed by the fact that a mixed-methods design supports and enhances interpretive methodologies through the use of both qualitative and quantitative data (Creswell & Clark, 2017). In addition, a qualitative case study enables an in-depth interpretive inquiry

offering rich and complex qualitative data (Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995). These two designs were therefore adopted to satisfy the purpose of this study. A mixed-methods design generally allows the researcher to comprehensively address the problem under investigation at a macro level, by offsetting the limitations of each strand of data by the strengths of the other (Brown, 2014). Moreover, a case study design enables the researcher to address the problem at a micro level (Yin, 2018). The following sections focus on a detailed description of these two designs.

This research project consisted of two stages aimed at answering the research questions and meeting the purpose of the study. For the first stage, I adopted a sequential mixed-methods design (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), with a single holistic case study for the second (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Due to the breadth and depth of the data I wished to obtain, the mixed-methods stage employed a questionnaire followed by semi-structure interviews, while the case study consisted of an online observation followed by semi-structured interviews (Figure 5.1).

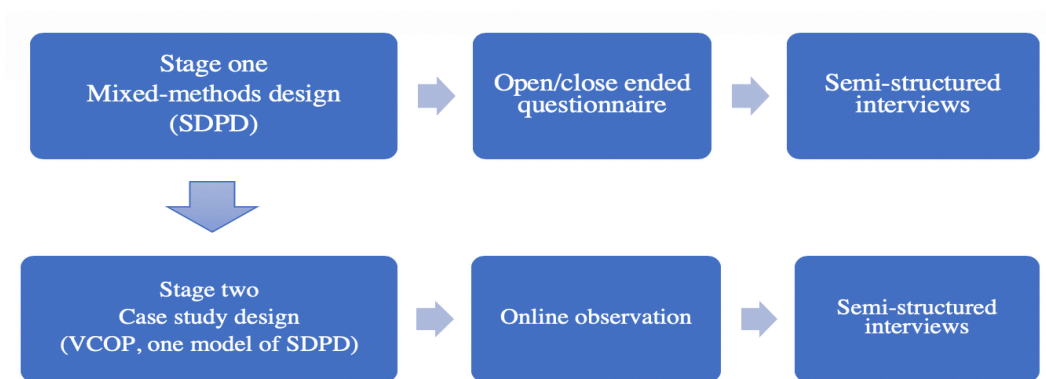


Figure 5.1: The overall interpretive design, including the two stages

STAGE ONE

5.4.1 Interpretive Mixed-Methods Research

This interpretive research employed a combination of both qualitative and quantitative data to: (1) satisfy the exploratory nature of the inquiry; (2) adequately address the research questions; and (3) enhance the quality of the overall investigation. Tashakkori and Creswell (2007) defined mixed-methods research as “research in which the investigator collects and analyses data, integrates the findings, and draws inferences using both qualitative and quantitative approaches or methods in a single study or a program of inquiry” (p. 4). Creswell, Shope, Clark, and Green (2006) emphasised that interpretive frameworks support mixed-methods designs, which are recommended for the examination of social phenomenon. I therefore adopted an interpretive mixed-methods design for the first stage of this research.

This study does not focus on mixing diverse worldviews or methodologies, however mixing does take place at the level of methods informed by the interpretive paradigm to compensate for the limitations of both methods and enhance the quality of the overall data (Creswell, 2015). My aim was to establish a comprehensive account of the nature of SDPD through different forms of complementary evidence. This mixing will contribute to both breadth of the inquiry and depth of our understanding of the phenomenon under investigation from a wide range of participants (Creswell & Clark, 2018).

The mixed-methods approach can be used for a number of different reasons, identified by Greene, Caracelli and Graham (1989) as triangulation, complementarity, development, initiation and expansion. Furthermore, Bryman (2006) proposed a number of more detailed reasons for adopting mixed-methods, noting that researchers can have single or multiple reasons for mixing their methods. Bryman (2006) stated that these include: (1) triangulation (or greater

validity); (2) to offset; (3) completeness; (4) process; (5) the use of different research questions; (6) explanation; (7) unexpected results; (8) the development of instruments; (9) sampling; (10) credibility; (11) context; (12) illustration; (13) utility (or improving the usefulness of findings); (14) confirming and discovering; (15) a diversity of views; and (16) enhancement or building upon quantitative and qualitative findings.

This prompted me to adopt a complementary mixed-methods design, which “seeks elaboration, enhancement, illustration and clarification of the results from one method with the results from the other method” (Creswell & Clark, 2011, p. 62).

Firstly, my aim was to complement the quantitative evidence (i.e. ‘percentages’) with detailed rich evidence from participants’ qualitative accounts. Creswell and Clark’s (2011) review of typology of reasons by Greene et al. (1989) and Bryman (2006) identified complementarity or ‘completeness’ as leading to “a more comprehensive account of the area of inquiry” when both types of data are being collected (p. 89).

Secondly, I employed development, which “seeks to use the results from one method to help develop or inform the other method, where development is broadly construed to include sampling and implementation, as well as measurement decisions” (Creswell & Clark, *ibid*, p. 89). Development was employed to develop the interview questions and the recruitment of participants for the qualitative phase.

Thirdly, I used offsetting, which refers to “the suggestion that the research methods associated with both quantitative and qualitative research have their own strengths and weaknesses that combining them allows the researcher to offset their weaknesses to draw on the strength of both” (Creswell & Clark, *ibid*, p. 89). The adoption of this design allowed me to enhance the rigour of the current study by developing instruments and recruiting samples, as well as

complementing, triangulating and offsetting the data from both stands. Furthermore, this also enabled me to meet the requirements of this interpretive research in terms of gaining a general understanding of the problem by simultaneously examining a large sample and presenting a detailed account of the problem through studying and exploring the meanings constructed by, and the experiences of, a small number of individuals.

The use of mixed-data enhanced the quality of this exploratory design through the creation of different pictures allowing the weaknesses of one to be offset by the strengths of the other. It was therefore inadequate to rely on a single source of data (i.e. qualitative data) from a few participants for the preliminary stage of the research (Creswell & Clark, 2011; Jick, 1979). Somekh and Lewin (2011) noted that “numerical data can make a valuable contribution in both quantitative and qualitative research whether it be simple percentages or the results of complicated techniques” (p. 220). This limitation prompted me to ensure this aspect was complemented with quantitative data from the questionnaire. Creswell and Clark (2017) argued that the use of a mixed-methods design can arise from uncertainty as to whether one type of data can fully address the problem. On the other hand, a reliance on quantitative data may result in an incomplete understanding of the research problem, i.e. data collected from several universities across the country has the potential for different results. This led me to believe that a mixed-methods design would fit the overall purpose of the study, as well as enhancing the quality of the data by means of elaboration, clarification and exemplification (Brown, 2014, p. 134). In addition, the use of mixed-methods is intended to improve the quality of the inquiry through “adding a considerable legitimation to the whole study” (Brown, 2014, p 135).

It is notable that adopting mixed-methods design entails taking key issues into consideration, including: (1) the way in which it is applied; (2) the selection of the appropriate variant; (3) the method of integrating the data; (4) the means of data analysis; (5) and the method employed to

make inferences and raise the overall quality (Cameron, 2011, p. 103). These issues are considered in detail in the following sections.

5.4.2 Sequential Mixed-Methods Design

The study of the literature affirmed a number of mixed-methods designs, which enabled me to choose the most appropriate variant. Each variant has a distinctive framework and purpose, with Creswell and Clark (2017) proposing a different typology for a number of commonly used variants of mixed-methods designs, including: (1) the convergent parallel design; (2) the exploratory sequential design; (3) the explanatory sequential design; (4) the embedded design; (5) the transformation design; and (6) the multiphase design. For the current study, I selected to use the two-phase sequential design. This was due to the nature and purpose of the inquiry and the philosophical underpinnings and research questions, all of which explore, understand and interpret the nature of SDPD of EFL university teachers as an under-investigated area within the Saudi higher education context. This also led me to adopt a customised version of the explanatory sequential variant to match the exploratory nature of this research, in which the primary qualitative phase employed preliminary quantitative data. This variant has been recently labelled a ‘participant-selection variant’ (Creswell, 2017, p. 89), primarily used to locate cases meeting the criteria for the qualitative phase through a systematic base, i.e. questionnaires. Unlike the explanatory sequential variant, the participant-selection variant prioritises the qualitative phase.

Creswell (ibid) asserted that the adoption of the participant-selection variant leads to more accurate results. This is potentially due to (as in the current study) the research commencing with the questionnaires, thus informing the development of a valid instrument for the main semi-structured interviews, i.e. guiding the researcher to the key issues for investigation. The use of close/open-ended questionnaires was aimed at obtaining a more accurate understanding

of the general trends/orientation of the phenomenon, as well as adding additional breadth to this study through the collection of data from a large sample based in multiple sites within the context of Saudi higher education. This sequential mixed-methods variant can be viewed as being compatible with the methodological ideologies of the current study (which are underpinned by interpretive perspectives) and therefore the most effective means of answering the research questions (Creswell & Clark, 2017). A visual representation of the adopted sequential mixed-methods design is presented below, in Figure 5.2.

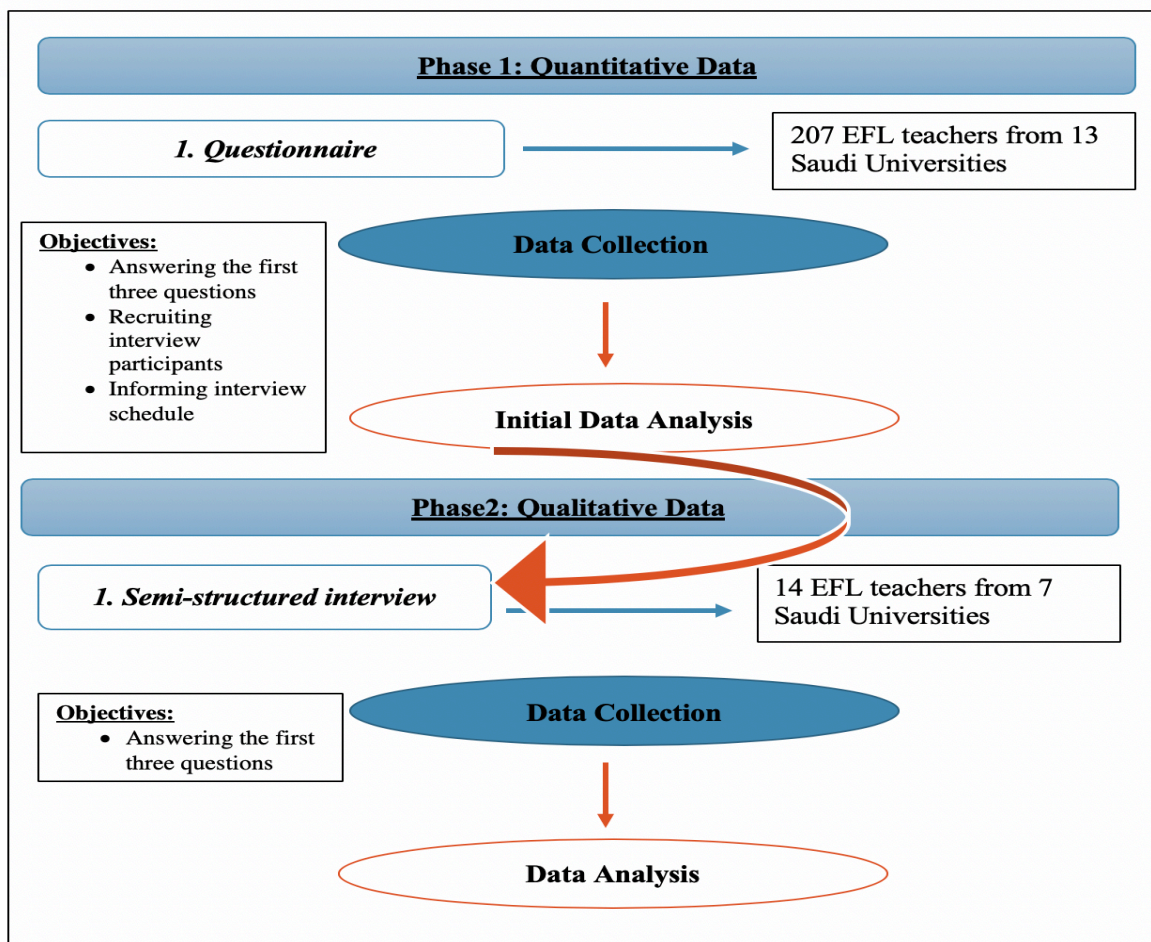


Figure 5.2: The design of the first stage of the study ‘sequential mixed-methods’

Creswell and Clark (2017) highlighted that the adoption of a mixed-methods design entails decisions regarding: (1) the participants of the two phases; (2) the size of the two samples; and (3) the type of quantitative data to be followed up with qualitative data, which is then presented in the subsequent parts. At the same time, the use of a fixed mixed-methods design employing a predetermined plan determines the need to make important choices regarding the implementation, priority and integration of data. These issues are discussed in further detail below.

5.4.2.1 Implementation

The implementation of any mixed-methods research requires a decision concerning the time and sequence of employing the two data sets (i.e. quantitative and qualitative). Creswell and Clark (2011) defined this implementation as consisting of the sequence and time of the data collection, which can be undertaken: (1) concurrently; (2) sequentially; or (3) in the form of a multiphase (p. 93). The current study adopted a two-phase sequential mixed-methods design to adequately understand the research problem (i.e. the nature of SDPD in relation to: firstly, the types and frequency of the adopted models; secondly, the contributing factors; and thirdly, the challenges). It is important to note that this variant commences with the quantitative strand (i.e. the questionnaire) followed by the qualitative strand (i.e. the one-to-one semi-structured interview).

The fact that the current study commenced with the quantitative instrument does not contradict the exploratory nature of the inquiry, due to not being purely quantitative but containing a number of open-ended questions analysed in a thematic manner. The design of the mixed-methods questionnaire facilitated an understanding of the general trends in a relatively larger sample, as well as refining the focus of study and developing the instrument for the second phase (i.e. the qualitative inquiry) and the process of recruiting the participants.

5.4.2.2 Priority

In undertaking a research study, it is vital to decide (either implicitly or explicitly) which type of data is of greater importance, or if both are equal (Creswell et al., 2006). Creswell and Clark (2011) noted that ‘priority’ refers to “the relative importance or weighting of the quantitative and qualitative methods for answering the study’s questions” (p. 92). Creswell, Clark, Gutman, and Hanson (2003) stated that, in most cases, this decision is left to the researcher, in order to weigh the importance of the type of data s/he believes capable of answering the research questions. A consideration of the philosophical stance, overall purpose and aim of the current study (i.e. understanding the nature of SDPD pursued by EFL university teachers) and the research questions resulted in the priority being placed on the qualitative data, with the quantitative data being used in a secondary role.

5.4.2.3 Integration

After deciding the sequence and priority of the data, I was then faced with the most salient and critical decision, i.e. the integration of both types of data. Integration in mixed-methods research refers to “the combination of quantitative and qualitative research within a given stage of inquiry” (Creswell et al., 2003, p. 220). However, I first needed to determine the level of integration, i.e. independent or interactive (Creswell & Clark, 2011, p. 91; Morse and Niehaus, 2009).

Due to employing a sequential design, this study needed to integrate data in an interactive manner. It was therefore important to make an appropriate determination of the levels of integration points. These can occur at the level of design, data collection, data analysis and interpretation. The mixing of data in the current study was implemented at the level of interpretation, i.e. following the individual collection and analysis of both sets of data, I then

integrated them for the final step of the research. This decision concerning the point of integration enabled me to enhance the quality of the conclusion by means of a comparison or synthesis of the study's findings (Creswell & Clark, 2017).

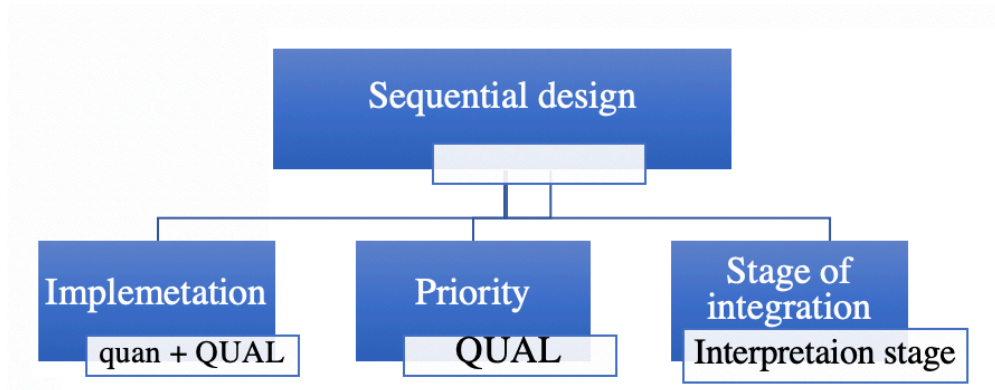


Figure 5.3: The sequential design employed in this research

5.5 Data Collection Methods Used in the Mixed-Methods Stage

The following sections outline the methods employed during the mixed-methods stage, including the process of designing, developing, piloting and administering the instruments.

5.5.1 Questionnaire

The questionnaire is the method most frequently employed in scientific research, despite the difficulties in ensuring its validity and reliability (Dornyei, 2003, p. 3). Questionnaires generally focus on facilitating a general understanding of a specific social phenomenon, answering questions relating to 'what' and 'how many' (Watkins & Gioia, 2015). It tends to be employed for various stages of social science research (Dornyei, 2003, p. 10) and falls into two categories: (1) interview schedules; and (2) the self-administrated questionnaire (Buckingham & Saunders, 2004, p. 43). This research concentrated on the latter. Brown (2001) stated that a questionnaire consists of "any written instruments that presents respondents with

a series of questions or statements to which they are to react, either by writing down their answers or selecting from among existing answers” (p. 6).

In addition, there are two forms of questionnaire (i.e. close and open-ended), each of which possesses its own characteristics and is used to generate different types of data, as discussed below.

1. Close-ended Questions: these are a popular format, being designed with lists of predetermined answers from which the respondents are able to choose (Church & Waclawski, 2017). There are a variety of close ended items formats, including: (1) categorical; (2) checklist; (3) multiple choice; and (4) rating questions (Oppenheim, 1992). Three of these were used in this study to formulate the close-ended items of the questionnaire.

2. Open-ended Questions: these offer a blank space to be filled by the respondent rather than a choice from predetermined questions. Their use can lead to unanticipated issues (including illustrative quotes and graphic examples), particularly when the researcher is unaware of the range of possible answers (Dornyei, 2003, p. 47; Oppenheim, 1992). Due to the current research being interpretive exploratory in nature, I employed open-ended questions alongside close ended items, in order to ensure a more flexible questionnaire that allowed the respondents to respond freely, in a qualitative manner, based on their personal experience. My analysis of the open-ended responses provided me with multiple views and experiences, enabling me to gain an initial understanding of the broader trends and orientation of the phenomenon.

Like most methods, questionnaires contain both merits and limitations. In particular, they are based on the use of standardised questions for all participants, which (in most cases) results in an ease of processing and analysing of data comparable to qualitative data. Questionnaires thus tend to be characterised by ease of administration and the minimum amounts of time, cost and

effort required to process a large amount of data (Dornyei, 2003, p. 9). Thus, well-constructed questionnaires lead to straightforward analysis and processing. On the other hand, ill-constructed questionnaires can lead to less reliable (or invalid) data (Dornyei, 2003, p. 10). Questionnaires are distinguished from other empirical methods by seeking information in a non-evaluative manner, rather than focusing on 'correct' answers (Dornyei, 2003, p. 3). However, it is also possible for respondents to misread (or misinterpret) the questions, resulting in inaccurate responses (Low, 1999). I attempted to lessen the impact of this issue by piloting my questionnaire with different participants at two stages of its construction, as discussed in more detail below.

The aim of the questionnaire in the current study was to provide information that was descriptive rather than analytical. Descriptive questionnaires are designed to describe a social phenomenon and identify facts concerning a specific population, i.e. the proportion displaying certain characteristics, opinions or facts (Buckingham & Saunders, 2004, p. 13; Oppenheim, 1992, p. 12). I therefore developed my own questionnaire to gather information regarding the SDPD of EFL university teachers (i.e. the types of activities, contributing factors and challenges), in order to provide an overview of the status of this phenomenon by means of a larger sample drawn from this particular context. At the same time, it was used to inform the design of the interview questions during the second phase, i.e. the creation of themes for the interview questions.

This study is informed by the interpretive paradigm. Buckingham and Saunders (2004) asserted that the use of quantitative research methods does not necessarily indicate a commitment to the positivist tradition, stating that "it is possible to use survey techniques without endorsing all aspects of positivist philosophy" (p. 19). This questionnaire therefore did not focus on the ability to generalise, but rather a broad understating of the phenomenon from a large

population. Dornyei (2003) argued that questionnaires are not the most effective method for truly qualitative exploratory research. Thus, it should be noted that the main method of the current research consisted of the semi-structured interviews, these being purely qualitative and therefore serving the requirements of the interpretive research. In addition, I used a mix of close/open-ended questions in my questionnaire. Thus, it was not purely quantitative but generates also some qualitative interpretive data. Wolcott (2008) highlighted that standardised questionnaires tend to be less formal and semi-structured and are frequently used for triangulation, particularly in conjunction with multiple data sources (as cited in Gerber Abrams, Curwood & Magnifico, 2017, p 153). This is the case in the current study, which employed the questionnaire data for the purposes of complementation.

5.5.1.1 Designing a Researcher-Developed Questionnaire

When it came to designing the SDPD questionnaire, I started with 106 items, which were later refined (by means of multiple piloting stages) to fifty-two items, organised in four sections in a logical manner. The first section included four mandatory demographical questions, focussing on teachers' gender, English related major, qualifications and years of experience. The second section was made up of twenty questions, including sixteen Likert scale items, two multiple choice and two open-ended questions investigating the types, contexts and frequency of the use of SDPD models. The third section was made up of sixteen questions, including fifteen Likert scale items and one checklist question, focussing on the participants' motivation for pursuing SDPD in relation to the level of importance. The fourth section consisted of eleven Likert scale items focussing on the challenges impeding teachers from pursuing SDPD (see Appendix 1). It is important to note that most questions were in a Likert five-point scale format (i.e. forty-two items), due to this being the most precise and reliable tool capable of eliciting various degrees of response (Oppenheim, 1992). The questionnaire was closed, while also

including two open ended questions capable of being answered in a single sentence. This method was supported by Gillham (2000), who suggested that “one or two questions can be a good way of finishing the questionnaire” (p. 34-35). It is also important to note that the questionnaire was written and administered in English. In addition, I ensured the questionnaire items were simple and straightforward, so as to be easily understood by all respondents. Open-ended questions tend to take time to complete and are difficult to be coded in a reliable manner, I therefore only included two questions, which were related to the research main questions, in order to contribute to the generation of themes for the interview questions. I used ‘specific open questions’ to question the respondents concerning facts, as well as their past activities and performance (Dornyei, 2003, p. 48). These were distributed throughout the questionnaire in a logical manner. I followed Dornyei’s (2003) recommendations for the check list questions, including giving an option for further open-ended answers, in order to ensure I provided an exhaustive list of options and avoided restricting the responses to being predetermined. This led me to include a category (i.e. ‘if others, please specify’) followed by space for an answer, for which I obtained a small number of qualitative responses. The questionnaire concluded with thanks and a short statement requesting any respondent willing to participate in the second qualitative phase to provide an email address so that I could contact them.

5.5.1.2 The Validity and Reliability of the Questionnaire

The content of the questionnaire was developed following a comprehensive consultation of the literature, in order to ensure coverage of main dimensions and theoretical information required for the investigation. As well as my own experience as an EFL university teacher, I drew on the work of Baily et al. (2001), Johnson (2009), Joyce and Calhoun (2010) Lee, (2015), Porter (2014), Raza (2010), and Richards and Farrell (2005). The questionnaire was linked to the research questions to ensure the focus and relevance of its content and to eliminate peripheral

questions of only superficial interest.

Del Greco, Walop and McCarthy (1987) stated that, in order to ensure content validity, a questionnaire should adequately cover its intended domain. I therefore sent the completed version to my supervisor (a professor in the field of language teacher professional development), along with two further PD educators, requesting them to check whether the items adequately covered the areas I intended to investigate in terms of: (1) measuring the frequency of teachers' use of SDPD activities (i.e. individual and collaborative); (2) the reasons for their preference for either type; (3) the reasons teachers tend to pursue SDPD; and (4) the challenges that impede teachers from practising SDPD. I was subsequently given a number of suggested amendments, including a number of suggestions namely about: (1) shortening any lengthy statements; (2) deleting similar items (e.g. the willingness to learn and to undertake PD); and (3) adding a third option for both multiple-choice questions 6 and 7, e.g. an either/or option regarding the context and types of SDPD. This did not restrict the respondents to one option, as a considerable proportion of their responses preferred both options. In response to this feedback, I firstly, removed any complex, ambiguous and negative statements in order to increase the clarity and smoothness of the instrument (Lewin, 2005, p. 200) and secondly, I attempted to reduce ambiguity by employing unidimensional statements (Oppenheim, 1992).

5.5.1.3 Piloting the Questionnaire

It is essential to ensure that a questionnaire has a professional appearance and that its items are suitable for the purpose for which it is developed (Bryman, 2016). Therefore, piloting is considered an integral aspect of its construction and vital to ensure its validity, reliability and feasibility (Dornyei, 2003, p. 63). Moreover, Oppenheim (1992) argued that it can prove dangerous for any researcher to assume he/she knows how the respondents will react, or to question an expert about their potential reaction in advance. Thus, every component of a social

questionnaire should be piloted, i.e. questions, items and scales (p. 49). This indicates that piloting must be undertaken in a continuous manner throughout all stages of its construction. Dornyei (2003) stated that formal piloting is particularly required at two important points: (1) the initial piloting of the item pool (i.e. the initial list of questions); and (2) the final piloting, during the completion of the final version (p.65).

Piloting can enhance the validity of the questionnaire by improving: (1) the wording; (2) the instructions provided to the respondents; (3) the layout of the questions on the page; (3) the categories of answers; and (4) the numbering system of the questions (Oppenheim, 1992, p. 49). Dornyei (2003) emphasised the importance of recognising minor differences in wording, due to their potential to influence any responses (p. 63).

I piloted my questionnaire at two different stages prior to commencing the fieldwork. Firstly, I piloted the item pool (consisting of eight-six items) with four teachers holding similar characteristics to the target sample. This allowed me to estimate the working of the questionnaire, including its appearance and whether it fitted the purpose for which it was designed (Dornyei, 2003, p. 63). In response to their suggestions, I subsequently: (1) modified the wording of some of the questions; (2) clarified some items by providing definitions; (3) removed unnecessary items; and (4) added a number of questions. For example:

- One participant suggested that I include a comprehensive definition of SDPD at the beginning of the questionnaire, to ensure that the teachers understood what I was referring to, as some of the activities can be self-driven or imposed by others. For additional clarification, I included a statement (in the form of a personal choice) after some activities, e.g. attending PD courses, conferences and workshops.
- Some participants requested a definition of the terms of some activities, due to teachers being potentially unfamiliar with academic constructs, e.g. Q.7 ('reflective teaching')

and Q.9 ('action research'). This led me to include a brief definition between brackets following any activity requiring further clarification.

- One participant asked me to change the term 'teacher's autonomy' in Q36, as she did not understand its meaning. I was unable to change it, due to forming a key concept of my research, but instead added an explanation between brackets, e.g. '(teacher independence)'.
- Some participants asked me to include further instructions before each main section and to put each on separate page, in order to maintain their focus on one area.
- Some participants felt that it was unclear whether the checklist questions required them to choose one or more, so I highlighted this in the instructions, e.g. '(you can choose more than one option)'.

As this questionnaire was designed to be online, I consulted an expert in developing online questionnaires on the final layout. I then modified a number of aspects according to his recommendations, font, colours, size and instructions. I then viewed this version on various devices (i.e. computer and smartphone) to ensure it appeared equally tangible and professional on all types of screens (Bryman, 2016). Following my adjustment of the questionnaire in response to the initial piloting, I again sent it to my supervisor for a final check. This resulted in the inclusion of fifty-two items. I subsequently piloted the near-final version on thirteen EFL university teachers to test its feasibility, validity and reliability. This second piloting allowed me to see how the questionnaire worked in practice (i.e. how well the respondents responded), as well as conducting an item analysis to confirm its validity and reliability.

5.5.1.4 Reliability of the Questionnaire

The reliability of the questionnaire was assessed by measuring the internal consistency of the scale items, i.e. the extent to which the item measured the same attribute (Pallant, 2016, p. 6).

Pallant (ibid) stated that the reliability of an instrument is “how free it is from random error” (p. 6). A Cronbach Alpha coefficient was used, with its acceptable value being no less than (0.75). During the test, the questionnaire was found to be sufficiently reliable with a Cronbach’s alpha value greater than 0.7 for all three scales (see Appendix 7 reliability statistics).

These pilots enabled me to ensure the questionnaire achieved validity and reliability in its final version (see Appendix 1).

5.5.1.5 Administrating the Questionnaire

I developed a self-administrated questionnaire for this study, capable of being administrated face-to-face, by post or telephone, or by means of the Internet (Bryman, 2016; Dornyei, 2003). I chose to administrate it through a web-based platform (i.e. via email and phone), as this was the most effective method of communication with the respondents in this context. Web questionnaires can be delivered by email as well as on mobile phones, with some modification to make it easier when using small screens and touchscreens (Bryman, 2016, p. 231). However, de Bruijne and Wijnant (2013) argued that there is no discernible difference between the two formats (i.e. email and mobile), apart from taking longer to complete a phone questionnaire. I used mobile phones with the aim of obtaining a high rate of response (Bryman, 2016). This was due to Mavletova (2013) noting that completing open-ended questions by means of a mobile format questionnaire can result in low response rate. I therefore only included two open-ended questions, all of them capable of being fully answered in a few words. It is notable that the response rate of mobile users was found to be far higher in this study than those undertaken by email.

5.5.2 Semi-structured Interviews

The most commonly used instruments for data collection in qualitative research tend to be interviews (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Silverman, 2017). Brinkmann and Kvale (2018) described the semi-structured interview as “a planned and flexible interview with the purpose descriptions of the life world of the interviewee with interpreting the meaning of the described phenomenon” (p. 173). When exploring a social phenomenon, in-depth interviews facilitate understanding the meanings participants inferred from, and attached to, their lived experiences (Silverman, 2017). This method can therefore, as in the current research, support interpretive research designs. In addition, interviews enable the researcher to elicit the participants’ perceptions, perspectives, thoughts, views, values, and feelings (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). In addition, this also provides the interviewer with the opportunity to infer meanings and create explanations from the surrounding context (Patton, 2002), thus supporting the interpretive nature of this mixed-methods design. Furthermore, the semi-structured interview can be used to validate information obtained from other sources of data, in order to establish a more accurate interpretation (Laforest, Bouchard and Maurice, 2012).

In adopting an interpretive mixed-methods design initiated by a questionnaire, I used semi-structured interviews during the second phase primarily to gain deep insights into how teachers perceived their actions, behaviours, and experiences of SDPD, seeking to further elaborate on issues arising from the previously employed questionnaire. Semi-structured interviews were therefore used to understand the nature of SDPD pursued by EFL teachers in Saudi universities, in particular in terms of the types/models, potentials, characteristics and challenges. I adopted this type of interview based on the theoretical ground that it allows participants to reflect on their experiences, actions and behaviours regarding the phenomenon under investigation. Furthermore, Arksey and Knight (1999) noted that interviews enable the researcher to elicit

more private and personal views, beliefs, experiences and understanding. The use of this method assisted me in eliciting the personal views and experiences of the participants concerning the challenges that they had faced and how these had impacted on their professional identity.

Semi-structured interviews possess, as indicated in the literature, both merits and limitations. Many qualitative researchers have been attracted to the diversity and flexibility of semi-structured interviews, as these accord with a wide variety of research purposes. Furthermore, the semi-structured interview allows the researcher to understand and interpret the constructed meaning of the phenomenon under investigation through the eyes of the interviewees. It therefore accords with the philosophical assumptions (i.e. constructivism, subjectivity) underpinning the current study. This form of interview also enables the researcher to gain comprehensive knowledge, potentially complemented by other kinds of information, i.e. participants' feelings and attitudes. A further notable feature concerns the provision of high-quality data, particularly if interviewees are approached in an appropriate manner.

However, it is important to highlight an important limitation of this method, i.e. the competence of the researcher. Brinkmann and Kvale (2018) claimed that the quality of each interview (in particular the precision and accuracy of the data obtained) can be compromised if the interviewer lacks the appropriate interviewing skills. Piloting the interview process with three participants enabled me to: firstly, assess the appropriateness of my interview questions (i.e. content, organisation and wording) and secondly, to practise interviewing prior to the interviews undertaken for the purposes of this research. Furthermore, my confidence was enhanced by my own previous experience of interviewing during a previous course of the MSc programme (i.e. IM module). A further critical limitation when analysing and interpreting the interviewees' responses is researcher bias (i.e. subjectivity). I therefore attempted to minimise

my influence by being reflexive, including monitoring the influence of my own preconceptions, presuppositions and belief system (Kvale, 2008). My interpretation of the interview results was complemented, triangulated and supported by the outcomes of other methods, i.e. the questionnaire and results from the following case study.

5.5.2.1 Modes of Interviews

It should be noted that I conducted my interviews throughout three modes during the first stage of my research: (1) face-to-face interviews; (2) online (Skype) interviews; and (3) written interviews by email exchanges. The decision to use these modes was in response to: (1) the preference of the participants; (2) the geographical dispersion of some of the participants; and (3) the existence of a number of social and religious restrictions, i.e. the segregation of the sexes, which prevented me from conducting face-to-face interviews with any male participants. I therefore undertook face-to-face interviews with all the female participants working in universities of Riyadh and email interviews with those who agreed to take part in my study but requested the questions through email. The latter was due to insufficient time to engage in face-to-face meeting as two participants reported; also with one participant noting that she found it more comfortable to express herself in writing. I conducted the Skype interviews with all of the male participants, as well as with female participants living a considerable distance from Riyadh, e.g. one lived over 1000KM away from my workplace.

Thus, this qualitative research employed online interviewing to overcome the boundaries preventing conventional face-to-face interviews, i.e. geographical dispersion, lack of time and finance, and physical mobility (Cater, 2011; Hooley, Wellens and Marriott, 2012). Janghorban, Roudsari and Taghipour (2014) viewed Skype as “an alternative choice for researchers who cannot afford face-to-face or want to change this conventional way” (p.1). In addition, the accessibility and availability of Skype has facilitated its use by qualitative researchers, with

Bryman (2016) stating that “Skype is available for use on many smartphones and tablets, as well as the conventional computer” (p. 492). The literature noted the advantages of Skype interviews, including: (1) being more flexible than those held face-to-face, particularly when there is a need to undertake any scheduling adjustment; (2) being more comfortable; and (3) involving less time, money and effort when participants are geographically dispersed. The main limitations are the quality of connection and the availability of Wi-Fi, as well as participants being familiar with the programme (Bryman, 2016). However, due to the prevalence of technology and Internet networks in Saudi Arabia, I did not encounter such problems.

5.5.2.2 Interview Guide Design

Designing a semi-structured interview, I had to prepare an interview guide, including main questions, prompts and probes whenever needed. This was to encourage the interviewees to articulate and elaborate on their ideas regarding the topic of discussion. The interviewees therefore became co-researchers, working collaboratively with the researcher to create knowledge ‘intersubjectivity’ (Creswell and Poth, 2018). Drever (2006) highlights that designing the interview guide allows the researcher to predetermine the structure and focus of the interview questions, however at the same time maintaining flexibility. It is worth noting that the content of the interview questions in the current study was determined and guided by the results of the first phase (i.e. the questionnaire) and the literature concerning SDPD.

In addition, following a consultation with my supervisor (as an expert in the field), further amendments regarding the clarity, sequence and content were also applied, in order to ensure the validity of the content and the piloting. This therefore led to the preparation of a list of questions regarding teachers’ initiatives when it came to SDPD. The questions were composed and organised logically to stimulate participants to respond to the discussion. Drever (2006) indicated that semi-structured interviews depend heavily on the use of both open- and closed-

ended questions. Furthermore, as probes permit focus, the use of prompts can clarify diversity in the questions, minimising ambiguity and avoiding misinterpretation (Laforest et al., 2012). In this research, twenty-two main questions were reduced to eighteen, followed by various prompts and probes. This refinement allowed me to thematise the content of the questions under five main themes (Kvale, 2008) (see Appendix 2).

Table 4.1 (below) outlines the design and the research methods employed in Stage One, to answer the three first research questions of this study.

Table 5.1:

The relationship of the mixed-methods design and research methods to the research questions

No.	Research questions	Designs	Research methods
1.	<i>What is the nature of the SDPD initiatives pursued by EFL university teachers in a Saudi university context?</i>	Mixed method	Questionnaires and interviews
2.	<i>What are the factors that contribute to the SDPD of EFL teachers in Saudi universities?</i>		Questionnaires and interviews
3.	<i>What are the underlying factors that potentially hinder EFL teachers in Saudi universities from pursuing SDPD?</i>		Questionnaires and interviews

STAGE TWO

5.6 Case Study Design

My decision to adopt a qualitative case study design for the second stage of this research was prompted by my interest in VCoP as an online method of teachers' informal collaborative SDL, as well as representing one model of SDPD. This was prompted by my membership of a VCoP via WhatsApp group initiated informally by EFL teachers from one university, which suggested a need to conduct an in-depth investigation exploring its impact on members' teaching practice, particularly in the Saudi university context.

A qualitative case study design enabled me to gain a deep insight into the impact of this model on teachers' practice from their distinct experiences through multiple sources of data, while at the same time enhancing the quality of my overall findings. The mixed-methods stage allowed me to broaden my investigation into the nature of SDPD pursued by EFL university teachers. However, the case study enabled me to gain in-depth data from teachers' actual practice of one model of SDPD; that is the VCoP via WhatsApp. Consequently, conducting the case study as the second stage of this research allowed me to complement the findings from the mixed-methods stage: firstly, by supporting them with further evidence from teachers' practice of VCoP and secondly, by validating some of my findings and interpretations drawn from Stage One. This was particularly relevant to examining online collaborative SDPD activities through comparison and triangulation.

This study is, methodologically speaking, interpretive in nature. The rationale behind adopting the qualitative case study was due to the rigour of this design, which allows the researcher to understand and interpret the complexity of a constructed social phenomenon within its natural context and thus produce multiple interpretations of the same reality; (1) by the participants,

(2) by the researcher, and (3) by the readers of the research report (Stake, 1995). Baxter and Jack (2008) emphasised the rigour of a qualitative case-study design, as it enables an examination of multiple facets of the same situation through a variety of lenses. This concurs with the constructivist philosophical stance that underpins the current study (Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995). Baxter and Jack (2008) stated that this “supports the deconstruction and the subsequent reconstruction of various phenomena” (p. 544). In addition, it answers questions of ‘how’ and ‘why’, which is the intention of this study (Yin, 2018, p. 31). It was thus beneficial in answering the fourth question of this research: *How does participating in a VCoP through a ‘WhatsApp group’, as a form of SDPD, relate to EFL university teachers’ teaching practice?*

In this research, I adopted Stake’s (1995) assumptions of case study because it concurs completely with those underpinning interpretive research. Unlike Yin (2018) who conceptualises case study from a positivist orientation, Stake (1995) views case study epistemologically as being constructivist thus emphasises its flexibility in terms of design and implementation (Yazan, 2015). A case-study design allows the investigation of a single (or small number of) cases (i.e. EFL university teachers working in one university). I therefore adopted ‘a single holistic case study’ approach, i.e. “studying a single person or group of people in one environment because it represents ‘a unique or extreme situation” (Baxter and Jack, 2008, p. 549). This decision was due to wishing to investigate empirically the unique case of the VCoP of EFL teachers in one Saudi university. The adoption of this design allowed me to collect multiple sources of data to enhance the quality of my findings and provided me with insight into its complexity and entirety (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2017). Little is known about the nature of EFL teachers learning through VCoP via WhatsApp in a Saudi university context as a form of informal SDPD. I therefore adopted two primary qualitative data collection methods to ensure of complementation and triangulation of the findings: (1) online observation and (2) semi-structured interviews.

I was an original member of the WhatsApp group being studied, which made me an insider researcher, thus facilitating my access to the field and the participants for the observation and interviews (my role in this case study is discussed in detail in Section 5.4.2.2). I found that initiating my investigation with an online observation contributed to my understanding of the nature of teachers' informal discussions, particularly those pertaining to their SDPD. At the same time, it offered me the opportunity to raise certain questions regarding issues arising when formulating the interview questions and helped me to understand teachers' accounts in the interviews, particularly when they referred to issues experienced within the group.

I conducted the face-to-face interviews during my return to Saudi Arabia, following the Stage One data collection and the observation. I found that the strategy of using multiple data sources facilitated a holistic understanding of the phenomenon under investigation and enhanced the credibility of my data, in particular by supporting my findings with concrete evidence from the observation (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Thus, the use of multiple qualitative data methods contributed to the validity of the data obtained from this case study by complementing and triangulating the results (Creswell, 2017). The case study provided insights into both the potential and limitations of one collaborative online SDPD model (i.e. VCoP). In addition, it demonstrated the effectiveness of teachers' collaborative self-directed learning, particularly when pursued informally and self-directedly. The findings from both stages provided me with considerable evidence that validated and strengthened the rigour of my overall design. It should be noted that all participants of this case study were female, in response to the sex segregation in place in Saudi academic institutions.

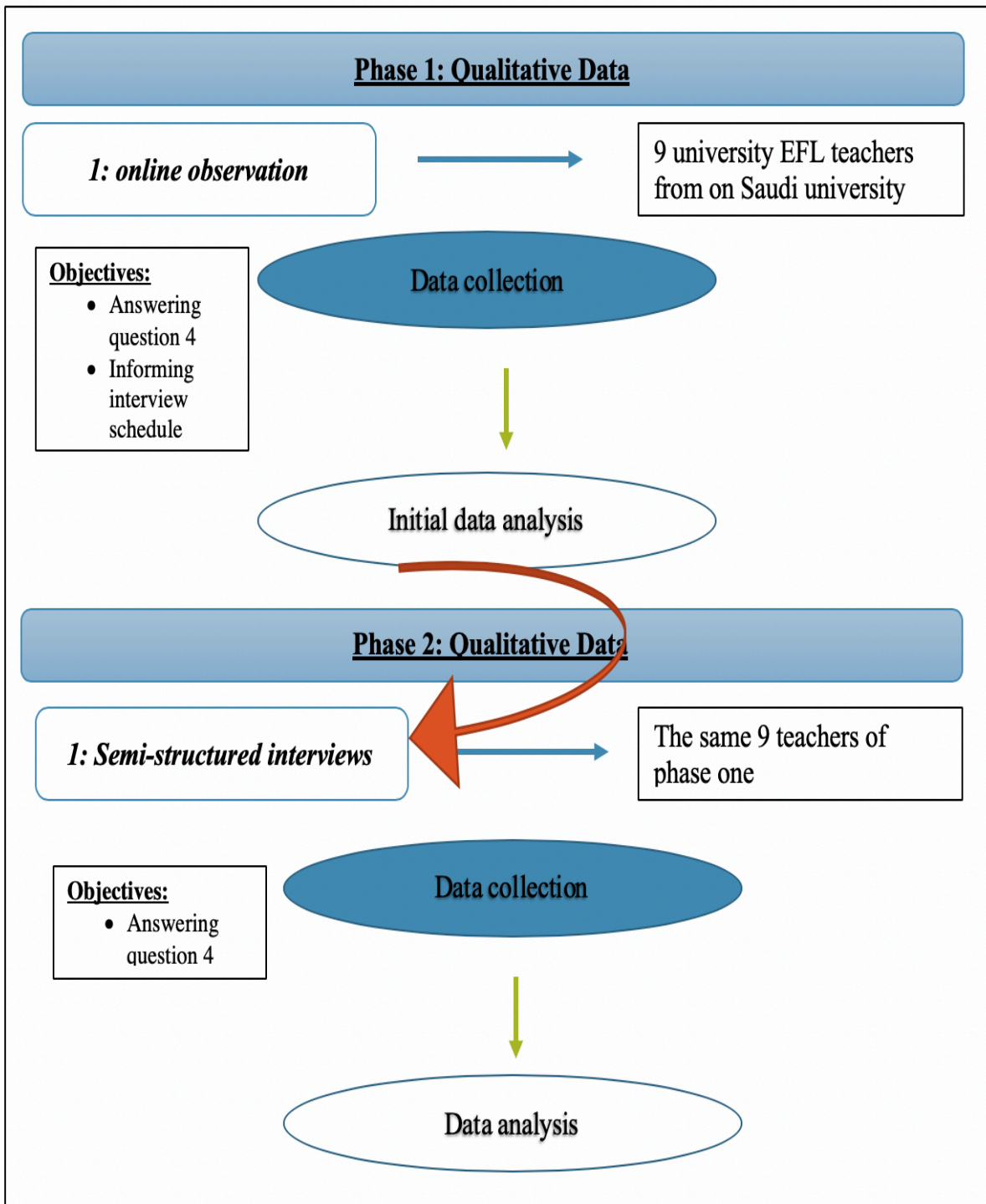


Figure 5.4: The qualitative case study design

5.7 Data Collection Methods Used in the Case Study Stage

5.7.1 Online Observation

Observation is a qualitative method regarded as the cornerstone in case study inquiry (Merriam, 1998). Angrosino (2007) defined observation as “descriptions, either through open-ended narrative, or through the use of published checklists or field guides” (p. 730). This indicates the variety of observation undertaken in terms of structure, i.e. whether pre-structured, or (as the case of purely qualitative research) less structured. The current research adopted the latter approach, as it “allows the observer considerable freedom in what information is gathered and how it is recorded” (Robson & McCartan, 2016, p. 322). Adoption of this less structured technique necessitates the involvement and presence of the researcher in the field, in order to take notes regarding the phenomenon under investigation. Moreover, the emergence of online spaces for learning has resulted in observation no longer being confined to site-based fields, but also taking place (as in the current study) in online fields. Gerber et al. (2017) argued that “qualitative research is increasingly digitally mediated, especially as researchers seek to understand how online spaces shape how people learn by engaging with semiotic resources, constructing meaning and interacting with others” (p. 19). This shift in learning in response to the appearance of online spaces has created an interest in defining the nature of the constructed cultures of these communities, which is also the intention of this study.

During this research, I was involved as an online participant observer during the teachers’ informal daily discussions taking place in the WhatsApp group. It is important to note that this WhatsApp group is not publicly accessible, i.e. only members were able to participate and access its content. I found that being an original member of this group facilitated my role as a participant observer. Garcia, Standlee, Bechkoff and Cui (2009) stated that online observation refers to “watching text and images on a computer screen rather than watching people in offline

settings” (p. 58). Schensul and LeCompte (2012) highlighted that the data produced by this method can prove valuable and lead to thick description. Online observation enables the observer to electronically visit, record and save the data, as well as being able to revisit if necessary. Gerber et al. (2017) supported this view, stating that observation is a fundamental method of studying learning, due to providing the researcher with critical insights into the learning process through taking notes, screenshots and recording time stamps, as well as describing the evidence in terms of interaction, texts or any other tools. They also noted that “online spaces shape how, when, and why people learn, including through social networking, microblogging, photo and video sharing, and constructing and disseminating knowledge” (p. 19). These arguments convinced me that online observation of teachers’ VCoP was the most appropriate tool for understanding the nature and focus of their learning, as well as participation and discussion within their natural context.

Gerber et al. (2017) stated that conducting qualitative research in online spaces requires a conceptualisation of the learning process in an online setting, as well as how, when and why. The application of online observation bears a number of similarities to offline observation, although it also contains differences regarding the context in which it occurs. Gerber et al. (ibid) provided a detailed account of the contextual characteristics of online observation, which can be conducted: (1) in one single space or multiple spaces; (2) formally or informally; and (3) synchronously or asynchronously (p. 19). It is significant that the design of the WhatsApp application supports all of these features, in addition to enabling both individual and collaborative discussions through the establishment of either an individual or group chatroom.

Prior to discussing this method in further detail, it is first vital to define the online field site. This research observed an informal space created by EFL university teachers as a VCoP. I employed the online observation prior to the interviews, on the grounds that teachers may, in

an interview situation, report actions, behaviours and learning practices that could possibly differ, contradict or confirm their actual practice in the group (Gerber et al., 2017). Furthermore, I commenced the case study stage with online observation in order to refine the focus of the interviews and generate its questions (Gerber et al., 2017).

5.7.2 My Positionality within the Case Study

In this research, it was critical to establish my role as the researcher, due to its potential impact on the nature of learning in this online community. As I was an original member of this WhatsApp group (which has been in operation since 2013) I can be considered an insider researcher (i.e. a participant observer). I was therefore to some extent confident that my observation would not have any influence on the nature of the teachers' participation. Gerber et al. (2017) stressed that "as long as the online space is private, it requires building rapport with the participants, transparency is critical regarding the used methodological approaches and the ethical considerations" (p. 135-134). As a member of this VCoP, I did not need to exert additional effort to build a rapport and gain the trust of the participants. Furthermore, I undertook several procedures to avoid researcher bias, as discussed later in the section on quality. According to Adler and Adler (1994), a 'complete member researcher' or a 'complete participant observer' is one who studies a space in which s/he is already a member. Schensul and LeCompte (2012) employed the term 'participant observation' to refer to "the process of learning through exposure to, or involvement in, the day-to-day or routine activities of participants in research settings" (p. 83). Garcia et al. (2009) and Musante and DeWalt (2010) argued that online participant observation is one of the best methods of accurately recording data and establishing important relationships. It also allows the researcher to identify how matters are organised and individuals relate to each other. Schensul and LeCompte (2012) highlighted collaboration as a critical feature of online participant observation, i.e. maintaining

a dialogue with participants. This feature was achieved in this context, but as a member of the group rather than an outside researcher. Cherny (1999) further added that joining an online community is easier when the researcher is a participant of the target community, and that this will allow the participants to accurately reflect their identity and how they perceive the world (Campbell, 2006). This method therefore supported the observation and recording of teachers' online chat concerning their professional learning, at the same time supporting the naturalistic approach of data collection. This accorded with both the aims of the study and the purpose of its design.

5.7.3 Procedures of Conducting Online Observation

It is important to clarify the context of this online observation. In this study, I observed EFL university teachers' informal daily discussions through one online social media platform, i.e. 'WhatsApp'. Having this VCoP via WhatsApp proved convenient for online observation due to having access through my smartphone even when I was in the UK. I therefore initiated my online observation prior to my departure to Saudi Arabia for follow-up interviews. My observation took place over six months, i.e. from the beginning of November 2017 to the end of April 2018. During this time, I observed teachers' daily discussions regarding their learning in this group. Both following the completion of the observation, and during the analysis phase, I took a number of screenshots of discussions relating directly to their PD, in order to: (1) support their interpretation of specific discussions during the follow up interviews; and (2) show certain features of this platform contributing to their learning in this group. At all times the teachers were aware of their right to request me to stop at any point of the observation.

5.7.4 Semi-structured Interview

In qualitative case studies, Stake (1995) argues that interviews is the fundamental method for eliciting multiple realities that cannot be inferred by other qualitative methods. Although during the online observation I developed a general understanding of the nature of the teachers' discussions and interactions, a number of questions remained unanswered. This led me to develop semi-structured interview questions based on issues requiring further clarification, and those related to the impact of this group on the participants' practice. Semi-structured interviews can answer questions (i.e. 'why?') incapable of being answered by other qualitative methods, i.e. observation and document analysis (Drever, 2006). The semi-structured interview was the primary method for my case study, due to my focus being on the impact of this particular VCoP on the participants' teaching practice, which cannot be answered by observation. The purpose of the interviews was therefore to answer the 'how' question (Kvale, 2008). Moreover, the use of semi-structured interviews for the case study also validated some findings from Stage One (i.e. mixed-methods). In addition, eliciting teachers' experiences regarding the use of self-directed VCoP via WhatsApp in relation to their teaching practice supported the findings advocating the effectiveness of SDPD through concrete evidence from everyday practice. All interviews during this stage were conducted in a face-to-face manner, as all the members of this group were females working in the English department where I work in Riyadh.

5.7.4.1 The Interview (Two) Guide Design

The semi-structured interviews two were only undertaken with the participants of the case study. The interview guide of the case study stage focussed on developing a deep understanding of teachers' learning within this VCoP via WhatsApp, as well as its impact on teachers' practice. I therefore generated my interview questions (followed by prompts and probes) based

on the issues and topics highlighted while conducting my observation. My interview schedule (2) consisted of nineteen questions gathered under eight different themes. Twelve questions were developed to elicit teachers' views, feelings and experiences regarding their learning in this VCoP via WhatsApp, along with its potential, limitations and impact on their teaching practice. The four remaining questions focusing on the unexpected issues I had identified during my observation, including: (1) an absence of theoretical discussions; (2) an absence of evaluating educational research; (3) the focus being on practical knowledge and experience; and (4) the impact of using Arabic (see Appendix 3 semi-structured interview two).

5.7.4.2 Piloting the Interview (Two) Guide Design

Merriam (1998) and Stake (1995) suggest piloting the instruments used in the case study rather than the whole case. I therefore piloted the interview schedule with two EFL university teachers, in order to check its efficiency and clarity. One teacher was drawn from the WhatsApp participants and the second from outside the group but a member of another WhatsApp group. This pilot proved to be highly efficient in improving the final version of the questions, in particular when it came to refining focus of my questions, along with their length and wording. I developed nineteen questions based on my observation and the research question. The piloting allowed me to refine the content of my questions, thus 'thematising' them. I then eliminated any questions covering the same ground, and reorganised the remaining questions in a more logical manner. In addition, I found the comments and suggestions made by the interviewees helpful and informative, helping me to improve the comprehensibility, wording, length and sequence of the final questions (Bryman, 2016). In addition, piloting helped me to develop my interpersonal skills and confidence prior to undertaking the real interviews. For example, I was prepared to change the sequence of the questions according to the discussion, giving the participants time to think, and I was ready to receive questions (Kvale, 1996;

Bryman, 2016).

Table 5.2 (below) outlines the design and the research methods used to answer the fourth research question.

Table 5.2:

The relationship of the case study design and research methods to the research question

No.	Research questions	Designs	Research methods
4.	<i>How does participating in a virtual community of practice (VCoP) through a 'WhatsApp group', as a form of SDPD, relate to university EFL teachers teaching practice?</i>	Case study	Online observation and semi-structured interviews

5.8 Participants (i.e. the Study Sample)

Before describing the actual participants of this study, it is beneficial to give a general view of the wider population from which they were drawn. The term population is used to cover “all those who fall into the category of concern” (Oppenheim, 1992, p. 38). In the current study, the population represented all EFL teachers within Saudi universities. Since it was not possible to include all these teachers in this study, a smaller sample was employed to represent the characteristics of the wider population. The concept of sample is used to denote “a smaller group, usually (but not always) a representative one, within a population” (Oppenheim, 1992, p. 38). However, this concept carries a number of different meanings and labels based on the type of data collected. Jupp (2006) stated that ‘sampling’ refers to techniques applied in order to select a group of participants from the larger population (p. 271).

It is worth noting that qualitative research labels the sample as ‘participants’ while in quantitative research they are known as ‘subjects’ or ‘respondents’. Thus, the concept of

sample and sampling techniques can be seen to vary according to the type of research. This variation is not limited to the terms, but also impacts on the strategies of selection and the size of the sample. Most importantly, Lewin (2005, p. 216) emphasised that sampling strategies adopted in any research should be detailed in the final report, to enable the reader to judge the potential for bias (or any other limitations) threatening the quality of the research. The following sections therefore outline the sampling techniques adopted in the two stages of this research.

The first stage of this study adopted a sequential mixed-methods design, which was made up of two distinctive phases. Two sampling strategies were therefore applied, based on the perspectives of probability and purposive sampling. Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009) stated that mixed-methods sampling “involves combining well-established qualitative (QUAL) and (QUAN) quantitative techniques in creative ways to answer research questions posed by mixed-methods research design” (p. 178). In addition, they suggested that the sampling of a mixed-methods design employs strategies involving both probability and purposive sampling techniques (p. 180). I therefore adopted a sequential mixed-methods sampling method, through a sequential use of both probability and purposive techniques. Kemper et al. (2003) stated that this sequential (QUAN – QUAL) sampling technique is commonly used “in sequential mixed models studies, information from the first sample (typically derived from a probability sampling procedure) is often required to draw the second sample (typically derived from a purposive sampling procedure)” (as cited in Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2009, p. 284). As generalisation was not the primary purpose of this study, I adopted a simple random sampling technique to minimise any risk of bias (Lewin, 2005, 2017). During the first phase (i.e. quantitative), I randomly selected thirteen public Saudi universities through a systematic choice from a sampling frame, which included all twenty-five Saudi public universities (Figure 5.6). I used a table (matrix) of random numbers representing the twenty-five universities, in order

to ensure each had an equal chance of being selected. I then randomly selected thirteen university from this list (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 214).

1	6	11	16	21	25
2	7	12	17	21	
3	8	13	18	22	
4	9	14	19	23	
5	10	15	20	24	

Figure 5.5: The random sampling table

Following the selection of the thirteen universities, I was unable to randomly send the questionnaire to the respondents, due to the lack of sampling frame for teachers in each university. I therefore sent the questionnaire to all EFL teachers in the selected universities, to ensure that each teacher had an equal opportunity to participate (Cohen et al., 2018). However, the low response rate (and an inability to obtain the email addresses of some faculty members in a number of the selected universities) led me to send the questionnaire to the head offices of the English departments in all thirteen universities. These then forwarded it automatically to the emails of all EFL teachers working in the selected departments. Although these were all EFL teachers, they originated from a variety of academic backgrounds and held qualifications (including Bachelor's, Master's and PhD degrees) in different English related majors (i.e. Education, English Literature, Translation and applied Linguistics).

A total of 415 EFL university teachers took part in this survey, with 260 fully answering the questionnaire. Oppenheim (1992) argued that samples in descriptive studies are not necessarily representative, or represent only part of the population. However, a representative sample is

not an issue of concern to the current study, as it does not seek generalisation, but to build a broad understanding of the phenomenon. However, applying the random sampling techniques enhanced the quality of the overall research.

During the second phase of Stage One (qualitative), I used basic purposive technique to select the interview participants. Tashakkori and Teddlie (2003) defined purposive sampling as “selecting units based on specific purposes associated with answering a research study’s questions” (p. 713). They further noted that purposive sampling is commonly employed in qualitative research. The participants in the qualitative phase of the current research were drawn sequentially from the quantitative phase, in order to: (1) possess identical characteristics to the general population; (2) be familiar with the topic; and (3) provide further information concerning the investigated phenomenon. Purposive techniques are considered to result in greater depth, while probability techniques lead to greater breadth, thus “combining the two orientations allows the researcher to generate complementary databases that include information with both depth and breadth” (Kaeding, 2007, as cited in Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2009, p. 189).

I selected nine EFL university teachers as the participants of Stage Two (i.e. the case study). All worked in a single university and were members of a VCoP via WhatsApp. These participants were selected purposively from this WhatsApp group, in order to ensure that they were knowledgeable and capable of providing sufficient amounts of information regarding the impact of this VCoP on their practice (Cohen et al., 2018; Creswell, 2012). It is important to note that those taking part in the case study only participated in the questionnaire of the first mixed-methods stage. All the nine teachers gave their consent to take part in the observation and the follow up semi-structured interviews and thus fully represented the VCoP in this particular context.

As discussed above, in order to achieve both breadth and depth, a study requires the use of differing sample sizes. The number of participants employed to elicit qualitative data depends on the type of the qualitative research and the research questions (in general thirty, or under) (Oppenheim, 1992). I interviewed fourteen EFL university teachers for the qualitative phase of the mixed-methods stage. These included both males and females, Saudi nationals and non-Saudi nationals in possession of various academic qualifications from different universities across the country. These participants were the only ones approached to give their consent and available to take part in the follow up interviews.

5.9 Data Analysis

5.9.1 Quantitative Data Analysis

The adoption of a mixed-methods design entails the collection and analysis of quantitative data, which contributes to the overall interpretation, as well as adding breadth to the inquiry (Creswell and Clark, 2017). As long as this questionnaire is descriptive, no analytical relations are intended. The close-ended items were therefore analysed with SPSS software version 24. The principal aim of this analysis was to gain descriptive information (i.e. the relevant percentages) to give me a snapshot picture of the nature of SDPD in relation to: (1) activities employed by teachers; (2) reasons for such use; and (3) challenges faced by teachers when pursuing this form of PD.

5.9.2 Qualitative Data Analysis (Thematic analysis)

In a broader sense, the process of qualitative data analysis refers to “systematically searching and arranging the interview transcripts, field notes and other materials that you accumulate to increase your understanding of them and to enable you to present what you have discovered to others” (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p. 153). In order to refine the focus of this study, and facilitate

comprehension of the meanings of the phenomenon under investigation, I adopted an inductive approach known as the ‘reflexive thematic analysis’ framework. Thematic analysis is a fundamental method in qualitative analysis, being distinguished by its flexibility, i.e. it is “independent of theory and epistemology ... it can be applied across a range of theoretical and epistemological approaches ... yet, provides rich and complex data” (Braun and Clark, 2006, p. 5). Furthermore, Braun and Clarke (ibid) also argued that the adoption of this framework allows for the generation of themes strongly linked to the data while bearing the research questions in mind, i.e. as applied in the current study. This form of analysis is data-driven. However, I need to acknowledge that I was unable to free myself from my theoretical and epistemological assumptions. Despite this, I did not attempt to “fit into a pre-existing code frame” (Buran and Clarke, 2006, p. 12) but to generate the codes from the data itself.

5.9.2.1 Data Preparation

In response to the nature of this interpretive research, I collected a considerable amount of qualitative data (e.g. open-ended questionnaire items and interviews for Stage One, and WhatsApp discussions from observation and interviews for Stage Two). All of the previous data were uploaded to my computer under four separate files, in order to conduct separate analyses. Regarding the open-ended questionnaire items, I stored the data from items (16, 23, and 25,) by copying all responses under each question and pasting them into a word document. In addition, I exported all of the data from the WhatsApp discussion in one file from my own account in the WhatsApp web version to my computer, which I then transferred into a word document (see Appendix 6). During and after the observation, I took screenshots of some of the discussions by means of the application and uploaded them to my computer (Chapter 7).

In this study, I adopted Braun and Clarke’s (2006) six phase thematic analysis framework. I applied the first two phases of their framework (i.e. familiarising myself with the data and

generating initial codes) with each set of data separately. After generating the initial list of codes for each set, I then integrated the data sets of the mixed-methods stage (i.e. the open-ended responses and the interviews) to allow me to carry out the final four phases of the analysis. This analysis enabled me to identify the major themes of this stage and answer the first three questions of this research. I then analysed the two data sets of the case study (i.e. the interviews and WhatsApp discussions) following the same procedures as in the mixed-methods stage to answer that fourth research question.

The following section gives a detailed description of my analysis adopting Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework (See Figure 5.6).

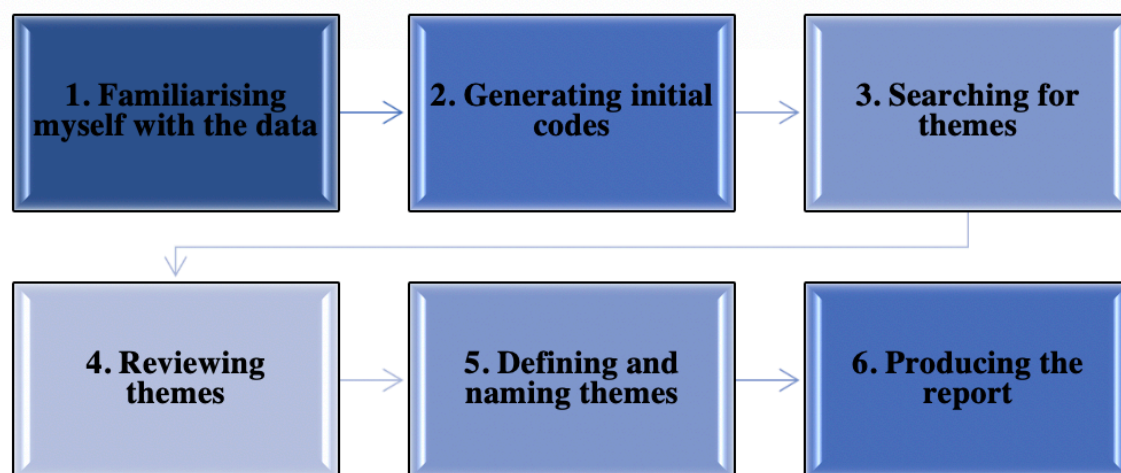


Figure 5.6: Analysis framework

Phase One: Familiarising Myself with the Data

During phase one, I conducted the interviews myself, and therefore had some initial knowledge, interests and thoughts about the data. Furthermore, I listened to the interviews' recordings several times before starting the transcription, in order to familiarise myself with the data. I used two high-quality digital recording apps in two separate Apple devices: (1) Recoding Memos; and (2) Voice Record Pro. I chose these apps because they allowed me to

store and share the recordings through both email and iCloud accounts, thus facilitating their transfer to my computer. In addition, in order to secure the reliability and credibility of the transcriptions, I transcribed the interviews myself, subsequently checking their content against the original recordings, in order to enhance their validity and confirm their accuracy (Braun and Clarke, 2006). This part was time consuming, but it allowed me to immerse myself even more deeply into the data and familiarise myself with all aspects of the transcripts.

It is important to note that, as the participants were EFL university teachers, all interviews were conducted in English. I needed to decide whether to transcribe the interviews word by word, or to use a more formal written form. Brinkmann and Kvale (2018) stated that the process of transcription refers to the “translation from an oral language to a written language, where the constructions on the way involve a series of judgements and decisions” (p. 106). Due to there being no standard form, I transcribed the interviews into a more formal written style, enabling me to: (1) conduct thematic analysis, and (2) use extracts in a formal written style in my final report (See Appendix 4 & 5).

Firstly, my intention was to undertake a thematic analysis rather than a linguistic conversational analysis, i.e. my focus was on the meanings generated by the participants, rather than the manner of their reporting. Braun and Clarke (2006) stated that thematic analysis “does not require the same level of detail in the transcript as conversation, discourse or even narrative analysis” (p. 17).

Secondly, I wished to support my interpretation with evidence from the original data. It is important to note that, bearing in mind the research aim and questions, I used my discretion when it came to the irrelevant parts, including the pauses and the frequent repetition (Kvale, 2008). When I started the transcription, I jotted down notes regarding the points attracting my attention. Rapley (2007 as cited in Kvale, 2008, p. 94) asserted that the process of transcription

is an initial analysis. I found that this step enabled me to develop a general understanding of the data, thus facilitating the undertaking of the following phase of ‘generating the initial codes.’

Phase Two: Generating Initial Codes

Familiarising myself with the data allowed me to engage smoothly with the second phase, i.e. generating the initial list of codes. These represented key, interesting and unexpected features. Saldana (2016) defined a code as an aspect of a qualitative inquiry as “the word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data” (p. 25). Following my generation of the initial list of codes, I classified them into meaningful groups, to enable me to reach broader themes. It is important to indicate that the codes in this study are data-driven, and I thus gave an equal attention to all the extracts, in order to identify any repeated and unexpected patterns across the entire data.

Phase Three: Searching for Themes

During this phase, I refocused (i.e. broadened) the level of my analysis by grouping the codes under their potential themes. In order to achieve this, I analysed the list of codes by considering the relationships between them, in order to establish broader themes, sub-themes, categories and sub-categories. I achieved this by copying the relevant extracts. I then developed several files for each overarching theme, including all the relevant codes. I subsequently analysed the relationships between the relevant codes, in order to identify sub-themes, categories and sub-categories, if available. I adopted several different techniques to facilitate this phase, including mind maps, outlines and tables (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 19). This enabled me to develop a thematic outline for the content of each theme, including the relevant extracts.

Phase Four: Reviewing Themes

Phase four was a critical aspect of this research, as it refined the candidates' themes from the previous phase. I reanalysed the list of themes I had drawn up to create a thematic map, this included determining which were actual themes and which could be categorised as sub-themes. I achieved this by checking if a theme had sufficient supporting data, and whether this data was too diverse (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 20). This enabled me to link together a number of separate themes, while at the same time breaking others into sub-themes, categories and sub-categories, by identifying the relationships between the different elements of each theme and using their similarities and differences to organise them coherently.

In order to make sense of constructed themes, I ensured I related each of them to: (1) the existing literature; (2) the research questions; and (3) the results of the questionnaire. This analysis was undertaken on two levels: firstly, the micro level of the theme itself and secondly, the macro level of the whole themes together. In examining the micro level, I read all the extracts of the main theme, to check that they were relevant, sufficient and presented in a coherent manner. I excluded all those that appeared unrelated, either creating a new category, or attaching them to other relevant themes. When examining the macro level of the analysis, I checked the relationship between the themes and organised them logically and according to the research questions. In general, I attempted to strike a balance between the content of each theme, in order to ensure that all the themes and sub-themes were fully supported by extracts from my data.

Phase Five: Defining and Naming Themes

Following the generation of a thematic map representing all of my data, I then began the process of defining and refining the themes produced, i.e. by identifying the essence of each

theme (Braun and Clarke, 2006). I analysed the titles of the themes and sub-themes to confirm that they were fully representative of the purpose of the complete data set. I defined my themes by presenting a concise description of the purpose of each theme and how it answered the research question. This helped me to explain how each theme is related to the overall picture of my research.

Phase Six: Producing the Report

Having drawn up the final list of themes, followed by their sub-themes, categories and sub-categories (See Appendix 12), I then undertook the writing up of the final report (i.e. telling my story) in a logical manner, supported by evidence from the data. Braun and Clarke (2006) stated that reporting the findings of a thematic analysis entails showing its complexity supported with coherent accounts to convince the readers of its validity. I therefore focussed on writing a concise, coherent and engaging account to support each theme from my data, while at the same time avoiding repetition.

5.10 The Quality of the Research

Quality in qualitative research remains a debatable issue, since there are no fixed criteria for researchers. Qualitative research is flexible and diverse in nature and is conducted using different methods, informed by various philosophical positions. It therefore (unlike positivist research) cannot be governed by a predetermined set of rules (Seale, 2002). However, it is possible to achieve rigour in qualitative research through the constant application of several procedures: (1) formulating the research questions; (2) choosing an appropriate theoretical and methodological framework; (3) sampling; and (4) adopting the appropriate approach towards data collection and analysis.

It is thus impossible to fully outline how I established the quality of my research, as the steps I followed were manifested in each stage of the current study. This section will therefore present the main strategies, not previously discussed in the preceding sections, which I adopted to enhance the rigour and credibility of my research.

5.10.1 Validity

It is generally more difficult to validate qualitative research than quantitative research. Thus, qualitative researchers are required to adopt different strategies to demonstrate the validity of their work. The issue of validity in qualitative research has been subject to various conceptualisations and received a number of different labels. Researchers first used the scientific term ‘in parallel’ (LeCompte and Goetz, 1982), before developing alternative terms, including: (1) ‘trustworthiness’ (Lincoln and Guba, 1985); (2) ‘four types of validity’ (Lather, 1991); (3) ‘authenticity’ (Lincoln, Lynham and Guba, 2011), and (4) ‘validation process’ (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Creswell and Poth (ibid) viewed validity or validation as referring to the process of assessing the “accuracy of the findings, as best by the researcher, the participants, and the readers” (p. 386). In this research, I drew on Creswell and Poth’s (2018) perspective, including adopting several strategies to ensure the accuracy of my findings from my own lens, as well as those of my participants and peers.

The adoption of interpretivism as an overarching stance for both designs required me to recognise how my past experience, social position, political beliefs and orientation shaped the findings of this research, including potentially compromising its validity.

Firstly, I adopted the triangulation strategy in each design. Johnson (1997) suggested that “to improve the analysis and understanding of construction of others, triangulation is a step taken by researchers to involve several investigators’ interpretation, or peer interpretation, of the data

at different times or locations” (p. 284). During the mixed-methods stage, I recruited participants from various different universities across Saudi Arabia, including different nationalities and genders. I also used different data collection methods, i.e. questionnaires and interviews. During the case study stage (which focussed on nine participants all of whom were Saudi females from the same location), I used multiple methods, i.e. a prolonged online observation followed by interviews. Following my triangulation of the findings produced by each design, I corroborated the evidence (i.e. the relevant findings) from both designs to enhance the validity of my overall findings.

Secondly, I used member checking. For this, I checked the credibility of my analysis and interpretation by engaging a peer researcher and three of my active participants who had expressed a willingness to provide me with such assistance (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As noted above, there is no one absolute truth in the interpretive approach concerning social phenomenon and therefore collecting multiple accounts from the participants enhanced the credibility of the qualitative findings (Bryman, 2016). Throughout the process of analysing and interpreting my data, I consulted a peer researcher who read all of the extracts and my interpretation and provided critical feedback. Her comments were valuable in assisting me to consider the data from a new perspective (i.e. that of an outsider), which reduced my own biases and my over critical approach to my interpretations, as well as highlighting points I had missed as a result of my familiarity with the context (i.e. being an insider).

Once the initial analysis and interpretation were finalised, I sent the original transcripts with my interpretation to three active participants willing to contribute to my research from the two stages. They returned the documents with comments regarding the accuracy of my interpretation of their experiences, as well as contributing further details to the original extracts (Hays & Singh, 2012).

Following the completion of the original analysis, I left it for a few weeks, which enabled me to then review it with a new lens. This strategy offered me the opportunity to review these transcripts and interpretation in such a way as to identify whether my experience interfered with my understanding of my participants' accounts.

Thirdly, I enhanced the validity of my findings and interpretation by sharing them with colleagues in academic conferences and seminars (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). I presented the findings of my case study in the Annual Education Research Conference hosted by the Graduate School of Education of the University of Exeter (2019), while the findings of the complete research were presented to the Doctoral Forum at the University of Exeter (2019). In addition, while writing this research, I discussed my work both formally and informally with other PhD researchers and experts in professional development and teacher learning.

Fourthly, the validity of this work was enhanced by my extensive time spent in the field. Fetterman (2010) argued that "participant observation requires close, long term-contact with the people under study" (p. 39). Thus, I spent six months during the case study stage in undertaking my online observation. I found this particularly beneficial as I have been away from the teaching field since 2015 and spending a prolonged amount of time with my participants in the WhatsApp group helped me to understand the current situation of their teaching practice, as well as the changes taking place within the university teaching profession. In addition, this prolonged engagement allowed me to identify the focus of this group and develop a valid instrument (i.e. questions) for my follow up semi-structured interviews.

5.10.2 Reflexivity

Reflexivity was, methodologically speaking, my primary concern in this interpretive research. This commenced from the forming of the research questions, followed by the recruitment of

the participants, the collection of the data, and the analysis and interpretation (Berger, 2015). Sword (1999, p. 277) noted that “no research is free of the biases, assumptions, and personality of the researcher and we cannot separate self from those activities in which we are intimately involved”. I took care to clarify the position from which I had approached my inquiry (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). I was therefore reflexive by checking on the influences of my previous experiences on the data and the participants, along with the impact of my social position, professional and political beliefs, orientation and prejudices.

Greene (2014) argued that an insider researcher implies the conducting of research within a social or cultural community or organisation of which that researcher is member (p. 1). In addition, it implies familiarity with the case being studied, as well as some form of relationship with the population (Berger, 2015). As a Saudi university EFL teacher, who had worked within this context for seven years, I was an insider in the current research. This allowed me to approach the fieldwork with a pre-existing knowledge of Saudi higher education, particularly the policy system of TPD of EFL teachers. However, during the fieldwork, I also found myself in the position of an outsider. Recognising and acknowledging my dual role helped me to enhance the rigour of my research, including the advantages and limitations of both roles.

During the mixed-methods stage, I was a geopolitical insider to the macro context of Saudi Arabian higher education, which facilitated my access to the field and interactions with the participants (Berger, 2015). In addition, my familiarity with the social, cultural and political circumstances enabled me to deeply understand and interpret the participants’ accounts of their experiences. However, this was not the case with all of my participants, due to a number being non-Saudi nationals. I was therefore an outsider to the micro context (i.e. nationality) of some participants, which formed a critical variable influencing their SDPD. In order to achieve a balance, I was highly reflexive while conducting the data collection and analysis and did my

best to make myself transparent when writing the final report. Berger (2015) referred to reflexivity as “the process of a continual internal dialogue and critical self-evaluation of researcher’s positionality, as well as active acknowledgement and explicit recognition that this position may affect the research process and outcome” (p. 220).

I found that being a researcher who had been trained in the West (and was therefore influenced by Western perspectives on conducting research) helped me to build a rapport with the non-Saudi teachers, as well as being a member of the same profession. These factors also helped me to gain their trust and establish a mutual understanding, helping them to voice their concerns regarding the challenges faced while pursuing SDPD in this context. In addition, I was able to demonstrate my understanding and willingness to hear both sides of the issue under investigation. Moreover, my familiarity with the Saudi political, economic and social context helped me to understand and interpret their concerns, which may not have been the case had I been not familiar with the Saudi context. Recognising my role as an in/out-sider helped me to stand back a little from both groups of participants and observe their accounts from various different perspectives, thus awarding additional depth to my analysis and interpretation.

By contrast, during the case study, I was an insider of both the macro and micro contexts while at the same time being an outsider (i.e. not currently working as a teacher). This facilitated my access and overcame the need to go through the procedures of building a rapport and gaining the trust of the members of the WhatsApp group, as we have been working together since 2009. However, I did not find this to influence my understanding of the teachers’ daily discussions, as I had been teaching in the same immediate context and have my own teaching experiences and knowledge. This gave me far less of a sense of being an outsider in comparison to the mixed-methods stage. I should also highlight that the fact that I was an original member of this

group facilitated my interactions with the participants and I did not feel that my presence had any discernible impact on the natural flow of their discussions (Berger, 2015).

In addition, I found that being currently away from teaching allowed me to distance myself during the data collection, which helped to reduce my influence on teachers' participation.

5.11 Ethical Considerations

As discussed above, employing the quality measures of research is insufficient of itself to produce high-quality research. However, researchers are also required to pay critical attention to 'ethical considerations', i.e. aspects guiding all researchers to mitigate any psychological social and physical risk (Cohen et al., 2018). A consideration of ethical issues entails an acknowledgement of the rights of the participants, i.e. the most crucial element to be established prior to conducting any research. Hammersley and Traianou (2012) defined ethics within the domain of social sciences as "a set of principles that should be taken into account when doing social research" (p. 17). The function of such principles is to determine what is right or wrong, and what is good or bad.

The current study focused on educational research, and therefore the following principal areas are discussed in the subsequent section: (1) accessing/recruiting participants; (2) issues related to the participants (i.e. voluntary informed consent and right to withdraw, openness and disclosure, privacy and confidentiality); and (3) data protection.

5.11.1. Accessing/Recruiting Participants

For this research, I adopted two interpretive designs: (1) a sequential mixed-methods design and (2) a qualitative case study design. In addition, all of the study participants (i.e. EFL teachers) were from different universities, with some participating in both the quantitative and qualitative phases. After obtaining ethical approval from the University of Exeter (see

Appendixes 8 & 9), and before initiating contact with the participants of the mixed-methods stage, I obtained official approval from the local authorities within the Saudi higher education system, in accordance with their regulations. I therefore contacted the head of administration of the research and English departments in all thirteen universities to request permission to collect the data for this research.

Once I had been awarded official approval, the research departments in these universities sent email on my behalf to all EFL teachers in their English departments. This included a letter of invitation providing general information about the research project (i.e. the aim, objectives, methods and procedures) along with a link to the online questionnaire (see Appendix 1). It is important to note that a statement was placed at the end of the questionnaire eliciting the potential willingness of the participants to take part in the second qualitative phase (i.e. the interview). Those who expressed a willingness to be interviewed gave me their email addresses, which enabled me to then send an email including further information regarding the second phase of the study.

5.11.2. Issues Related to Participants

This research rigorously addressed the practical ethical issues related to the participants, including: (1) voluntary informed consent; (2) the right to withdraw; (3) anonymity; (4) confidentiality; (5) openness; and (6) disclosure.

5.11.2.1 Informed Consent and Withdrawal Right

The ethical codes issued by British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2018) state that informed consent guarantees that participants understand and voluntarily agree to their participation in research (p. 7). This indicates that researchers are obliged to follow a number of specific steps to ensure all participants understand the implications of what they are engaging

with, why they are participating and to whom it will be reported. In addition, all participants need to be clear about their right to withdraw from the research at any point (with or without a reason) and that this should be stated and agreed upon in the consent form. I used an informed consent form contained all the stated points regarding voluntary participation, as well as: (1) the method of recording data; (2) the use of a digital recorder during interviews; (3) the use of online observation; (4) the freedom to withdraw at any stage of the research; (5) to whom to send further enquiries; and (6) the means of protecting participants' confidentiality. These steps were taken to ensure that no harm would come to the participants (see Appendix 11). The type of interview in both stages (i.e. face-to-face, online via Skype, or written), along with time and place of the interviews, were agreed upon with the participants. Finally, in order to encourage participants' contribution to the discussion, I guaranteed their confidentiality and anonymity in the informed consent form.

5.11.2.2 Institutional Ethical Approval

Official ethical approval was obtained from the ethical committee at university of Exeter prior to the piloting and fieldwork (see Appendix 8). It is important to indicate that the current study rigorously adhered to the ethical principles set by Ethics Committee Guidelines of Graduate School of Education at the University of Exeter. This approval confirmed that the content and procedures of my research would be conducted in an ethical manner, i.e. all of the ethical concerns were discussed and approved by the committee. Furthermore, external ethical approvals (i.e. letters of access) were obtained from the thirteen universities in which the research was undertaken. This demonstrates that all methods and procedures used in the data collection were legally and ethically approved.

5.11.2.3 Privacy, Confidentiality, Data Storage and Disclosure

Issues concerning privacy, confidentiality, anonymity, data storage and disclosure are of great importance to any research (BERA, 2018). Privacy refers to “the confidential and anonymous treatment of participants’ data” (BERA, *ibid*, p. 21). The participants in the current research were assured that neither they, nor their institutions, would be identified in any report or publication. Furthermore, the participants were asked to choose their own pseudonyms, to be used in the writing up of the final report. Some asked me to use their initials and some chose specific names, while the rest asked me to assign them a pseudonym, which I did through the use of pseudonym names.

The data for this research was held in accordance with the Data Protection Act and adhered to the procedures of data-protection stipulated by both the University of Exeter and the British Education Research Association (BERA, 2018). The data was therefore held in confidence and used only for the purpose of this study, with no access permitted to third parties. However, the participants were supplied with a copy of the result on request. It was stated clearly in the information sheet (see Appendix 11) that I would keep the data stored on the ‘U drive’ of my computer until my PhD was awarded, following which it would be destroyed (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

When it came to issues of data disclosure, it was stated in the information sheet that the results will be published within my PhD thesis and other publications (i.e. journal articles), as well as being presented at academic conferences, seminars and symposiums.

5.12 Challenges and Limitations of the Study

I encountered a number of issues and challenges while undertaking this research, particularly during the data collection phase, as discussed below.

Firstly, I experienced a lack of cooperation from Saudi universities administrations, which led to difficulties in distributing my questionnaire. As I had adopted a simple random sampling technique to recruit the respondents of the questionnaire during the mixed-methods stage, it was important to access to all the participants in the thirteen selected universities. This proved challenging without the assistance of the administration personnel. I therefore chose to reach them officially through their departments, which were able to send the questionnaire out automatically through their university emails. However, this process took over three months, with some universities failing to respond. I was therefore obliged to obtain an official letter from my own Department of Scientific Research where I work requesting the thirteen universities to cooperate with this study (see Appendix 9). However, I found I still needed to contact them regularly through emails and phone calls to remind them of my questionnaire. One of the universities refused to distribute the questionnaire because they wanted their teachers to concentrate on completing their own internal questionnaires, I therefore had to select another university randomly to complete the research sample. However, I needed responses from each university to obtain the required diversity of the participants for the interview stage to enrich my findings.

Secondly, I experienced a number of issues while recording the interviews during the case study. One of the female participants agreed to conduct the interview, but refused permission for it to be recorded. However, she was very cooperative and when I explained the reason behind recording the interview, she offered to send me her written answers in advance and then undertake the oral interview for further clarification and if I need to ask further questions. I feel that her refusal was potentially due to her lack of familiarity with being interviewed in this context, as well as the feminine conservative culture in Saudi Arabia, where it is considered that women's voices should not be recorded and kept with others.

The final challenge concerned the teachers' daily discussions in the WhatsApp group. Although the general findings of this study show WhatsApp to be an effective medium of VCoP, the researcher can find a limited contribution on the level of discourse or participation. This could, however, be due to the nature of the discourse itself, rather than the tool, i.e. the topic is an extension of the members' work, particularly in comparison to more engaging social topics. Hence, the subject of the discourse in the VCoP might be interesting professionally, but not very attractive for frequent engagement.

5.13 Summary of the Chapter

This chapter presented a detailed description of the methodological assumptions underpinning the current research. Firstly, it discussed the research questions and the adopted designs. Secondly, it examined the research methods employed in each stage, followed by a detailed account of the participants and the data analysis frameworks. Thirdly, there was a discussion of the quality of the data obtained. Fourthly, there was an examination of the ethical considerations and the challenges of the study. The following two chapters present the findings drawn from the two research designs.

Chapter 6

Findings of the Mixed-Methods Stage

6.1 Introduction

This chapter presents and discusses the findings of the mixed-methods stage of this study. Three major themes emerged from the thematic analysis of both the quantitative and qualitative data from the questionnaires and semi-structured interviews: (1) the nature of SDPD pursued by EFL university teachers; (2) factors contributing to SDPD; and (3) factors inhibiting teachers from pursuing SDPD. This chapter therefore answers the first three research questions, supported by the data from the participants.

6.2 Information about the Questionnaire

The study employed an online questionnaire to investigate the nature of SDPD pursued by EFL university teachers, structured as follows. The first part focussed on demographic information regarding the respondents (i.e. gender, English related major, level of education and years of teaching experience). The second part focused on the different contexts, models and types of SDPD activities (i.e. individual as opposed to collaborative). The third part investigated the factors contributing to teachers' SDPD. The final part investigated factors potentially inhibiting teachers from pursuing SDPD.

6.2.1 Participants' Profile

A total of 260 participants responded to the online questionnaire. Of which, 169 were female and 91 male (see Figure 6.1). Although male faculty members outnumber female ones in Saudi universities (MoE, 2017), the rate of female respondents was nearly double that of male ones, which perhaps indicates their interest in participating in questionnaires and scientific research.

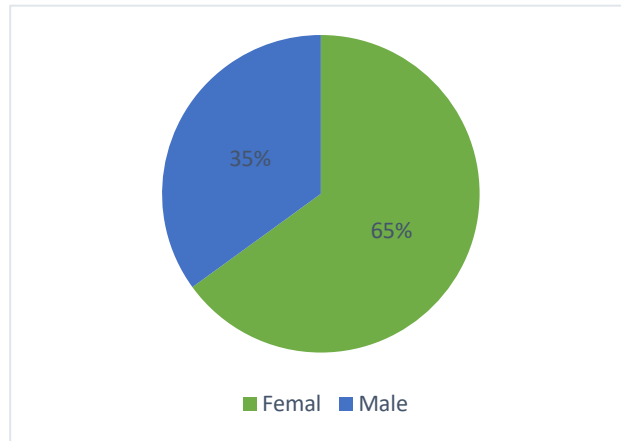


Figure 6.1: Distribution of participants based on gender

The majority (41%) majored in applied linguistics, while (31%) majored in education and (19%) in English literature, with a minority of (9%) majoring in translation. The majority held master’s degrees (60%) while the minority (16%) held bachelor’s degrees and (24%) were PhD holders. The majority had over ten years’ experience of teaching, with the minority having less than two years’ experience (Figure 6.2).

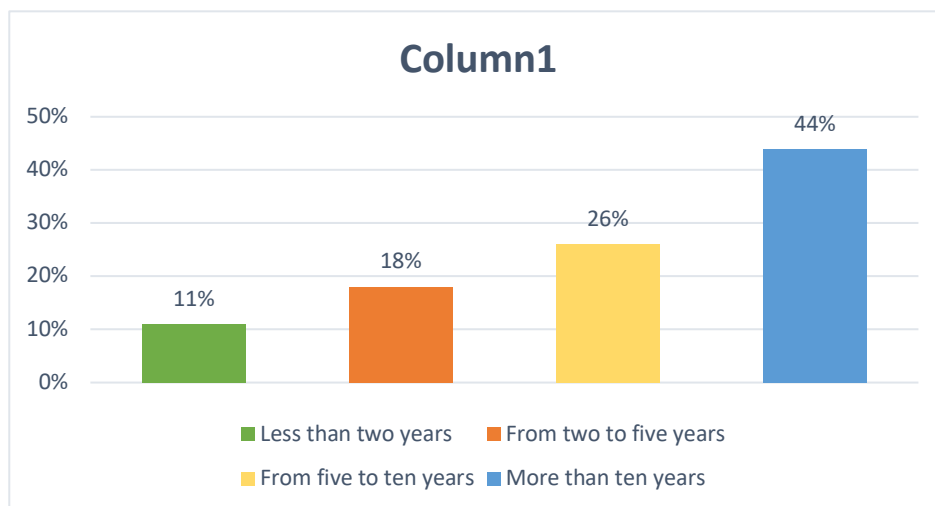


Figure 6.2: Distribution of teachers according to length of teaching experience

6.3 Nature of SDPD Activities

This section presents findings and interpretations related to the nature of SDPD based on EFL teachers' experiences in the Saudi university context, i.e. types, models, characterises and context of learning. The effectiveness of SDPD or SDL has been the subject of considerable debate among PD scholars (Raza, 2010), although it remains an under-researched area in the literature (Section 3.4.1). The analysis of the different sources of data revealed that SDPD is widely adopted by EFL university teachers and that can be practised through a number of different forms and models, either individually or collaboratively and in an online or offline context, as discussed below.

6.3.1 Individually Initiated SDPD Activities

Prior to introducing individual SDPD activities, it is important to establish their usage by EFL university teachers in Saudi university context through a comparison of individual and collaborative SDPD activities. The statistical results relating to item (5) of the questionnaire (What type of SDPD do you prefer to engage with?) reveal that, although teachers frequently adopted both types, collaborative SDPD activities were less adopted than individual activities (Figure 6.3).

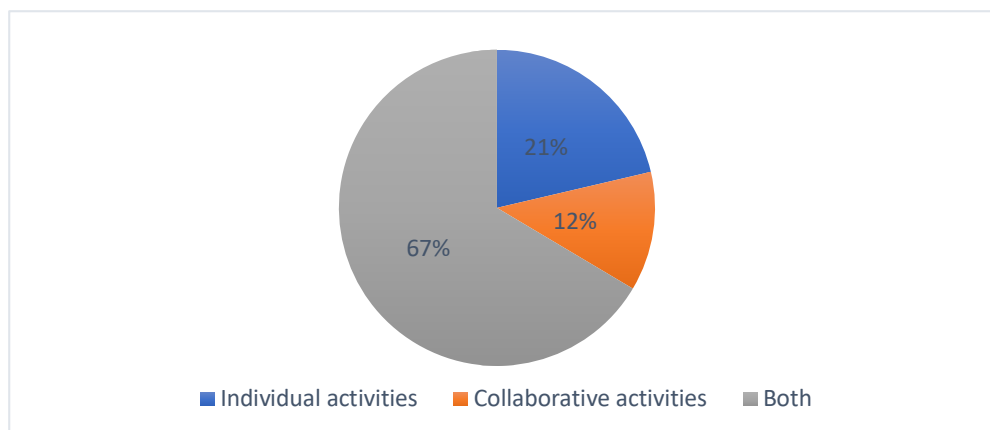


Figure 6.3: Types of SDPD (individual, collaborative or both)

Figure 6.4 (below) depicts the detailed results of questionnaire items (17) and (24) regarding the frequency of individual and collaborative activities.

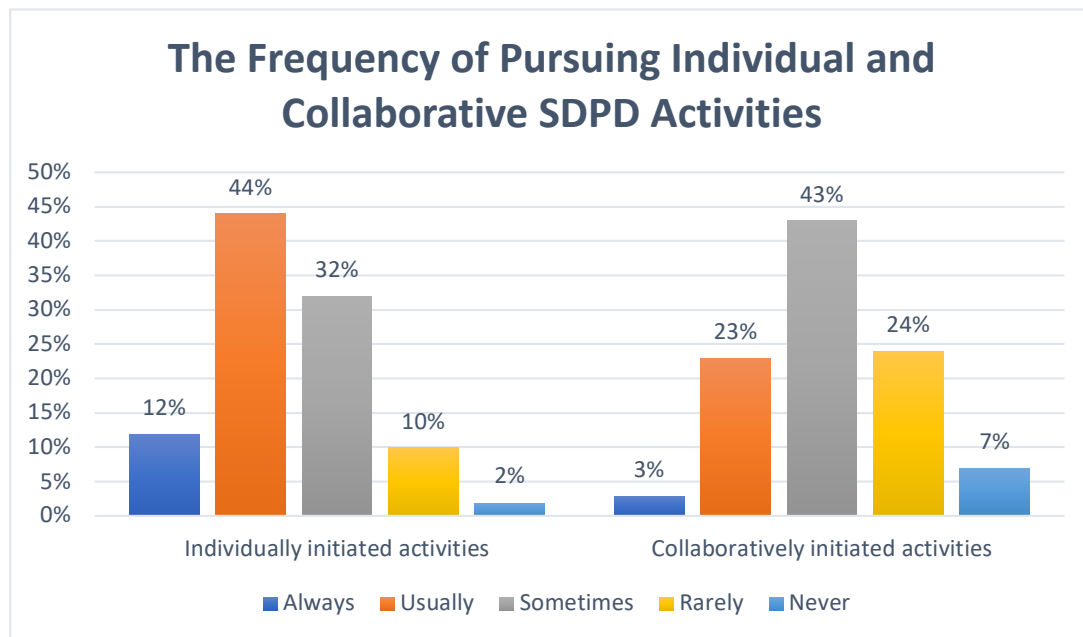


Figure 6.4: Frequency of pursuing individual and collaborative SDPD

The percentage of frequency presented in the bar chart reveals that: (1) over half the respondents (56%) practised individual SDPD activities, with 44% stating ‘usually’ and 12% ‘always’; (2) less than a third (26%) practised collaborative activities, with 23% stating ‘usually’ and 3% ‘always’; and (3) collaborative SDPD activities are far less widely practised than individual activities, with 7% stating ‘never’ and 24% ‘rarely’ (Figure 6.4). However, it should be noted that this result relates to the frequency of use in the context of Saudi higher education and thus may differ in other contexts.

It is important to obtain a deep insight into the contextual factors influencing this result in order to establish how each of these forms is employed. The following section therefore presents detailed accounts from the participants concerning their preference for either individual or collaborative SDPD activities. This is followed by quantitative data from the questionnaire regarding the frequency of use of each activity within this context.

As noted earlier in the literature review chapter, individual models of SDPD refer to any model or activity personally initiated, planned, implemented and evaluated. It is important to note that taking part individually in any structured PD activity (i.e. PD courses, conferences and workshops) in response to personal intentions, interest and need is considered to constitute an individual SDPD, since it is underpinned by the principles of SDL (Section 3.4.4).

In investigating the reasons behind this tendency, the following major reasons for favouring individually initiated activities were identified as: (1) freedom of decision-making; (2) flexibility of time; (3) convenience and comfort of learning; and (4) focusing on the self. These aspects are discussed in detail below.

6.3.2 Reasons for Adopting Individual SDPD Activities

The following categories and subcategories were answered by the questionnaire's open-ended (i.e. qualitative) item (16): Why do you prefer individual SDPD activities?

6.3.2.1 Freedom of Decision-making (Control)

The qualitative responses demonstrate that a considerable number of teachers preferred to undertake individual SDPD due to it allowing freedom of decision-making during the learning process. For example, one respondent justified her preference as follows: *“because I will have the opportunity to make every decision”*. Participants further elaborated that practising individual SDPD allowed them to decide upon: (1) the learning style (e.g. activity type); (2) the learning context (whether online or offline); and (3) the content of learning (i.e. area of interest and subject matter). One of the respondents justified her preference in the following manner: *“I can choose what activities to do and which areas to improve”*. A second added that *“freedom of choice when it comes to subject matter allows me to choose what is more suitable in terms of the scope of interest, the areas of focus, the material, procedure, medium of learning*

... etc.”. These statements clarify the practicality of individual SDPD, due to this providing teachers with a high amount of control over the contextual and external factors of their learning process. This finding demonstrates a considerable shift in the teacher’s role, i.e. from passive to proactive learner. Relating this finding to existing theory confirms that the pursuit of individual SDPD fosters autonomy and control, i.e. a core dimension of SDL (Brookfield, 2009; Candy, 2001; Garrison, 1997). Hence, it can be concluded that a critical motivation for adopting individual SDPD is the freedom afforded to teachers in relation to learning style, area of interest and learning context.

6.3.2.2 Time Flexibility

A further feature of individual SDPD is flexibility of time, which can be viewed as arising from freedom of decision-making, as discussed above (i.e. control). The qualitative analysis of the open-ended item (16) in the questionnaire (Why do you prefer individual SDPD activities?) reveals time flexibility to be a major factor for the pursuit of this type of SDPD. This result confirms that SDL promotes flexible learning schedules (Piskurich, 1993), with twenty-two respondents emphasising that they preferred this type due to it offering flexibility in relation to time, highlighting that they found it beneficial to practise SDPD in their free time and at their own pace. This was confirmed by one respondent, who stated: *“I prefer individual-based learning because it gives me a full management of my time, including when, what and where to perform such practices”*. This reflects how this type of SDPD removes time pressure, particularly for slower learners who need to repeat the task several times.

Most importantly, the participants confirmed that individual SDPD activities are, in comparison to collaborative activities, immediate, consistent and less time consuming. A number of participants reported that they pursued individual SDPD due to this enabling them to learn immediately when required. Others noted that this also saves time by removing the

need to wait for others to catch up. One respondent remarked: *“I like the individual form because it’s something I can do in my spare time, and I am not restricted to anyone or anything.”* Another respondent elaborated that individual SDPD facilitates on-going learning, thus meeting his requirement to constantly update his skills: *“we teachers need to update our expertise constantly. So, we cannot always afford to wait for external PD programmes and activities ... I am not patient enough to wait if there is some delay.”*

The above statements reflect the distinctive aspects of individual SDPD relating to the time factor: (1) the learner’s full control of his/her time; (2) immediacy; (3) being less time consuming; and (4) can be pursued on regular basis (see Figure 6.5). This implies that individual SDPD activities are most appropriate for teachers who find the issue of time as a barrier to practising PD.



Figure 6.5: Aspects of time flexibility

6.3.2.3 Convenience and Comfort of Learning

Further incentives for teachers to pursue this type of SDPD were found to be convenience and comfort of learning. The results of teachers’ qualitative responses to the questionnaire open-ended item (16) (Why do you prefer individual SDPD activities?) reveal that they preferred

this form due to its practicality, i.e. as adult learners, they are more likely to learn according to their own plans, preferences and circumstances (Smith, 2017). One of the respondents to the questionnaire justified her preference for individual activities as follows: “*they are flexible, and I do not have to be guided by policies or an individual administrator.*” Another respondent stated that individual learning is convenient, according to his preferences and potential:

It gives me the chance to think, learn, achieve and practise without shyness [...] I become more honest with myself, particularly in realising my limitations [...] I can work in my pyjamas and feeling comfortable in my own home [...] this is because everything is planned in a way that is more convenient to my needs and potential, while I can also repeat things as many times as I need.

This convenience enabled the respondent to become more productive and self-aware, thus supporting the view that learning in such an environment can encourage teachers’ learning. In addition, this extract also reveals that individual learning promotes a lack of stress, as a comfortable environment results in a more relaxed experience, in which (as noted in the previous extract) the learner is not forced to engage interactively with others. The teachers defined a comfortable environment as the absence of peer pressure and formal (and informal) evaluation, with one participant noting that individual activities have: “*less peer-pressure and lack judgement or evaluation.*” The teachers considered that learning in comfort was in harmony with their personal/psychological attributes, particularly for those less socially communicative and who did not enjoy speaking in public.

It can therefore be concluded that individual learning can afford teachers with the comfort and convenience they need for initiating and sustaining their learning. Furthermore, freedom of decision-making, flexibility of time, and convenience and comfort allow teachers to focus on self-awareness and developing their self-confidence, as discussed in detail below.

6.3.2.4 Focusing on the Self

The analysis of the qualitative responses to the open-ended item (16) (Why do you prefer individual SDPD activities?) reveals that some teachers adopted individual SDPD activities due to these enabling them to focus on self-development. Govender (2015) noted that this enables teachers to identify their own needs, set personal plans and targets, thus exercising agency and increasing their professionalism (p. 490). The teachers explicitly stated that individual practise of SDPD offers additional space to reflect on their own learning and teaching practices and to evaluate their overall performance. This was supported by a number of respondents, with one remarking *“I prefer it, since it gives me transparency when finding out about my own strengths and weaknesses”*, while another added: *“it helps me to better understand myself and my needs.”*

This focus is therefore designed to assist teachers in identifying their own strengths and weaknesses. Furthermore, one teacher highlighted that SDPD is informed by a teacher’s own beliefs: *“I prefer this type because it allows me to focus more on what I believe, which can add to the learning process.”* A second also noted that practising individual SDPD prevents her from being distracted by negative comments or evaluations:

It provides me with a chance for self-assessment, as I do not like being evaluated by others. It helps me to focus on my own weak points. These could be seen as someone else's strengths, which can result in a form of comparison I don't find very helpful.

Thus, individual SDPD constitutes learning in a relaxed manner in the absence of distractions, providing teachers with the opportunity to focus on the self. This was supported by a respondent who stated: *“I believe in being my own judge and I try to identify my own weaknesses and rectify them.”* When relating this result to theory, it is clear that focusing on

the self as an appealing consequence of SDPD reflects a key assumption of SDL, i.e. that the learner has an independent self-concept allowing him/her to focus on the self and direct the complete learning process (see Section 3.2.3.1).

In addition, one respondent reported preferring individual activities as these matched his personal characteristics, as well as preventing a clash of interest with peers, i.e. minimising the negative impact of collaborative learning, Muhammed stated that:

I benefit from it a lot, possibly due to my personality. I can be a bit of an introvert and I sometimes tend to work more efficiently when I work independently. Additionally, when I am interested in a topic that may seem odd or insignificant to my colleagues, I am left to my own devices to pursue the topic.

6.3.2.5 Enhancing Self-confidence

Both the qualitative data from interview one and the open-ended responses to the questionnaire item (16) (Why do you prefer individual SDPD activities?) reveal that some teachers preferred individual SDPD activities due to these increasing their self-confidence by enabling them to take the initiative when it came to problem-solving: “*it promotes confidence and the ability to solve problems.*”

The other critical impact of individual SDPD activities concerns teacher autonomy, with one respondent reporting that:

This type of activity is very important to me and I simply cannot see myself learning about my practice without it. The sense of autonomy given by individual SDPD is another beneficial result of its practice.

This section has established the main reasons for teachers pursuing individual SDPD activities, i.e. (1) flexibility of timing; (2) freedom of decision-making; and (3) the convenience and comfort of learning. These aspects enable them to focus on their own learning needs, as well as enhancing their self-confidence.

This insight into the reasons for the adoption of individual SDPD activities subsequently led me to investigate the nature of their actual usage by EFL teachers in Saudi university context, as discussed in the following section.

6.3.3 Models and Activities of Individual SDPD

The overall statistical results of the questionnaire demonstrate that EFL teachers in Saudi universities employ a range of individual SDPD activities, including: (1) practising reflective teaching; (2) conducting action research; (3) reading books and papers; (4) attending conferences and workshops; (5) joining PD courses (either online or offline) out of personal interest; (6) conducting self-evaluation; (7) conducting self-observation; and (8) consulting online websites, blogs, or social media platforms (see Figure 6.6).

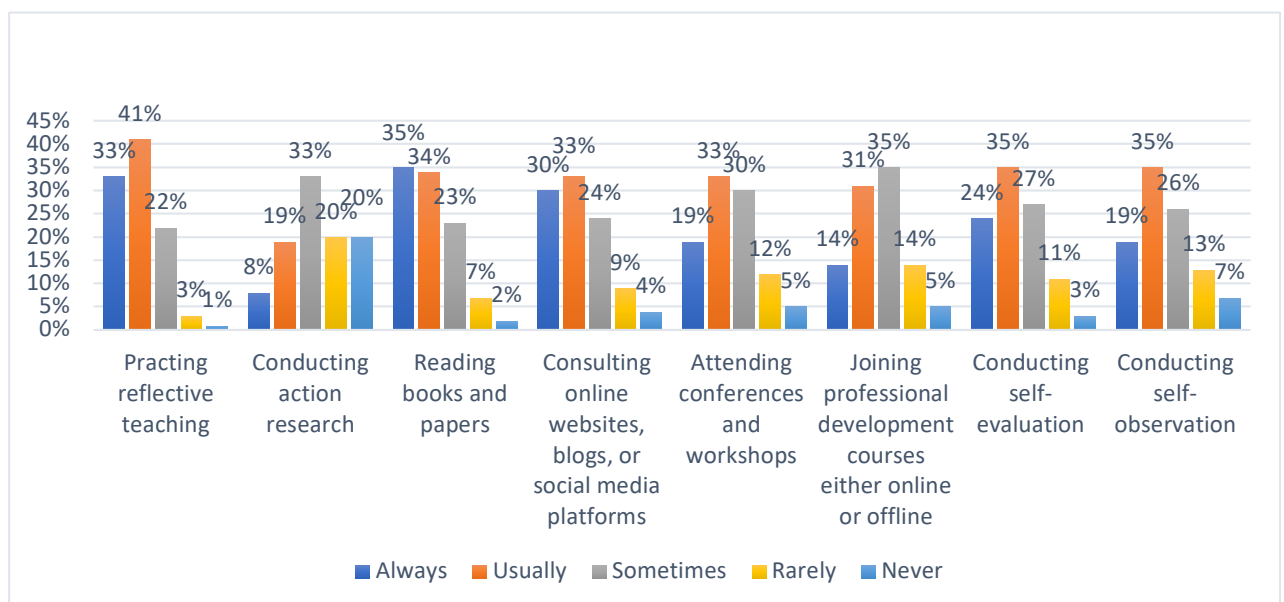


Figure 6.6: Frequency of adopting individual SDPD activities

The following section offers a more in-depth discussion of these aspects through the findings pertaining to the popularity of these activities in the EFL context in Saudi universities, including their frequency of use.

6.3.3.1 Reflective Teaching and Action Research

The results of questionnaire item (7) (How often do you practise reflective teaching as an individual SDPD activity?) reveal reflective teaching to be the most frequently adopted activity. Thus, 74% of EFL teachers in Saudi universities frequently practise reflective teaching, while only 4% do not pursue it, with 3% rarely and 1% not at all. Farrell (2015) emphasised the importance of reflective teaching for allowing teachers to critically examine their teaching practice, in order to then make logical decisions concerning methods of improvement. When related to my findings, this high percentage can be seen to reflect teachers' awareness of the effectiveness of this activity as a model of SDPD for developing teaching practice.

This raises the issue of whether this high percentage reflects a teacher's autonomy or whether reflective teaching can be seen as a method of achieving teacher autonomy.

In this context, action research refers to "teacher-conducted classroom research that seeks to clarify and resolve practical teaching issues and problems" (Richards and Farrell, 2005, p.171). The results of item (10) (How often do you practise action research as an individual SDPD activity? reveal action research to be the least frequently adopted model of SDPD by EFL teachers in Saudi universities, i.e. it was used by approximately 27%, while 40% of the respondents less frequently used it, with 20% stating 'rarely' and 20% 'never' (Figure 6.6). This shows that action research is not a popular form of individual SDPD in Saudi universities, particularly in comparison to the growing use of reflective teaching. Balushi (2017) found that

this was due to work overload, as well as a lack of time and support. This finding is consistent with Kember and Gow (1992), who noted that, despite being considered effective and feasible for faculty members, action research is not widely promoted in higher education institutions as an aspect of teacher development.

This highlights a need for further attention from faculty members as well as the administration. This failure to support the use of action research can be seen as one reason behind teachers tending to favour the use of reflective teaching.

6.3.3.2 Reading Books and Papers and Consulting Social Media Platforms, Websites, Blogs, or Social Media Platforms

Despite the pervasive use of social media platforms for teachers' SDL, it was found that reading books and papers remained one of the dominant models of SDPD pursued by EFL university teachers. The results for questionnaire item (10) (How often do you engage with reading books and papers as a model of individual SDPD?) and item (15) (How often do you use social media platforms as a model of individual SDPD?) reveal that 63% of teachers consulted social media platforms and 69% reported reading books and papers (Figure 6.6). This indicates that the majority of these teachers are active readers and utilise this for the practice of their SDPD. Although a slight difference (6%) can be found between the two results, this can be interpreted as confirming that the prevalence of social media does not devalue conventional methods of learning.

Despite this lack of conflict, it is important to recognise teachers' preferences and perspectives. In particular, the pursuit of SDPD through online platforms (i.e. social networking) has currently become a popular trend in the Saudi higher education context (Alsolamy, 2017). This

is therefore a central focus of this thesis and will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter.

6.3.3.3 Attending Conferences and Workshops and Joining PD Programmes

The findings of questionnaire item (11) (How often do you attend conferences and workshops out of personal choice?) reveal that over half of EFL teachers in Saudi universities (53%) reported attending conferences and workshops as an activity of their individual SDPD, i.e. 19% stated 'always' and 33% 'usually'. However, it should also be noted that 12% rarely attend and 5% never attend (see Figure 6.6). The results reveal that this is among the frequently adopted individual SDPD activity, although it remains less popular than reflective teaching, reading books and papers and using social media platforms. The results for questionnaire item (12) (How often do you join PD programmes and courses out of personal choice?) show that EFL teachers in Saudi universities moderately join PD programmes (i.e. both online and offline) out of personal choice. While 45% stated that they frequently attended, 19% attended less frequently, with 14% stating 'rarely' and 5% 'never' (see Figure 6.6). The overall results indicate that approximately 50% of teachers join PD courses, conferences and workshops, which can be considered low for such traditional activities. However, the teachers reported a number of factors inhibiting their participation, i.e. lack of geographical mobility, lack of institutional support and the low quality of some courses. These inhibiting factors will be discussed in detail under the third theme of 'Challenges and Limitations of SDPD' (see Section 6.6).

6.3.3.4 Self-evaluation and Self-observation

The statistical results for questionnaire item (13) highlight that a considerable proportion of EFL teachers in Saudi universities frequently conduct self-evaluation as a form of individual

SDPD, with 24% stating 'always' and 35% 'usually'. 27% of the teachers reported 'sometimes' practising self-evaluation and only 3% stated 'never'. This reflects teachers' awareness of the importance of self-evaluation as a metacognitive activity to assess and develop their professional practice.

The statistical results for questionnaire item (14) reveal that over half of the respondents (55%) frequently employ self-observation as a model of individual SDPD. Baily et al. (2001) stated that self-observation as a means of TPD: "leads to critical reflection ... puts the responsibility of PD onto us teachers ... implies professional curiosity" (p. 27). While 26% of teachers stated that they sometimes used self-observation, less than quarter indicated that they either made use of this infrequently (7%) or (13%) rarely (see Figure 6.6). This result demonstrates that, although nearly a fifth of the respondents did not make frequent use of self-observation, its use is currently increasing. Baily et al. (2001) indicated that self-awareness and self-observation are essential to TPD, functioning as prerequisites to the pursuit of reflective teaching, which functions as a model of individual SDPD (p. 22).

In summary: The analysis of the findings revealed that the most frequently used activities were: (1) reflective teaching; (2) reading books and papers; and (3) consulting online websites. There is less frequent use of self-evaluation and self-observation, along with attendance of conferences and PD courses. This can be seen as indicating that these activities are viewed as somewhat challenging or as demanding additional effort and expense. The findings also reveal action research to be a less popular activity. However, I find this finding somewhat unexpected, as most respondents were holders of Masters' degrees (59.62%) and PhDs (23.80%), which infers that they were familiar with undertaking research and working in higher education institutions, where there is a focus on academic research.

This result drew my attention to the culture of research in Saudi universities, particularly applied research. If promoted, this could be of considerable benefit in assisting teachers and lecturers to address existing problems without waiting for the intervention of outside agents or organisations.

6.4 Collaboratively Initiated SDPD Activities

As noted in Section 6.3.1, collaborative SDPD activities appear to be less widely adopted by EFL university teachers than individual activities. This result does not lessen the importance of collaborative activities, but reflects their level of popularity in this context. This lack of popularity led me to explore the reasons why teachers are motivated to use such collaborative activities, as discussed in further detail below.

6.4.1 Reasons for Adopting Collaborative SDPD Activities

Collaborative learning primarily demands the involvement of other learners. Successful learning cannot be independent from its surrounding context, although it generally takes place during interaction with the environment, i.e. materials or people (Serdyukov & Serdyukova, 2015). This demonstrates that learning from others is a reciprocal process benefiting all those involved in the learning process, enabling them to share and receive knowledge, skills and experiences. The analysis of the motivation for adopting collaborative SDPD identified three major subcategories: (1) learning through social interaction; (2) learning from multiple perspectives; and (3) learning due to external motivation. These are discussed in detail below.

6.4.1.1 I Like to Learn through Social Interaction

The responses to questionnaire item (23) (Why do you prefer collaborative SDPD activities?) reveal collaborative SDPD to be a socialising activity developing learning through social

interaction (i.e. communication). Serdyukov and Serdyukova (2015) stated that communication is:

A key to effective learning as it plays a crucial role by helping develop cognitive skills, construct and transfer knowledge, socialise and establish a learning community. It also enables the sharing of information, thoughts and ideas, which contribute to learning. (Serdyukov and Serdyukova, 2015, p. 87)

One respondent noted that “*it means interaction and implies a spirit of cooperation*”, while another added that “*it provides a sense of community, which it is essential to be part of, and to have that friendly environment around you.*” These statements indicate that learning through both on and offline collaborative SDPD activities creates a friendly interactive environment for learning through: (1) facilitating communication between teachers; (2) promoting the building of relationships; and (3) developing a sense of belonging to a particular community. This interaction also promotes learning via constructing meaning and exposing an individual’s thoughts and experiences to further discussion. This finding aligns with the view found in the literature that collaborative learning “provides opportunities for social and communication skills, developing positive attitudes towards co-members and learning materials, and building social relationships and group cohesion” (Johnson & Johnson, 1999, as cited in Kreihns, Kirschner, Jochems & Van Buuren, 2004, p. 337). It also develops a sense of cooperation, thus establishing learning communities, as noted by one participant: “*it leads to informal communities of practice.*”

Thus, learning through communicating with diverse learners (teachers) permits a discussion of the ongoing discourse from multiple perspectives, which is the focus of the following subcategory.

6.4.1.2 It Provides me with Multiple Views and Perspectives

The qualitative data from interview one shows that six out of fourteen teachers preferred collaborative SDPD because it offers various different types of knowledge (i.e. practical and theoretical). Furthermore, it also provides multiple and distinct views, opinions, perspectives and experiences concerning a single issue or area of discussion, so expanding the teachers' horizons when it came to addressing problems. The qualitative data from open-ended questionnaire item (23) supports this view, with one participant remarking that *"it provides me with the chance to listen to different opinions regarding the same issue and other experiences."* A second respondent added: *"you can benefit from the varied perspectives via engagement with other teachers."* A further participant noted that the adoption of collaborative SDPD for addressing problems *"shows different ways of doing things and at the same time helps unify teaching efforts, learning inputs and outcomes."* This also reflects the creation of a shared culture of learning and problem solving.

An additional benefit is that this allows the teacher to learn as part of a group, even if s/he fails to participate (i.e. passive learning): *"sometimes you get many benefits from only listening to other people talking about issues they share."* It can therefore be concluded that learning from multiple perspectives generally reflects the diversity and richness of the type of knowledge constructed from collaborative SDPD. Govender (2015) argued that collaborative SDPD allows sharing knowledge and experience and also sources of knowledge.

6.4.1.3 It Is Externally Motivating

Collaborative activities (unlike individual activities) are primarily driven by external motivation. Garrison (1997) indicated that the motivational aspect of SDL is significant for the achievement of cognitive goals, stating that motivation firstly, initiates learning and secondly,

maintains an individual's effort to achieve his/her goals. The qualitative data from interview one and the questionnaires indicates that collaborative SDPD activities promote motivation, with one respondent noting that *“working in groups improves my motivation to move forward and to learn from my colleagues.”*

A further teacher suggested that collaborative learning promotes creativity by stimulating hidden talents: *“collaboration always enhances our talents by letting us share and learn from one another.”* Another added that *“it is conducive to learning, as it creates an opportunity to exchange new knowledge and experience.”* Thus, collaborative learning can increase external motivation and facilitate learning. This was highlighted by one of the participants, who noted that carefully planned collaborative activities can generate effective results: *“there are situations in which, when carefully planned, collaborative efforts give more encouraging results in comparison to individual self-directed activity.”*

The motivation developed by collaborative activities also leads to an avoidance of procrastination, with one respondent noting that *“working with people helps me to avoid procrastination and focus on the task at hand.”* It can also prove beneficial when a teacher begins to lose his/her motivation toward learning: *“sometimes I feel bored of learning and I want to share the experience with someone.”* However, it should be noted that learning as a result of external motivation does not necessarily infer the absence of internal motivation. Park (2008) identified the latter as stemming from: *“the need for self-esteem, the desire to achieve, the urge to grow, the satisfaction of accomplishment, the need to know something specific, and curiosity”* (p.1), which can also drive teachers to take part in collaborative learning opportunities.

This section has demonstrated that collaborative learning is driven by both external and internal motivation, unlike individual learning, which is primarily driven by internal motivation.

6.4.2 Types and Models of Collaborative SDPD

The statistical results from the questionnaire demonstrate that EFL teachers in Saudi universities adopt a range of collaborative SDPD activities, including: (1) informal teacher discussions; (2) informal peer observation; (3) peer coaching; (4) collaborative action research; and (5) informal communities of practice. The following bar chart depicts the popularity of these activities for EFL university teachers in terms of their frequency of use (see Figure 6.7).

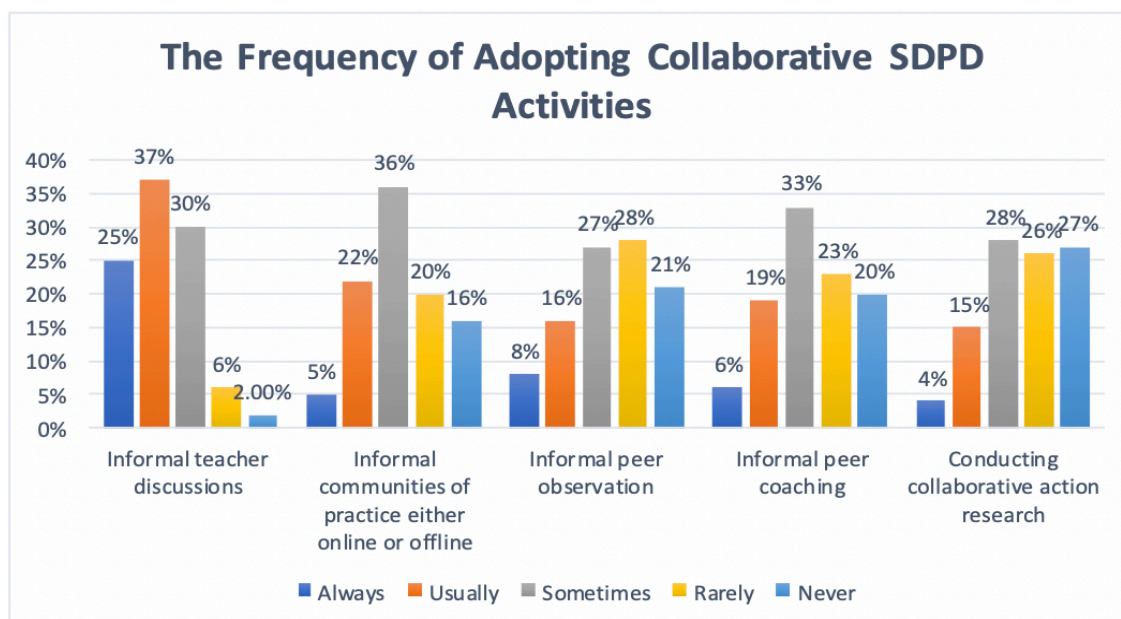


Figure 6.7: Frequency of adopting collaborative SDPD activities

6.4.2.1 Informal Teacher Discussions

The statistical results of questionnaire item (18) (How often do you use informal teachers' discussions as a model of SDPD?) reveal a significant preference for informal discussions as a form of collaborative SDPD. Over half of the respondents stated that they frequently used informal teacher discussions, with 25% stating 'always' and 37% 'usually' and only 2% 'never' and 6% 'rarely' holding such discussions. In comparison with the other four activities, this result reflects the prevalence of such discussions among EFL university teachers as a form of collaborative SDPD. However, the results of questionnaire item (24) (How often do you

conduct collaborative action research as a model of SDPD?) reveal less propensity for collaborative action research, which was found to be the least adopted activity, with over half the respondents stating that they ‘never’ (27%) or ‘rarely’ (26%) engaged in this form of research. This result suggests a limited orientation towards the use of collaborative action research (co-researching), while also raising the issue of the motivation for teachers’ avoidance.

6.4.2.2 Informal Peer Observation and Informal Peer Coaching

The results of questionnaire item (19) (How often do you use informal peer observation as a model of SDPD?) indicate the limited use of peer observation. Nearly half the respondents (49%) did not use this model of SDPD, with 28% stating ‘rarely’ and 21% ‘never’. This approach therefore appears to be less frequently adopted than informal teachers’ discussions (8%), communities of practice (36%) and peer coaching (43%). However, there is evidence that it is undertaken informally, i.e. without the pressure of formal evaluation. In the follow-up interviews, the participants reported the following inhibiting aspects: (1) lack of experience in providing constructive and professional feedback; (2) adverse previous experience in formal observation; (3) the potential to damage friendships; (4) damaging a teacher’s reputation; and (5) the experience of stress, due to feeling inferior and inadequate.

EFL university teachers appear to employ slightly more informal peer coaching and peer observation than collaborative action research. The results of questionnaire item (20) (How often do you use informal peer coaching as a model of SDPD?) reveal that this was not used by 43% of respondents, with 20% stating ‘never’ and 23% ‘rarely’, while it was only used ‘always’ by 6% and ‘usually’ by 19%.

This result therefore implies that this model is less popular than peer observation in the context of Saudi higher education.

6.4.2.3 Informal Communities of Practice (CoP)

The results of questionnaire item (22) (How often do you use CoP as a model of SDPD?) reveal that CoP is not a popular activity within the Saudi university EFL context, i.e. over one third of the respondents reported that they did not participate in informal communities of practice as a form of informal SDPD, with 20% stating 'rarely' and 16% 'never'. This result was unexpected, particularly given the prevalence of communities of learning in higher educational contexts (Arthur, 2016). As a member of an existing VCoP via WhatsApp, I investigated this phenomenon, adopting a qualitative case study design. The findings pertaining to the potentials, limitations and impact of this VCoP on teachers' teaching practice will be explored in further detail in the following chapter.

In summary: The frequency of the adoption of collaborative SDPD activities assisted in establishing the use of these activities by EFL teachers in the Saudi university context. The most frequently adopted collaborative activity was found to be informal teacher discussion, with the second most popular being CoP (27%), followed by peer coaching (25%) and peer observation (24%). The least adopted was collaborative (i.e. participatory) action research (19%), which (as noted above) thus requires further consideration. In addition, an examination of the motivation behind the degrees of popularity can assist in establishing a comprehensive understanding of the contextual underlying factors potentially transforming the use of these activities.

The following section provides a detailed account of the findings regarding the second theme of this chapter ‘The reasons for pursuing SDPD’. This covers SDPD covered both individually and collaboratively with respect to socio-political and socio-economic factors.

6.5 Reasons for Pursuing SDPD with Respect to the Contextual Factors

This section investigates the second research question, presenting the findings concerning the motivation for EFL university teachers in Saudi universities to pursue SDPD. Semi-structured interviews and questionnaires were used to answer this question. Brockett and Hiemstra (1991) highlighted that learning in general, and SDL in particular, are influenced by the social context in which they take place. The overall findings therefore demonstrate that teachers reported being influenced by social, psychological, economic and political dimensions. In general, the majority of these arose from teachers’ real experiences of SDPD.

6.5.1 Personal Reasons

6.5.1.1 Teacher Autonomy and Empowerment

- **Teacher Autonomy**

Caffarella (1993) emphasised that autonomy is a personal attribute of self-directed learners. However, the qualitative data from interview one identified teacher autonomy as a main reason for pursuing SDPD. This supports the concept that learner autonomy can function as (1) a means of learning (i.e. autonomous learning) or (2) an end of learning (i.e. learning to become autonomous) (see Section 3.2.3.2). A number of participants agreed with the first point, asserting that teacher autonomy is essential to the practise of SDPD. This can be seen as indicating that autonomous teachers are generally more likely to pursue SDPD. Leen confirmed this argument stating that:

I am an independent kind of person, and practising SDPD made me more autonomous in my learning [...] I do not wait for the department to instruct me to improve myself in a certain area. Instead, whenever I find myself in need of development, I go for it and learn everything I need off my own back.

Emma confirmed this view, stating that: “*in order to undertake SDPD, we need to be autonomous. It makes you independent and responsible.*” This aligns with Candy’s (1991) interpretation of the concept of ‘autonomous learners’ as referring to self-regulated learners working independently of the support or supervision of their institutions (p. 343).

Although autonomy is a fundamental element of implementing SDPD, the findings of the current study show that it can arise as a consequence of its practise (i.e. an end in itself). Zack highlighted that the development of autonomy taking place as a result of practising SDPD:

In terms of myself, I can feel a growing sense of autonomy, a feeling of independence, and that I have done something for myself on my own account. And when it succeeds or becomes effective then this encourages me to continue.

Furthermore, Saud believed that autonomy forms a core quality of professional teachers, encouraging self-reliance to grow professionally. Saud implied that, in order to be professional, teachers need to develop autonomy:

I believe that teachers have to depend largely on themselves to develop their skills professionally. I cannot imagine a good teacher who does not wish to improve or seek to develop new skills or rectify weaknesses. Therefore, autonomy and being an independent learner forms a core quality of teachers, which is manifested by SDPD forms and techniques.

The quantitative results of questionnaire item (36) (Rank teachers' autonomy as a reason for pursuing SDPD according to the level of importance), support this, as the majority of respondents (81%) agreed on its importance when practising SDPD (Figure 6.8).

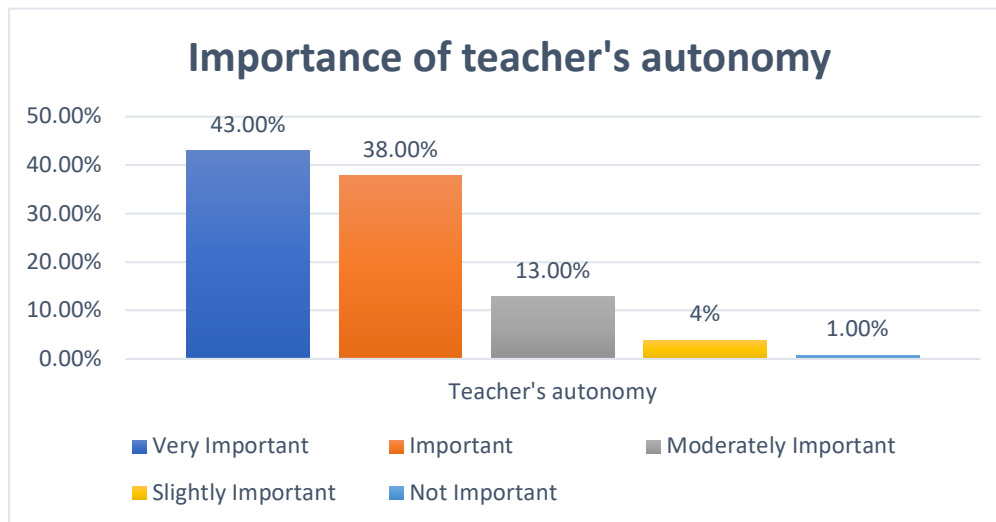


Figure 6.8: Frequency of importance of teacher's autonomy

The previous findings led me to conclude that the relationship between teachers' autonomy and SDPD is direct, intrinsic and interrelated. Thus, if a teacher is autonomous, s/he will continue to practise SDPD, while a sense of autonomy will also increase when teachers practise SDPD.

- **Teacher Self-empowerment**

The issue of empowering learners also represents a main principle of autonomy (Brookfield, 1993). The qualitative data from the interview one and questionnaires indicates that, in developing teachers' autonomy, SDPD is also empowering. During the analysis of the interviewees' responses, I found that the participants lacked any shared understanding of the concept of the teacher's self-empowerment, and thus conceptualised it in relation to their experiences concerning SDPD. Firstly, Emma noted that taking the initiative in learning is of itself empowering, remarking that "*it is empowering when you do something for yourself,*

instead of waiting for someone to tell you that you need to do something. It is okay, I am motivated to do this on my own.” In addition, Leen related an increase in a teacher’s confidence to the results of self-empowerment arising from the pursuit of SDPD, claiming that:

Of course, it empowers me. It makes me feel more confident in my abilities. I see how I have confronted my personal challenges, which no one else can understand. I have more power, especially with the informal activities I am undertaking.

Moreover, Maria related self-empowerment to an increase in knowledge and subsequently a teacher’s confidence, decision making and ability to take the initiative:

Knowing more about pedagogy and how to teach each skill professionally gave me power. I became more confident about my teaching, as well as the decisions I make during and after class. After I became myself coach and leader, I got used to planning and implementing useful and innovative strategies to differentiate my teaching without any need to consult the programme leader. I also got used to taking the initiative to apply and try out anything I believe may prove efficient. I no longer wait for others to help me develop my instructional skills.

This clarifies the results concerning teacher empowerment. In addition, I believe that so long as teachers enjoy a level of self-empowerment, its impact goes beyond the level of the teacher to also reach the students and the educational context. Thus, confidence in her/his competencies can encourage a teacher to take further initiatives to improve current education conditions.

Correspondingly, the results of the questionnaire item (37) (Rank teacher’s self-empowerment as a reason for pursuing SDPD according to the level of importance) demonstrate that the majority of participants (87%) believed that their adoption of SDPD was due to their desire for

empowerment (Figure 6.9). This high percentage indicates the importance of teacher's empowerment as a motivation for pursuing SDPD.

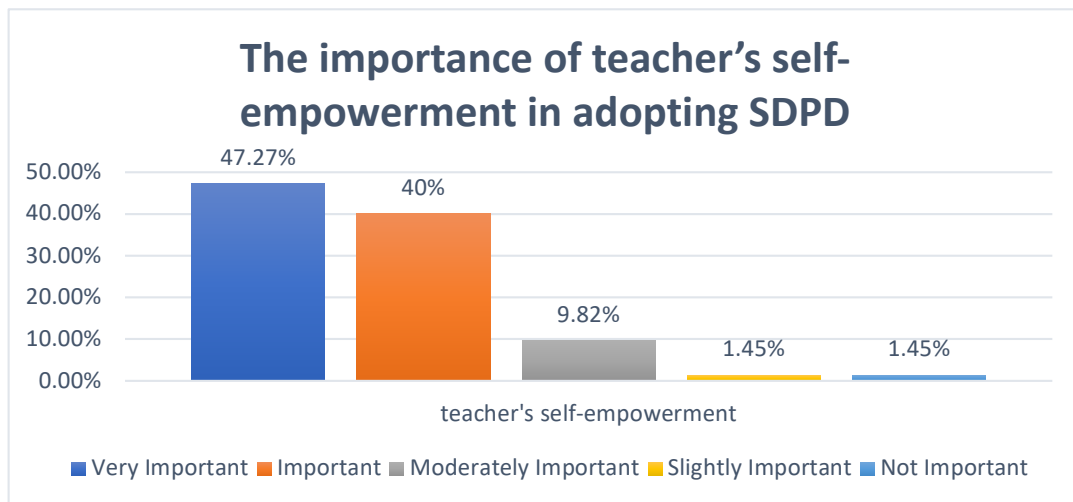


Figure 6.9: The importance of teacher's self-empowerment in adopting SDPD

However, although teachers' self-empowerment can develop as a consequence of practising SDPD, a number remain unaware of this development. Maha clarified that she had previously practised SDPD unconsciously and was therefore unable to decide whether self-empowerment was the reason for, or a product of, her SDPD:

I feel a difference, but I cannot decide if it is empowerment or something else. In fact, I've only just become aware of the existence of SDPD as a concept, after I became a member of an informal online learning community and started to pay attention to it intentionally. During last semester, I began to return to learning and implemented multiple strategies. However, one semester is not enough to decide whether it is empowering. If you ask me two years from now, I may be able to answer you.

This demonstrates the positive impact of this informal learning community on this teacher's perception, and realisation, of SDPD. Although time is needed to determine the nature of this impact, Maha can already feel the difference.

However, there remains some disagreement regarding the impact of SDPD on teacher's self-empowerment. While, as noted above, such an impact was confirmed by the first group, the second group rejected it, claiming that they will be unable to see any noticeable empowerment so long as they work in a top-down system in which their institutions control such aspects as courses, materials, methods and work duties.

When I asked Mark about the level of impact he had experienced on his empowerment as a teacher from practising SDPD, he stated: *"not much. I prefer the promotion of academic courses that can lead to greater empowerment and professional development."* Omar agreed with Mark, elaborating that teacher empowerment should be formally supported by the institution, even if the teacher is evolving informally through SDPD, commenting: *"if I am allowed to select the course, then definitely it will be empowering, and will help me a lot. But if they force me to do something, then I wouldn't feel any empowerment."* However, as noted earlier, the participants revealed no shared understanding of the concept of teacher self-empowerment, tending to employ the terms 'teacher self-empowerment' and 'teacher empowerment' interchangeably.

It is therefore clear that these two concepts require clarification.

1. **Teacher self-empowerment:** within the context of SDL, this refers to a teacher's ability to make decisions in an independent manner and take further action according to her/his abilities and competencies.

2. **Teacher empowerment:** this refers to "involving teachers in decision-making, making sure they feel good about their teaching ability, allowing them to have control over certain aspects of their career, and ensuring that they believe they have an impact on the organisation" (Squire-Kelly, 2012, p. 23).

Thus, SDPD can be seen as empowering, due to the teacher being personally in control of her/his learning. At the same time, this cannot be achieved at the occupational level without assistance from the relevant administration.

6.5.1.2 Teachers' Professional Identity

The professional identity of teachers remains an implicit reason for pursuing SDPD. The majority of the participants agreed with the statement: *'I pursue SDPD because I want to be a professional teacher.'* Marwan supported this finding, stating that *"SDPD motivates me to innovate my instructional skills and boosts my morale as a university faculty member."* This was also supported by Leen, who noted that *"self-directed learning builds my professional identity. It fills the gaps that need improvement. These gaps are identified as I teach, or intend to teach, a specific aspect."* Ivanova and Skara-MincLne (2016) argued that "a teacher with a strong and positive professional identity will be an effective teacher, who will be self-directed to acquire knowledge and skills necessary for teaching throughout their life." (p. 530). This has led me to consider the presence of an interrelation between these two dynamic processes (i.e. SDPD and a teacher's professional identity), which therefore develop in parallel.

The results of the questionnaire item (38) demonstrate that the majority of the responses (87%) confirmed the importance of professional identity for practising SDPD, with only 2% viewing it as unimportant (see Figure 6.10). This result thus confirms the interrelated relationship between professional identity and the practice of SDPD.

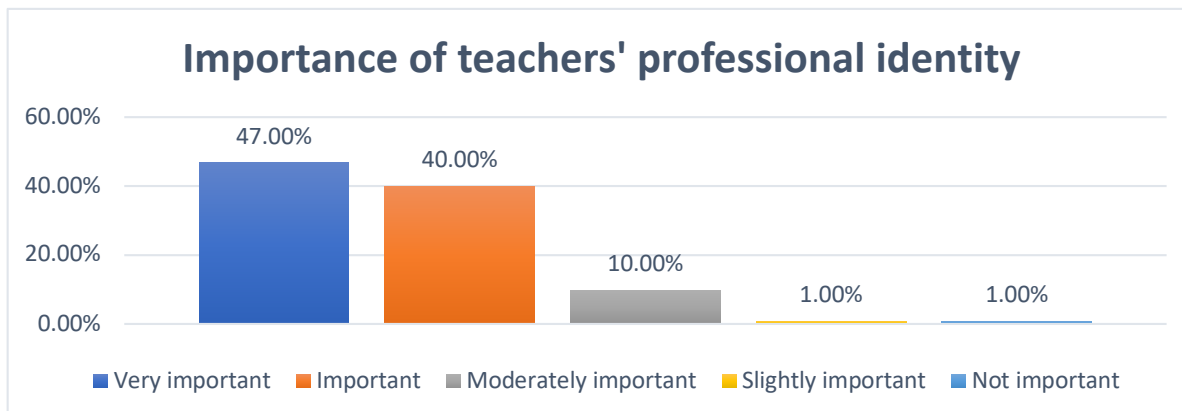


Figure: 6.10: The importance of teachers' professional identity

Moreover, Saud also acknowledged that it was his wish to become a professional university teacher that motivated him to pursue this form of PD. This highlights a growing sense of responsibility of being a responsible representative of the profession. This finding suggests that adopting SDL to develop the overall professional performance enhances a teacher's professional identity and can thus be identified as a motivating factor.

6.5.1.3 Teacher Motivation

SDL supports Knowles' (1980) premise that adult (self-directed) learner is internally motivated (Marriam, 2001, p. 5). However, the results of my own study indicate that a self-directed learner can be both internally and externally motivated, i.e. by means of collaborative SDL, during which learners motivate each other (see Section 6.4.1.3). The qualitative data from both the open-ended items of the questionnaire (16 + 23) and the interviews indicate that teachers' intrinsic and extrinsic motivation is a major reason for practising SDPD.

Marwan supported the view that SDL is internally motivating: *“my intrinsic, rather than any extrinsic motivation urged me to join the DELTA course. Doing PD courses definitely augments informal SDPD. I undertook my DELTA due to my passion for the profession.”*

Additionally, the positive outcomes appear to inspire teachers to continue pursuing SDPD. This is demonstrated by Saud and Omar, who agreed that the direct positive (i.e. practical) impact of practising SDPD prompts teachers to continue the learning process. Omar stated:

The reason I chose online forms of SDPD was their clear positive impact. As a teacher, there were always tasks or dilemmas I managed to overcome. This was thanks to the self-motivated activities of reading books and online articles, attending webinars on different platforms, as well as watching scientific and research-based documentary movies.

On the other hand, extrinsic motivation appears to motivate teachers towards SDPD. Zack stated that it was the positive reaction from colleagues to his presentation of informal PD sessions (i.e. self-directed initiatives) motivated him to continue, noting that:

For days afterwards, teachers continued to pop in to thank me for these sessions, telling me that the discussions were really effective. This in itself is therefore encouragement for me to continue.

This reveals that, alongside internal motivation, external motivation is manifested as a result of the pursuit of SDPD (e.g. verbal appreciation from teachers). This can be seen as motivating and sustaining the pursuit of SDPD, with Zack indicating that he was now intending to continue offering such informal presentations and discussion sessions.

A positive result can encourage me to act more independently and develop other areas of teaching. It can also encourage me to continue using a consistent pace to pursue my PD.

There is no magic here. It takes time to get things done.

Leen thus highlighted the importance of external motivation to sustain self-directed efforts, potentially contradicting Knowles' (1980) assumption that internal motivation is the only element required for SDL. The primary triggers appear to consist of investigating ways SDPD

can prove motivating, encouraging a thirst for knowledge, offering flexibility and being a needs-based PD.

Knowledge as a Source of Motivation

The data from interview one reveals that the majority of the teachers acknowledged that SDPD increased their motivation to learn. Omar noted that he considered knowledge to be a source of motivation: “*SDPD is motivating, this is because the more you learn, the more you wish to gain further knowledge and all the books and other sources and programmes are unable to satisfy this thirst.*”

Thus, pursuing SDPD motivates learners, as the more they learn, the more they realise that they need to continue to learn, so they are encouraged to maintain an ongoing engagement with learning. Furthermore, Mark described SDPD in terms of long-life learning that stimulates the brain. A teacher’s motivation to pursue SDPD is therefore not necessarily simply to address practical issues related to his/her teaching practice, but rather to satisfy intellectual curiosity.

Mark stated:

To a certain degree, apart from the benefit of ‘life-long learning’, SDPD also motivates the brain. For example, at present, I am reading Dostoevsky’s ‘Notes from the Underground’, providing a social history of Russians during the mid-1800s, and O Henry’s short stories with both audio and visual elements, again showing a social history of the USA at the turn of the twentieth century. The stories can be used for English literature, but also for providing viewpoints from different parts of the worlds, both from the past and as they are now.

These extracts support the argument that it is the flexibility of SDPD that enhances teachers’ motivation towards learning, as it enables them to undertake activities that match their interests

and needs. This, in turn, inspires them to sustain their learning in a self-directed manner. Harvey supported this argument with the following example:

When you join PD courses in response to a personal choice, it matches your interest and encourages you to become more involved with the course, including increasing your concentration and improving your understanding. This is because it is related to something you need. If you are being forced to go, then the motivation is not there.

6.5.1.4 It Fits my Learning Style and Needs

The qualitative data from interview one and the questionnaire reveals that the majority of teachers pursued SDPD due to a match between its features and their learning characteristics, needs and interests. This was confirmed by Zack: *“I like informal study circles as a form of SDPD, because it fits my character and my interests, and because I am a person who likes to work with a small number of people in groups that are highly focussed.”* Furthermore, this result supports the analysis of quantitative data from questionnaire item (34), which revealed that over three quarters of the respondents (79%) confirmed the importance of the match between the characteristics of learning style and those of SDPD (Figure 6.11). This reflects its significance as a personal psychological motive for practising SDPD.

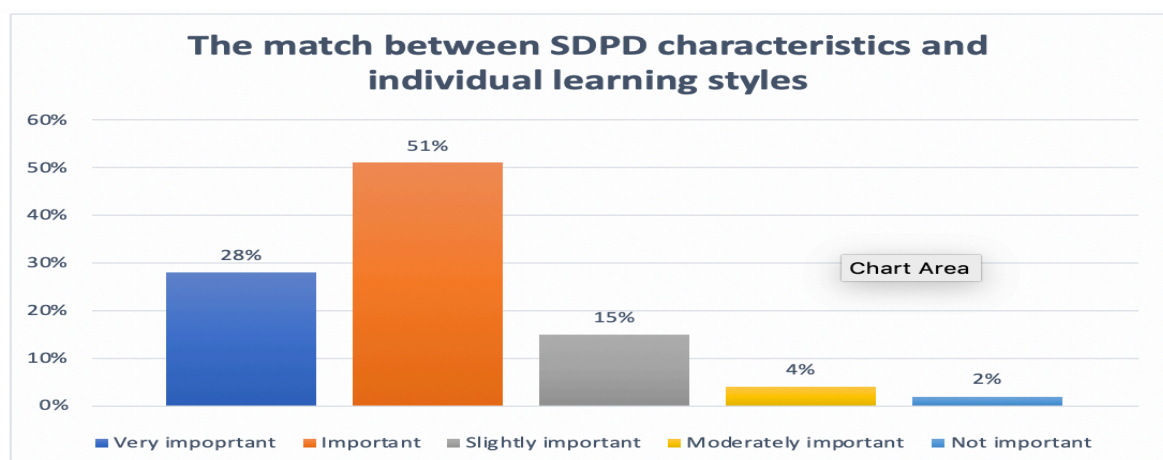


Figure 6.11: The match between the SDPD characteristics and individual learning styles

Moreover, a number of further participants emphasised that they practised this form because it addressed their needs. In response to questionnaire item (16) (Why do you prefer individual SDPD activities?), one of the respondents claimed that *“through individual SDPD, I am able to identify what I need to learn, because I know my own weak points.”* Saud supported this claim by linking this aspect to adult learning characteristics: *“we teachers are adults, so everyone knows the exact weak spots that need to be addressed. Furthermore, self-directed efforts are usually precise, rather than investigating general topics.”*

The ability to identify areas of weakness reveals an advanced level of thinking (i.e. reflection) in a self-directed learner. This interpretation supports the assumption proposed by Knowles (1980) that the adult learner “has an independent self-concept and can direct his or her own learning” (as cited in Merriam, 2001, p. 5). Zack confirmed Knowles’ assumption that SDL is “problem-centred and interested in the immediate application of knowledge” (as cited in Merriam, 2001, p. 5):

When I do something on my own, and I find something that interests me, then I implement this into my practice. When I find it to be effective, this encourages me to do more and to build on those practices.

It should, however, be noted that not all adult learners have the ability to identify areas of weakness. A small number of participants confessed to experiencing difficulties in identifying their weak points. Harvey noted:

At a personal level, I do not know where to pinpoint the development. I also find it difficult to recognise my needs and the areas in which I need to improve.

Therefore, despite Knowles' (1980) statement that adult learners are able to recognise (and address) their needs, this was found not to be the case with all self-directed learners, as demonstrated by Harvey.

6.5.1.5 Teacher Self-evaluation

The qualitative data from interview one reveals that eleven of the fourteen participants agreed that they employed self-evaluation as a consistent activity of their SDPD, in order to facilitate their professional growth throughout their careers. Marwan emphasised the importance of self-evaluation as a symbol of professionalism, as follows:

Undeniably, self-evaluation is the hallmark of a successful professional. I regularly conduct self-assessment. As a matter of fact, I am a reflective practitioner. In other words, I persistently evaluate, take stock of, analyse, think back about and contemplate my performance on a daily basis.

Marwan thus implicitly related self-evaluation to reflection, viewing a reflective practitioner as entailing constant self-evaluation. Zack elaborated that self-evaluation is an opportunity to identify learning needs, particularly if the teacher does not realise a need for further learning or where to focus if s/he wishes to enhance his/her teaching practice: *“this provides a good opportunity for reflection, which can lead teachers to identify their needs. This is important, as teachers can sometimes fail to realise that they need to develop themselves in certain areas.”* The above discussion has led me to the conclusion that teachers should learn how to conduct critical reflection, so as to improve their practice. Emma was in agreement with Zack, adding that setting new goals requires her to perform self-evaluation. She demonstrated when, and the motivation for, undertaking such evaluation:

I usually ask myself: what is going to happen for next year? What are your plans, what are your goals? This is because I am someone who sets my own goals and then check how far I have come to achieving my goals and whether or not I have fulfilled them. This is what prompts me to undertake self-evaluation, it is to understand both where I am going and where I need to go.

The analysis of the interviewees' responses from interview one revealed a number of strategies for conducting self-evaluation, including:

1. Employing a checklist for short-term and long-term goals. Thus, Emma stated that *“regarding the way I used to use to evaluate my work, I have a list of my goals and I look at my list and then I measure it that way.”*
2. Measuring students' achievement to evaluate performance. Ledia noted: *“I measure my students' examination outcomes throughout by applying the university matrix standards that measure students' achievement in the different skills I teach.”*
3. Receiving feedback from colleagues.
4. Asking students to develop quizzes, e.g. Zack stated:

I used to ask my students to develop quizzes individually and in groups. Then, I collected them and extracted questions from the quizzes they developed. I would then return it to them, showing how I selected questions from each group (or each student). This gives me an idea of my effectiveness.
5. Writing reflective reports. Marwan reported that: *“I keep track of my informal SDPD by documenting what I have gained from these activities. I also periodically revise these documents and evaluate my achievements in practical terms.”*

It is therefore important to highlight the importance of external feedback as a complementary strategy/tool for self-evaluation. This is supported by Butler and Winne (1995), who argued that the accuracy and explicitness of internal feedback may not be sufficient.

Saud demonstrated that taking part in the interview for the current study inspired him to practice self-evaluation: *“honestly, until conducting this online interview, I have never critically evaluated my informal methods of self-development. Maybe, this study would encourage me to reflect more on that in the future.”* Saud highlighted the positive impact of the current study for the participants, i.e. raising teachers’ awareness regarding the critical role of their SDPD in general, and self-evaluation in particular.

However, some participants commented that, despite valuing self-evaluation, they found it difficult to be professionally performed, i.e. Maria explained that undertaking self-evaluation leaves her with plenty of unanswered questions:

I usually evaluate my teaching, because I am the first person I am able to evaluate. When I fail to evaluate myself in a certain area, then I need to rely on my colleagues [...] As long as I am responsible, I feel a need to evaluate my work to meet my job requirements. Self-evaluation allows me to think of how I can make things better. However, the main challenge that I face when I evaluate myself is having a large number of questions and not finding the answers [...] Sometimes, when I use a certain strategy to address a problem, I cannot evaluate how much it might be useful, due to my limited experience in evaluation. This means I could have an adverse impact on myself or my students.

Maria thus reveals a critical challenge, in that some teachers lack the support of the required systematic knowledge on methods of efficiently conducting self-evaluation. This lack has the potential to result in a failure to improve the evaluation process. Saud also added that

“nonetheless, the difficulty of self-evaluation is that it is a process that is slow and takes time ... one might not be able to see his/her own problems easily.”

This section has revealed that, despite self-evaluation being one of the most important reasons of SDPD, it is not straightforward, and can also prove beyond the ability of some teachers.

6.5.2 Academic Factors

6.5.2.1 To Improve my Knowledge

The qualitative data from interview one and the questionnaires reveals that almost all of the participants concurred that their main reason for practising SDPD was to refresh their existing theoretical and practical knowledge. Some also clarified they needed to refresh their minds and learn how to teach using up-to-date strategies. Harvey elaborated that:

I do some reading to refresh my mind about what I have learned in the MA. Things like how to write a report or an abstract, or teach a student how to write a report. This is something I know, but I need to keep myself updated with recently implemented techniques, particularly as I teach first and second year Bachelor students in (X) university. This includes learning more about what areas they need to cover, and what it should contain, etc. I see it both as a recap and a development.

This indicates that the change in the academic context (i.e. majors, level of students, and degrees) prompts teachers to develop themselves self-directedly in certain areas, as in the example of Harvey. In addition, a further motivation to pursue SDPD is to keep up to date with any newly discovered concepts in the field. Mark confirmed that: “*SDPD consists of keeping abreast of theoretical concepts and updating my knowledge in areas required for my work. This includes academic reading in my specific area.*” Mark’s statement highlights another motive for practising SDPD, i.e. developing theoretical knowledge to improve practical performance and assist teachers in applying theory to practice. This reflects the critical role of theory in developing teachers’ practice, including the potential benefits of current published educational research.

6.5.2.2 To Conduct Research

A significant factor in pursuing SDPD was found to be the undertaking of research. The quantitative results of questionnaire item (29) (Rank conducting research as a reason that prompts you to pursue SDPD according to the level of importance) suggest the vast majority of participants viewed research as an important factor in the practise of SDPD, i.e. 87% agreed on its importance, while only 9% 'slightly' believed in its importance and approximately 4% expressed no belief in its importance (see Figure 6.12).

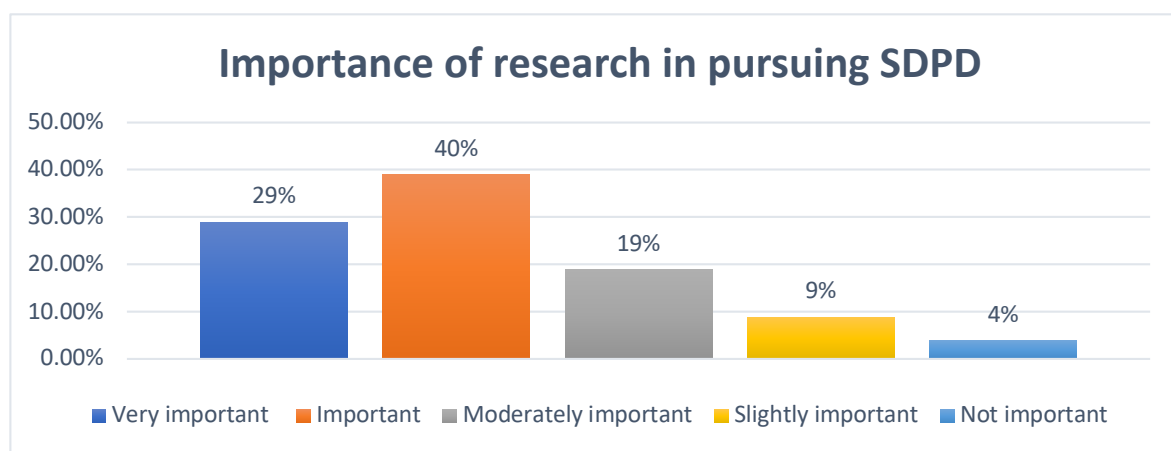


Figure 6.12: Importance of research in pursuing SDPD

Similarly, the qualitative data from interview one reveals that conducting research and publishing papers appear to be a contributing factor for pursuing SDPD. Zack, for example, highlighted that he commenced learning about any new subject through conducting research:

When I develop an interest in certain topics, I just research that topic. Sometimes, I try to do this in the form of a study, developing research questions and downloading reading materials (such as papers) and consult those working in the field about the authenticity of the topic.

Zack therefore found such research beneficial for making presentations to disseminate and discuss the findings of his research with colleagues. He further elaborated on how practising SDPD through making presentations encouraged him to conduct further research:

Three weeks ago, I did a brain-based presentation regarding language learning. This was my initiative, no one asked me [...] This presentation required me to search for, and read, updated theories, to enable me to identify any criticism of previously used methods, theories or techniques or that a particular theory had been invalidated. In this way, I tried to keep myself updated with what is out there in both the research community and teacher learning communities.

This outlines the relationship between SDPD and research, particularly that firstly, the pursuit of some SDPD activities can require the undertaking of research and that conducting research forms a model of SDPD. It is significant that Zack's actions were self-initiated, as a result of recognising his responsibility, thus reflecting the essence of SDL.

6.5.2.3 Contributing to Curriculum Development

Contributing to the development of the curriculum was not a popular motivation for pursuing SDPD in this context. However, the qualitative data from interview one reveals that Omar was motivated by this aspect:

A self-motivated and self-directed learner can definitely contribute to the PD of EFL teachers. For example, I taught modern English drama for one complete semester [...] As English literature is my passion, I keep reading in this area as a form of my SDPD. I then composed a handbook covering major topics in modern English drama, which my students still use as a required material. This indicates my contribution to the development of the curriculum as a result of self-directed work. No one asked me to undertake this, but once they found it useful and applicable, they adopted it as part of the programme materials used by other teachers.

Although this represents only one participant, I found it to be an interesting example, reflecting the professionalism of this teacher, as well as the central role he likes to play in improving teaching materials. Omar's willingness to inform the curriculum system can therefore be seen as representing Knowles' (1980) view that a self-directed learner "has learning needs closely related to changing social roles" (Marriam, 2001, p. 5). When I asked Omar why he pursued SDPD, he stated: "*I have never allowed myself to remain stagnant as a professional ... because I want to be a better teacher and I believe that I have the courage to change the scenario of language teaching.*" This indicates that the contribution to curriculum development can be part of long-term goal, i.e. that of changing the scenario of EFL teaching.

6.5.2.4 The Introduction of a New Curriculum

The introduction of any new curriculum or technology appears to stimulate teachers to use SDL, as this enables them to cope efficiently with meeting the new course/curriculum requirements, particularly in the absence of institutional support. Omar noted how a change in the curriculum had led him to practise SDPD, in order to enhance his competence in a specific area of teaching:

I spent a decade doing the same job until the introduction in 2010 of E-learning and E-testing. Since then, my focus has shifted towards a new world of technology, particularly EFL with ICT (i.e. information and communication technology). To cope with this requirement of the course, I had to teach myself how to conduct my lessons from a new perspective [...] So, now I am now 50% language teacher and 50% computer professional, specialising in E-learning and E-testing. This means that my offline SDPD activities (such as delivering seminars and workshops) are all now basically done through ICT. Last semester, I delivered a presentation on ICT in ELT. From next month, I will be working on a different project, which is entitled 'Class(room) Wall Technology with

Teachers'. This covers the struggle between teacher and technology and attempting to ascertain which is superior and who will prove the most successful in the long run. This means that all of my SDPD is basically focussed on benefiting this innovative field of E-learning and E-testing.

Thus, SDPD immediately fulfils the needs of Omar in terms of: (1) learning how to use technology (E-learning in the field of EFL); (2) how to teach students by drawing on a new perspective; and (3) how to become an expert in a new field through SDL, i.e. participating in conferences and publishing academic papers, which indicates a high level of knowledge and professionalism. This highlights how the introduction of any changes to the curriculum or methods of teaching can prompt teachers to pursue SDPD in an attempt to meet the requirements of these changes in an efficient manner.

6.5.3 Administrative Reasons

6.5.3.1 Teacher Evaluation Report

The qualitative data from interview one shows teacher evaluation reports motivating teachers to develop themselves through SDPD. Zack confirmed this aspect, noting that the reason that he had commenced pursuing peer observation as an activity of SDPD was to prepare himself for formal observation: *"I used to ask my friends to attend my classes and give feedback before having the formal observation. This worked well and I started to get used to being observed."* The results of questionnaire item (39) reveal that over half of the responses (65%) emphasised the importance of evaluation reports as an external factor contributing to their SDPD, with only 8% stating it to be only slightly important and 5% as not at all (see Figure 6.13). This high percentage reflects the advantage of teacher evaluation and the key role it indirectly plays in

encouraging teachers to pursue SDPD. Subsequently, these reports have an indirect impact on teacher SDL and in some cases can work as an external motivation.

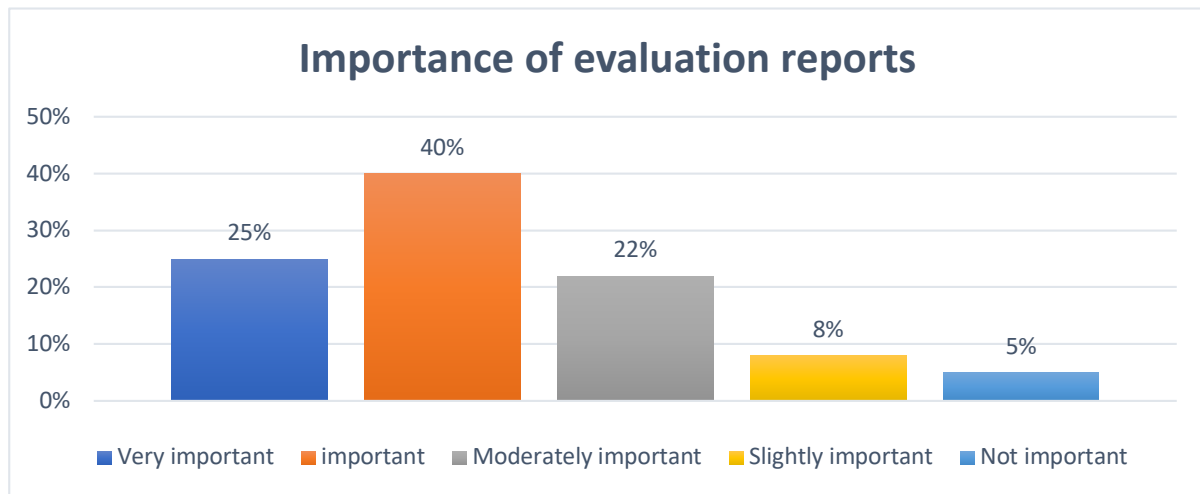


Figure 6.13: Importance of evaluation reports

6.5.3.2 Obtaining Administrative Positions

The quantitative data from questionnaire item 25 shows that a small proportion (28%) of the participants practised SDPD to obtain promotion and high ranking administrative positions. However, this proved less frequent in comparison to other listed purposes. The statistical results reveal that the most popular consist of academic purposes (85%), then cultural and environmental purposes (49%), followed by administrative purposes (i.e. obtaining promotion) (28%), and social purposes (e.g. social reputation) (23%) (see Figure 6.14). The most interesting of the other purposes mentioned by the respondents was the ability to ‘think outside the box’.

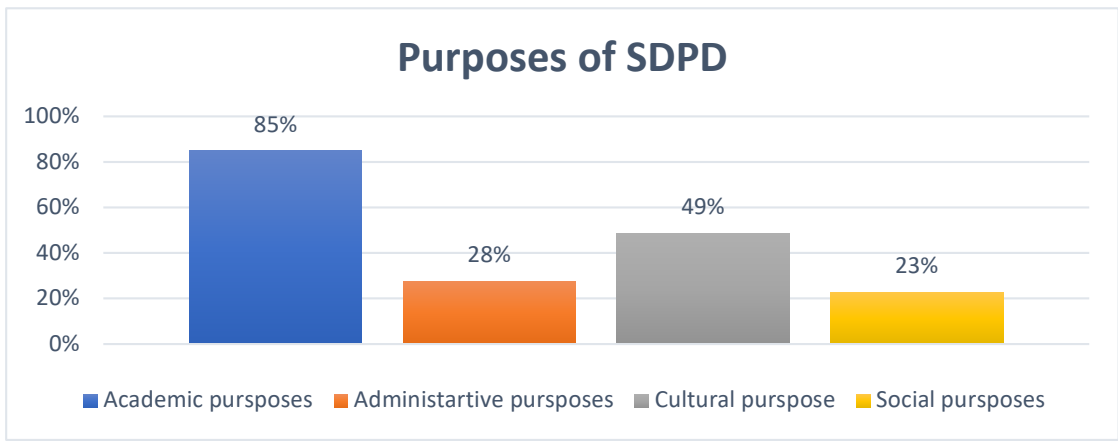


Figure 6.14: Purposes of SDPD

Furthermore, according to quantitative data derived from questionnaire question (26) (Based on your experience, rank the following factors that drive you to pursue SDPD according to the level of its importance,) the overall results show all the reasons mentioned are important to varying degrees (see Figure 6.15).

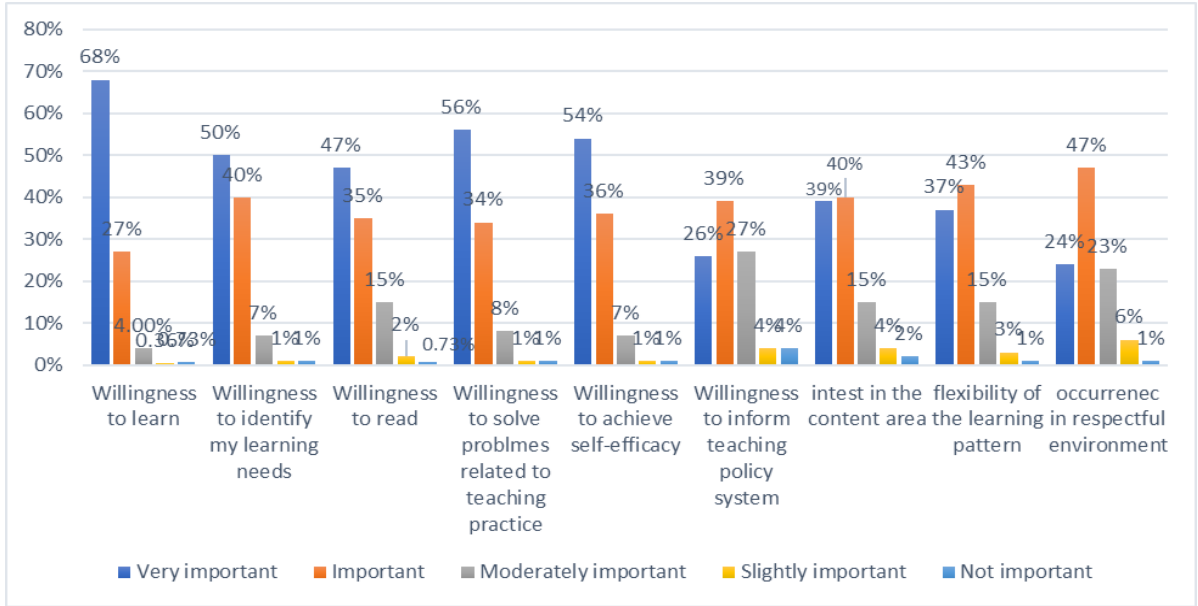


Figure 6.15: Reasons for pursuing SDPD according to level of importance

Willingness to learn was revealed as the most important reason for pursuing SDPD with (95%). This was followed by a willingness to solve problems associated with teaching practice, willingness to achieve self-efficacy, and willingness to read at (90%) each. Identifying

learning needs came after at (82%), followed by flexibility of learning pattern at (80%), and interest in content area at (79%). Occurrence in a respectful environment chosen by the teacher was also important at (71%). Although informing the policy system is not an academic factor, (65%) of teachers considered it an important reason to pursue SDPD. Thus, we can understand that reasons pertaining to academic and pedagogical development received significantly greater importance than personal and political reasons, such as contributing to teaching policy system, learning for interest, and learning in a respectful environment.

In summary: This section has presented the findings regarding the contributing factors to, or reasons for, pursuing SDPD, based on the experiences of EFL teachers in Saudi universities. The data identified three main categories: (1) personal reasons; (2) academic reasons; and (3) administrative reasons. Personal reasons included the following six areas: (1) autonomy; (2) self-empowerment; (3) motivation; (4) learning styles; (5) self-evaluation; and (6) professional identity. The academic reasons were focussed on two areas: firstly, improving teaching knowledge and secondly conducting research. Finally, there were a number of administrative reasons, which focussed on the following three areas: firstly, teacher evaluation reports; secondly, the introduction of a new curriculum; and thirdly, obtaining administrative positions.

Other practical reasons were also important but to a lesser extent than the above-mentioned ones. The following section will present findings pertaining to the challenges and limitations of SDPD.

6.6 Challenges and Limitations of SDPD

This section examines the findings from the semi-structured interview one and online questionnaires related to the third question of this research, which focuses on the challenging factors potentially inhibiting teachers from pursuing SDPD. The data reveals that participants

demonstrated a variety of factors inhibiting them from pursuing this form of PD (including contextual factors), which vary according to the learning context. The challenges were therefore broadly divided into two main categories, including the challenges concerning offline SDPD and the challenges pertaining to online SDPD.

6.6.1 Challenges Pertaining to Offline SDPD

6.6.1.1 Time Issues

The teachers found the lack of time and the inflexibility of the timing of some PD sessions² to be challenging. The quantitative results from the questionnaire item (45) (To what level do you agree that time constitutes an inhibiting factor for pursuing SDPD?) reveal that the majority of the respondents agreed that a lack of time is an inhibiting factor preventing them from pursuing their SDPD, i.e. 47% agreed and 30% strongly agreed, while only 8% disagreed and 1% strongly disagreed. The remainder of the respondents (14%) did not report an opinion either way (see Figure 5.16).

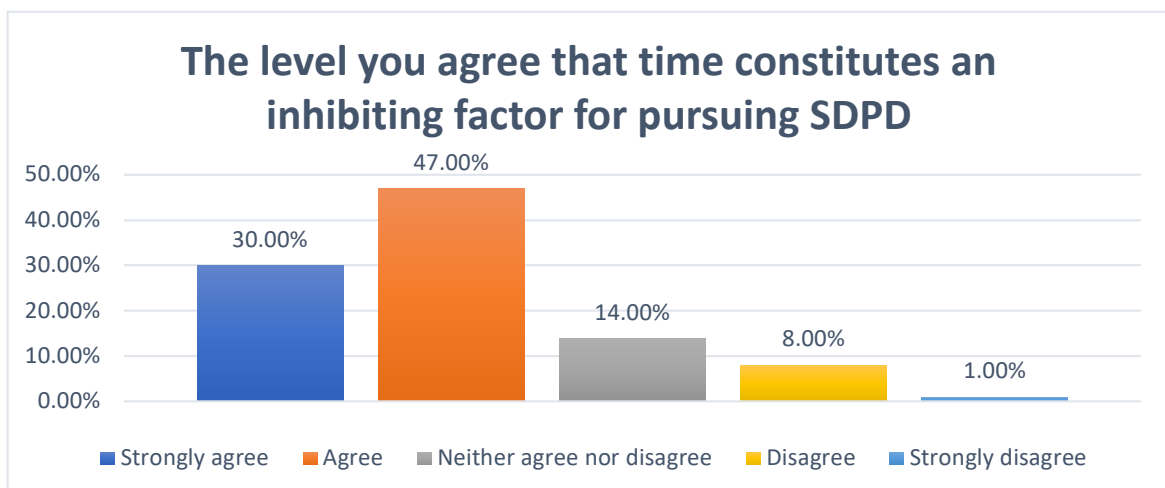


Figure 6.16: To what level do you agree that time constitute an inhibiting factor for pursuing SDPD?

² The PD sessions that being attended out of personal choice.

Furthermore, the qualitative data from interview one shows time as an issue in the pursuit of SDPD. Marwan asserted that time represents a major challenge when it comes to practising SDPD, commenting that: *“the major hurdle I encountered was that I had to find the time ... to complete a learning course while being fully occupied already with job-related duties and responsibilities.”* Nouf concurred, adding that family responsibilities leave her with less time to practise SDPD: *“finding time for SDPD is a big challenge for a working woman, especially when you have kids.”* An additional factor was found to arise when offline PD sessions take place during times that conflict with the teacher’s teaching schedule. Leen noted that *“what prevents me from attending morning PD courses is that the time often conflicts with my lectures. This can mean I end up cancelling my attendance, because I have to do my work no matter how important the PD session.”*

When the participants were asked how they would be able to overcome the challenge of the lack of time, they provided two strategies: (1) setting regular schedules to remind themselves; and (2) pursuing SDPD via online platforms, i.e. due to these being accessible at all times. For example, Marwan proposed formulating daily plans for practising SDPD, noting that *“the time factor poses a challenge at all times. Therefore, I overcome this problem by setting a schedule each day for informal SDPD.”*

Harvey supported this strategy, noting that:

In term of individual development, if teachers can organise their time well, they can develop themselves quite a lot [...] regarding offline PD sessions, this is very difficult in the UK, and development can only take place in fixed weeks within the year. In the UK, teachers are very busy throughout the year. In Saudi Arabia, you can have time to undertake SDPD, things are more flexible there and we are able to go home once we have

finished our work commitments. This flexibility means that no one is constrained by time when it comes to PD, particularly Saudi EFL university teachers.

However, it should be noted that this is Harvey's personal experience within specific contexts. Harvey's view is contradicted by previous statements that EFL university teachers in the Saudi context face difficulties in finding time for SDPD as a result of their heavy workload and/or family responsibilities. These contradicting claims reveal a disagreement regarding the issue of time. However, an observation of the social circumstances of these teachers reveals that female teachers with children have a far higher level of caring responsibilities, while male teachers have less responsibilities and thus have a greater amount of time to set up plans for learning, particularly when free from teaching duties.

It is significant that the findings from interview two of the case study demonstrate that this issue related to time can be overcome by practising SDPD via online platforms such as WhatsApp. HKM (who is a mother of two children) confirmed that VCoP as a model of online SDPD has addressed the problem of time:

Our teaching loads and busy lives can mean we can't find the time for our PD. But being in the WhatsApp learning group has reduced the challenge of time for me. Before, I could never find the time, but now, especially as my phone is always with me, I can do things when my kids are sleeping. I have access whenever I find I have a bit of free time. I used to tell myself that I would read about this or whatever when the semester was over, but being in this learning group has given me the opportunity to avoid postponing such things.

In summary: Although the majority of the teachers found time a challenging factor, they were able to apply a number of strategies to address this issue, i.e. practising SDPD by means of online platforms, setting daily schedules, or pursuing it during long breaks.

However, further challenges tend to emerge once the issue of time has been addressed, including geographical mobility, which is discussed in detail below.

6.6.1.2 Geographical Mobility

Pursuing some forms of offline SDPD (i.e. joining PD courses, workshops and conferences)³ can result in a number of obstacles. The qualitative data from interview one shows that, for some of the participants, travelling to attend or pursue any type of SDPD was a challenge. Emma (who works as an EFL teacher and a programme leader in a small remote city) confirmed that the geographical mobility for the purposes of SDPD can prove difficult, particularly in the absence of institutional support, i.e. funding and permission to take time off from work to travel:

Just needing to travel to attend face-to-face courses is an issue. Location is a big factor, especially if you are working in a less developed or remote city. Being in (X) city is not like being in Riyadh or Jeddah, where you can easily attend any of the courses available.

Travelling between locations requires time, money, effort and, in some cases (i.e. during working hours), official approval. Saud confirmed Emma's point, highlighting that the number of PD courses in his city is limited, so attending other high quality courses or conferences requires travelling, which incurs additional cost: *“usually such courses would not be for free, and they might cost a bit, especially in my case where there are not many courses in my city, which means additional costs.”*

³ Joining PD courses, workshops and conferences out of personal choice/self-directed decision.

In addition, the TPD policy system in Saudi universities does not appear to support travelling abroad for the purposes of SDPD. Emma asserted that university regulations do not permit travelling for attending SDPD during work periods:

We are not permitted to travel abroad to attend SDPD. We can do it during our vacations, but that is our time to relax and spend more time with our families, not for PD. This isn't helped by the removal of the short vacations, which means we can't use them for personal development.

This highlights the impact on SDPD of the new changes in the national vacation system, i.e. the reduction in the number of short breaks.

6.6.1.3 Lack of Institutional Support

The qualitative analysis of the interview one and the questionnaires reveal that a lack of institutional support (i.e. a contextual factor) constitutes a major issue preventing teachers from pursuing SDPD. Challenges regarding institutional external support were grouped under three sub-categories, as discussed in further detail below: (1) lack of morale support; (2) lack of financial support; and (3) lack of political support (i.e. flexible work policies).

- **Lack of Moral Support**

The qualitative data from interview one reveals that the lack of morale support from university administration discourages teachers from continuing SDPD. Leen (an active self-directed teacher) argued that, although SDPD is self-initiated, the institution needs to support teachers' morale through the creation of a conducive learning environment and offering rewards:

Sometimes, even when we do things informally, we still need the administration's assistance and support. There is a lack of this in most cases, which discourages and demotivates us from doing things by ourselves, especially when we are given no

recognition or incentives. A positive outcome could encourage me to do more things independently and develop other areas of teaching, including increasing the pace, and also practising my PD consistently, because there is no magic here, it takes time to get things done.

This suggests that, although SDPD is grounded on SDL, administrations retain an indirect impact on this kind of learning. In particular, supporting morale can work effectively in motivating teachers to pursue SDPD. Mackenzie (2007) emphasised the importance of teacher's morale and its impact on the quality of teaching. Lumsden (1998) argued that administrators can improve teacher's morale by empowering and acknowledging their expertise, thus increasing their productivity, resulting in a positive influence on students' attitudes and achievement. Collaborative learning has been found to facilitate emotional support from peers, particularly in the form of "thanking, complimenting and congratulating" (Cansoy, 2017, p. 291). Cansoy (ibid) also emphasised the importance of emotional support from peers (in particular from other teachers) for creating a culture of trust and support within the community (p. 291).

However, although I recognise the importance of peer emotional support, I feel that it is unable to compensate for a lack of support for morale from the administration, which may be due to a lack of recognition of SDPD as form of PD. At the same time incompetent or resentful administrators may compromise teachers' morale, inhibiting the undertaking of professional improvement. This was highlighted by Mark, who stated that jealous programme leaders can refuse to offer any form of support, in order prevent professional growth in others: "*many leaders do not like their workers to be highly qualified and will prevent workers from upgrading their skills.*" McNamara (1999) also highlighted that supervisors can have an influence over self-directed learners in the workplace by encouraging them to build positive

attitudes towards learning. However, the results of the current study reveal that there can be a negative influence from supervisors or programme leaders, working in these academic institutions. This results in a need to introduce specific regulations to minimise their negative impact, in particular to guarantee teachers' rights to practise PD, thus creating a fairer working environment.

- **Lack of Financial Support**

Lack of (or inadequate) funding proved to be a central issue for most teachers, inhibiting them from taking part in some PD courses, workshops and conferences. The statistical results of the questionnaire item (43) show that more than half of the participants agreed that a lack of funding constitutes a major challenge, in particular for pursuing the PD, i.e. 66% agreed and 2% strongly disagreed, with only 10% disagreeing (see Figure 6.17).

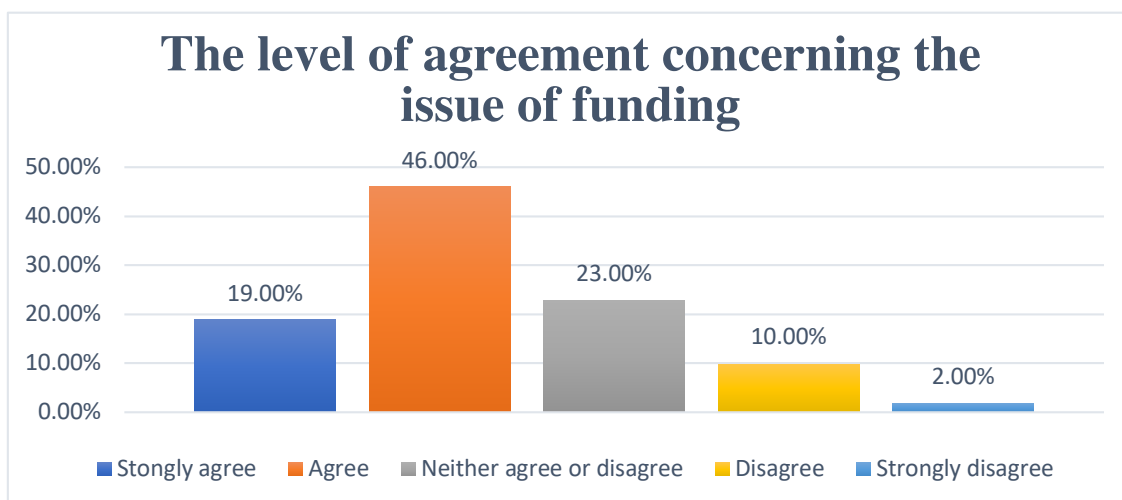


Figure 6.17: The level of agreement concerning the issue of funding

This challenge increases for foreign (i.e. non-Saudi) teachers. Omar (an Indian university EFL teacher), complained that, despite his strong desire to attend PD courses, even if this required travelling outside the country, his administration fails to provide any kind of financial support. Furthermore, this lack of support was attributed to the regulations of TPD in the Saudi higher

education system, which only provides a financial commitment to Saudi teachers. This infers that teachers such as Omar would need to personally cover the costs of attending any PD event, Omar stated that:

Sometimes, it is all related to financial support and lack of funding. When you go to a conference, there tend to be fees, which is off-putting. Even if we go in order to present a paper, we have to pay a registration fee. Who is going to recompense us for this expense? In India, where education is very cheap, I pay only 1000 INR for a conference [...] which means it is affordable. However, when they know I'm coming from Saudi Arabia they charge me more. In this case, should I pay it from my own pocket and use the college name? This happened on one occasion when I attended a conference under the name of my university, but when I asked for recompense on my return they did not give anything. As an institution, they are not financially supportive.

Harvey agreed with Omar, stating that *“in terms of cost, Saudi Arabia does not pay for foreign teachers, only for Saudis. This means there is a money issue ... So, when it is expensive, I tend not to go.”* This finding highlights the need to provide financial support for all, and that policy makers should recognise this need, due to the role such support can play in encouraging teachers to continue developing their professionalism. A further important point concerns the issue of justice. Considering the cases of both Omar and Harvey, it highlights that all teachers need to have equal treatment when undertaking the same job and no discrimination should take place in any educational institution. This is particularly important as I believe that the impact of this limitation is not confined to teachers' PD but also has an impact on the students and the overall outputs of these academic institutions.

- **Lack of Political Support (flexible work policies)**

Qualitative data from the interview one reveals that a heavy workload and the absence of TPD policies facilitating and promoting teacher's SDPD represent major challenges for almost all teachers within this context. Harvey (a British university EFL Preparatory Year teacher), emphasised this issue by comparing the situation to his previous working conditions in the UK, stating that:

The greatest challenge in Saudi Arabia is getting away from work. You say to your manager 'I have a class on the day, I have a course I want to attend. Can I leave early?' or 'can I not teach on Thursday?' The trouble is that they tend not to be flexible in Saudi Arabia.

Harvey's statement reflects the lack of flexibility in the policy system of Saudi universities, which fails to support the pursuit of SDPD during working hours. This lack of any official system contributing to teacher's SDPD is therefore a discouraging factor, as teachers can assume that participating will have a negative impact on the quality of their teaching and the overall outcome of these institutions. Emma suggested that, in order to overcome such challenges, universities could reward teachers undertaking SDPD with other kinds of support:

Universities could give incentives for teachers to perform SDPD, even if it is something for their own benefit, because, in the end, it will enhance the out-put of the university. So, if the university does not offer PD itself, it should give incentives for pursuing it externally. Even if they do not give financial support, they could give time, or tell us to use our emergency leave time to attend. Teachers need to be supported by their administrations and departments.

6.6.1.4 SDPD Means Nothing When You Apply for a Job

A further concern relates to the issue of the acknowledgement of SDPD, which is entirely self-driven and, in most cases, pursued informally. The qualitative data from interview one shows that some teachers avoided SDPD due to it being an unacknowledged factor when applying for jobs. Mark asserted that he pays little attention to SDPD because of its limited potential, i.e. its lack of influence when it comes to securing a job, promotion or other credits. Mark remarked that:

In reality, I do not care much for informal SPDP, because it means nothing when one applies for a job. It is like little discussions where one delivers something they have tried (often) twenty years previously and have not changed since.

Theoretically speaking, Mark is demonstrating the argument of Brookfield (1984) that self-directed learners assume their learning is neither significant nor valid, as a result of the predominant belief that valid learning only takes place within formal educational institutions (p. 68). Brookfield further asserted that this influences the learner's ability to make a change at both individual and social levels. As long as the belief that SDPD is not valid remains, it indicates that there is a need to address this matter.

Omar insisted that SDPD needs to be acknowledged, appreciated and rewarded, in order to ensure that teachers maintain their engagement:

The only thing we need is acknowledgement, whatever we do (either formally or informally), in order to encourage us to do more. Everything needs to count, even if I pay for it from my own pocket. Something should be done regarding this matter. The administration and those in charge should understand the importance of submitting a paper or undertaking a presentation and should therefore encourage such activities,

particularly as they can't be imposed on us. Non-Saudi teachers should also be supported, otherwise the system will lose many brilliant professionals.

This highlights the issue of encouraging EFL university teachers to engage with additional academic work that, while beneficial, is not officially required, i.e. writing papers, presenting at conferences and joining up-to-date PD courses. This requires the issuing of specific regulations to support and value SDPD and informal efforts made by teachers.

6.6.1.5 A lack of Job Stability and Security

The rapid political changes taking place in Saudi Arabia, along with the introduction of new educational policies, have resulted in university faculty members (particularly non-Saudi nationals) experiencing a lack of job stability and security. This can also lead them to avoid pursuing any further SDPD. Harvey commented that:

For me as a foreign teacher, I feel a lack of stability, which might not exist with Saudi teachers, due to the changes happening in Saudi Arabia. Some foreign teachers think that they might not remain here for much longer, so ask themselves they should undertake such self-development. They tend to prefer to save money for the future and move on back to a country where they have stability and security.

This indicates the critical role of political stability on the continuity of teacher's SDPD, which requires a stable environment in which teachers feel safe and have a sense of belonging. Thus, job security is essential for motivating teachers to pursue PD in general and SDPD in particular. Again, the political changes and economical reformation taking place in the country (as noted by Harvey) may cause foreign teachers to leave, particularly when they feel unsure as to whether their contracts will be renewed for the following year. This can have a negative impact on their SDPD, along with the quality of teaching and the future diversity of EFL university

teaching staff. I believe that these changes should work for, and not against, the development and improvement of the higher education system.

6.6.1.6 The Low Quality of PD Content

The qualitative data from interview one further highlights the issue of the low quality of the content and presenters of some PD courses and workshops in Saudi universities, which can result in teachers' lack of participation and negative attitudes. For example, Saud stated that he finds "*low quality of the content*" challenging, which leads to him avoiding such courses. He added that a further concern was the incompetence of some presenters, i.e. "*not to mention the challenge of the incompetence of presenters.*" This indicates that the low quality of available formal PD opportunities may reflect the lack of effort exerted by administrations and the PD providers on TPD, particularly those designed for EFL teachers. Leen agreed with Saud, adding that "*repeating the same content of the PD workshops and courses every semester is frustrating. I start to think of it as a waste of time and so lose interest.*"

Leen's statement reveals a critical shift in a teacher's perception of PD courses and workshops, i.e. from being meaningful sessions to meaningless events that waste teachers' precious time and efforts. This negative result needs to be taken into consideration, otherwise it will have a negative influence on teachers' perceptions of SDPD.

Furthermore, according to the quantitative data drawn from questionnaire question (41): (*Based on your experience, rank the following factors that inhibit you from pursuing SDPD according to the level of agreement*), the overall results show all of the factors mentioned appear to be challenging; however, varying degrees of level agreement were noticed (see Figure 6.18).

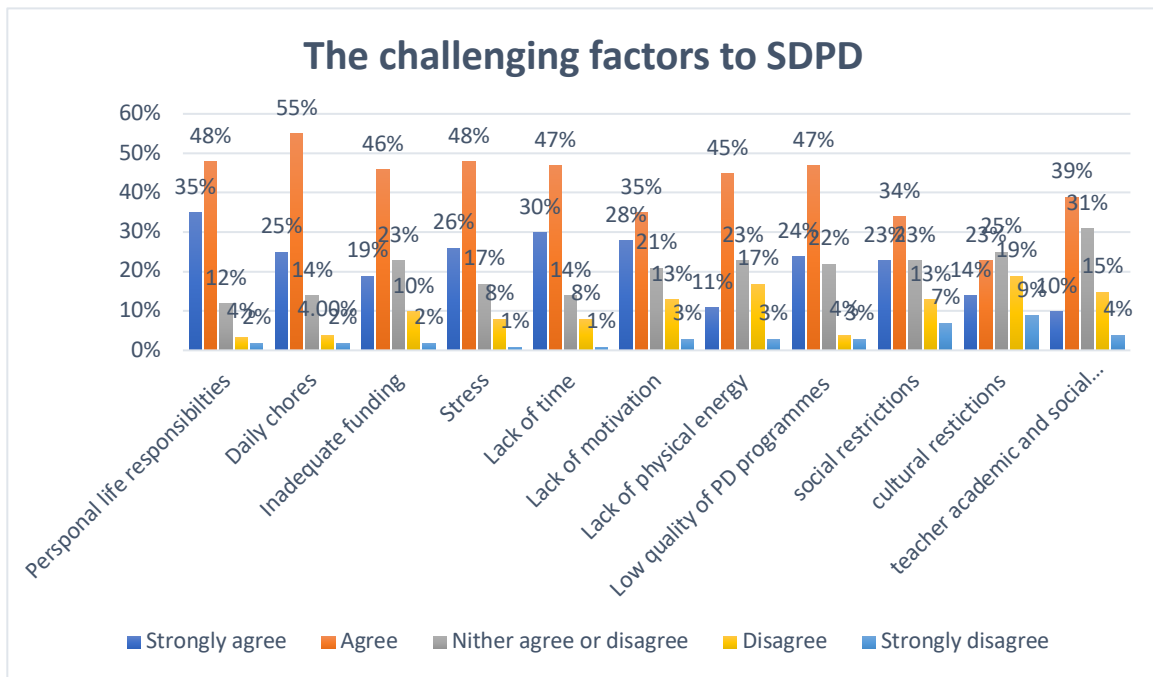


Figure 6.18: The challenging pertaining to offline SDPD

Personal responsibilities appear to be the challenging factor that most inhibits teachers pursuit of SDPD (83%), followed by daily chores at 80%. As mentioned earlier in this section, although lack of time represents a major challenging factor at (77%), being under stress exerts a similar influence as an inhibitor (74%). Practically speaking, almost two thirds of the participants appear to agree that the low quality of PD programmes offered by their universities prevent them from attaining these opportunities (out of personal choice) (71%). Looking into the contextual factors, inadequate financial support appears to be a critical factor affecting teachers' engagement with SDPD at (65%), followed by lack of motivation at (63%). Lack of physical energy is another factor influencing teachers' engagement with SDPD, but it is not as significant as previous factors. Socio-cultural factors, surprisingly do not score highly; despite the research having been conducted in a Saudi conservative context where a lot of practices remain subject to social and cultural restrictions. For example, there are restrictions placed on females' traveling abroad, and separation between male and female teachers in collaborative offline SDPD activities. The findings showed that although 57% agreed that social restrictions

are an inhibiting factor, only 37% agreed that sex segregation is an inhibiting factor. This result, in my view, could be due to the prevalence of social networking platforms, upon which collaborative learning becomes feasible and accessible to anyone regardless of gender, which is particularly relevant in the Saudi context (Alsolamy, 2017). Teachers' academic and social reputation was also identified in the literature as an inhibiting factor (Althobaiti, 2012); however, only 49% appeared to agree that this factor might prevent EFL university teachers from engaging in SDPD. From this comparison, we can see that reasons pertaining to socio-cultural context (e.g. female traveling issues, sex segregation), were of much less influence than personal factors (e.g. daily responsibilities), psychological factors (e.g. motivation, stress), or contextual factors (e.g. funding, time, quality of PD).

6.7 Challenges pertaining to online SDPD

In relation to the previous category, the data from the semi-structured interview one demonstrates that contextual and personal factors have an impact on teacher's online SDPD. This section will therefore present the issues present in undertaking SDPD by means of online platforms. Although technology has facilitated learning and practising PD, teachers continue to encounter a number of challenges, including: (1) that it is time consuming; (2) the validity of online content; (3) a lack of privacy; and (4) misunderstanding online discourses. These aspects are discussed in further detail below.

6.7.1 It Is Time Consuming and Sometimes Distracting

Despite the previous finding that online SDPD saves time and is available at all times, teachers also experience it as time consuming. This is confirmed by the qualitative data from interview one and elaborated by Emma, who stated that the abundance of online sources and materials results in it taking a considerable amount of time to identify specific, or relevant content:

YouTube is the same. There are a lot of good sources if I want to teach certain topics, but it takes time to watch several YouTube videos, to find out if it works with you and matches your needs. This means you are often going on to the next one to see if you can find better content. It's time consuming.

Harvey agreed, adding that the huge amount of online data requires time to consider and can thus be distracting:

I used to use apps and online platforms a lot, but now I cannot find the time. This is why I stopped using many of them, like the Facebook and WhatsApp. I could find myself getting over 300 messages in a two-hour period, and it was impossible to read and reply to all of these messages. WhatsApp could be beneficial if used for the purposes of development, and many people use social media for PD, but I personally do not use such tools as they distract me from what I need to do [...] I also avoid having online discussions because they are time consuming.

The finding suggests that, despite time flexibility being an advantage of online SDPD, it can be time consuming, particularly when having to deal with the huge deluge of information available on those platforms. Moreover, the difference in the time zone of some online courses can prove challenging. Leen revealed that time differences led her to withdraw from an online course, stating that: *"I registered once in an online course and had to drop it because it started at midnight."* Hence, we can understand that, although the difference in the time zone presents a number of challenges, these tend to be confined to interactive sessions or live courses.

6.7.2 Validity of Online Content

The validity of learning content is of prime importance. The qualitative data from interview one reveals a serious issue with the quality of the content available on some online platforms.

Five out of fourteen participants highlighted that the validity of content cannot be guaranteed for most online sources, due to a lack of references, or not being peer reviewed by experts. Thus, teachers need to go through the additional process of verifying any information they wish to use. This issue was highlighted by Emma, who works as an EFL university teacher and a programme leader, in particular in relation to an incident with a novice teacher who relied heavily on information available on the Internet. This led to the frequent use of inaccurate information:

In my case, I have a new Saudi teacher, who used to ask a lot of questions regarding grammar, and when I asked her where, as a native speaker, she obtained a particular rule or point, she replied that it was from online websites. I told her ‘this is garbage, do not get anything else from these sites because they are inaccurate’. So, I think this is the limitation with regard to online sources, because there is so much stuff out there and you have to be careful where you get your information.

Deem also questioned the objectivity of online information, noting that “*online information may be subjective, unlike other sources of information, such as books, which can be more objective.*” Although this is a highly personal viewpoint, it reflects the fact that not all online content is valid and confirms the previous limitation of the time necessary to validate the available information concerning online platforms, as well as to find reliable sources. Marwan added that in-App advertisements appear on the whole screen during searches, which can take time to remove, and sometimes cannot be blocked: “*some inauthentic materials and news creep into such apps.*” Such irrelevant content can prove irritating when time is limited, as well as disturbing a teacher’s concentration.

6.7.3 Misunderstanding of Online Discourse

The qualitative data from interview one clarifies the issue of misunderstanding in relation to discussions on online platforms. The discourse here refers to teachers online written discussions. Harvey asserted that, unlike face-to-face discussions, those online can be misinterpreted or difficult to understand. This leads him to prefer traditional face-to-face discussions and to see them as more effective:

One disadvantage of online discussion is the issue of misunderstanding. This is despite being a face-to-face discussion, when you are able to clarify things and ask questions. However, people have now started to use voice notes to make it more communicative and active [...] as you can misunderstand a lot of things in a message. I also do not find it easy to grasp a concept just from reading, I prefer to listen and discuss it with someone, in order to understand.

Harvey emphasised the importance of context in facilitating understanding. Emma agreed, adding that this limitation occurs in online courses: *“I once joined an online programme, but I did not like it that much because I realised that I prefer face-to face courses.”* My impression was that Emma found the online course somewhat tedious, due to it being less interactive.

6.7.4 I Need to Protect my Privacy

Despite the feasibility of maintaining anonymity on many online platforms, some require the handing over of personal information, including telephone numbers and email addresses. These applications therefore cannot guarantee participants’ privacy, a factor that prompted some of the participants to avoid their use. Mark stated that he did not wish to use online platforms because of his belief in his need to protect his privacy:

Social media platforms are becoming a means of disseminating information. However, as these are generally informal means of relaying or gaining information, they create issues with regards to relevancy, privacy, and what is, and is not, work related. As there is world-wide concern over the lack of privacy, I attempt to avoid them except in formal situations that do not involve individuals using my private phone or email. I've no wish for students or work colleagues to phone me at 10 pm to ask about some work-related issue.

This suggests that some individuals have abandoned the use of online platforms that may compromise their privacy. This finding supports the findings of Rashidi et al. (2016), which identified the issue of privacy in relation to mobile instant messaging, and is thus a factor that needs to be considered by the developers of these online platforms. Leen, for example, highlighted that she only participated in online platforms where she was able to hide her identity because she does not wish to publicly share her points of weakness, even to her colleagues: *“I do not want my colleagues to know that I have a skill that needs improvement. So, it is a sensitive issue.”*

This section has established that a safe online environment, with guaranteed privacy, would create a more appealing context for teacher's learning, particularly for those for whom privacy is paramount.

6.8 Summary of the Chapter

This chapter presented a detailed account of the research findings drawn from different sources of data (semi-structured interviews and questionnaires), in order to answer the first three research questions. The analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data (including comparing, contrasting and synthesising) contributed to enriching the interpretation of the findings. These were classified under three main themes: (1) The nature of SDPD activities

(both individual and collaborative) pursued by EFL university teachers, including a full description of the main features of each type. (2) The reasons EFL university teachers pursue SDPD activities. (3) The challenges and limitations impeding EFL university teachers from pursuing SDPD activities. The following chapter outlines the results pertaining to the fourth theme, i.e. investigating the impact of adopting VCoP via WhatsApp on teachers' practice.

Chapter 7

The Findings of the Case Study Stage VCoP

“... maybe if WhatsApp is used for the purpose of development, then it might be beneficial, and many people could use social media for PD...”

Muhammed, from the mixed-methods stage

7.1 Introduction

This chapter is devoted to presenting findings pertinent to the second stage of this study in order to answer the fourth research question: ‘How does participating in a virtual community of practice (VCoP) through a ‘WhatsApp group’, as a form of SDPD, relate to EFL university teachers’ teaching practice? It presents the teachers’ qualitative accounts of their experiences — taken from the interviews conducted and supported by data from the online observation (screenshots of the teachers’ discussions) — regarding (1) the conceptualisation of WhatsApp as a context of virtual learning and its importance for the teachers; (2) the potential of the VCoP via WhatsApp to facilitate the teachers’ SDL; (3) the limitations that affected the teachers’ learning; and (4) the impact of SDL via WhatsApp on their actual teaching practice. The reason for investigating these areas is to contextualise the findings and make more sense of them in order to understand the impact of learning in this context on teachers’ practice, and to complement and triangulate the findings from the first mixed-methods stage regarding online collaborative SDPD with evidence from actual practice.

Prior to introducing the features of WhatsApp as a medium of collaborative online SDPD, it is important to determine how the teachers conceptualised learning via a WhatsApp group. As mentioned earlier in this study, WhatsApp is an instant messaging platform for mobile devices

that allows its users to conduct individual or group chats as well as exchange a wide variety of content (see Section 4.5). As Gerber et al. (2017) emphasise conceptualising the learning process in an online setting, AHA conceptualised WhatsApp as an online round table meeting, noting that “*this WhatsApp group is like an online meeting table where the English teachers gather to share their experiences, give their opinions and learn new teaching techniques and methods.*” In this way, AHA’s definition provides a basic summary of how EFL university teachers consider WhatsApp and how it functions in terms of learning rather than just communication. In other words, it reveals the potential of establishing a VCoP via WhatsApp, which is a model of SDPD that is investigated thoroughly in this chapter. This model in particular has been selected due to its innovative features, as well as its current popularity as a learning method in teachers’ collaborative learning communities. Moreover, it is a notable method because teachers participate voluntarily in learning through sharing their own practices and mutual emotional support (Cansoy, 2017; Macià & García, 2016). In the Saudi higher education context, a study conducted by Alsolamy (2017) found that WhatsApp was regarded as “the main social platform that attracted significant usage among academic respondents (88%), Twitter (84%), Facebook (78%), and YouTube (63%)” (p. 245). Furthermore, that (94%) of faculty members in Saudi universities considered WhatsApp a useful and supportive tool for learning and improving their teaching practice, in addition to facilitating communication among faculty members and their students (Alsolamy, 2017).

7.2 The Importance of WhatsApp as a Context for Learning

7.2.1 The Nature and Content of Activities Used in the VCoP

In order to investigate the importance of the VCoP group thoroughly, it is important to examine the nature and focus of the activities conducted in the group in order to determine the level of its contribution to the teachers’ practice. When asked about the nature of the activities

conducted in the group, HKM revealed that they took the form of discussions and suggestions. To explain, she gave a general description of the nature of participation and how discussions were held, as shown in the following extract:

They are like suggestions and replies and teachers actually doing something. Like when BSA mentioned the mind maps strategy, she went and gave a workshop voluntarily on that topic, then teachers shared their own experiences with their students and pictures of the mind map developed by their students. So, I think it starts with a suggestion, and then teachers build up on the other experiences.

AHA described the quality of the content of the activities as rich, diverse, and difficult to classify. She also indicated that they should target both teachers and students. A brief account of her observation is presented in the following extract:

There are a lot and it is hard to describe each one, but in general some of these activities target both the students and teachers to help them in their teaching, such as ‘the mind maps’ that BSA suggested.

Results of the thematic analysis conducted to examine and classify the content of the WhatsApp discussions reveal five major areas of focus: (1) teaching methodology and theories (e.g. using L1 in L2 teaching, reflective teaching); (2) teaching materials (e.g. idioms, test banks); (3) student assessments (e.g. peer assessments, sharing and developing evaluation rubrics); (4) student motivation (e.g. using mind maps, using games, giving bounces); and (5) issues related to policy (e.g. unifying exams questions, teaching students the same skill throughout the academic year). However, as the focus of the WhatsApp discussion was open and not structured according to a predetermined agenda, the data were diverse and stemmed from the teachers’ needs, interests, and everyday incidents. For this reason, I am not able to provide a detailed

description of the content in this section because the findings do not belong to one category. Instead, I present a detailed account of each area under the relevant subtheme or category in order to contextualise the interpretation of the interviews and support this with the relevant evidence from the primary data.

7.3 Reasons for Implementing a VCoP via WhatsApp

My online observation of the teachers' daily discussions on WhatsApp revealed that what made this model of self-directed VCoP (via WhatsApp) effective was the combination of online and collaborative learning features. When I asked the teachers in interview two about their reasons for participating in the WhatsApp group, I found that allowing collaborative learning, ease of accessibility and use, informality of environment, and informality of language were the most common reasons for participation.

7.3.1 Allows Collaborative Learning

The qualitative data from interview two reveals that all the nine teachers in the group perceived it to be an important and useful medium, as it provided a wide range of opportunities for learning. Indeed, WhatsApp allows collaborative learning, and HKM argued that learning from others' experiences is the best way to learn, which reflects the way learning was conducted in this group. HKM stated:

I believe that the best way to professional development is to build on experience, whether our own experience or others'. So, having a group where some people are trying something out leads the way to other ideas you have never tried and things like that.

HKM's words indicate that learning collaboratively was an effective way of learning in the group because it allowed each member to take advantage of others' experiences by implementing different ideas and knowledge that may have been new or never practised before.

Interestingly, this finding supports a previous finding from the mixed-methods stage that collaborative learning allows learning from multiple perspectives, views and experiences (see Section 6.4.1.2). It also supports the findings of previous research regarding teachers' collaborative learning, which has demonstrated that it helps to reduce isolated learning efforts. Furthermore, this finding emphasises that collaborative learning develops a shared culture among teachers in terms of addressing student needs based on the shared goals and policies of academic institutions. In addition, it also helps to develop a mutual understanding of teachers' instructional goals, methods, problems, and solutions (Chong & Kong, 2012).

Professional growth was another reason given by the teachers for their participation in the group. AHA remarked that "*the main reason behind my participation is to develop myself in my career by being interested in my colleagues' teaching methods, especially those who have a degree in TESOL.*" This quote reveals the positive impact of having teachers with diverse educational backgrounds in the same group. It is important to note that the participants in this group were from different English-related majors: (3) education (TESOL), (4) English literature, and (2) translation. So, having teachers with a TESOL educational background benefitted other teachers who had never taken any TESOL course; i.e., those who were specialised in English literature or translation — as in my case — and hired to teach English because of their high GPA in English (see Section 2.4.1). As the following extract shows, AHA provided an example to justify her claims that the diversity of the teachers' educational backgrounds in this group was useful:

I would say that it is very important because it functions now like a TESOL reference. Although I am not participating in every discussion, I do search for some of the teaching techniques that teachers have mentioned; for example, the mind maps: I searched for it and I asked my students to do mind maps for the grammar rules [...] I normally read

teachers' contributions in my office hours. I have also attempted to directly apply some of the recommended teaching techniques, such as introducing some idioms to the students.

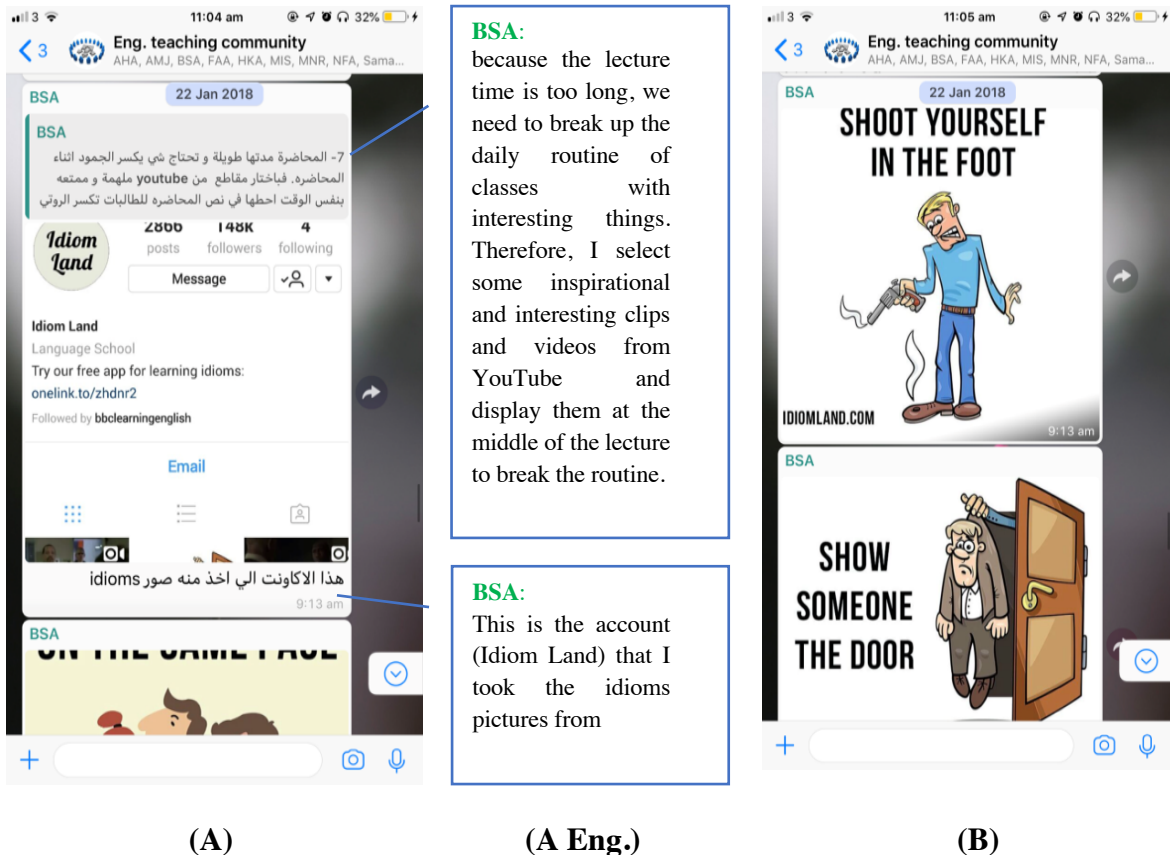


Figure 7.1: Shows two screenshots A&B of a sample of the teachers' daily WhatsApp discussions, and my translation of the Arabic in the first screenshot.

The screenshots show some of the teachers' suggested strategies for motivating students during long lectures by introducing a variety of useful and interesting English idioms (visualised with pictures and short clips from a free Instagram account called Idiom Land). The idea behind this activity was to motivate students through the unconscious learning of useful English content, thereby changing the atmosphere of the lecture. These screenshots reveal that student motivation was one of the major areas that attracted the attention of this group.

7.3.2 Ease of Accessibility and Use

According to the teachers' responses, ease of accessibility and use appears to be the main reason for participating in this VCoP. All nine teachers stated that the VCoP via WhatsApp was accessible anywhere and anytime through their phones as long as they were connected to the internet. HKM remarked that: "*it is there at your fingertips,*" and she supported her claim with an example:

Today, for example, when I brought up the grammar issue, the students were just in the exam, and it just crossed my mind, the issue of using the first language in teaching the second language. It was a question, and I needed to know how other teachers deal with this issue or if they have any evidence regarding certain ways or theories that have been tested on this matter.

This example illustrates a key feature of WhatsApp, which is asynchronisation. Asynchronisation allows content to be posted and retrieved easily and directly, without the need to wait for a specific time. At the time she needed to enquire about a particular issue, HKM posted it in the group and knew that replies would come later if no one was available to discuss it at the same time of posting. This example demonstrates another feature of WhatsApp groups, which is that anything can be shared when it comes to mind, before it is forgotten. In this way, asynchronisation reduces the chances of postponing learning, which can be considered a positive feature that facilitates immediate access to the learning context, and consequently keeps teachers engaged in learning. HKM supported this interpretation by stating that "*sometimes, even if we want to look for a certain issue or ask about it, we forget later because of our busy lives. Having the WhatsApp group facilitates posting about any issue easily, when I do not want to forget to discuss it.*" HKM also highlighted another useful feature of WhatsApp groups, which is the availability of the chat history, observing that:

[...] not only this, but it allows me and others to revisit the chats when we are free or when we need specific information. This feature, I think, does not exist in other offline mediums. I can look at their replies as soon as I am done with my work. It is also convenient; i.e., whenever an idea pops into your head, you can ask about it and share it immediately. The ease of using WhatsApp and the variety of its features are the main attractions for using it.

Samantha confirmed HKM's view and commented that she found learning via WhatsApp very convenient because it did not require her to separate herself from her social life for the sake of learning. She elaborated that sometimes she read and replied while she was dealing with her daily responsibilities, stating that:

I can just text you while I am feeding my child, 'What do you guys do with below average students?' and I will get multiple answers while they are busy with their families but still thinking and sharing, and that's the idea, learning and adding to the others' knowledge through this WhatsApp group.

In the above extract, Samantha highlighted two critical features of learning through WhatsApp: (1) the convenience of learning while carrying out multiple other tasks; and (2) the immediate access whenever the teacher needs to know about something. Linking this finding to the characteristics of individual SDPD as discussed earlier, in Section 6.3.2.3, it appears that these features also existed in the collaborative self-directed VCoP, especially when it was used informally, under no external control or predetermined conditions. This supports an earlier finding by Rashidi et al. (2016), who argued that the ease of contact and sharing content through WhatsApp facilitates its usability and adoption as a means for teachers' learning (see Section 4.5.). The following diagram summarises the online features that contributed to the ease of using VCoP via WhatsApp.

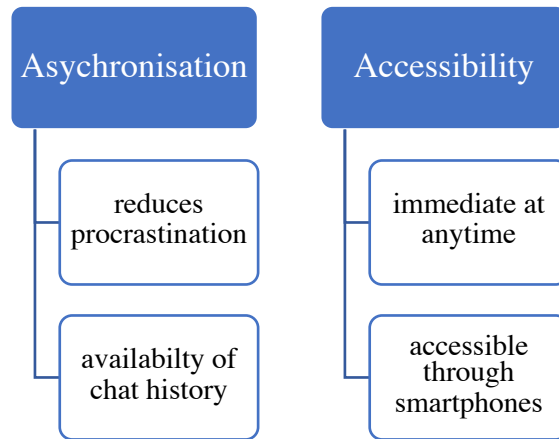


Figure 7.2: Online features of VCoP via WhatsApp

7.3.3 Informality of Environment

The informality of the environment (friendly environment) was a distinctive feature of the VCoP studied. According to the participant experiences, learning in an informal collaborative environment allowed them to learn comfortably. As the following extract shows, HKM emphasised that learning within an informal community made her feel comfortable during learning:

Because it is an informal community, it is more comfortable, it gives the space to express things freely, talk about any issue I like any time I like, with the language I like, and not really worry ‘Am I saying this right or not?’ ‘Did I make a typing error or not?’ as we are all friends, no one is above others and there are no judgements.

The above extract indicates that learning collaboratively in a friendly environment leads to the use of friendly language as a medium of communication, which is discussed in detail in the following section. Furthermore, the absence of formal external evaluation appears to be another reason for learning through this type of informal environment. HKM highlighted the freedom from being judged by others as a result of all the group members being friends. Furthermore,

AHA agreed with HKM and added that “*being informal makes you free and open to share more.*” Consequently, this indicates that an informal learning environment results in freedom, which in turn encourages teachers’ openness to share ideas and personal experiences, and eventually their participation.

On the other hand, AHA contradicted the view that learning in this context meant no evaluation, claiming that even in the informal learning context of the group she sometimes did not share her experiences, because she was afraid that the teachers might tell other teachers outside the group — such as the programme leaders or coordinators — about the strategies she used, leading to criticism or negative feedback that affected her overall evaluation and academic reputation. She explained that “*I did not participate in every topic because I am afraid I will be misjudged if I share a teaching technique, or it will affect my job performance evaluation.*” Although this example was given by only one participant, it may also be true for teachers who are more reserved. This example also indicates that the bureaucratic administrative system in Saudi universities might indirectly inhibit teachers from learning through sharing experiences and applying up-to-date teaching strategies. Thus, it can be concluded that such fears might work against the creation of a culture of shared teaching practices through the exchanging of teaching strategies even in informal learning environments.

7.3.4 Informality of Language

As mentioned above, informality of language represents a critical feature of this self-directed VCoP. According to the qualitative data obtained from interview two and the online observation, as the WhatsApp group was an informal context for learning, the teachers used informal language in their discussions, which consequently made them feel free, relaxed, and more comfortable. Furthermore, this informality or freedom of speech seems to have

encouraged daily interactions between teachers regarding their learning. In addition, the language used for the discussions and communication revealed a unique feature of this learning community. Informality of language occurred at different levels: (1) using simple everyday language (e.g. simple form of English, contractions, and emotional faces or Emojis ⁴(see Figure 7.3 C&D); (2) using Arabic (the mother tongue of all group members) (see Figure 7.3);

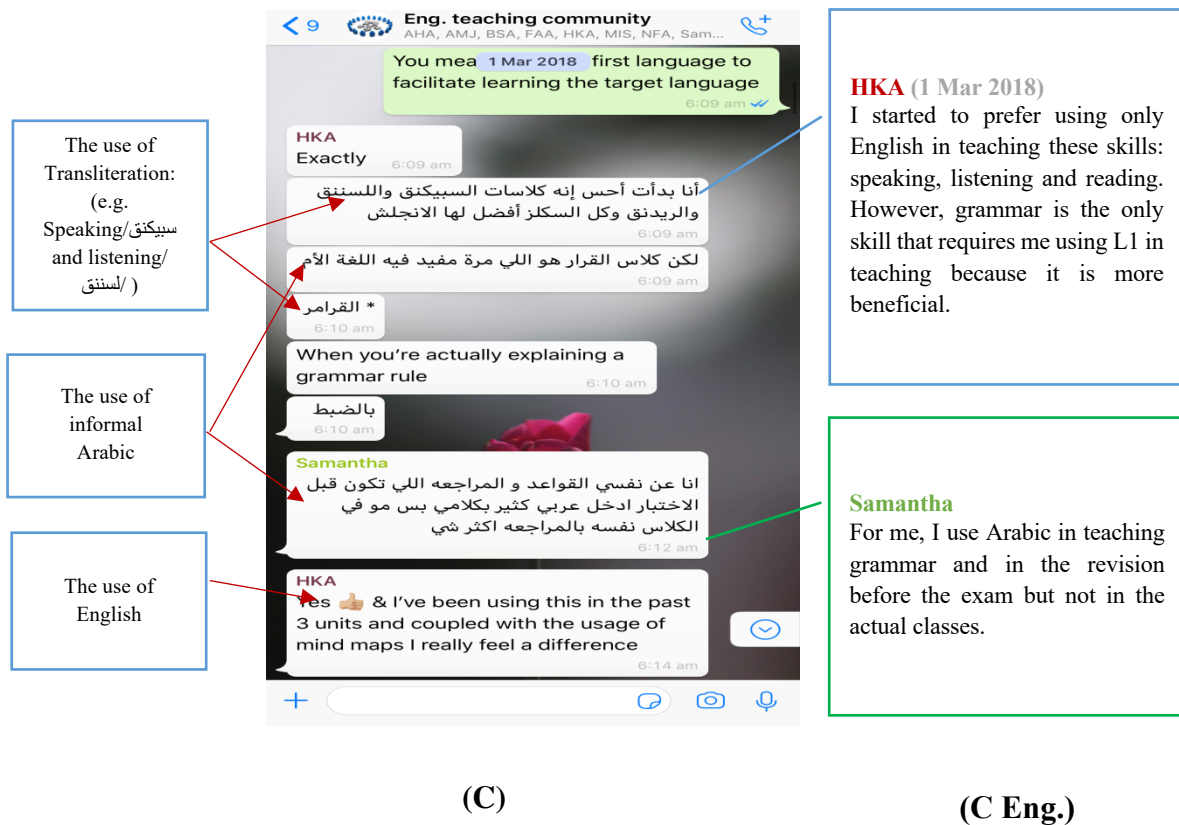
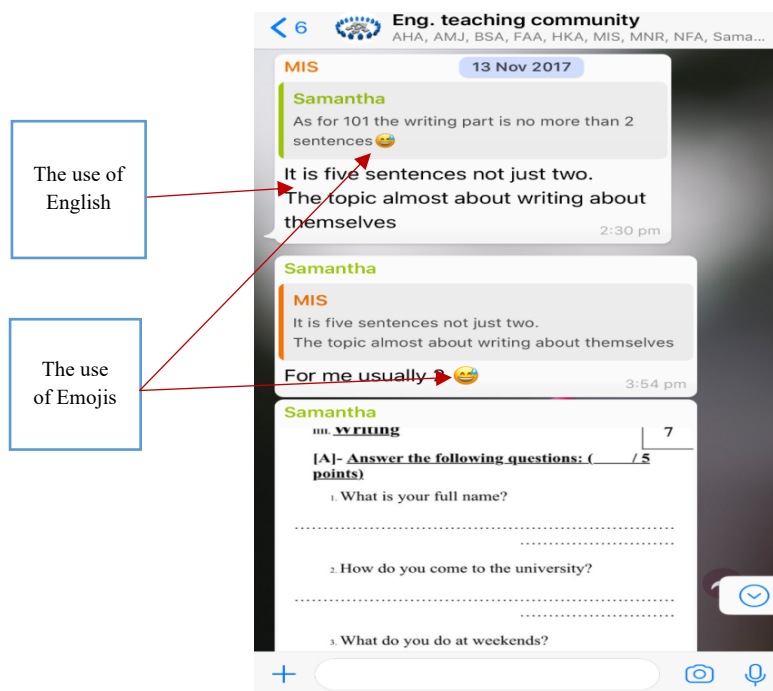


Figure 7.3: WhatsApp screenshots C & D showing the use of both English and (informal) Arabic and my translations of the teachers' Arabic comments.

⁴ Emojis: “any of various small images, symbols, or icons used in text fields in electronic communication (as in text messages, e-mail, and social media) to express the emotional attitude of the writer, convey information succinctly, communicate a message playfully without using words, etc” (Merriam-Webster, 2019).



(D)

(3) using code-switching⁵ (e.g. when participants talked in Arabic and referred to certain concepts in English) and transliteration⁶ (see Figure 7.4); and (4) using no titles when addressing each other (e.g. thank you Samantha or MIS, etc.)

⁵ “The switching from the linguistic system of one language or dialect to that of another” (Merriam-Webster, 2019).

⁶ “Transliteration: to represent or spell in the characters of another alphabet” (Merriam-Webster, 2019).

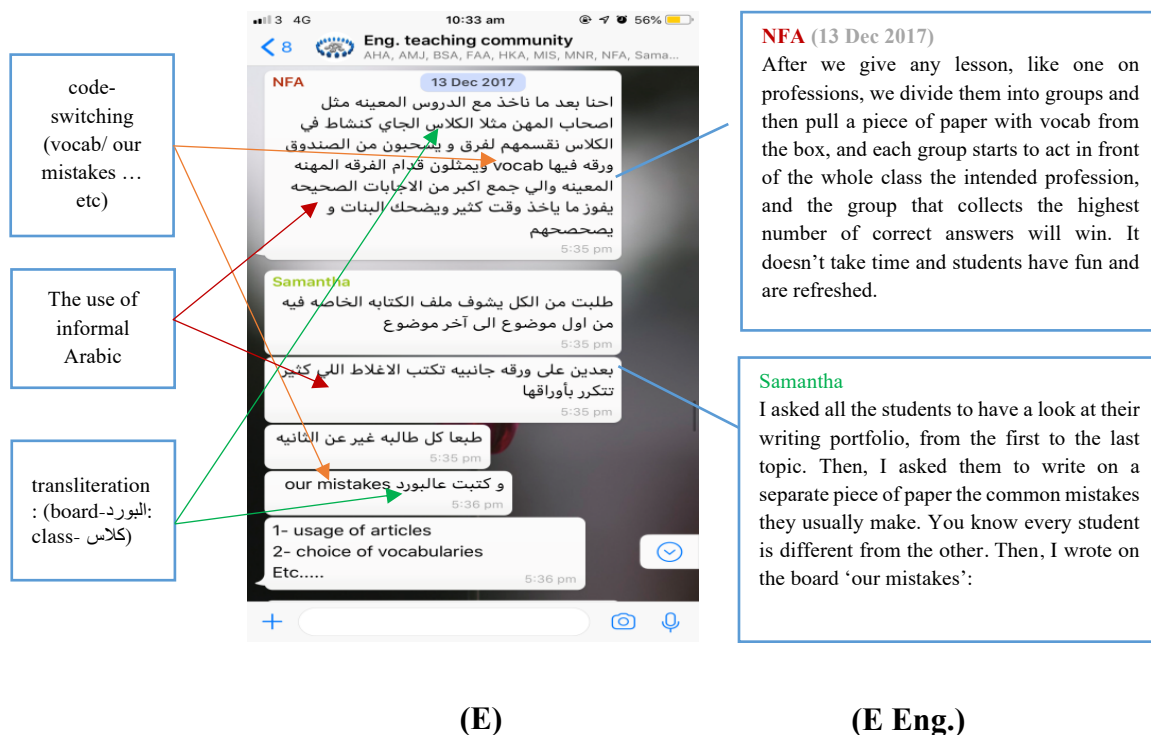


Figure 7.4: A WhatsApp screenshot E showing the use of transliteration, code-switching and informal Arabic

Again, according to the participants, learning in this informal community created a friendly environment, in which teachers could focus more on their cognition (the construction of knowledge) rather than on the formality of their language when communicating. This finding confirms the essence of Tasker, Johnson and Davis's (2010) argument that the cognitive abilities and skills of teachers can be developed through social interaction with their peers, indicating how the sociocultural context contributes to teacher's cognition and learning. Moreover, it also indicates that being required to use formal language when communicating might affect the level of teacher participation (i.e. it might make them hesitant to use English all the time due to the fear of committing language mistakes), or it might distract their attention from the most main task, which is learning.

Interestingly, teachers in the WhatsApp group studied were not required to use any standard language or call each other by titles. According to Samantha:

Drop and say whatever. I find it a friendly environment, it is good and approachable. I can say whatever, call teachers without titles, and I noticed that when you suggested to change the language into Arabic, teachers started to write freely in Arabic as it is their first language and more expressive than English. In general, it made us more relaxed. I know that everybody is able to chat in English, but asking other people to use their own language is different [...] because the main purpose is not to test the language and put teachers under further pressure but to learn from each other and exchange information. Sometimes I want to say things but informally, using Arabic helps me to be more expressive and to ask about what comes to my mind at the same moment. I do not need to go and check if the terminology is correct because I do not want to show my friend that I am less able to express things correctly in English even if I am talking about something new. So, using Arabic — my native language — is the best way to do things immediately.

Furthermore, HKM, FAA, NFA agreed that they were free to use English and Arabic, code-switching, and transliteration, which facilitated their interaction. HKM emphasised that using Arabic, the mother tongue of all group members, facilitated and encouraged teachers' involvement in most of the discussions. HKM argues for using Arabic in learning, although she is a bilingual and has a good command of both languages. She stated that:

Personally, I have no problems speaking in Arabic or English, but sometimes we use our mother language in the discussions in order to make our ideas clearer. For me, it is fine to have the discussion in Arabic or in English because I grew up in the States and I acquired the English language when I was little [...] However, I noticed that the other

teachers became more engaged and interested and willing to participate once the language changed. I think they feel more comfortable and more expressive due to their command of Arabic because it's our native language, and no one avoids discussions in Arabic as we all speak it all day and it's friendlier than English in our context [...]

Thus, the teachers' experiences indicate that using L1 facilitated the learning process and encouraged interaction among the group members. FAA provided an example of her two daughters to support this argument, explaining that *“one grew up outside in an English-speaking country and the other one here in Saudi Arabia ... when it comes to arguing or discussing important issues, the oldest one starts to talk in English unconsciously, while the youngest keeps talking in Arabic.”*

On the contrary, although MNR agreed that Arabic was more practical for daily discussions, she argued that using English was necessary when discussing academic or theoretical issues. Hence, the findings show that the informality of the discussion medium contributed to the sustainability of teachers' informal learning in this VCoP.

7.3.5 Level of Engagement in WhatsApp Discussions

When I asked the participants about their engagement in the informal discussions, the majority (seven out of nine) responded that although they liked the group, they did not participate in every topic. However, the remaining two teachers confirmed that they tried to participate in every discussion because they wanted to learn. For example, HKM — one of the two teachers who always participated due to her willingness to learn — justified her involvement by explaining that she wanted to see how other teachers reacted to her ideas, i.e. whether they supported/validated them or not. She elaborated that:

Yes, I tried, and I think so far I'm engaging in all the discussions. What makes me participate is that I'm going to learn, because if I do share an idea with someone they can confirm it with some results from empirical research, personal experience, or someone will add to it.

In HKM's case, learning from other's experiences and opinions motivated her to share more and participate in every discussion. Nevertheless, the fact that the rest of the teachers only participated occasionally prompted me to ask about the factors that affected the level of their participation and engagement, the results of which are presented in the following section.

7.4 Limitations of Using WhatsApp as a Context for a VCoP

Discussing the features of WhatsApp as a viable setting for a VCoP does not mean it is without limitations. Thus, it is necessary to investigate the limitations and challenges that teachers may encounter when learning through this model. Understanding the limitations will help to develop alternative strategies to minimise the number of challenges and increase the effectiveness of learning within this context. Qualitative data obtained from interview two and the online observation reveal a number of challenges and limitations faced by the teachers when learning via WhatsApp, which are presented in the following section.

Although all participants in interview two agreed that they did not encounter any significant challenges when participating in the WhatsApp group, they did identify a number of common limitations that may occur in other learning contexts. NFA stated explicitly that she had not encountered any major challenges, arguing that the existence of technology made the learning process easier:

[...] there are not really any major challenges, especially now with technology. When you try it, then you can just use the microphone and the phone writes it for you. If you find something online, you can just click the link and just copy the link to the group [...]

In fact, NFA highlighted the merits of technology — particularly smartphones — and how it facilitates learning through its various features. However, the accounts presented in the following section show that (1) less participation; (2) lack of nonverbal cues in online discussions; (3) changing topics; (4) the huge number of WhatsApp groups; (5) the low level of students' English proficiency; and (6) the absence of discussions in exams and vacation periods were the major limitations of learning in this VCoP.

7.4.1 Less Participation

Although all the nine teachers participated in this group, the overall rate of their participation was considered low. Thus, teacher's lesser participation, as relating to their reaction to the topics being discussed, seems to be a general issue in informal online discussions. In my view, as the topic for this group is an extension of their work 'PD', it might not be as attractive as other social life topics that would otherwise entice teachers to participate regularly. However, it is noteworthy that teachers' lesser participation does not mean that they did not benefit from the group. Six teachers confirmed they had benefitted a lot from just reading other teachers' discussions (e.g. posts, notes, replies), which prompted them in most cases to learn more individually, and added to their knowledge and skills. This indicates that learning collaboratively can foster further individual learning.

7.4.1.1 Lack of Experience and TESOL Knowledge

The qualitative analysis of interview two responses reveal several factors that discouraged teachers from participating in the WhatsApp discussions. First, a lack of experience and knowledge in TESOL was the main reason given to explain lower participation. WMB, FAA, MNR, and AHA noted that a lack of participation was an issue with the group, but WMB argued that some teachers' lack of experience and knowledge could be the reason behind their lack of participation: *“the limitation of this WhatsApp group is represented in the lack of participation; not all the teachers participate and this might be due to a lack of knowledge and experience”*. Samantha agreed with WMB, confirming that this was the main reason behind her low level of participation, explaining that:

Another reason is because I also graduated from the translation department and I have not taken any educational courses or in-service training. So, I acknowledge that my teaching knowledge and experience is a bit limited because I was prepared to be a translator not a language teacher, but that doesn't mean that I'm not a good teacher. For example, I already knew that one of the teachers is majoring in education, she is the most active one, later on I learnt that she took professional courses in TESOL (e.g. DELTA) from Cambridge and I was surprised by her knowledge. I believe that as long as I'm developing my teaching knowledge and experience, I will improve. This group has taught me a lot and maybe in the future I will become a specialist in education as a result of being a member of this educational community.

This factor seems to be significant, as the majority of the participants (6) were not specialised in TESOL and only three were specialised in education (as mentioned earlier in Section 7.3.1). This reflects a gap in the EFL university teachers' professional knowledge, which could be filled by continuing to learn through this group. In addition, having a huge number of teachers

who were not specialised in TESOL reflects a critical limitation in the university EFL teacher-hiring system, which should recruit TESOL teaching professionals for the benefit of students and the university (see Section 2.4.1). Thus, the benefit of being in this group was twofold: first, it prompted the sharing of educational knowledge (practical or theoretical) by teachers with TESOL expertise; second, it drew teachers' attention to areas of learning that they had not previously realised needed development. This view was supported by HKM, who stated that *“in fact, these activities shed light on areas of need, where I did not know that I needed to improve myself.”*

7.4.1.2 Negative Peer Pressure

In addition to a lack of knowledge, negative peer pressure was another issue that affected the teachers' participation in the group. For example, receiving few or no comments regarding their participations was identified as demotivating and caused them to hesitate before they engaged in any further discussion. When I asked NFA about the challenges, she identified a lack of replies to posts, regardless of reason, as a limitation. Furthermore, she highlighted that this limitation might be interpreted as being culturally rude:

Culturally speaking, it is considered rude not to answer, and people start questioning you if you do not start answering quickly. So, I guess we lack some ethics when it comes to answering online or responding to social media. The ethics we have is for talking face-to-face and we just transfer it to social media, but I know that is wrong because when you talk to me face-to-face, naturally I am going to answer you immediately, but it is not the same case online, actually, you do not know what the other person is doing. So, maybe they are not in the mood or they have no time [...] and people may misunderstand you [...]

This extract suggests that no response to teachers' participation might be interpreted as culturally rude, and as a result might cause teachers to avoid future participation.

7.4.2 Lack of Discussion Skills

In addition to a lack of knowledge and negative peer pressure, a lack of discussion skills appears to have discouraged teachers from participating in discussions. MNR emphasised the importance of having the confidence to giving a point of view even if it went against the existing discourse, and observed that some teachers seemed to lack this attribute, which in turn may have affected their participation. She stated that: *"I think it is not enough to share your experience and your opinions, you also need to be able to answer questions and to have the freedom and courage to agree and disagree"*. This finding indicates that a lack of discussion skills and a culture of free argumentation and giving counter arguments may have negatively affected teachers' participation and involvement in the group. However, interestingly this could also reflect the teacher's high sense of criticality as she has a low tendency toward engaging with or participating in straightforward and less argumentative discussions.

7.4.1.4 . Lack of Nonverbal Cues in Online Discussions

In addition to the limitations previously identified, a lack of nonverbal cues in online discussions might be an issue for some teachers. For example, NFA stated that: *"writing in WhatsApp lacks feelings, and, in some way, it is kind of formal. So, people can read it a thousand ways and become angry due to their interpretation"*. This challenge identified by NFA, that misinterpretation can occur in a VCoP, confirms a perspective identified in the mixed-methods stage by Harvey, that a significant limitation of online discussions is misunderstanding (see Section 6.7.3). However, the observations revealed that although the group discussions were friendly, some teachers tended to use Emojis (emotions icons) to

make them affectionate and dynamic whereas others did not (Figure 7.5). In that, the use of Emojis can show a kind of feeling within such online discussions, thereby delivering the sense of a less formal tone. This challenge identified by NFA, that lack of nonverbal cues can occur in a VCoP, confirms a perspective identified in the mixed-methods stage by Emma, that a significant limitation of online (SDPD) courses is the lack of nonverbal interactive communication as in the case of face-to-face interactions (see Section 6.9.3).



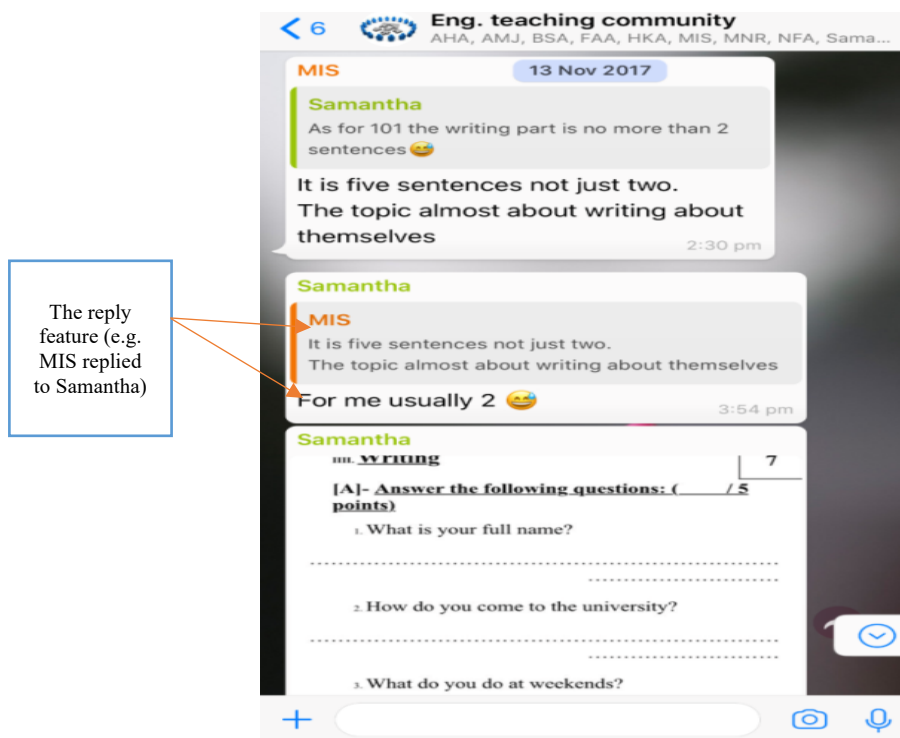
Figure 7.5: A WhatsApp screenshot (F) showing the use of Emojis

7.4.1.5 Changing Topic

Changing topic at certain points was another limitation of the WhatsApp group identified by the participants. Samantha commented on this issue, stating that: “... *maybe if one of the participants took another path of discussion that would have been a problem for everybody ...*” HKM agreed with Samantha, adding that late participation prevented her from participating when she saw that the topic of discussion had changed:

[...] Sometimes, I say I will discuss this with the group but then I do not find the time to follow up or be there when the rest are discussing it, and then the topic changes and they start to talk about something different.

However, although late participation was identified as an issue, especially if the topic of discussion had changed, there is a new feature in WhatsApp called ‘reply’, which allows group participants to reply to a specific statement or content by quoting that content and writing directly underneath it (see Figure 7.6). Nevertheless, although this feature facilitated commenting on specific past posts, the teachers in this study still found changes in the topic of discussion challenging, especially when they participated later.



(J)

Figure 7.6: A WhatsApp screenshot showing the reply feature

7.4.1.6 Large Number of WhatsApp Groups

A large number of WhatsApp groups is another factor that might affect teachers' participation. Being a member of many groups might have a negative impact on the teachers' enthusiasm for participating in all of them. It is worth noting that most WhatsApp groups are established for social communication; nevertheless, the large number is still an issue. For example, AMJ stated explicitly that what sometimes prevented her from participating was *"the amount of WhatsApp groups! Too many groups."*

In addition to identifying the large number of groups as a reason for not participating in WhatsApp discussions, the teachers in this study also noted the long message threads. Indeed, MNR stated that: *"I try to avoid long WhatsApp discussions"*. This quote indicates that some teachers do not like long WhatsApp discussions because they are confused by the number of

messages they receive per day and do not have time to read and concentrate on all of them, even though they might be important. Interestingly, this result supports a result from the mixed-methods stage of this study, that online SDPD activities are time consuming and sometimes distracting (Section 6.7.1), as well as a finding from a recent study by Hayward and Ward (2018), that the “overload of WhatsApp” messages negatively affected participants’ contribution to discussions, as they were members of several other groups (p. 569).

7.4.1.7 Low Level of Students’ English Proficiency

Apart from the personal and technical reasons identified, the interviews also reveal some external contextual factors that may also affect teachers’ involvement in such discussions. Samantha explained that what prevents her from engaging in every topic is the low proficiency level of her students. Although not being interested in some topics is natural and occurs with all learners, Samantha confirmed that having students with low levels of proficiency demotivated her from learning innovative ways of teaching. She stated that:

I do not engage in every topic because I do not see myself in some of the topics. As you know, most of our students are below the average and their English is very weak. So, I do not see myself looking for a more advanced or elevated style to teach them.

Samantha’s claim that the proficiency level of Saudi EFL undergraduates is below the average concurs with the finding by Alharbi (2015), that the proficiency level of Saudi EFL students is low due to the lack of “authentic language learning situations outside the classroom” (p. 105). However, although Samantha found students’ low proficiency level demotivating, HKM presented an opposing view to Samantha, noting that although she had avoided teaching students in the college due to their low level of English proficiency, being in the group had changed her attitude, and she became very interested in challenging herself and her

assumptions through tackling the low proficiency of her students by utilising different strategies:

I used to avoid teaching the beginner courses in my college, focusing instead on advanced courses in other colleges, in which students tend to be at a higher level and the courses are more rigorous. But I have now changed. Before being in this group, I was less motivated and more frustrated and disappointed that I was no longer working in the writing centre or in the foundation year. My attitude has now changed. I have become more motivated and realised that the problem might not be from the students or from the environment itself, but as long as we have motivation, we can make a huge difference.

7.4.1.6 Absence of Discussions in Exam and Vacation Periods

The final limitation of teacher discussions conducted via WhatsApp, as identified by the participants was the absence of discussions during exam periods and vacations. An investigation of the factors that prevented the teachers from continuing discussions during such periods revealed two sets of reasons — one concerning exam periods and the other concerning vacation periods. On one hand, regarding the absence of such discussions during exam periods, all nine teachers agreed that completing the work required (preparing for exams, correcting students' papers, and releasing final results) was more important than seeking PD during this time. For example, AHA stated that: *“my absence during the exam periods is due to the huge number of papers I am correcting. I have around 56 students in each class, and correcting their papers will take time”*. Furthermore, she added that being a member of two to three committees carrying out administrative work during exam periods also caused her to be busy: *“some of us are members of two to three committees that require a lot of work during exam time”*. FAA and NFA also prioritised their specific job-related tasks over participating in the discussions, and highlighted that this is what they were paid to do. NFA in particular stated

that “*in exams period I am busy, I get paid to do my job. So, I better do that well*”. Likewise, AMJ agreed that she was busy preparing for the exams, and she also believed that exam periods were an appropriate time for “*preparing for the exams, having a break from WhatsApp discussions*”. In addition, WMB noted that the lack of motivation which occurred by the end of the year or semester could be another reason for the lack of participation in the group, stating: “*by the end of the semester I become less motivated to do any SDPD*”. This might explain AMJ’s desire to take a break from WhatsApp discussions at exam times.

On the other hand, regarding the absence of such discussions during vacations, the participants identified a lack of realisation that SDPD is important and can be practised any time as a key factor. HKM acknowledged that:

[...] I think it was an absence of realisation. We needed to hear this from anyone in the administration, e.g. the PD providers, we needed to be educated about the value of SDPD and such discussions in vacations. Actually, I do some readings in vacations but not in exam periods. This reading is because a question pops in my mind [...] and a small percentage for PD, but I think I should read more for my PD.

Samantha agreed with HKM, and suggested that teachers should motivate each other because they have a plenty of time in which they can concentrate on theoretical matters. As the following extract shows, Samantha said:

In vacations, I think we should take advantage of the free time we have and remind each other. I think in vacations it is a good time for discussing theoretical issues because we have a lot of free time to read and we are away from students and teaching problems, and we have the chance to concentrate on theoretical issues.

However, NFA insisted that vacations are the times for relaxation, and PD should only be carried out if it is a matter of interest:

[...] vacation that is my time so, in vacation it depends on what you are doing. If your attention is just to put your feet up and relax, then put them up and relax. If your attention is that let's relax for a little bit and then do some research or publish something, then do it. It's related to nature of the teacher b/c some teachers like to do PD in vacations b/c it's their interest and a kind of a hobby.

WMB added that “*having no idea about the upcoming courses which one is going to teach*” was another reason for ignoring SDPD during vacations. Thus, it appears that a lack of realisation of the importance of conducting SDPD during vacations and having no idea of upcoming teaching courses were the most critical factors that might prevent the teachers from carrying out SDPD during vacations. If upcoming courses and timetables were considered ahead of time, this might encourage teachers to use their free time for self-development.

7.5 The Impact of the VCoP (via WhatsApp) on Teaching Practice

Investigating the consequences of joining the self-directed WhatsApp group in the interviews led to clarification of their major impact, which was acknowledged by the participants to have a direct effect on their teaching practice and on themselves (in terms of professional identity, attitudes, and motivation) and an indirect effect on their students (in terms of comprehension, attitudes, and motivation), as shown in (Figure, 7.7). The participants confirmed that the WhatsApp group (1) enhanced their teaching practice; (2) changed their attitudes towards learning and teaching; (3) enhanced their motivation towards learning and teaching; and consequently (4) enhanced their students' motivation and overall performance. In fact, each

teacher demonstrated the impact of learning via the WhatsApp group with an example taken from their own experience, which is described in detail in the related subsection.

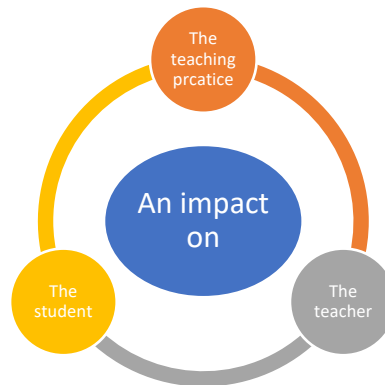


Figure 7.7: Impact of the self-directed VCoP via WhatsApp on teaching practice

When asked about the nature of the relationship between SDPD via WhatsApp and teaching practice, HKM identified it as direct:

[...] they are directly related because when we suggest any method or activity, we try to implement it immediately and apply it in our classes. As you know, the results are not something that happens within one day or a week, it requires much time to see the difference.

Interestingly, this quote reflects the immediate impact of SDL highlighted by Knowles (1980) and also indicates how the participants in this study were influenced by their learning in the WhatsApp group. The following section presents findings related to the impact of the VCoP via WhatsApp on the teachers' practice.

7.5.1 The Impact of the VCoP via WhatsApp on Teaching Practice

As mentioned previously in this study, a qualitative analysis of teachers' responses to the fourth research question (How does participating in a VCoP through a 'WhatsApp group', as a form of SDPD, relate to EFL university teachers' teaching practice?) revealed that learning in the VCoP via WhatsApp enhanced teachers' practice in terms of: (1) the acquisition of knowledge; (2) refreshing their teaching styles; (3) learning how to assist students with different learning styles; and (4) using it as a teaching/learning resource.

7.5.1.1 The Acquisition of Knowledge

All the nine teachers observed that being a member of the VCoP offered them an opportunity to acquire new knowledge and develop creative ideas about teaching. They reported that, had they not been part of the group, they would not have been aware of many of the practical matters being discussed. This also led them to undertake immediate implementation of such aspects in their classrooms. For example, AHA stated that: *"some of these discussions enlightened me about ideas I wasn't aware of before, ones that will attract my students' attention and motivate them to learn English."* Similarly, HKM confirmed that learning collaboratively in the group facilitated the emergence of new ideas and strategies regarding teaching, explaining that: *"having a group where some people are trying something out leads the way to other ideas you have never tried and things like, for example, the use of mind maps in teaching grammar."* This finding supports the argument proposed by Hayward and Ward (2018), that a VCoP via WhatsApp allows faculty members to share their experiences and raise questions about their teaching practice.

7.5.1.2 Refreshing Teaching Styles

It emerged that participating in the VCoP via WhatsApp not only affords teachers new knowledge, but also facilitates their ability to abandon some outdated and conventional teaching methods and strategies. They stated that refreshing their styles enhanced their teaching practice. For example, Samantha noted that:

It enhanced my teaching performance, especially with the methods I used to rely on, but have now stopped using, employing new ones instead. You guys gave me good advice. I needed to refresh my teaching style, and this helped me to recognise that I needed to read and learn more about these teaching methodologies. Being in this group allows me to see more than one way of teaching, evaluating, and grading students, and I have learnt all of this from this group.

In this way, Samantha implied that being in the group encouraged her to engage in reflective teaching, through which she exchanged outdated teaching methods with effective ones. This supports Braun and Crumpler's (2004) notion that if a teacher does not engage in reflective teaching, they may keep using the same "ineffective teaching strategies" (p. 61). Thus, Samantha began to update/change her teaching methods as a result of learning informally in the group, which aligns with Govender's (2015) findings that learning through sharing knowledge and expertise in an informal context drives teachers to change their practice.

7.5.1.3 Learning about Student Learning

Participating in the VCoP via WhatsApp offered teachers the opportunity to learn more about the characteristics of their students, and how to assist them with their different learning styles. FAA acknowledged this aspect, stating that:

It had a positive influence because it helped me [...] I was teaching thirty years ago, and I realised that the mentality of current students differs from how it was five or ten years ago and that we need to understand and respond to this difference. A couple of times, I talked about different situations I have faced with my students and asked the teachers in the group how they would have reacted if they had been in my place. They gave me good ideas. Now, my students have started to express themselves and realise what types of learners they are.

7.5.1.4 Using it as a Teaching/Learning Resource

Having constant access to the content of the VCoP (i.e. the history of the teachers' chats, including a wide range of content) provides teachers with the information they require, whenever they need to improve their teaching practice or acquire new skills. Figure 7.8 is a photograph of BSA's notebook, showing how she documented important notes taken from the group. WMB described the group as "*a good source to go back to when I need it, and it relates positively to my teaching*". NFA also gave the following example:

Sometimes, they post names of books, articles, techniques, examples of the work and games. So, I usually take screenshots just in case I'm in the library and need to read about something, and I can check out their suggestions. This means that you can check every activity in your group whenever you wish.

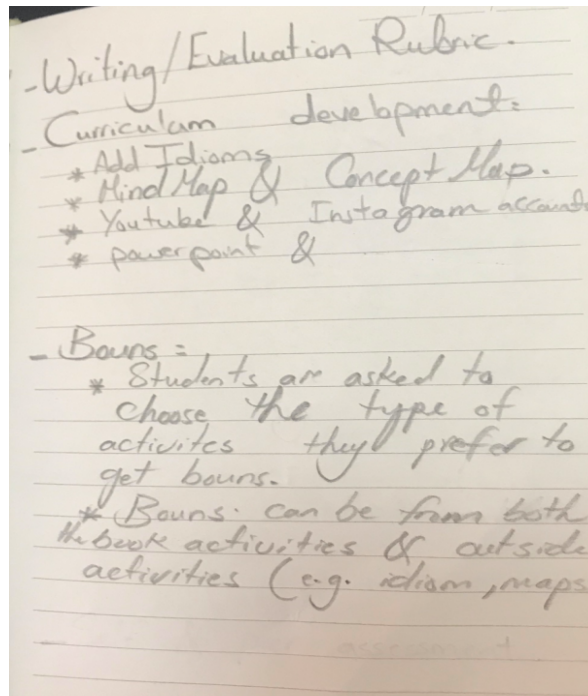


Figure 7.8: Photograph of a teacher's notebook documenting key notes taken from the WhatsApp group.

This indicates that participants like WMB and NFA took advantage of the group by using it as a resource for furthering their individual learning. Having a list of readings and a list of topics to research contributed to their individual SDL/SDPD. Thus, the WhatsApp group promoted not only collaborative learning but also individual learning.

7.5.2 The Impact of the VCoP via WhatsApp on the Teachers

7.5.2.1 Teachers' Professional Identity

This subsection examines the impact of the VCoP on the teachers' professional identity. In interview two, seven out of nine participants confirmed that learning in the VCoP appeared to enhance the teachers' identity, improve their confidence in their performance, and enable them

to view themselves from a professional perspective, i.e. as a university EFL lecturer rather than simply an EFL teacher. Samantha stated that:

I see myself climbing the ladder of professionalism. Although I am at the beginning of my career, I can recognise an improvement [...] I feel an improvement in my professional identity as I become more confident about my performance [...] I have also begun to see myself not only as an EFL teacher but as a university EFL lecturer, one who should have high levels of all types of knowledge regarding the teaching of English.

FAA agreed that being a member of this group influenced her identity, stating that:

I have changed the idea of being a teacher to the idea that I am still learning and need to be professional in this context. I have become more open to new ideas and trends. I have changed a lot of my practices to meet the professionalism that suits me as a university teacher although I have been teaching for almost 30 years.

HKM also asserted that her perception of her professional identity changed. She also supported what Samantha observed regarding the realisation of the need to be more professional in the field of academia:

This community enhanced my identity as a university lecturer. The difference is here in my mind, but what I realised is that I do need to be more of an academic than I am, because we do not do anything that makes us like academics, like having theoretical discussions and evaluating educational research, holding seminars and workshops, and we as colleagues need to remind each other even if teachers participation is not expected, but I can see a change. This group is like a seed which starts to grow not only in our minds and but is also reflected in our practice.

The extracts presented above clearly reveal that the teachers' sense of professional identity increased, although some may not have been aware of this as they were focused on pursuing SDPD through the WhatsApp group. This finding supports the argument presented by Ivanova and Skara-MincLne (2016), that learning contributes to the formation of a professional identity, and teachers tend to be self-directed learners who consistently seek to improve their professional knowledge and skills. This finding also confirms the theory proposed by Govender (2015), that when teachers engage in professional discussions regarding their teaching and learning, they begin to realise who they are and what they represent.

7.5.2.2 Teachers' Attitudes towards Learning

Culturally speaking, most of the teachers in this study consider having a postgraduate degree (MA or PhD) to be at the end of their learning journey. Moreover, the lack of institutional support in terms of providing constructive PD programmes for EFL teachers and educating them regarding the importance of PD for EFL university teachers meant that a lot of the participants were unaware of the critical role PD played in their professional lives. In relation to the previous subsection, the qualitative interview two data showed that participation in the VCoP via WhatsApp enabled the teachers to develop positive feelings and attitudes towards learning and teaching. A considerable change was observed in the nine teachers' attitudes towards learning as university teachers (lecturers). This was demonstrated by HKM, who gave the following example of how being a part of this group had transformed her attitude towards teaching:

I used to avoid teaching the beginner courses in my college, focusing instead on advanced courses in other colleges, in which students tend to be at a higher level and the courses are more rigorous. But I have now changed. Before being in this group, I was less motivated and more frustrated and disappointed that I was no longer working in the

writing centre or in the foundation year. My attitude has now changed. I have become more motivated and realised that the problem might not be from the students or from the environment itself, but as long as we have such motivation, we can make a huge difference.

Interestingly, this extract reflects how SDL in this WhatsApp group led to transformation through engaging in critical reflection (Mezirow, 1991), in that a change occurred in the teachers' thinking and attitudes towards teaching and the teaching context, which confirms that SDL can foster transformational learning. (see Section 3.2). Similarly, MNR stated that "*being a member of this group showed me that teaching English can be really interesting. I learnt that there are plenty of teaching methods besides the traditional ones I keep using.*"

Therefore, the teachers' feelings were directly influenced by their participation in the VCoP, with WMB remarking: "*I love this group. It gives me the opportunity to express my teaching philosophy, while encouraging me to be more confident about my strategies and how to tune that to a better fit.*" Likewise, AHA related her feelings and change of attitude towards learning to participating in the group: "*I am grateful for being in this group, I learnt many new things, such as that learning is required in my case, and it is an endless process through which I can improve my teaching.*" Samantha also appreciated the group because it has enhanced her teaching, stating that "*... thanks to the group, these discussions have improved my teaching a lot. I was thinking of this group, and I was saying I wish it would last as long as I am in the profession.*" Thus, it can be concluded that the VCoP developed the teachers' attitudes to, and appreciation of, informal learning, which contributed to developing their teaching practice.

7.5.2.3 Teachers' motivation

Related to the previous subsection, the interview data shows that the collaborative learning facilitated by the VCoP improved the teachers' motivation to learn. HKM noted:

I get a great feeling when I see replies to my posts or experience participation, because I feel that the teachers are more engaged and they like my ideas and are interested in the aspects I am discussing. This motivates me to learn more, share more, and to be more effective in this community [...] I can say that this group is currently a source of motivation compared to my attitude before engaging in professional development via WhatsApp.

This example demonstrates how the teachers were motivated externally by interactions with the other group members. When describing her reaction to the replies, AHA stated: *"I become very happy and overwhelmed. In fact, that's what keeps me motivated to share all of my methods."* Therefore, the positive comments received by the participants when they were chatting prompted them share and learn more. WMB confirmed this point by explaining: *"when I read replies to my thoughts and opinions, it keeps me engaged and allows me to realise how they are actually relevant to others."* This result supports a result from the mixed-methods stage of this study, that collaborative learning activities constitute a primary source of teachers' extrinsic motivation (see Section 6.4.1.3).

Moreover, this result confirms Joyce and Calhoun (2010) argument that collaborative learning has a positive effect on teachers and their perception of this learning method, which consequently can be transferred to their students, as the findings presented in the next section show.

On the other hand, NFA highlighted that not all of the replies were positive, and their effect depended on the reply itself and whether it made sense or not: *“if the reply makes sense, then I am more than happy to read it, and when the reply is nonsense then it will piss me off.”* Similarly, WMB acknowledged that counter arguments and opinions affected the level of her continued or future participation: *“if the participants agree with me, I become more confident to engage in other discussions. If they do not, I usually keep silent.”* These extracts indeed support an earlier limitation of the WhatsApp group, which is the negative peer pressure. Moreover, this may reflect the particular nature of Saudi culture, which generally relies on sharing successes rather than failures or weaknesses.

In contrast to the viewpoints given by NFA and MNR, Samantha asserted that she was open to criticism from the other teachers and replied even if they disagreed with her stance, justifying this by stating:

[...] as long there is something to discuss, there is something to think about, things to offer [...] this group functions as a reminder, source of motivation, a way for discovering new things. I think there is not something that is not good about this group. We all share the same interests, have same level of education, belong to the same environment. It's purely educational and friendly at the same time.

This extract reveals another significant factor related to motivation, which is that learning via a group in which all members belong to the same context and have similar educational backgrounds and share similar interests is motivating. This finding aligns with those of Good and Weaver (2003) that the effectiveness of learning groups increases when they exist within similar teaching contexts; in particular where teachers are of a similar level educationally, and in terms of age and background, teach the same subjects, and use similar curricular; thus, meaning they are likely to have similar professional needs.

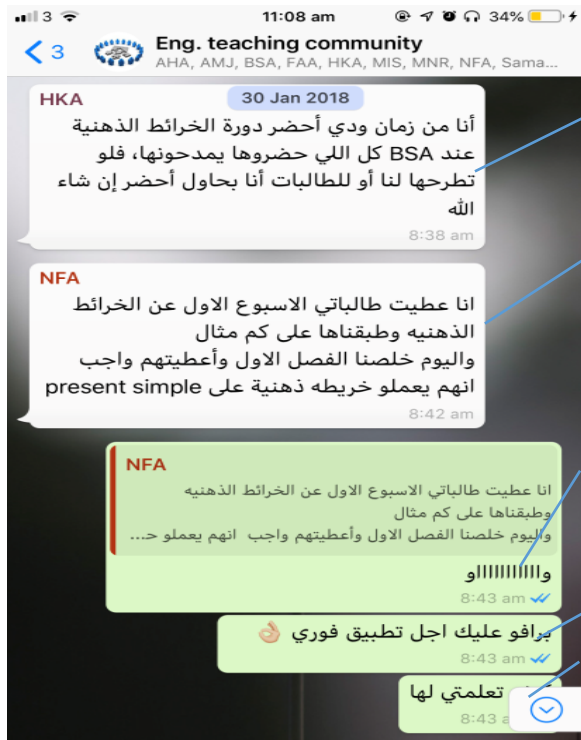
In addition to the positive feelings the teachers expressed in relation to participating in the group, all nine teachers asserted that they felt satisfied and appreciated when they saw replies to their posts and participation, which reveals another source of external motivation.

7.5.3 The Impact of the VCoP via WhatsApp on the Students

The qualitative interview two data reveals the effect of pursuing SDPD via WhatsApp was not confined to the teachers, but also reached their students. A qualitative analysis of the teachers' responses to the fourth question (How does your participation in the VCoP through WhatsApp relate to your teaching practice?) show SDPD via WhatsApp influenced students in terms of enhancing their (1) understating of the subject matter; (2) general motivation; (3) level of engagement in the class; and (4) attitudes towards learning English.

7.5.3.1 Enhancing Students' Understanding of the Subject Matter

The improvement of students' understanding demonstrates the positive impact of adopting a VCoP via WhatsApp as a model of SDPD. In one of the WhatsApp discussions, BSA suggested using mind maps as a technique for teaching and learning grammar to motivate students and enhance their learning. She shared her experience of using this technique, and revealed how it was effective with the majority of her students; accordingly, other teachers decided to try it by asking their students to formulate mind maps to summarise certain grammatical rules. Figure 7.9 shows screenshots of the teachers' discussions with my translation for the Arabic comments.



HKM. (30 Jan 2018)

I wish to attend your mind map workshop, **BSA**. All of those who attended it liked it. So, if you are going to present it again to us and to our students, I will definitely attend.

NFA

In the induction week, I gave my students a lecture about mind maps. Then, we all applied it to a number of examples and today we finished the first chapter, and I asked them to do the homework on the '**present simple**' using mind maps

Reply to NFA post

Me: Wooooow

Parvo, so you applied it immediately

How did you learn about it

(G)

(G Eng.)

Figure 7.9: WhatsApp screenshots G of teachers' discussions regarding the use of mind maps and my translation for their Arabic comments.

The exchange of knowledge and experiences in the VCoP not only led to the suggestion to introduce new strategies, it also resulted in their implementation in the classroom. This was found to contribute to students' understanding, as seen in the following example given by NFA of the use of mind maps during grammar teaching:

After using mind maps, I noticed an improvement in my students' understanding of grammar. This was due to becoming more involved in the process of explaining and retaining the rules, particularly after they had created their own individual mind maps. Thanks to mind maps, they no longer forget the rules.

The above quotation clearly shows the teacher perception that applying mind maps directly contributed to the students' understanding and retention of grammatical rules, which seems to be one of the areas that students generally tend to forget quickly. A study conducted by

Borovkova (2014) used mind maps to teach vocabulary and asked students to use mind maps in their learning. Although the study did not focus on grammar learning, the researcher reached the same conclusion: mind maps were a very effective and comprehensive method for understanding and retaining vocabulary. Moreover, although the students found the method time consuming, they also acknowledged that it was fun and motivating, and that they would continue using it. This indicates that the teachers who participated in the group worked hard to enhance their students' learning by adopting more effective ELT strategies.

7.5.3.2 Enhancing Students' Motivation

The results presented in the previous subsection indicate that the enhancement of the students' understanding increased their motivation to learn in this case. Six out of nine teachers reported that they have noticed an increase in their students' motivation, as expressed by HKM:

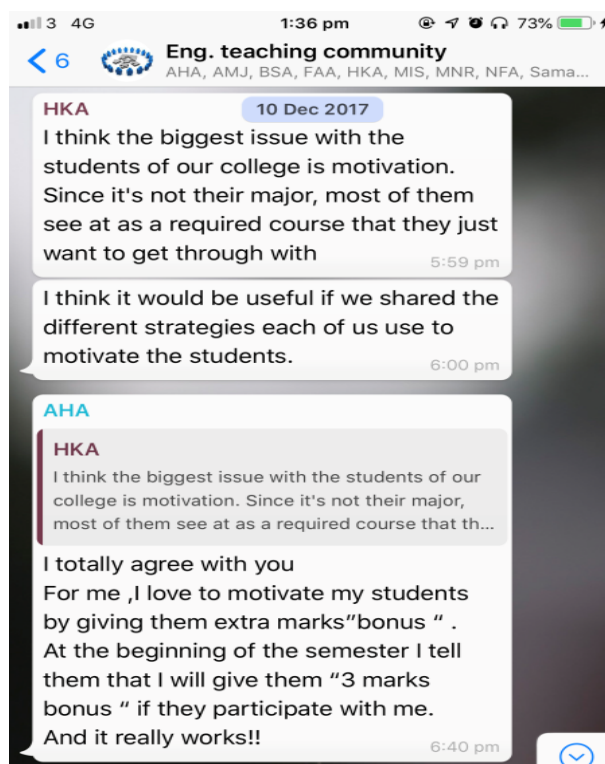
I have noticed that my students have become more motivated than ever before. I know I haven't imagined it, as one of my students actually expressed it verbally, saying, "Miss, I really love how we are doing these mind maps because the grammatical rules are sticking in my mind now."

Thus, receiving positive feedback explicitly from the students motivated the teachers to continue learning and enhanced their confidence in implementing new strategies, which consequently enhanced the students' engagement. This is shown in Figure 7.10 with my translation for the Arabic comments.

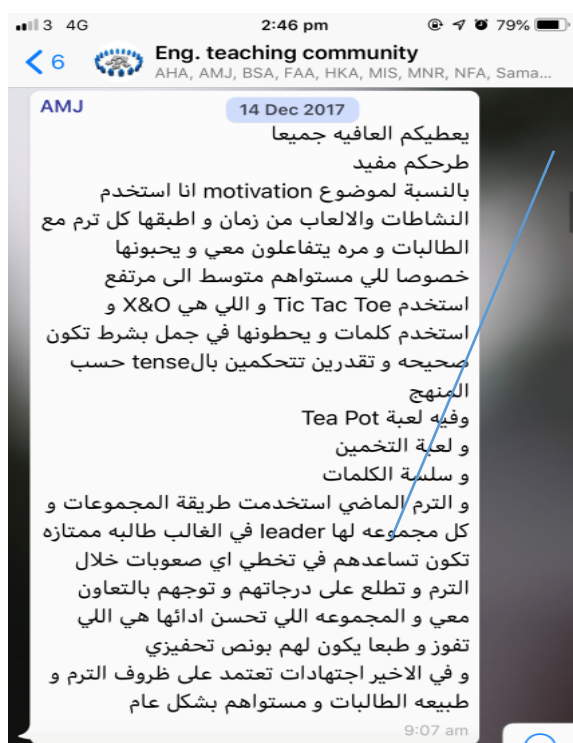
The Level of Student Engagement in the Class

The teachers also reported that, after they had started to differentiate their teaching methods, their students became more engaged in the classroom. According to AHA:

This had a positive influence. I found that my students started to become more engaged when we used the mind maps and the games suggested in the group, including when I used Arabic while teaching grammar. Students told me that they liked this change and asked me to keep using the new strategies, as these helped them to understand more than they had before. It was very beneficial. I also noticed that their grades improved, as well as their attitude during lessons.



(H)



(I)

AMJ (14 Dec 2017)

Thank you all

A very useful discussion.

Regarding the issue of **motivation**, I use games and activities from a long time ago, and I apply them each semester and the students like it very much and engage with it, especially those who are average and excellent. I use **Tic Tac Toe**, **Tea Pot**, guessing games, I use words and ask them to put them in correct sentences according to the tense we are learning. Last semester, I used the group strategy, whereby each group has a **leader**, usually an excellent student, to help them to overcome any difficulties during the semester, learn about their proficiency levels, and guide them with my assistance. The group that improves its performance take a bounce as a reward. In the end, it is all my efforts and it depends on the circumstances of semester, the students, and their overall level

(I Eng.)

Figure 7.10: WhatsApp Screenshots H&I of Teachers' Discussions Regarding Enhancing Students' Motivation and my Translation for their Arabic Comments.

7.5.3.3 Enhancing Students' Attitudes towards Learning English

Diversifying teaching methods and strategies did not only motivate students and enhance their engagement, it also changed their attitudes toward learning English. Samantha noted that:

Regarding my students, I noticed positive attitudes towards learning in the classroom, especially when I started to diversify my teaching methods and styles, because they were willing to learn. Some of them were very active in learning, and when they saw me working hard, and changing my style, they started to work harder to meet my level and to meet my expectations.

Interestingly, what Samantha mentioned is supported by an earlier view of Muhammed taken from the mixed-methods stage of this study; when he was asked about the impact of SDPD

on his teaching practice. At the end of his account, he stated: “I can say that the students are very much reflection of the teacher”. This can explain the relationship between teachers’ and students’ motivation and attitudes to learning, particularly students’ attitudes towards learning English. Guskey (2002) suggests a five-level model for evaluating the effectiveness of PD, focusing on students’ learning outcomes as one main level for evaluation. Guskey (ibid.) elaborates that when teachers apply new practices, they need to receive feedback regarding their students’ learning to evaluate the practices’ effectiveness. This feedback can be in the form of (1) students’ regular feedback; (2) students’ learning outcomes; (3) students’ involvement; and (4) students’ feelings of confidence or self-growth (p. 387). The current study found that teachers reported that a VCoP via WhatsApp had an immediate positive impact on students’ comprehension, motivation and attitudes towards learning English. Thus, it can be inferred that this VCoP is effective for students. Hence, the enhancement of these areas motivates teachers to continue using SDL to achieve similar results. Thus, the results make a valuable contribution to the argument for adopting VCoP as a form of SDPD.

The next chapter includes a discussion of the main findings of this study in relation to its social and political context, along with highlighting its contribution to the literature.

Chapter 8

Discussion of the Research Findings of both Stages

8.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the key research findings in light of its aims and objectives, with particular reference to the theoretical framework and existing literature and current Saudi higher education. It focuses on the contribution of the findings to: (1) the understanding of self-directed professional development currently pursued by EFL university teachers within the Saudi university context, and (2) the ability of TPD policy to advance the pursuit of SDPD within this context. The chapter is divided into three parts. The first section discusses the main findings concerning the nature of SDPD activities pursued by EFL university teachers in relation to SDL, with an emphasis on individual learning. The second section focusses on the main findings concerning the impact of SDPD on teachers' practice in relation to the social dimension (collaborative SDL), with particular emphasis on VCoP via WhatsApp as a collaborative model of SDPD. The third section discusses the findings pertaining to the reasons for adopting, and the challenges of, SDPD activities in relation to the social and political dimensions.

8.2 SDPD and Individual Learning

8.2.1 Individual SDPD and Teachers' Autonomy

This study revealed that the participants expressed a preference for individual as opposed to collaborative SDPD, due to: (1) the freedom to make decisions; (2) flexibility when it came to time; (3) the convenience and comfort of learning; and (4) the ability to focus on the self. These all come under a main dimension of SDL, i.e. personal control over the learning process

(Garrison, 1997). Most importantly, the participants asserted that they found the most attractive features to be the practical aspects of individual learning, (i.e. convenience of time and place) and feeling comfortable (see Section 6.3.2.3). On the one hand, the study found that this greater degree of autonomy resulted in a high level of convenience, particularly in comparison to collaborative SDPD. This convenience resulted in teachers being able to make decisions regarding the learning process, including: (1) focussing on the subjects they considered beneficial; (2) learning methods; (3) time; and (4) location. These results are generally in line with Weir's (2017) findings; i.e. that individual SDPD leads teachers to experience emancipatory professional learning, through which they are able to control the time, context and content of their learning. On the other hand, when we compare this finding to the dominant approach to PD for EFL teachers in Saudi university, i.e. other-directed PD, we find that teachers in this format lack autonomy and they cannot make decisions regarding 'task management' based on their needs, competencies and interests. Alshahrani (2017) and Alssalahi (2016) agree with this, confirming that their research found that in other-directed institutional PD, EFL teachers lack autonomy, voice and involvement in the design and implementation of PD due to a top-down policy and a culture of compliance, which consequently affects teachers' participation and establishes negative perceptions towards PD. By contrast, these issues were not encountered by the participants in the current study; and this is due to the potential features of individual SDPD, except the lack of institutional support in some cases. In that, I agree with Kennedy's (2014) argument that the use of PD activities that promote teacher autonomy leads to enhancing the quality of teaching, thus resulting in greater agency. Individual SDPD can therefore be seen as more effective than the other-directed PD opportunities provided by the universities and more convenient than collaborative SDPD due to facilitating a higher degree of teacher autonomy and agency, which enhances the quality of teaching.

Earlier findings have demonstrated that the preference expressed by some teachers for individual SDPD arises from the freedom to make personal decisions at all times, i.e. to take full control of the learning context (see Section 6.3.2). However, it is important to note that this freedom may not be sufficient to make informed decisions regarding the learning process. Therefore, if a teacher lacks sufficient self-awareness, s/he may fail to engage in effective learning, as discussed in more detail in Section 8.2.5. Baily et al. (2001) suggested using Freeman's (1983) model to make informed decisions concerning teachers' PD, made up of: (1) a high level of awareness; (2) a positive attitude towards the self and the other; (3) the improvement of teaching skills; and (4) the development of various forms of knowledge. Baily et al. (2001) argued that traditional models of PD are based on transmitting knowledge and thus address only the development of skills and knowledge. At the same time, SDPD (being informed by SDL) requires the development of all the four components, commencing with teachers' awareness (i.e. responsibility for learning) and a positive attitude to developing skills and knowledge. This highlights that teachers' self-awareness is fundamental to SDPD, particularly when it comes to a need for change.

8.2.2 Individual SDPD and Stress-free Environment of Learning

The findings of the mixed-methods stage highlighted the practicality and popularity of individual SDPD for EFL university teachers. The participants reported that individual learning enabled them to control the process, based on their interests, needs and competencies, resulting in a less stressful, non-evaluative, non-argumentative environment more conducive to learning (see Section 6.3.2.3). MacKeracher (2004) argued that adult learners can experience stress, anxiety and other negative emotional responses when learning in the company of others. In addition, MacKeracher (ibid) noted that this can result in increased anxiety, distress and resistance to learning (p. 126), potentially resulting in a negative impact on the learning

process. The participants of the current study indicated that their main reasons for avoiding collaborative activities were: (1) negative peer pressure; (2) a lack of discussion skills; (3) fear of implicit evaluation by others; and (4) information overload (see Section 7.4). These results are in agreement with those of MacKeracher (ibid), who noted that stress can arise in the presence of others in the form of “information overload, competition, exposure of inadequacies, discounting of persona” (p. 126). Regarding the relationship between SDPD and individualism, the findings of the current study concur with those of Braman (1998), who found that learning individually enhances the readiness for SDL. Braman (ibid.) elaborates that the interests and goals of the individual learner may conflict with the interests and culture of the group, thus hindering SDL. Similarly, this finding supports Govender’s (2015) findings that learning in professional communities can constrain teacher’s SDL. Thus, individual SDPD can be seen as a beneficial approach to minimising the negative aspects of collaborative SDL (i.e. distraction, the negative influence of peers, and external power). At the same time, this could indicate that collaborative learning as a form of learning does not prove effective for all learners, in particular those wishing to learn in a less distracting environment.

8.2.3 Individual SDPD and Reflection

The participants stated that individual SDPD and flexibility in relation to time encouraged them to become more productive and self-aware. In particular, this allowed them to focus deeply on themselves (i.e. learn through the self) and improve their performance by identifying their personal strengths and weaknesses. The teachers stated that this enabled them to make plans and set goals to address their needs (see Section 6.3.2.4). Thus, learning individually enhances engagement with the self through critical reflection, resulting in increased levels of creativity and innovation. This finding aligns with those of Minott (2010) that SDPD promotes reflection and Govender (2015), who stated that SDPD allows teachers to learn through the self, taking

responsibility for their own professional development. Govender (ibid) elaborated that self-learning promotes control, agency and the transformation from being a teacher to professional, by staying “up-to-date on the latest developments in teaching and learning” (p. 490). This finding also supports Caffarella’s (2000) argument that SDL leads to reflection, which in turn fosters transformational learning, demonstrating the relationship between the two theories. Moreover, Rozimela and Tiarina (2018) emphasised that engaging in reflective teaching does not only allow language teachers to evaluate their teaching practice, but it increases their awareness regarding unrecognised teaching problems (see Section 3.4.3.1). In addition, Hao et al. (2016) stressed that engaging in reflection by evaluating and generating ideas enhances learner creativity. This indicates that individual SDPD encourages creativity by prompting greater engagement with reflection, particularly in comparison to the distractions inherent in collaborative SDPD. The current study therefore suggests that learning within a less constraining environment results in reflection aimed at enhancing teacher creativity.

8.2.4 Individual SDPD and Teacher’s Personal Traits

A further key finding of the current research is that a number of its participants found individual SDPD to match their learning style, i.e. as a result of being an introvert by nature, or, as in the case of Harvey (see Section 6.3.1.1), disliking speaking in public. Individual learning can guarantee engagement in learning according to individual preferences without the impact of the social presence of others. Jensen (2015) clarified that introversion is based on a number of personality facets, i.e. being “reserved, seeking solitude (a loner), physically passive, quiet, sober, unfeeling” (p. 92). Jensen (ibid) found that introverted learners tend to learn through reading, rather than strategies demanding a social presence. This might explain the finding of the current study that the personal traits of teachers (e.g. being an introvert) can result in a

preference for individual SDPD. It is thus significant to consider the personality traits of teachers when suggesting the most appropriate types of learning.

8.2.5 Individual SDPD and Teacher Self-awareness

The findings of this study reveal that over half of the participants reported an improvement in their teaching practice as a result of reflective teaching, self-evaluation and self-observation (see Section 6.3.4). Candy (1991) and Garrison (1997) highlighted that the cognitive dimension of SDL tends to be neglected in comparison to the contextual and motivational dimensions. Garrison (1997) argued that most research into SDL focuses on self-management (control) and motivation while ignoring self-monitoring (cognitive). This frequent use of reflective teaching and self-observation reflects a high level of teacher awareness, i.e. an essential trigger for pursuing SDL. Freeman (1989) defined the concept of awareness as “the capacity to recognise and monitor the attention one is giving or has given to something. Thus, one acts on or responds to the aspects of a situation of which one is aware” (p. 33). Baily et al. (2001) related self-awareness to PD, arguing that “self-awareness and self-observation are the cornerstone of all professional development ... (and) prerequisites to practising reflective teaching” (p. 22). This suggests awareness is essential for engagement in any meta-cognitive SDPD activity.

It is also important to highlight that Bandura (1986) considered self-observation (a known model of SDPD) to be a process of self-regulated learning, followed by self-judgement and self-reaction. Furthermore, these processes all take place during the self-monitoring stage (Garrison, 1997). The participants of the current study reported that practising SDPD encouraged them to think critically about both their learning and teaching practice. This led them to practise reflection as a means of evaluating their teaching practice (see Section 6.3.4.4).

Garrison (1997) argued that increased control of learning improves awareness of individual responsibility. I believe that this heightened awareness has the potential to function as the driving force to assist teachers in sustaining their SDPD. Psychologically speaking, this process is viewed as the cognitive stage of SDL. Piaget (1896–1980) defined this as being concerned with a learner’s responsibility to construct meaning, in order to enrich and modify the existing repertoire of knowledge, or develop new schemes of meaning (as cited in Garrison, 1997). Knowles’ (1980, p. 47) assumptions of SDL considers that a self-directed learner has “accumulated a reservoir of life experiences that is a rich resource for learning” (as cited in Merriam, 2001, p. 5). Piaget’s perspective on constructivism reveals that the cognitive construction of knowledge in SDPD takes place by means of two processes: (1) assimilation (i.e. new knowledge accords with a teacher’s existing structures of knowledge or, if these do not exist, in creating a new schema (structure)); and (2) accommodation (i.e. new knowledge conflicting with a teacher’s existing knowledge prompts the teacher to adopt a new schema). In this way, a teacher’s responsibility to construct meaning is undertaken in relation to previous knowledge and experiences, followed by deciding which aspects to add or change within existing professional knowledge. It is important to indicate that such awareness is triggered by this process of reflection. In linking this to individual SDPD, the findings of the current study suggest that learning in an individual manner enables teachers to concentrate on the cognitive and metacognitive processes of learning through the construction of personal meanings, while at the same time raising their awareness of personal responsibility towards learning, i.e. the achievement of goals. My analysis of the interviews of the mixed-methods stage focused on highlighting the role of teacher cognition (i.e. awareness) during the pursuit of SDPD, thus contributing to an essential component of teacher’s SDPD in the literature.

My examination of the main aspects underpinning individual and self-directed learning identified that this relies heavily on the use and development of intrapersonal skills, thus

implying the internal use of language. The language used in internal thinking is consequently manifested in the reflection process, and, as noted above, takes place while applying the activities of reflective teaching to improve performance. The quantitative results from the questionnaire revealed reflective teaching to be among the most frequently adopted models of individual SDPD (see Section 6.3.1.2). This result emphasises the importance of teacher awareness in the practise of SDPD.

I therefore believe that self-awareness can lead to self-determination. Thus, teachers' awareness of the status of their own teaching/performance enables them to determine how it can be improved, and to freely pursue SDPD. This identifies a critical dimension of SDPD, i.e. its promotion of a level of freedom through the process of self-control, guaranteeing teachers the right to choose learning goals based on their needs and interests. Teachers can therefore control the SDPD process according to their personal attitudes, skills and knowledge. Synthesising the findings of practising individual SDPD reveals self-awareness as vital for promoting the pursuit of SDPD, while also empowering teachers through internal or external feedback to promote an understanding of themselves and their performance. This allows them to recognise and act upon their responsibility for learning.

It is important also to note that individual SDPD does not contradict collaborative constructivism. Garrison (1997) highlighted that individual learning is consistent with a collaborative constructivist view of learning, i.e. individual learning does not infer independence from the surrounding context. Garrison (1997) stated that "the individual does not construct meaning in isolation from [a] shared world" (p. 23). When related to individual SDPD, this implies that a teacher learns individually and self-directedly, to construct meaning influenced by the surrounding world, in the form of: (1) materials; (2) people; or (3) materials and people. This suggests that control over learning does not imply social independence from

the contextual influence (Garrison, 1997, p. 23). The impact of the social context on SDPD is discussed in the following section.

8.3 SDPD in Relation to the Social Context

SDPD is, as discussed above, deeply rooted in the theory of SDL. However, SDL is not confined to individual learning independent of the societal context. Both Brockett and Hiemstra (1991) and Candy (1991) emphasised the influence of the social context on SDL. Brookfield (1984) criticised SDL research for ignoring the influence of the social, cultural and political contexts and for focusing instead on the single dimension of task management (i.e. control of learning). Brockett and Hiemstra (2018) highlighted that research into SDL should involve the process of developing and implementing policy, an aspect currently overlooked. The current research therefore contributes to the literature concerning SDL by gaining insights into the nature of SDPD pursued by EFL university teachers in relation to the socio-political context. The following sections discuss firstly, the main findings from both stages in relation to social context, and secondly, the findings pertinent to the political context.

8.3.1 SDPD and Collaborative Learning

The results of the mixed-methods stage identified that collaborative SDPD appears to be less favoured in comparison to individual SDPD. However, multiple research studies have concluded that the latter is both important and effective (Ardichvili, 2008; Balushi, 2017; Chong and Kong, 2012; Kuusisaari, 2013; Lassonde and Israel, 2009). The current study viewed both forms as being of equal importance, while at the same time placing additional focus on one online collaborative model, i.e. VCoP through WhatsApp. This was employed to estimate teachers' views of the impact of collaborative SDPD, both on themselves as professionals and their teaching practice, including the output of their students. The aim was

to answer the fourth question of this research (*How does participating in a virtual community of practice (VCoP) through a 'WhatsApp group', as a form of SDPD, relate to EFL university teachers' teaching practice?*) This section therefore discusses the findings regarding general collaborative SDPD (both on and offline) in relation to its context, with a particular focus on a single model (i.e. 'VCoP' via WhatsApp), as a current trend within the context of Saudi higher education.

Collaborative learning is informed by the sociocultural perspective (Johnson, 2009) and closely related to SDL. Vann (1996) asserted that SDL opportunities occur in a social context through interaction with others, i.e. it is grounded in the concept of learning by means of social interaction. Park (2008) highlighted the tendency of self-directed learners to learn together. However, as discussed in the first section of this chapter, this is not always the case. The findings of the current study have identified that EFL university teachers practise a number of collaborative activities, including: (1) CoP; (2) VCoP; (3) informal teacher discussion; (4) informal peer observation; (5) informal peer coaching; and (6) collaborative action research, although generally to a lesser degree than individual activities.

The current study found that the most popular collaborative SDPD activity pursued in this context to be teachers' informal discussions, potentially due to practicality and simplicity of use. In agreement with this, Govender (2015) argues that teachers' discussions are very important for teachers' everyday learning, as they lead to educational change and contribute to boosting teachers' confidence through sharing knowledge with others (p. 489). Eraut (2004) stated that informal discussions can form an aspect of informal or accidental/unplanned learning, i.e. they lack any predetermined agenda. In addition, Eraut (ibid) noted that this can function as a complementary type of learning, which can take place during the practice of both formal and informal learning, which can explain its popularity and practicality in this context.

As discussed in detail below, my own membership of a VCoP through a WhatsApp group allowed me to gain an insight into the nature of teachers' informal discussions in this virtual community and its relation to teaching practice.

The findings of the current study revealed that, in practice, collaborative SDPD promotes communication between teachers, thus contributing to their learning and teaching practice by means of knowledge sharing. Serdyukov and Serdyukova (2015) highlighted the importance of social interaction for effective learning, due to its contribution to the development of teachers' cognitive skills, as well as helping to "establish a learning community" (p. 87). This allows teachers to share different perspectives and extend their thinking beyond the boundaries of their own experience and knowledge. Most importantly, it places teachers into a more interactive environment encouraging the exchange of knowledge. Thus, collaborative SDPD has the ability to facilitate the transformation of both knowledge and practice (see Section 4.2).

Most importantly, collaborative learning promotes external motivation. While individual learning is driven primarily by internal motivation, collaborative learning can be result from both internal and external motivation. Jensen (2016) argued that motivation leads to successful learning, thus indicating that collaborative SDPD promotes effective learning. The current study found that interaction through collaborative SDPD generates external motivation, encouraging teachers to sustain their SDPD to achieve their goals (see Section 6.4.1.1). This aspect could be absent during individual SDPD, as indicated by Lopes and Cunha (2017), who found that a teacher who practises individual SDPD loses motivation to sustain learning effort over a long period of time and thus requires support from the social context. Such a conclusion supports Garrison's (1997) argument that motivation plays a critical role in both initiating and sustaining SDL to achieve the cognitive goals of learning.

8.3.2 Virtual Communities of Practice (VCoP)

The concept of VCoP represents both networking and collaborative SDL taking place in this WhatsApp group. This study has explored the impact of teachers' participation in a WhatsApp VCoP as a form of collaborative SDPD on their teaching practice. The findings from the current study are in line with previous research, in which VCoP has been identified as an effective medium for learning, facilitating the process of: (1) the exchanging and generation of knowledge; (2) enhancing innovation; (3) enhancing teachers' teaching practice; (4) improving teachers' communication; and (5) promoting collaboration between teachers (Alsolamy, 2017; Hayward and Ward, 2018; Ozmen, 2013).

However, the WhatsApp group in this study was informally self-initiated (i.e. self-directed). This differs from previous studies, due to the VCoP not having been created by an outsider (i.e. a programme leader or PD provider), but emerging naturally from the teachers themselves. This subsequently proved to be a context for informal (i.e. unplanned) learning, arising from teachers' daily discussions. Alenazi's (2017) study in the context of a Saudi university investigated the extent of the engagement of pre-service teachers' in an 'other-initiated' (i.e. by the researcher) WhatsApp group as a VCoP for learning. Although this group was only for pre-service teachers (including the researcher as a non-participant observer), the rate of their participation was unsatisfactory (i.e. 57%). A number of reasons were found for this low level of participation, including: (1) negative peer pressure; (2) untypical usage of WhatsApp as a context for learning; (3) struggles with certain types of posts; and (4) the absence of any instructor (Alenazi, 2017, pp. 4–5).

Although the findings of the current study also identified negative peer pressure as a limitation, this was not the case when it came to the absence of an instructor and the untypical use of WhatsApp. Thus, all nine teachers in the current study found WhatsApp to be very effective

context for collaborative learning (see Section 7.5.2). In addition, being an experienced teacher entails a sense of responsibility towards learning, resulting in the advantage of learning in a more convenient and friendly environment. Alenazi (2017) found that negative peer pressure tends to occur in the form of adopting passive attitudes (i.e. a lack of any serious approach to learning), with a negative impact on the attitudes of adult pre-service teachers. However, the current study found that a lack of any comments from their peers had a negative impact on the level of teacher participation. The differing kinds of passive peer pressure may be due to the different academic and occupational levels of the participants in both studies. While Alenazi (2017) focussed on pre-service teachers, the current study examined faculty members holding a variety of educational degrees. They can thus be seen as having experienced different responsibilities, leading to higher levels of self-regulation.

Alenazi (2017) asserted that a lack of self-regulated learning skills led to lower levels of participation in his study. By contrast, the findings of the current study highlight that, due to the VCoP being self-initiated, rather than imposed on the teachers, the absence of an instructor proved beneficial in the creation of a friendly learning environment, i.e. the situation was the total opposite of the WhatsApp group of EFL university teachers. It can generally be assumed that, as adult learners, teachers have previously experienced an adequate level of responsibility and are therefore capable of establishing a level of self-regulating skills, thus removing the need for a guide or facilitator. This identifies how this group was informed by the premises of SDL (i.e. self-initiated, self-regulated and self-controlled). The teachers also noted that they were encouraged to participate due to the general equality of qualifications and positions among the members of the group, resulting in a lack of any hierarchy and or any evaluation or controls being imposed from outside the community. This demonstrates that the teachers' participation was on a voluntary basis, resulting in an effective collaborative culture. Garet et al. (2001) asserted that when teachers are drawn from an identical educational context (i.e.

teaching the same subject at the same level), they will develop a shared understanding of their instructional goals, teaching approaches, problems and solutions. Consequently, both the environment and the language of communication in this group were friendly and comfortable, encouraging the participants to be open and share their experiences, both successful and unsuccessful.

This discussion highlights how the nature of learning through this self-directed VCoP was effective in this particular context. The following section discusses how it impacted on the teachers themselves.

8.3.3 The Impact of VCoP on Teachers

The findings of the current study revealed that teachers reported participating in WhatsApp group discussions enhanced their attitudes towards learning, as well as improved their motivation, i.e. as in the case of HKM (see Section 7.5.2), changing their attitudes towards teaching from negative to positive. This positive impact on teachers' feelings, motivation and attitudes toward learning and teaching has the potential to increase teachers' confidence, so enhancing their practice. With the lack of research on the impact of self-directed VCoP on the practice of teachers in general and EFL teachers specifically, the results of the current study were found to contribute to the literature by revealing its impact on the psychology of teachers.

Furthermore, the findings of this study reveal that teachers prefer to use WhatsApp, due to its ability to create a private context for online learning. This concurs with the findings of Alsolamy (2017), suggesting that WhatsApp allows the creation of a private, safe and friendly environment, capable of motivating faculty members within the conservative Saudi community to practise learning in a free and open manner. However, this finding also partially agrees with the findings of an earlier study by Rashidi, Vaniea and Camp (2016), which revealed that,

although one group of Saudi WhatsApp users liked the current level of its privacy, another group expressed dissatisfaction and wished to be given further options to control their privacy, particularly as users not in their phone lists were able to obtain access without mutual agreement. However, this differs from the current case, in which participants were members of a private group, where no one was able to join without an invitation from the group administrator and which only existed in the accounts of members of the group (WhatsApp, 2019).

It is noteworthy that with the dearth of research on self-directed VCoP and teachers' reflection, the findings of the current study revealed that occurrence of critical reflection is not confined to individual SDPD but it also occurs in collaborative SDPD, as in the case of their learning in the WhatsApp group. Although it might not be of the same depth and focus as in the individual learning, but teachers' discussions in VCoP, according to participants reports, stimulate them to reflect on their practice in order to share their views and experiences regarding the topic of discussion. So, teachers learning in this group is not only to enrich their existing knowledge but also to evaluate learning outcomes through reflection as well as feedback, so which perhaps facilitates developing shared understanding and new strategies for future learning.

8.3.4 Impact of Teachers' VCoP on Students

The findings of the current study revealed that teachers experienced the positive impact of teachers' collaborative SDL through VCoP via WhatsApp on students' learning in four areas: (1) understanding content; (2) motivation; (3) their level of their engagement in class; and (4) attitudes towards learning English. Joyce and Calhoun (2010) supported this finding, stating that "teachers' collaborative learning can lead to positive changes and can have a serious positive impact over students learning in a relatively short period of time" (p. 62). They added that, when teachers have positive experiences of collaborative learning, they tend to pass this

attitude on to their students (Joyce and Calhoun, 2010, p. 64). This supports the account of the participants in the current study, when they stated that the motivation of their students had increased, including greater involvement in the classroom. This finding therefore indicates the effectiveness of teachers' learning by means of WhatsApp on practice, including its positive impact on students' performance, i.e. the ultimate goal of any teacher. Thus, this finding is in line with Joyce and Calhoun's (2010) argument regarding the impact of teachers' collaborative learning on students' learning.

8.3.5 VCoP and the Informality of the Language of Communication

The VCoP in this study was informed by the premises of SDL being self-initiated and self-controlled, according to the characteristics, competencies and interests of the learners. EFL university teachers were thus able to use a less formal medium of communication, i.e. their first language, since not all are native English speakers.

Most importantly, the findings of this study revealed that being in an informal community of learning, giving the freedom to use a range of Arabic, English and code-switching, as well as transliteration if required, provided teachers with a conducive environment for discussion. This highlights the effectiveness of this virtual community for the learning of non-native EFL teachers. Davis (2010) supported this finding, arguing that the use of friendly language is a key factor in establishing a successful VCoP.

When I asked the participants about their experience of using Arabic (L1) for the majority of their discussions, they all stated that they found it motivating, as well as maintaining engagement and facilitating the sharing of experiences. They considered the Arabic language to be more expressive, while also asserting that they could not avoid discussing things in

Arabic, due to the pressure of holding a discussion in English potentially leading to embarrassing mistakes, consequently limiting their participation (section 7.3).

During my consultation of the literature regarding the use of L1 by non-native EFL teachers while learning within VCoP, I was unable to find any research investigating this phenomenon. However, I found a considerable degree of research regarding the use of L1 by EFL learners. For example, de la Colina and Mayo (2009) argued that, as it has been found to cognitively support learners: “the L1 shared by learners provides cognitive support that allows them to work at a higher level than that which would be possible if they were just using the L2” (p. 325). Although the context of Colina and Mayo’s (2009) study focussed on EFL learners rather than teachers, this finding supports the view that the use of L1 can effectively facilitate the learning of non-native EFL teachers.

Most importantly, the absence of studies in this area results in this finding contributing to the literature of non-native EFL teacher learning (i.e. cognition), including the use of L1. From this, it can be seen that the current study promotes the use of L1 by non-native EFL teachers while learning in VCoP, due to it being effective, while also providing a comfortable medium for communication and motivating teachers to continue learning. It is therefore vital to raise the awareness of policy makers, PD providers and teachers regarding the effectiveness of the use of L1 as a medium of communication while engaging in collaborative learning in general and collaborative SDL/SDPD in particular. In addition, this area provides a fruitful subject for future research.

8.4 SDPD with Respect to the Political Dimension

This study found that SDPD, being informed by SDL, has the potential to promote social change and thus implies a critical perspective. SDPD is therefore underpinned by a democratic

ideology guaranteeing teachers' rights to both individual and collaborative learning. Brookfield (1984, 1993) supported this argument, relating the act of learning in general, and SDL in particular, to changes made by an individual, in order to reconstruct his/her social environment. Brookfield (1993) was the first scholar to consider the political aspect of SDL, arguing that it is naturally rooted in the political concepts of control and power. This accords with the findings of the current study that teachers are empowered through the act of taking control of their professional learning during the pursuit of SDPD. At the same time, Brookfield (1993) and Brockett and Hiemstra (2018) criticised educational researchers for decontextualising and depoliticising the concept of SDL by ignoring its socio-political dimension (see Section 3.2.1). Thus, the findings of the current study contribute to research into SDL by considering the political and social nature of SDPD with respect to the specific context of university EFL.

The participants in this research reported experiencing a sense of empowerment when control over learning was transferred from educators and trainers. This enabled them to conceptualise, design, implement and evaluate their learning, as well as select appropriate sources to achieve their goals. Brookfield (1993) noted that this reflects a democratic approach, freeing teachers to set their agenda in response to personal needs, abilities and competencies (p. 233). The current study found that, although working under a bureaucratic (i.e. top-down) system, which prevented them from contributing to educational change, the participants reported that the pursuit of SDPD led to an improved sense of self-empowerment. Furthermore, this permitted them to develop their competencies and thus confidence in their ability to improve their teaching practice.

The findings of the current study revealed the development of teachers' self-empowerment through a WhatsApp group, including: (1) enabling the same teacher to teach a whole courses developing the same skill; (2) presenting mind map workshops for students; and (3) developing

evaluation rubrics to unify assessment criteria (see Section 7.2.1). This finding reveals that this form of PD allows teachers to bring about a practical change (however limited) in teaching, evaluation and policy. It is notable that none of these decisions had been taken by the participants prior to joining the WhatsApp group.

As noted previously in this thesis, Saudi society is traditionally governed by bureaucracy, covering both the macro context (i.e. governmental organisations) and the micro context of the family. This results in difficulties in locating external support for social change. However, the pursuit of SDPD, alongside the current socio-political reforms taking place to liberalise and modernise Saudi society, has the potential to reduce the power of bureaucracy and increase the role of the individual, in order (particularly in the case of women) to make the required changes. Hence, the adoption of SDPD can give teachers, as adult learners, control and power potentially absent from other forms of learning.

8.4.1 SDPD and the Policy System

The third research question of the current study focussed on identifying the potential challenges impeding teachers from pursuing SDPD. Brockett and Hiemstra (2018) stated that “unfortunately, in our view, there have been far too few reports in the literature of efforts to think through the implications, policy needs, and programmes changes related to self-direction in learning” (p. 280). Furthermore, Fraser-Seeto et al. (2015, p. 10) highlighted the need to investigate “the factors that impact the ongoing effectiveness of SDPD.”

This section therefore discusses the issues highlighted by the participants concerning the policy system of TPD found in Saudi universities. It should be noted that working in a bureaucratic educational environment in which policymakers tend to be unfamiliar with current PD requirements, can result in a lack of structural integrity (i.e. intolerant work polices) as well as

obstructing the aims and objectives of these institutions. The participants reported that they found the lack of flexible work policies challenging, particularly when needing to pursue SDPD during working hours (Section 6.6.1.3). This infers that, if these universities continue to fail to recognise SDPD as form of in-service PD, teachers will continue to miss opportunities to serve their professional needs. Moreover, the failure of policies supporting TPD in the Saudi university context seems to be not confined to self-directed initiatives, but rather includes some formal ones. Alshahrani's (2017) study found that the university administration failed to adequately support EFL teachers attending external PD activities, such as conferences. However, he did not indicate whether this failure of policy affected both Saudi and non-Saudi teachers, or one group only, because the regulations of the Saudi Higher Education Council only allow Saudis to avail themselves of such opportunities. Hence, the findings of the current study, in addition to those of Alshahrani, reflect a remarkable lack of political support for TPD for EFL university teachers, which if taken into consideration might contribute to their SDPD enhancing their professionalism in these universities.

Furthermore, the findings of this study identified discrimination in the legal provision concerning institutional financial support between Saudi and non-Saudi teachers, resulting in the TPD policy system in Saudi universities working against foreign teachers (Section 6.6.1.3). This raises the critical issue of discrimination, which has no place within an academic context. Optional PD training programmes, workshops and conferences are funded and approved by universities, meaning that the regulations set by university councils only support the attendance of Saudi teachers (Statutes and Regulations of The Higher Education Council and Universities, 2007). These regulations constitute a challenging factor for foreign teachers wishing to pursue SDPD and may result in the development of a negative attitude. I therefore believe that teachers undertaking identical duties should have equal rights, including access to PD/SDPD opportunities. Although Alshahrani (2017) highlighted lack of financial support as a

challenging factor, he did not establish whether this lack affected Saudi or non-Saudi teachers more, as demonstrated in the current study.

Socioculturally speaking, it is important to indicate that this lack of equality in foreign TPD works against the principles of Islam, the source of all policies formulated in Saudi Arabia, including work policies. Islam is a religion of equality that sees all people as equals and makes no differentiation between individuals, except by piety (personal integrity). In the Prophet Muhammed's (peace be upon him) farewell speech, he affirmed that "all people are equal like the teeth of a comb, and no Arab is superior to a non-Arab, nor is a white person superior to a black person, unless by virtue of personal integrity and moral rectitude" (Ibn Hanbal, 2001, p. 474). The fact that it forms one of his farewell messages reflects its critical importance, i.e. rejecting racism to guarantee a peaceful and equal society.

Moor (1999) highlighted the importance of managing diversity and equality in the workforce as a result of its impact on all members of the community in relation to increased opportunities, productivity and competitiveness. This signifies the importance of ensuring equal opportunities to enable PD to create an appealing working environment, in which all members enjoy the same rights. This is also considered vital for increasing the productivity and diversity of workers (Ricucci, 2018).

However, it is important to recognise the difficulties inherent in managing the diversity and equality of faculty members. Sharma (2016) argued that effective management of the diversity of university teachers (both nationals and non-nationals) requires specific rules and regulations (p. 2). In addition, Alian (2014) highlighted the recommendation of international experts that, in order to benefit from diversity in culture, experience and skills, 25% of staff in all universities should be made up of foreign faculty members. In addition, this ensures a multilingual context, which also contributes to the diversity of university educational life. Alian

(ibid) identified that foreign teachers currently make up 40% of the staff within Saudi universities. Although this may be seen to work against the principles of the Saudisation employment system (i.e. to fill vacancies with Saudi nationals), the presence of diverse international professional faculty members creates a healthy academic environment (Collins and Kritsonis, 2006).

8.4.2 SDPD and the Saudi higher Education Employment System

8.4.2.1 Acknowledgement

The current study found that, as a result of being self-determined, SDPD currently lacks official recognition as a form of in-service PD. The teachers reported that they tend to avoid pursuing SDPD as result of its lack of practical recognition during evaluations or when applying for a job or promotion. Omar called for an appreciation of SDPD, in particular through acknowledgment and reward (see Section 6.6.1.4), as this would contribute to its promotion and sustainability. However, I feel that the absence of measures to evaluate and appreciate SDPD arise from its lack of acknowledgement within this context. The current study therefore addresses this gap by offering a number of implications and recommendations, as discussed in the concluding chapter.

8.4.2.2. Lack of Job Security

A further critical challenge identified by this research concerns the lack of job security experienced by foreign teachers, arising primarily from the current economic reforms. Teachers need to work in a stable teaching environment to maintain their productivity and motivation to grow professionally, and in particular one in which they feel secure and experience a sense of belonging (Khan, 2011, p. 151). Job security also stimulates and enhances innovation and creativity when it comes to problem-solving, particularly among highly

educated employees (Neumann, 2016). Thus, Neumann (ibid) stated that a lack of job security has a negative impact on innovation and lowers creativity in relation to problem-solving. In addition, high levels of job security are considered primary socio-psychological factors facilitating the realisation of creative potential (Neumann, ibid, p. 598).

Moreover, this problem has been increased by the current reduction in government expenses in Saudi Arabia (including for the higher education sector), along with the current employment reforms. Thus, the new Saudisation employment system dictates that faculty members should be Saudis. The only exceptions are in cases of insufficient qualifications in rare specialisations, or an individual being temporarily absent for the purposes of undertaking a scholarship, when positions can be filled temporarily by non-Saudis until qualified Saudis are available (Ministry of Civil Service, 2017). Five participants of the current study (particularly non-Saudi teachers) reported that this has resulted in feelings of insecurity and thus a loss of interest in SDPD. This finding also corresponds to those set out by Alshahrani (2017), which state that the policy system regarding foreign teachers' contracts in Saudi universities causes insecurity; i.e. the "policy of short term contracts and late contract renewal confirmation, leading to a sense of insecurity which discouraged engagement with CPD" (p. 207). However, despite the current policy to reduce unemployment by offering more jobs to Saudi nationals, this study feels that higher education needs to maintain the diversity of its staff members, particularly those too highly educated and experienced to be replaced by new Saudi graduates. This would ensure stability for such faculty members, thus enhancing the quality of these institutions.

As discussed above, the current reforms of the socio-economic sector have led foreign university teachers choosing not to pursue SDPD, thus highlighting the critical role of social and political dimensions on the status of SDPD in Saudi universities. However, I hope that this situation will improve when, as set out in Saudi 2030 vision, higher education begins to

privatise its institutions to improve their quality of education, as well as enhancing international partnerships with world-leading universities (see Section 2.3.2/ 2.3.2). This lack of an atmosphere of discrimination would enable Saudi higher education to enhance its status by attracting globally recognised experts.

8.5 SDPD and Educational Research in Saudi Higher Education

This study found that action research remains an unpopular form of SDPD (both individually and collaboratively) within the Saudi university context. This raises the issue of the reasons behind such avoidance, particularly given its critical role in improving learning and teaching practice (Ulvik and Riese, 2015). This study identified teachers' belief in the critical role of research in the pursuit of SDPD. This raises the issue of the reasons behind such an avoidance, including whether it is seen as difficult, or teachers are unaware of its existence.

I feel it is significant that, as a university EFL teacher with an MA in applied linguistics, I was unaware of action research, or its potential for focussing on teaching practice and addressing its problems (Taylor, 2017). I only became aware of its existence when I started my MSc in educational research in the UK. This may indicate a lack of knowledge regarding action research as a genre of educational research in general, and as a form of SDPD in particular. The current study included EFL university teachers, with a minority holding a bachelor's degree (16%), who, it can be concluded, may never have been made aware of the existence of action research. On the other hand, the majority of the study sample held postgraduate degrees (60% having a master's and 24% a PhD), and it can therefore be assumed that the majority of the participants were familiar with undertaking research. Action research is primarily employed to improve performance and practice, and therefore its lack of popularity can be seen as reflecting a limited use of applied research in Saudi universities to diagnose and address existing problems. Ulvik and Riese (2015) noted that action research is somewhat complex and

requires specific contextual support, but that it is also efficient at addressing teaching problems (McNiff, 2017). This, consequently, raises the further issue of how educational problems can be addressed in this context.

Politically speaking, promoting the use of applied research in general, and action research in particular, aligns with the aims and objectives of the Saudi National Transformational Programme. As noted above, this programme was introduced in 2016 with the aim of privatising Saudi public universities by changing the current bureaucratic system that limits their ability to: (1) attract international competencies (i.e. highly qualified members to work in the universities or take part in their research projects); (2) develop their resources; and (3) form international partnerships (Alkhraif, 2018). The new orientation towards improving Saudi universities' performance primarily focuses on establishing autonomy in universities and research centres through restructuring the orientation of existing universities and establishing new ones. A draft proposal released in Makkah newspaper, on 14th September 2017 revealed that the new university structure will be placed under three main categories: (1) research-based universities; (2) applied universities; and (3) educational (teaching) universities. This reform aims to firstly, meet the requirements of the labour market and secondly, reduce competition and imitation arising from the existence of similar universities (Alesa, 2017). (1) Research-based universities focus on research and postgraduate studies. (2) Education (teaching) universities focus on the delivering of bachelor and master's degrees. (3) Applied universities focus on applied teaching of diploma and bachelor's degrees. The use of action research is not limited to one type, i.e. research-based universities. Thus, the culture of conducting research as a form of SDPD should be promoted in all universities, regardless of title or orientation. This forms a successful model of PD allowing teachers to critically question their teaching practices (Taylor, 2017), as well as satisfying other purposes of conducting research. Thus,

they should raise the awareness of faculty members regarding the critical role of research in general and action research in particular.

8.5.1 Implications of Saudi 2030 Vision for SDPD in Higher Education

This study concludes that the aims and outcomes of SDPD as a form of self-development within the educational system are compatible with the broader economic and socio-political orientation of the Saudi 2030 Vision, which seeks to modernise the country. Overseen by the current government of Saudi Arabia, this vision looks forward to developing the education system in higher education (see Section 2.3). In particular, it aims to create new modern systems and formulate new standards for the selection of effective academic leaders based on competence, experience and strategic vision (MoE, 2019).

It is hoped that the application of the new system will result in improvements to the productivity and quality of faculty members within top universities. It is also hoped that this system will foster greater competition between universities, thus contributing to the development of each individual university. The introduction of the new system is informed by the wish to rationalise expenditure and maximise the use of available resources. I therefore believe that promoting SDPD as a form of SDL will prove a considerable contribution to achieving the aims and agenda of the 2030 Vision, particularly as (unlike traditional PD programmes) this will not incur any great expense. At the same time, it will enhance university autonomy in the higher education system.

8.5.2 Enhancing Universities' Autonomy

As noted earlier, SDPD is deeply rooted in teacher's control (autonomy). Saudi 2030 Vision aims to autonomise the university system through the provision of additional control over each university's internal and financial systems, in particular by reforming current academic

programmes and disciplines to become more aligned with the labour market. These changes may lead to the expansion of the power of university councils, enabling them to: (1) provide the required support; (2) increase productivity; and (most importantly) (3) reduce bureaucracy during the process of implementing decisions from higher authorities.

In addition, I anticipate that this autonomy will also spread to reach other core issues, i.e. university teachers. Thus, teacher autonomy can be applied to both learning and practice. The analysis of qualitative data found that teacher autonomy can function as a means for learning (personal trait) or to end learning (being an autonomous learner) and thus teacher autonomy in SDPD can be viewed according to the characteristics of the learner. Thus, for those already autonomous, this assists in sustaining the pursuit of SDPD, while practising collaborative SDPD increases this trait among those who tend to be less autonomous, as with a number of teachers in the WhatsApp group. This result accords with Garrison (1997), but not with Candy (1991) who argues that personal autonomy is not necessarily manifested in the learning endeavour nor does autonomy in learning necessarily contribute in developing personal autonomy.

8.6 SDPD Among other Approaches to Teacher PD

Although SDPD is yet to be widely recognised as a practical form of PD, it is positioned alongside the other forms of PD for complementarity. Thus, this section discusses how SDPD is not contrary to other approaches to PD, but rather it offsets the limitations of traditional approaches, such as structured, formal, and other-directed approaches in which the teacher lacks autonomy, voice and agency (Diaz-Maggioli, 2004; Smith, 2017). When examining approaches to PD, we can observe a mixture of different approaches. Kennedy (2005) grouped PD models into three broad categories: transmissive, transitional, and transformative models. This typology demonstrates how the development of theories underpinning PD moves from

those informed by instrumental managerial perspectives that neglect the teacher role as a key element in the process of designing and implementing PD, to more democratic ones that promote professional autonomy and teacher agency (Kennedy, 2014). Although SDPD models fall predominantly within the transitional and transformative approaches, encompassing an increase in the capacity for teacher autonomy, they do not contradict traditional (transmissive pedagogical) models informed by instrumental perspectives, but instead complement them when implemented together, or compensate for their limitations. To illustrate, as transmissive (structured/other-directed) models lack teacher involvement, professional autonomy and teacher agency, SDPD is found to promote these critical aspects, which have been emphasised to support effective PD (Guskey, 2002; Smith, 2017); thereby addressing key limitations.

Action research, for example, can be considered as a model of SDPD when conducted self-directedly. Conducting this kind of research as an initiative by teachers themselves, rather than one imposed by others, can allow teachers to practically investigate and address various classroom problems as they emerge in their classes. This is significant, as problems differ from one class to another, particularly when taking the differences in social context into consideration. Doing so allows university teachers to contribute to enhancing the quality of their teaching, without a need for intervention from outside agencies to enhance the teaching scenario. Moreover, conducting action research entails addressing teaching problems empirically by teachers applying theory themselves. Thus, this model of SDPD exemplifies how teachers have the freedom to make decisions when focusing on issues of critical importance/concern to each. This consequently shows how they can apply theoretical knowledge within classroom practice. According to Norton (2018), action research can contribute not only to address teaching problems, but also to enhancing teachers' understanding of their own teaching practice, which might not be achieved following other models of PD. Moreover, when conducted self-directedly by a teacher, this approach will increase teachers'

engagement with, and reflection on the issue under investigation. Thus, such research is recommended as potentially of great importance as a tool that can contribute practically to enhance teaching practice.

The following chapter examines the implications of the current study, followed by drawing major conclusions and outlining the contribution to knowledge, as well as making recommendations for PD policymakers and EFL teachers in Saudi universities.

Chapter 9

Conclusion, Contributions and Implications

9.1 Introduction

This chapter summarises the main findings of this study and discusses its theoretical, practical and methodological contribution to the understanding of SDPD. It also includes significant implications for practice and policy makers to improve the status of SDPD in the context of both international and Saudi university EFL. The chapter concludes by highlighting the research limitations, along with recommendations for further research and a personal reflection of the researcher's PhD journey.

9.2 The Main Findings of the Study

The key findings of this research (as discussed in chapters 6,7 and 8) present a conceptual and theoretical understanding and offer practical suggestions for teachers' practice of SDPD and self-directed VCoP in the EFL context in general and the Saudi university EFL context in particular. Findings pertinent to the first question ("What is the nature of the SDPD initiatives pursued by EFL university teachers in Saudi university context?") demonstrated that, although teachers employed both types of SDPD, they tended to favour individual rather than collaborative activities. An examination of the popularity of these individual activities identified eight that were employed to varying degrees, with the most frequently adopted being: (1) reflective teaching; (2) reading books and papers; and (3) consulting online websites. Self-evaluation, self-observation, attending conferences and joining PD courses were used to a lesser extent, while action research proved to be the least popular. The results also indicated that teachers tended to adopt the use of individual activities due to these promoting: (1) freedom of decision-making; (2) flexibility in relation to time; (3) convenience and comfort of learning;

and (4) an ability to focus on the self. This study highlights the effectiveness and flexibility of individual SDPD, due to it allowing the teacher to decide the following aspects for him/herself: (1) what to learn; (2) when and where to learn; (3) how to learn; and (4) why to learn. I strongly believe that these factors encourage teachers to learn consistently and grow professionally.

Although collaborative SDPD activities were found to be adopted to a lesser extent than individual activities, this study recognises their importance and effectiveness. When I questioned the teachers preferring this type of SDPD, they noted that the most significant reasons consisted of: firstly, the ability to learn through social interaction and from multiple perspectives (particularly when addressing specific problems) and secondly, being externally motivating. This study identified fewer collaborative than individual activities, with the most frequently adopted being informal teacher discussion, followed by communities of practice, informal peer coaching and informal peer observation. However, it should be noted that these remain far less frequently adopted than informal discussion. The least adopted activity was found to be collaborative action research.

It was noted that, despite the difference in popularity, both types of SDPD were pursued by teachers within this context. In addition, the findings of the case study argued for the effectiveness of VCoP as a collaborative SDPD activity in the Saudi university EFL context.

Furthermore, teachers were asked about the reasons for, and potential of, pursuing SDPD. The findings of the second question (“What are the factors that contribute to the SDPD of EFL teachers in Saudi universities?”) indicated that SDPD enhances teachers’ autonomy, self-empowerment, motivation, confidence and professional identity. Further key reasons for pursuing this form of PD were identified as self-evaluation and that it matched teachers’ learning styles. Participants also reported that they adopted SDPD for academic reasons, in order to: (1) improve their knowledge and skills; (2) conduct research; (3) contribute to

curriculum development; and (4) when introducing a new curriculum. The main administrative reasons consisted of: (1) obtaining administrative positions; and (2) responding to teacher evaluation reports. The findings revealed that, while autonomy was cited as a significant reason for pursuing SDPD, it also contributed to the development of self-empowerment and confidence.

The findings for the third question (“What are the underlying factors that potentially hinder EFL teachers in Saudi universities from pursuing SDPD?”) revealed a number of challenges and limitations. The teachers stated that the main challenges consisted of: (1) time; (2) geographical mobility; and (3) a lack of institutional support (i.e. moral, financial and political). Teachers’ involvement in such activities were found to be impacted by the low quality of the current PD activities provided by Saudi universities (i.e. content and presentation), with the most significant aspect being the lack of acknowledgement, which resulted in some teachers avoiding participating in this form of PD. Furthermore, a number of non-Saudi EFL teachers reported a key challenge as being the lack of job security and stability in Saudi university context, resulting from current economic and political changes. This caused them to lose interest in SDPD, due to being more concerned about securing their own futures (i.e. not necessarily in Saudi Arabia). These challenges represent a threat to the practice of SDPD among EFL university teachers, with the potential to influence their professionalism, thus highlighting the need for further attention from policy makers, administrators and researchers. At the same time, this study identified a number of limitations to online SDPD, in particular that it was time consuming and distracting, as well as containing issues related to: (1) online content validity; (2) users’ privacy; and (3) possible misunderstanding of online discourse.

The findings for the fourth research question (“How does participating in a virtual community of practice (VCoP) through a ‘WhatsApp group’, as a form of SDPD, relate to EFL university

teachers teaching practice?") demonstrated the significant impact of VCoP via WhatsApp as a model of SDPD. Teachers reported experiencing a direct influence on their teaching practice in terms of: (1) the acquisition of new knowledge; (2) refreshing their teaching styles; (3) learning how to assist students with different learning styles; and (4) using it as a teaching/learning resource. The findings also indicate that this also impacted on their students. The findings revealed that teachers' discussions in the WhatsApp group increased their confidence and external motivation, along with their sense of professional identity, while at the same time improving their attitudes towards their own learning and EFL teaching. Most importantly, the teachers stated that their students became more motivated and engaged in the classroom, which, in turn, enhanced their understanding of, and attitude to, the learning of English.

9.3 Contribution of the Research

This section presents the main contribution of this research to existing knowledge, in relation to SDPD and the informal self-directed VCoP of EFL university teachers. It also highlights the implications for both the international and the Saudi EFL context. This has resulted in theoretical, practical and methodological contributions being presented separately.

9.3.1 Theoretical Contribution

The interpretive mixed-methods and case study designs of the current study have resulted in a significant contribution to the knowledge of SDPD and self-directed VCoP via WhatsApp, in particular by revealing the impact on teaching practice. Theoretically speaking, the findings of the current study reveal that the pursuit of SDPD contributes to enhancing teachers' learning and knowledge, as well as their professionalism.

SDPD is a beneficial approach to professional development for teachers, particularly those needing to fill a gap in their knowledge (Wanger, 2018). At the same time (as discussed throughout this thesis), it addresses the limitations of other-directed PD. The diversity of SDPD activities (i.e. individual or collaborative and both on- and -offline) affords teachers the opportunity to become their own developers of theory, learning and knowledge. This is supported by the richness of SDPD's potential to ensure full control over learning, along with freedom of decision making, accessibility to learning resources and flexibility of practice. It also provides teachers with a sense of agency and ownership, i.e. "they were not just recipients of knowledge, but also contributed to the process of knowledge creation" (Govender, 2015, p. 490).

The current thesis has established that the professionalism of EFL teachers is now no longer dependent on (or measured by) attendance at formal, other-directed PD opportunities provided by their institutions. SDPD initiatives should now be acknowledged and recognised as equal to any recognised formally structured PD. This view is supported by Brockett and Hiemstra (2018), who recommended that institutions develop specific measures for the accountability and evaluation of SDL, in order to ascertain the value of SDPD.

At the level of theorisation, Kennedy (2014) argued that "the state of the literature on teachers' CPD as a whole is partial in its coverage, is fragmented and is under-theorised" (p. 689). This fragmentation persists, with the current literature failing to award equal attention to SDPD (both as a term and a concept) as an aspect of formal/structured PD. Thus, the current study contributes to the theorisation of an otherwise unrecognised form of PD. The findings enable me to confidently suggest that SDPD needs to be included in any definition or framework, both at the level of conceptualisation and the theorisation of professional development. In addition, this should appear in the literature concerning PD or when developing PD programmers and

policies. Similarly, at the level of terminology, terms such as ‘teacher learning’ or ‘teacher professional learning’ are now being employed, rather than ‘PD’ or ‘CPD’.

Furthermore, Kennedy (ibid) argued that teacher autonomy promotes teacher agency, i.e. an important element of PD. The pursuit of SDPD and self-directed VCoP enhance a teacher’s autonomy and self-empowerment, as well as his/her internal and external motivation and self-confidence. This indicates that SDPD is beneficial for the psychology of teachers, which, particularly in the Saudi university context, is not always achieved by means of formal/institutional PD. This study has established that the experience of personal autonomy leads to teachers being able to initiate their learning in an independent manner, so increasing their confidence and being empowered to apply such skills into practice. Knowles (1980) emphasised that SDL is based on the premise of the immediate application of acquired knowledge. The results of the current study confirm that the immediate implementation of new teaching methods and practices gained through SDPD reflects increased self-empowerment, particularly within top-down systems, i.e. the current Saudi university system. Hence, SDPD enables teachers to grow professionally, both with and without the support of their institutions. However, it should be noted that institutional support is important in facilitating and promoting the pursuit of this form of PD, as discussed in relation to the contribution to practice.

In the context of EFL, the most recognised form of PD is formal, structured and other-directed. This study recommends that, due to its complexity and effectiveness, SDPD should be awarded theoretical and practical recognition as an aspect of recognised PD in the field of EFL/TESOL PD in general, and in the Saudi university EFL context in particular.

9.3.2 Practical/Pedagogical Contribution

The findings of this study contribute to the improvement of EFL pedagogy by enhancing teacher development. EFL teachers in Saudi universities originate from a number of different English backgrounds (i.e. in relation to education, translation, applied linguistics and English literature), with many having no specialisation in education, or undertaken specialised pre/in-service training, and therefore lacking primary knowledge of TESOL (see Section 2.4.1). It is thus vital for such teachers to undertake PD in order to learn how to teach English professionally and increase their overall professionalism as EFL university teachers. The participants of the current study reported a low quality of structured other-directed PD provided by Saudi universities, as well as, in some cases, the lack of specialised PD in TESOL (see Section 6.6.1.6). This study has established that SDPD (both individual and collaborative) makes a practical contribution to enhancing teachers' professional knowledge, skills and experience. It therefore indicates that SDPD can be regarded as an efficient, practical and sustainable approach for the acquisition of additional skills, particularly as it is based on teachers' needs, competences and interests. This study therefore calls for the implementation of policies to promote and acknowledge SDPD. In addition, it highlights the need for policy makers, administrators, programme leaders and researchers to promote and reward its use, in order to raise teachers' awareness of its potentiality and effectiveness. Suggestions for promoting SDPD is discussed in depth in the following section focussing on the implications and recommendations of this study.

A further practical contribution of this study relates to the self-directed VCoP via WhatsApp of EFL teachers. This VCoP is private, informal and self-directed, being available on smartphones through the WhatsApp application and accessible at all times. It has therefore created an authentic conducive environment for teachers' informal collaborative learning. This

study finds that teachers acknowledged the positive impact of this WhatsApp group on their teaching practice, themselves and their students, thus reflecting an effective form of teacher learning.

Moreover, at the level of discourse, the use of WhatsApp as a medium of VCoP for non-native EFL teachers makes a major contribution by enabling less formal communication, i.e. code switching, transliteration and (most importantly) the use of teachers' first language (see Sections 7.3.4/8.3.5). This aspect proved highly effective and enhanced teachers' involvement and ability to join in discussions, as well as their openness towards sharing their practices and problems faced in the classroom. The participants stressed that being able to use their L1 enabled them to focus on learning rather than the language of communication (i.e. the correct term or vocabulary). Although all participants were EFL teachers, they acknowledged that they would not be equally competent in English as in their first language, and thus the use of English as this could restrict/limit their ability to communicate, participate and learn. This study therefore concluded that it is beneficial for non-native EFL teachers in VCoP to use their L1 as a medium of communication, in order to enhance collaborative learning.

9.3.3 Methodological Contributions

The current study responds to calls advocating the adoption of an interpretive approach within SDL research (e.g. Candy, 1991). Candy (1991) noted that this approach facilitates the gaining and understanding of learners' views of SDL, including: (1) the intentions and purposes of its adoption; (2) attitudes towards SDL; (3) views of SDL as a means of autonomous learning; and (4) the development of personal autonomy. Furthermore, the current study identified the impact of social, economic and political factors both contributing to and inhibiting teachers' pursuit of SDPD. This has the potential to increase the use of SDPD and improve the professionalism and practice of teachers and consequently their students' ability to learn. Most

importantly, this study focused primarily on qualitative data in a context that appreciates quantitative research for the sake of generalisability. This focusses on benefitting both EFL teachers and TESOL specialists in: (1) Saudi higher education; (2) the Arab Gulf region; and (3) the international context.

Furthermore, the current study adopted an exploratory interpretive methodology, employing two designs (i.e. mixed-methods and a case study) to address the research aim and questions. The overall design represents a methodological contribution to the SDPD of EFL university teachers, including its impact on their practice. The review of the literature of SDPD highlighted a lack of studies adopting an interpretive methodology employing two designs. The mixed-methods design was used to add breadth to the investigation, through an examination of the nature, potential and challenges of SDPD on a large sample taken from multiple sites. The qualitative case study was adopted with the aim of gaining a deep insight into the impact of self-directed VCoP via WhatsApp, as a model of SDPD, on teachers' practice. The stages, phases and sequence followed in this research can be used as guidelines for educational research in both Saudi Arabia and the international context. It is particularly relevant in relation to the development of interpretive methodology with two designs, in order to cultivate a rich and in-depth understanding of the area under investigation.

9.4 Implications and Recommendations for Practice

Kennedy (2014) called for the development of theory impacting on the policy and practice of professional development. This study is underpinned by SDL theory and contributes to both practice and policy, in particular through suggesting a number of significant implications and recommendations, as outlined below.

1. **The lack of financial support and difficulties relating to geographical mobility:**

The findings of the mixed-methods stage identified these as challenging issues inhibiting some teachers from pursuing offline SDPD in contexts (local or international) requiring funding. The current study therefore recommends that teachers take advantage of online learning, which (in terms of cost, effort and potential) has proved to be highly effective and practical (El-Hani and Garcia, 2012). Thus, teachers should be aware of the potential of online platforms or websites providing free to use PD, including: (1) YouTube; (2) Telegram; (3) LinkedIn; (4) Twitter; (5) Facebook; and (6) free online PD courses, webinars and conferences presented by internationally respected universities. Balushi (2017), for example, recommended that teachers join 'Massive Online Open Courses' (MOOC), which offer free online courses in every subject area (p. 270). This has established that learning through online sources enables teachers to join any beneficial PD course or programme, regardless of location.

2. **Online SDPD is time consuming and some resources can lack validity:** This was the conclusion drawn by the mixed-methods stage of the current research. Thus, administrators and programme leaders should work as facilitators and support teachers online SDPD through arranging with experts to present workshops focussing on teaching the skills required to search for accurate, valid and authentic online sources, in order to save teachers' time and effort, as well as obtaining information from valid sources. This would, in turn, enhance teachers' professional and technical research skills.

3. **Action research was the approach least adopted by EFL university teachers.** This was established by the findings of the mixed-methods stage, despite this approach being considered an effective form of PD that seeks to investigate and improve teaching and

learning (McNiff, 2017). However, it was clear that teachers required specialised support, due to action research being complex, demanding and time consuming, particularly when conducted simultaneously with teaching (Ulvik and Riese, 2015). This has led me to the view that administrators and programme leaders should provide the required support, which could be in the form of: (1) educating teachers concerning the nature of, as well as why and how to, conduct action research; and (2) ensuring a supportive environment through the provision of adequate funding, time (i.e. research leave) and resources. This would promote a culture of action research in university context as an effective tool for improving teaching practice.

4. **Teachers' lack of awareness of the courses they will be required to teach during the following year/semester.** The findings of the case study revealed that a lack of information of the courses they would be teaching resulted in teachers' failure to participate in WhatsApp groups during vacations. This highlights the need for programme leaders and coordinators to provide teachers with their schedules early, to enable them to invest a proportion of their vacations in learning new skills and preparing themselves to teach to a high professional standard, particularly when they know they are about to teach a new course.
5. **The lack of institutional morale and respect accorded to teachers' SDPD.** The findings of the mixed-methods stage identified this aspect as a major challenge, one capable of demotivating teachers from pursuing SDPD. This challenge should therefore be taken into consideration, in order to prevent a negative influence on teachers' perceptions and attitudes toward SDPD, and thus subsequently their practice. This highlights that administrators, programme leaders and coordinators should work together to create a supportive and respectful environment to support teachers' morale and offer an appreciation of their SDPD initiatives.

9.5 Implications and Recommendations for Policy Makers

Brockett and Hiemstra (2018) argued that “policy is a concern that is frequently overlooked by educators of adults. Yet each of us is, in one way or another, involved in the development or implementation of policy” (p. 295). In response to their call, this study contributes to policy supporting SDPD. This section focuses on the significant implications and recommendations for the policy, with the aim of supporting the SDPD of EFL university teachers.

The system of public universities in Saudi Arabia is currently undergoing considerable change, in order to achieve the objectives of the 2030 vision (i.e. moving from bureaucratic to autonomous systems). It is therefore important to note that the following implications are directed towards policy makers, both those currently working in MoE and those potentially subsequently creating new policies for each university.

1. An inability to leave the workplace for the pursuit of SDPD. Both Saudi and non-Saudi teachers reported that current policies and regulations issued by MoE and university councils prevented them from taking time off for the purposes of SDPD. This indicates a lack of institutional political support, with the potential to frustrate and demotivate teachers and consequently have a negative impact on any self-directed efforts to improve their professionalism. This study therefore recommends that policy makers should issue flexible work policies permitting teachers to attend such opportunities and respect their efforts on self-improvement. The findings of the current study identify SDPD as an effective form of PD, thus demanding its encouragement by administrators and programme leaders through the provision of incentives. The participants suggested that these could take the form of awarding them: (1) a small number of free days to focus on their SDPD; (2) credits in their annual evaluation reports; (3) paid overtime opportunities; (4) tickets to enable them to travel; (5) financial and public recognition of their self-directed efforts.

2. The security and stability of foreign EFL university teachers' posts. This study identified foreign EFL teachers' insecurity arising from the current political and economic changes taking place in the country, particularly the employment system of Saudisation (see Sections 2.4.1/8.4.2.2). This has caused such teachers to lose interest in pursuing SDPD and to rather seek for secure employment in a more stable economic and political context. This study therefore recommends the issuing of new policies and regulations improving the security of a foreign teacher's job over a considerable length of time, instead of the current legal position dictating that foreign teachers' contracts are renewed on an annual basis (i.e. unless one party wishes to terminate, or it becomes against the general interest) (Statutes & Regulations Of The Higher Education Council & Universities, 2007, p. 154). It is clear that this issue is critical and may lead to the loss of international academic competencies, impacting on the quality and diversity of EFL teachers in this context.

3. Teachers need to work in a stable environment, in which they feel safe and feel a sense of belonging (Khan, 2011). Policy makers and administrators should also pay close attention to this emerging phenomenon, so as to create a stable occupational environment, and protect the reputation of Saudi higher education institutions as an attractive environment for international highly qualified EFL professionals. This would then guarantee the diversity of EFL teachers, while enhancing the quality of ELT in Saudi universities. To do so, administrators and policy makers are first recommended to set clear (internal and external) standards and regulations on their websites, pertaining to the: (1) recruitment of EFL teachers, including non-Saudis, (2) faculty members rights, (3) EFL teaching requirements; and (4) professional development expectations. This would then enhance teachers' understanding of the policies at the universities they work for, as they can refer back to them whenever needed. Second, to enhance the stability of foreign teachers, policy makers are recommended to restructure incentive and reward systems and to connect to them, to increase the duration of

contracts, rather than offering financial incentives. Third, administrations should establish informal social communities/gatherings, so that all faculty members, including the Dean and Administrative staff, can attend and meet on a regular basis for socialising, sharing achievements, and establishing relationships. Doing this would increase teachers' social interaction and create a sense of belonging.

4. The current PD available to EFL teachers in Saudi universities is of low quality in terms of both content and presentation. The findings of the mixed-methods stage revealed that this aspect caused teachers to avoid attending this form of PD. It is therefore important for PD planners and providers in Saudi universities to focus on enhancing the quality of their PD, in order to contribute in achieving the objectives of 2030 vision. Alsagri and Almohaimed (2017) stated that this can be achieved through establishing partnerships between the PD departments in Saudi universities and their counterparts in world leading universities, in order to benefit from their expertise in EFL TPD. In addition, Alsagri and Almohaimed (ibid) recommended sending experts in the field to examine and evaluate the appropriateness of current PD programmes, in order to: (1) draw up plans for their improvement; and (2) create an inviting environment for SDPD through organising and hosting local conferences, workshops and seminars. In addition, university PD providers and programme leaders should support their teachers through the provision of access to high quality online SDPD opportunities, i.e. programmes, workshops, seminars and resources.

5. Time being a major issue inhibiting teachers from pursuing SDPD. This aspect was confirmed by the findings of the mixed-methods stage of this study. This led to the recommendation for policy makers and administrators to specify certain times to be set aside for teachers' SDPD (i.e. at least one or two hours per week) and making it an official part of

their schedule. This study has identified that this would encourage teachers to pursue SDPD in a sustainable manner, so ensuring it becomes part of their professional culture.

In summary: The above implications and recommendations will be communicated (both formally and informally) to policy makers, administrators, programme leaders and (most importantly) EFL teachers at Saudi universities. This will include presenting papers and participating formally in local conferences and symposiums taking place: (1) in my own university; (2) other universities in Saudi Arabia; (3) in international TESOL events, (e.g. IATEFL, TESOL Arabia); and (4) other conferences in the Gulf region.

I will also arrange to meet the decision makers within my university, particularly those in charge of TPD, i.e. administrators and PD organisers at the Department of Quality and Development. I will also provide the MoE with the findings of this study. As most of the policy makers, along with those in charge of TPD in other Saudi universities, are active users of Twitter (and have official accounts representing their positions in these universities), I will contact them directly to present/disseminate the findings of this research. Furthermore, in response to the popularity of social media platforms in Saudi Arabia as a means of learning (Alsolamy, 2017), I will informally initiate a number of online channels on different social media platforms (i.e. YouTube, Twitter and Snap Chat) to share and disseminate the findings of my study, in addition to educating teachers and those with an interest in SDPD.

9.6 Implications for the Current Economic Reforms in Saudi Arabia

The current orientation of the National Transformation Project aims to diversify government revenue sources as part of the current economic reforms taking place in Saudi Arabia. This includes improving existing economic human resources, in order to achieve sustainability. According to the goals of the fifties plan, the reformation process seeks to: (1) implement

economic and developmental reformation; (2) reduce governmental spending; (3) diversify the economy and increase local production; (4) improve general and higher education; (5) expand privatisation; (6) encourage non-oil investment; (7) globalise local organisations; and (8) support the knowledge-based economy (2030 vision, 2019). The aims and plans of this vision are therefore compatible with the premises of SDPD and thus its adoption will allow EFL university teachers to pursue learning in a sustainable manner, thus compensating for the absence of previous governmental financial support for PD departments in Saudi universities. Hence, SDPD can be seen as an appropriate economical solution for the current reduction in PD budgets within Saudi higher education.

9.7 Implications for Enhancing the Role of Women in Leadership in Saudi Universities

Women in Saudi Arabia have currently achieved a much improved legal status, following the government enacting a number of laws and regulations supporting women and activating their role in society as key partners contributing to development of the country. This enables qualified women to occupy high and powerful positions and join the boards of university councils. In relation to the previous interpretation of SDPD, this is now improved, particularly when considering the political and social dimension. Thus, the adoption of SDPD by female teachers will enhance their practical professionalism, alongside their opportunities to achieve high positions and take part in the policy decision-making process. This will highlight the ability of women to be in authority, as in the case of deanships (which were previously exclusively male).

This may serve to improve the efficiency of female departments previously governed by male leaders. I also feel that the opportunity to gain such positions will encourage female faculty members to adopt SDPD to enhance their skills. The latest statistics published by MoE (2016/2017) stated that faculty members in all Saudi public universities are 40.83% female and

59.17% male. This higher percentage of males can be seen as due to political and sociocultural factors favouring males as a result of the male-dominant culture, in which all authoritative positions are reserved by law for men, i.e. all members of university councils and deans and vice deans of departments are male.

There is also a need to consider the additional issue of gender segregation, with the genders working on separate campuses resulting in the employment of female vice deans. However, it should be recognised that this role is superficial and merely that of transmitter, i.e. passing all paperwork to male sections where the real work is done and final decisions are made. Fortunately, the orientation of the current government is to empower women and boost their role of in all sectors of society. 2030 Vision is informed by the notion that women form half the population and thus their role is no less important than that of men. Thus, adopting SDPD would enhance the professionalism of female faculty members in all spheres, enabling them to occupy authoritative positions, not only in the university context, but also in other governmental organisations. The most prominent example of this initiative is the assigning of two female ambassadors this year, one for the United States and the second for Norway with one being vice dean of the college of languages and translation at King Saudi university in Riyadh.

Therefore, SDPD, being grounded in SDL (which promotes the autonomy and empowerment of learners) is completely compatible with the current changes taking place in Saudi Arabia. Moreover, adopting SDPD will support female university teachers seeking to become more professional, efficient and competent, and wishing to be involved in the decision-making process and fill highly authoritative positions within these academic institutions.

9.8 SDPD Bridges the Gap between Theory and Practice

The findings of this research suggest the pursuit of SDPD would bridge the gap between theory and practice by activating the potential of teachers to become the developers of theory, knowledge, learning and consequently innovate practice. Unlike the other approaches (e.g. structured, transmissive), which deal with teachers as passive learners who do not participate in selecting content nor developing knowledge as implemented by outsiders (Smith, 2017), SDPD, according to the findings of the current research, provides teachers with the opportunity to design, implement and apply what they have learned in their classrooms immediately. Thus, it arguably facilitates the application of theory into practice. However, although it has been suggested by the current research that SDPD can contribute practically to enhancing teachers' professionalism, this form of PD represents only one approach to pursuing PD by emphasising the role of the teacher, acknowledging at the same time that this is not the only approach/form of PD that might address the limitations of the other PD approaches. This does not imply all forms of PD should be self-directed in nature, but rather that SDPD will privilege particular learners (self-directed learners who seek professional autonomy, voice and agency), while still acknowledging that other forms/models of PD, such as the structured/transmissive ones, are practical and can still usefully contribute to teacher PD. Overall, when taking these approaches together, they provide a range of various forms of PD, with teachers left with the option to pursue suitable forms according to their needs, interest, and competence.

9.9 Study Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

Firstly, it should be noted that the mixed-methods stage of the current study employed a representative sample (i.e. both male and female teachers and Saudis and non-Saudis) selected randomly from thirteen public universities. However, it is recognised that the scope of the context was limited, i.e. it did not cover private universities. Unlike public universities (which

are funded and governed by the government (MoE)), private universities in Saudi Arabia are more autonomous in terms of their funding and management (see Section 2.3.3). It can therefore be surmised that the nature of SDPD of EFL teachers and the influence of the socio-political and socio-economic factors in these universities could differ. This suggests that future research into SDPD should focus on the context of private universities, in which high standards are required and stricter conditions are applied to faculty members regarding their quality of teaching (Baharmz, 1999, p. 9).

Secondly, the results of the mixed-methods stage of this research highlighted that action research (both individual and collaborative) was the least adopted model of SDPD by EFL university teachers. As this aspect was beyond the scope of the current study (which focussed on the nature of SDPD), it would be beneficial to undertake further research into the reasons behind such avoidance. This is particularly important as research in general, and action research in particular, is considered an important form of TPD (Govender, 2015).

Thirdly, the case study of the second stage of the current research was restricted to female participants. As noted above, many learning communities are single sex, as a result of gender segregation within the Saudi educational context. Furthermore, this WhatsApp group has been in existence since 2013, as an informal initiative by teachers working on female campuses. Therefore, as an interpretive researcher, I was unable to change the absence of male teachers. However, this limitation opens up opportunities for future research to investigate self-directed VCoP via WhatsApp of both genders, including how the gender variable may influence the learning in these VCoPs via WhatsApp.

Fourthly, the findings of the case study identified that teachers reported using a less formal means of communication in their VCoP via WhatsApp, in particular the use of Arabic, as their first language. This was found to be effective and enhanced teachers' involvement, openness

and engagement in group discussions. This results in a recommendation for future studies to undertake further research into the impact of using L1 of non-native EFL teachers while learning within VCoP.

Finally, the participants of the self-directed VCoP via WhatsApp in the case study of the current research were all non-native EFL teachers (i.e. Arabs). They therefore found it an advantage to be able to use Arabic (i.e. their first language) for their discussions. This raises a critical question regarding group members (i.e. EFL teachers) originating from different linguistic backgrounds, in particular whether their participation might prove equally effective if the use of their L1 does not prove feasible. This suggests the need for further research into the self-directed VCoP of non-native EFL teachers who do not share the same first language and are therefore forced to use English as their medium of communication.

9.10 Reflection on my PhD Journey

From the moment I was accepted onto the PhD programme in the School of Education at University of Exeter, my academic journey started. I began my journey six months before I arrived in the UK. Having a master's degree in Applied Linguistics and coming from a positivist research context, I decided to learn about other approaches to educational research, particularly research philosophy, and different schools of thought. I spent the whole six months reading books and papers and listening to lectures on educational research on different social-media platforms. Fortunately, before starting the course, my supervisor, Prof. Salah Troudi, recommended that I read a book on educational research: *Educational Methods in Research* by Cohen et al. (2011), and a number of academic papers. Reading this book, in addition to other sources, I learned a lot about the philosophy behind educational research in terms of different paradigms, the philosophical assumptions of each paradigm and debates, as well as how to carry out empirical research. Luckily, when I started my MSc, I did not find it difficult to

understand the content of the modules and what was expected from me as a PhD student. Being an international student did not affect me much as I came with an acceptable understanding of educational research; thus, I graduated from the MSc course with a distinction. Without my supervisor's recommendations and continuous support, I would not have had that level of confidence and comfort. Consequently, I was able to participate and get involved with full confidence in theoretical discussions. This successful beginning motivated and prepared me for the real mission with my thesis.

As I was aiming to produce an excellent piece of research, I was keen to learn practically from my supervisor how to broaden my thinking horizon and judgement, be critical and look at the issue from different angles. Then, I learned that research is all about creativity in looking at a single issue through a new lens, i.e. one that no one has thought of before. Moreover, besides the skills I learned in the workshops, seminars, conferences, research-fellow gatherings and research community, I developed the habit of reading newspapers and listening to live radio talks to keep abreast of what was going on in the world and then think about my topic in relation to socio-political changes occurring internationally and locally in the Saudi context. This was golden advice from my supervisor, whose fruit I picked later when I wrote my discussion chapter. So, instead of discussing/ positioning/ linking my work (only) to previous empirical research, I was able to link it to, and highlight its complexity in light of, current socio-political and socio-economic major issues, besides the underlying theoretical framework.

Interestingly, being a self-directed learner in nature helped me considerably to progress well through all the stages of conducting this research and to overcome the difficulties I faced by myself. However, this does not mean that I worked in isolation, but I was not relying on others to direct me regarding how to handle things.

Finally, throughout this research journey, I had a great opportunity to reflect on my experience with SDPD as well as teaching practice. This, together with the valuable results I gained from this research, provided me with thorough insights into the effectiveness of SDPD and how much I can benefit from it so as to grow professionally when I return to work. Furthermore, being a university faculty member who is likely to be in an administrative position, I am planning to enhance my role once I am back in my department by implementing a number of initiatives for promoting SDPD in my context, such as organising informal talks, presentations and workshops to educate my colleagues about its importance and effectiveness, hoping that my initiatives will inspire other teachers to do the same.

References

- Airasian, P. W., & Gullickson, A. R.** (1997). *Teacher Self-Evaluation Tool Kit*. Thousand Oaks California: Corwin Press, Inc.
- AL-Ghatrifi, Y.** (2016). *The Professional Development of Teachers in Higher Education in Oman: A case study of English teachers in the Colleges of Applied Sciences* (Doctoral thesis). University of Reading, United Kingdom.
- Alabbad, A.** (2009). *Introducing Constructivism and Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) into Traditional EFL Programs in Saudi Arabia* (Doctoral thesis). University of Queensland, Australia.
- Alasmari, A.** (2016). Continuous professional development of English language teachers: Perception and practices. *Advances in Language and Literary Studies*, 7(3), 117-124.
- Albahiri, M.** (2010). *Online CPD for Teachers in Saudi Arabia: Aptitude, attitudes and barriers* (Doctoral thesis). University of Strathclyde, United Kingdom.
- Alenazi, A. A.** (2017). WhatsApp Messenger as a Learning Tool: An investigation of pre-service teachers' learning without instructor presence. *Journal of Education and Training Studies*, 6(1), 1-8.
- Alenazi, O.** (2014). *The Employment of Native and Non-native Speaker EFL teachers in Saudi Higher Education Institutions: Programme administrators' perspective* (Doctoral thesis). Newcastle University, United Kingdom.
- Alkhraif, Rashoud.** (2018). The new university system between long wait and urgent need. *Aleqtisadiah Newspaper*. Retrieved from: http://www.aleqt.com/2018/03/18/article_1351916.html
- Alghamdi, A. H., & Li, Li.** (2011). *Teachers' continuing professional development programmes in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia*. Retrieved from: <http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICWebPortal/detail?accno=ED526850>
- Alharbi, A.** (2011). *The Development and Implementation of a CPD Programme for Newly Qualified Teachers in Saudi Arabia* (Doctoral dissertation). University of Southampton, Southampton, United Kingdom.
- Alharbi, H. A.** (2015). Improving students' English-speaking proficiency in Saudi public schools. *International Journal of Instruction*, 8(1), 105-116.

Alkhatib, A. J. (2013). *A Case Study of an Early Childhood Minority Teacher and How She Formed Her Professional Identity*. (Doctoral dissertation). Kent State University, Kent, United States.

Alnahhas, N. A. (2016). Identity in teaching a second language: The narrative journey of a Saudi female. *International Journal of English Language Teaching*, 3(2), 1-13.

Alian, Khalil. (2014, January 22). Saudization of faculty members in Saudi universities from an academic point of view. *Alriyadh Newspaper*. Retrieved from: <http://www.alriyadh.com/903082>

Alsagri, A. & Almohaimed, Y. (2017). *Evaluating training: An approach to promote the potentials of Saudi universities in light of global indicators*, presented at The Role of Saudi Universities in Activating 2030 Vision Conference, (pp. 467-498). Al Qassim: Al Qassim University Publication.

الصقري، عواطف، و المحيميد، يارا. (٢٠١٧). تقويم التدريب مدخل لتعزيز قدرة الجامعات السعودية على التنافسية في المؤشرات العالمية، ورقة علمية مقدمة في مؤتمر دور الجامعات السعودية في تفعيل رؤية ٢٠٣٠ (ص ص. ٤٦٧-٤٩٨). القصيم، ٢٠١٧. المملكة العربية السعودية: جامعة القصيم.

Alshahrani, A. (2017) *Exploring EFL teachers' views regarding their CPD activities and challenges at one of the Saudi Arabian Universities* (Doctoral thesis). University of Exeter, United Kingdom.

Alshahrani, Merzin. (2016). A Brief Historical Perspective of English in Saudi Arabia. *Journal of Literature, Languages and Linguistics*, (26), 43-47.

Alshamrani, S. (2012). Research priorities of science education in Saudi Arabia. *Journal of Educational Science and Islamic Studies*, King Saud University, 24(1), 199-228.

Alsolamy, F. (2017). *Social networking in higher education: Academics' attitudes, uses, motivations and concerns* (Doctoral thesis). Sheffield Hallam University, United Kingdom.

Althobaiti, N. (2012). *EFL teachers' beliefs, instructional practices and professional development about corrective feedback in Saudi universities* (Doctoral thesis). University of Queensland, Australia.

Angrosino, M. (2007). *Doing ethnographic and observational research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publication.

Ardichvili, A. (2008). Learning and knowledge sharing in virtual communities of practice: Motivators, barriers, and enablers. *Advances in Developing Human Resources*, 10(4), 541-554.

- Arksey, H., & Knight, P. T.** (1999). *Interviewing for social scientists: An introductory resource with examples*. London: Sage Publication.
- Arthur, L.** (2016). Communities of practice in higher education: Professional learning in an academic career. *International Journal for Academic Development*, 21(3), 230-241.
- Assalahi, H. M.** (2016). *An inquiry into TESOL teachers' perspectives on professional development in the workplace at a university in Saudi Arabia* (Doctoral thesis). University of Exeter, United Kingdom.
- Avalos, B.** (2011). Teacher professional development in teaching and teacher education over ten years. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 27(1), 10-20.
- Baharmz, A.** (1999). Determining the identity of private higher education in Saudi Arabia, presented at Private Higher Education Conference. Riyadh, November. School of Education: King Saudi University.
- باهرمز، أسماء. (١٩٩٩). تحديد هوية التعليم العالي الأهلي في المملكة العربية السعودية. ورقة عمل مقدمة إلى مؤتمر التعليم العالي الأهلي. الرياض، ١٩٩٩. المملكة العربية السعودية، جامعة الملك سعود.
- Bailey, K. M., Curtis, A., & Nunan, D.** (2001). *Pursuing Professional Development: The self as source*. Canada: Heinle & Heinle, Thomson Learning.
- Balushi, Ali, K.** (2017). "...they feel that they have a voice and their voice is heard": *Towards participatory forms of teachers' CPD in Oman* (Doctoral thesis). University of Exeter, United Kingdom.
- Bandura, A.** (1986). *Social foundations of thought and action: A social cognitive theory*. Englewood Cliffs, London: Prentice-Hall.
- Barab, S. A., Barnett, M., & Squire, K.** (2002). Developing an empirical account of a community of practice: Characterizing the essential tensions. *The Journal of the Learning Sciences*, 11, 489–542.
- Barnawi, O. Z., & Alhawsawi, S.** (2017). English education policy in Saudi Arabia: English language education policy in the kingdom of Saudi Arabia: Current trends, issues and challenges. In R. Kirkpatrick (Eds.), *English language education policy in the Middle East and North Africa, Language Policy* (pp. 199-222). Springer Publication, Cham.
- Baxter, P., & Jack, S.** (2008). Qualitative case study methodology: Study design and implementation for novice researchers. *The Qualitative Report*, 13(4), 544-559.
- BERA.** (2011). *Revised ethical guidelines for educational research*. British Educational Research Association. Retrieved from: <https://www.bera.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/BERA-Ethical-Guidelines-2011.pdf>

- BERA.** (2018). *Revised ethical guidelines for educational research*. British Educational Research Association. Retrieved from: https://www.bera.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/BERA-Ethical-Guidelines-for-Educational-Research_4thEdn_2018.pdf?noredirect=1s
- Berger, R.** (2015). Now I see it, now I don't: Researcher's position and reflexivity in qualitative research. *Qualitative Research*, 15(2), 219-234.
- Blaikie, N.** (1993). *Approaches to social enquiry*. (1st ed.). Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Blanchard, N., & Thacker, J.** (2013). *Effective Training: Systems, Strategies, and Practices* (5th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education, Inc.
- Bogdan, R., & Biklen, S.** (1998). *Qualitative research in education: An introduction to theory and methods*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon Publication.
- Borovkova, P.** (2014). *Application of mind maps in ELT with the emphasis on lexis in one-to-one courses, groups and self-teaching* (Doctoral thesis). Charles University. Prague.
- Braman, O. R.** (1999). *The cultural dimension of individualism and collectivism as a factor in adult self-directed learning readiness* (Doctoral thesis). University of Southern Mississippi. United States.
- Braun, J. A., & Crumpler, T. P.** (2004). The social memoir: An analysis of developing reflective ability in a pre-service methods course. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 20(1), 59-75.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V.** (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101.
- Brinkmann, S., & Kvale, S.** (2018). *Doing interviews* (2nd ed.). London: Sage Publications.
- Brockett, R. G.** (2009). Moving forward: An agenda for future research on self-directed learning. In M. G. Derrick & M. K. Ponton (Eds.), *Emerging directions in self-directed learning* (pp. 37-50). Chicago, IL: Discovery Association.
- Brockett, R. B., and Hiemstra, R.** (1991) *Self-Direction in Adult Learning: Perspectives on Theory, Research, and Practice*. New York: Routledge Publication.
- Brockett, R. G., & Hiemstra, R.** (2018). *Self-direction in adult learning: Perspectives on theory, research and practice*. New York: Routledge Publication.
- Brookfield, S.** (1984). *Adult Learners, Adult Education and the Community*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

- Brookfield, S.** (1993). Self-Directed Learning, Political Clarity, and the Critical Practice of Adult Education. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 43(4), 227–242.
- Brown, J.** (2014). *Mixed methods research for TESOL*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Brown, J. D.** (2001). *Using surveys in language programs*. New York: Cambridge University Press Ltd.
- Bryman, A.** (2006). Integrating quantitative and qualitative research: How is it done? *Qualitative Research*, 6(1), 97-113.
- Bryman, A.** (2016). *Social research methods* (5th ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Buckingham, A., & Saunders, P.** (2004). *The survey methods workbook: From design to analysis*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Butler, D. L., & Winne, P. H.** (1995). Feedback and self-regulated learning: A theoretical synthesis. *Review of Educational Research*, 65(3), 245-281.
- Caffarella, R. S.** (1993). Self-directed learning. In S. B. Merriam (Eds.), *An update on adult learning theory: New directions for adult and continuing education* (pp. 25-35). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Caffarella, R. S.** (2000). Goals of self-learning. In G. A. Straka (Eds.), *Conceptions of self-directed learning: Theoretical and conceptual considerations* (pp. 37-48). Munster, Germany: Waxmann.
- Cameron, R.** (2011). Mixed Methods Research: The Five Ps Framework. *Electronic Journal of Business Research Methods*, 9(2), 96-108.
- Campbell, A.** (2006). The search for authenticity: An exploration of an online skinhead newsgroup. *New Media and Society*, 8(2), 269-294.
- Candy, P. C.** (1991). *Self-Direction for Lifelong Learning. A Comprehensive Guide to Theory and Practice*. San Francisco, CA: John Wiley & Sons Ltd.
- Cansoy, R.** (2017). Teachers' Professional Development: The case of WhatsApp. *Journal of Education and Learning*, 6(4), 285-293.
- Cater, J. K.** (2011). Skype a cost-effective method for qualitative research. *Rehabilitation Counselors and Educators Journal*, 4(2), 3.
- Chalmers, L., & Keown, P.** (2006). Communities of practice and professional development. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 25(2), 139-156.

- Chene, A.** (1983). The concept of autonomy in adult education: A philosophical discussion. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 34(1), 38-47.
- Cherny, L.** (1999). *Conversation and community: Chat in a virtual world*. Stanford, CA, USA: CSLI publications.
- Chong, W. H., & Kong, C. A.** (2012). Teacher collaborative learning and teacher self-efficacy: The case of lesson study. *The Journal of Experimental Education*, 80(3), 263-283.
- Church, A. H., & Waclawski, J.** (2017). *Designing and using organizational surveys*. London: Routledge Publication.
- Cochran-Smith, M., & Lytle, S. L.** (1999). Chapter 8: Relationships of knowledge and practice: Teacher learning in communities. *Review of Research in Education*, 24(1), 249-305.
- Cohen, L., Manion, L. & Morrison, K.** (2018). *Research methods in education* (8th ed.). New York: Routledge Publication.
- Coldron, J., & Smith, R.** (1999). Active location in teachers' construction of their professional identities. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 31(6), 711-726.
- Collins, C. J., & Kritsonis, W. A.** (2006). National Viewpoint: The Importance of Hiring a Diverse Faculty. *National Journal for Publishing and mentoring doctoral student research* 3(1),1-7.
- Craft, A.** (2000). *Continuing professional development: A practical guide for teachers and schools* (2nd ed.). London: Routledge Publication.
- Crandall, J., & Christison, M.** (2016). *Teacher education and professional development in TESOL: Global perspectives*. New York: Routledge Publication.
- Cranton, P.** (1994). *Understanding and promoting transformative learning: A guide for educators of adults*. Sterling, Virginia: Stylus Publishing, LLC.
- Creswell, J. W.** (2015). *30 Essential skills for the qualitative researcher*. London: Sage Publications.
- Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D.** (2018). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (5th ed.). London: Sage publications.
- Creswell, J. W., & Plano Clark, V. L.** (2011). *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publication.

- Creswell, J. W., & Plano Clark, V. L.** (2017). *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publication.
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N.** (2018). *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publication.
- Creswell, J. W., Shope, R., Plano Clark, V. L., & Green, D. O.** (2006). How interpretive qualitative research extends mixed methods research. *Research in the Schools, 13*(1), 1-11.
- Creswell, J. W., Plano Clark, V. L., Gutman, M. L., Hanson, W. E.** (2003). Advanced mixed methods research designs. In A. Tashakkori & C. Teddlie (Eds.), *Handbook of Mixed Methods in Social and Behavioral Research* (pp. 209–240). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publication.
- Crotty, M.** (1998). *The Foundations of Social Research*. London: Sage Publication.
- Davenport, J., & Davenport, J.**, (1985). A Chronology and Analysis of the Andragogy Debate. *Adult Education Quarterly, 35*(3), 152–159.
- Davis, L. J.** (2010). *Social networking sites as virtual communities of practice: A mixed method study* (Doctoral thesis). Capella University, United States.
- Day, C. & Sachs, J.** (2004). *International handbook on the continuing professional development of teachers*. England: Open University Press.
- Day, R. R.** (1991). Models and the Knowledge Base of Second Language Teacher Education. *University of Hawai'i Working Papers in ESL, 11*(2), 1-13.
- de Bruijne, M., & Wijnant, A.** (2013). Comparing Survey Results Obtained via Mobile Devices and Computers: An Experiment with a Mobile Web Survey on a Heterogeneous Group of Mobile Devices Versus a Computer-Assisted Web Survey. *Social Science Computer Review, 31*(4), 482–504
- de la Colina, A. A., & Mayo, M. D. P. G.** (2009). Oral interaction in task-based EFL learning: The use of the L1 as a cognitive tool. *IRAL-International Review of Applied Linguistics in Language Teaching, 47*(3-4), 325-345.
- Del Greco, L., Walop, W., & McCarthy, R. H.** (1987). Questionnaire development: 2. Validity and reliability. *CMAJ: Canadian Medical Association Journal, 136*(7), 699.
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S.** (2011). *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research* (4th ed.) Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publication.

- Desimone, L. M.** (2011). A primer on effective professional development. *The Phi Delta Kappan*, 92(6), 68-71.
- Diaz-Maggioli, Gabriel.** (2004). *Teacher-centered professional development*. Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. Alexandria: Virginia United States.
- Djarmiko, I. W.** (2011, July 9). *Self-directed professional development approach: an alternative to enhance vocational teacher's character*. Seminar presented at Yogyakarta State University. Retrieved from: <http://staff.uny.ac.id/sites/default/files/penelitian/Dr.%20Widarto,%20M.Pd./Proceeding%20ICVET%202011.pdf#page=102>
- Dornyei, Z.** (2003). *Questionnaires in second language research construction, administration and processing*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Dowling, S. E. A. N.** (2009). Using online communities of practice for EFL teacher development. *Sharjah Higher Colleges of Technology*, Sharjah, United Arab of Emirates. Retrieved from: https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Sean_Dowling/publication/268396384_Using_Online_Communities_of_Practice_for_EFL_Teacher_Development/links/546b67ca0cf2f5eb18091c99.pdf
- Drever, Eric.** (2006). *Using Semi-Structured Interviews in Small-Scale Research. A Teacher's Guide*. Glasgow, University of Glasgow: The SCRE Centre.
- Dubé, L., Bourhis, A., Jacob, R., & Koohang, A.** (2006). Towards a typology of virtual communities of practice. *Interdisciplinary Journal of Information, Knowledge & Management*, 1, 69-93.
- Duff, P. A., & Uchida, Y.** (1997). The negotiation of teachers' sociocultural identities and practices in postsecondary EFL classrooms. *TESOL Quarterly*, 451-486.
- El-Hani, C. N., & Greca, I. M.** (2012). ComPratica: A virtual community of practice for promoting biology teachers' professional development in Brazil. *Research in Science Education*, 43(4), 1327-1359.
- Eraut, M.** (2004). Informal learning in the workplace. *Studies in Continuing Education*, 26(2), 247-273.
- Farooq, M. U.** (2016). Developing teachers' expertise to teach English language: An evaluative study of professional development programme at Taif University English Language Centre. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 6(2), 274-282.

- Farrell, T. S.** (2015). *Reflective language teaching: From research to practice*. Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Fetterman, D. M.** (2010). *Ethnography: Step-by-step* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications.
- Fischer, G., & Sugimoto, M.** (2006). Supporting self-directed learners and learning communities with sociotechnical environments. *Research and Practice in Technology Enhanced Learning*, 1(01), 31-64.
- Fraser-Seeto, K., Howard, S. J., & Woodcock, S.** (2015). An investigation of teachers' awareness and willingness to engage with a self-directed professional development package on gifted and talented education. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 40(1), 1-14.
- Freeman, Donald.** (1982). Observing teachers: Three approaches to Inservice training development. *TESOL Quarterly*, 16(1), 21-28.
- Freeman, Donald.** (1989). Teacher training, development and decision making: A model of teaching and related strategies for language teacher education. *TESOL Quarterly*, 23(1), 27-45.
- Freeman, Donald.** (2016). *Educating second language teachers*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Garcia, A. C., Standlee, A. I., Bechkoff, J., & Cui, Y.** (2009). Ethnographic approaches to the internet and computer-mediated communication. *Journal of contemporary ethnography*, 38(1), 52-84.
- Garet, M., Porter, A., Desimone, L., Birman, B., Yoon, K.** (2001). What makes professional development effective? Results from a national sample of teachers. *American Educational Research Journal*, 38(4), 915-945.
- Garrick, J.** (1999). Doubting the philosophical assumptions of interpretive research. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 12(2), 147-156.
- Garrison, D. R.** (1997). Self-directed learning: Toward a comprehensive model. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 48(1), 18-33.
- Gee, J.** (2001). Identity as an analytical lens for research in education: Review of research in education. *American Educational Research Association*, 25, 99-125.
- Gerber, H. R., Abrams, S. S., Curwood, J. S., & Magnifico, A. M.** (2017). *Conducting qualitative research of learning in online spaces*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications.

- Glickman, C. D., Gordon, S. P., & Ross-Gordon, J. M.** (2010). *Supervision and instructional leadership: A developmental approach* (8th ed.). Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.
- Good, J. M., & Weaver, A.** (2003). Creating learning communities to meet teachers' needs in professional development. *Journal of In-Service Education*, 29(3), 439-450.
- Govender, R.** (2015). Practices of self-directed professional development of teachers in South African public schools. *International Journal of Educational and Pedagogical Sciences*, 9(2), 487-494.
- Greene, J. C., Caracelli, V. J. & Graham, W. F.** (1989). Toward a conceptual framework for mixed-method evaluation designs. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*. 11(3), 255-274.
- Greene, M. J.** (2014). On the inside looking in: Methodological insights and challenges in conducting qualitative insider research. *The Qualitative Report*, 19(29), 1-13.
- Grix, J.** (2002). Introducing students to the generic terminology of social research. *Politics*, 22, 175-186
- Grix, J.** (2004). *The foundations of research*. London: Springer Nature Limited.
- Guba, E. G., & Lincoln, Y. S.** (1994). Competing paradigms in qualitative research. In E. G. Guba, Y. S. Lincoln & N. K. Denzin (Eds.), *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publication.
- Guskey, T. R.** (2000). *Evaluating professional development*. Thousand Oaks, California: Corwin Press.
- Habbash, M.** (2011). *Status change of English and its role in shaping public education language policy and practice in Saudi Arabia: A postmodernist critical perspective*. (Doctoral thesis), University of Exeter, United Kingdom.
- Hajisoteriou, C., Karousiou, C., & Angelides, P.** (2018). INTERACT: building a virtual community of practice to enhance teachers' intercultural professional development. *Educational Media International*, 55(1), 15-33.
- Hammersley, M., & Atkinson, P.** (2007). *Ethnography: Principles in practice*. London: Routledge Publication.
- Hammersley, M., & Traianou, A.** (2012). *Ethics in qualitative research: Controversies and contexts*. London: Sage Publication.

- Hao, N., Ku, Y., Liu, M., Hu, Y., Bodner, M., Grabner, R. H., & Fink, A.** (2016). Reflection enhances creativity: Beneficial effects of idea evaluation on idea generation. *Brain and Cognition, 103*, 30-37.
- Hargreaves, A., & Fullan, M.** (2000). Mentoring in the new millennium. *Theory into practice, 39*(1), 50-56.
- Hargreaves, D. H.** (1999). The knowledge-creating school. *British Journal of Educational Studies, 47*, 122–144.
- Hartree, A.** (1984). Malcolm Knowles' Theory of Andragogy: A Critique. *International Journal of Lifelong Education, 3*(3), 203–210.
- Hays, D. G., & Singh, A. A.** (2012). *Qualitative inquiry in clinical and educational settings*. New York, NY : Guilford Press .
- Hayward, E. C., & Ward, A.** (2018). Virtual Learning Communities for Faculty members—does WhatsApp work? *Wiley for Association for the Study of Medical Education, 52*, 550–573.
- Hondzel, C. D.** (2013). *Diverse perspectives on adult education and lifelong learning*. CreateSpace Amazon Publication.
- Hooley, T., Wellens, J., & Marriott, J.** (2012). *What is Online research?: Using the Internet for social science research*. New York: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Houle, C. O.** (1961). The inquiring mind. Madison, WI. *University of Wisconsin Press*. In Hoyt, DP, & Rhatigan, JJ. (1968). *Professional preparation of junior and senior college student personnel administrators. Personnel and Guidance Journal, 47*(3), 263-270.
- Hull, T.** (2015). Professional development, motivation, and community in a Moscow in-service recertification course. *Journal of Language and Education, 1*(2).
- Illeris, K.** (2004). *Adult education and adult learning*. Malabar, FL: Krieger Publishing.
- Isenberg, S.** (2007). *Applying andragogical principles to internet learning*. Youngstown, New York: Cambria Press.
- Ivanova, I., & Skara-MincEne, R.** (2016). Development of professional identity during teacher's practice. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences, 232*, 529-536.
- Janghorban, R., Roudsari, R. L., & Taghipour, A.** (2014). Skype interviewing: The new generation of online synchronous interview in qualitative research. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies on Health and Well-Being, 9*(1), 24152.

- Jarvis, P.** (1992). *Paradoxes of Learning: On Becoming and Individual in Society*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Jensen, M.** (2015). Personality traits and nonverbal communication patterns. *International Journal of Social Science Studies*, 4(5), 57-70.
- Jick, T. D.** (1979). Mixing qualitative and quantitative methods: Triangulation in action. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 24(4), 602-611.
- Johnson, R. B.** (1997). Examining the validity structure of qualitative research. *Education*, 118(2), 282.
- Johnson, B., & Christensen, L.** (2017). *Educational research: Quantitative, qualitative, and mixed approaches*. Sage Publication.
- Johnson, D. W., & Johnson, R. T.** (1999). Making cooperative learning work. *Theory into Practice*, 38(2), 67-73.
- Johnson, K. E.** (2009). *Second language teacher education: A sociocultural perspective*. New York: Routledge Publications.
- Jonassen, D. H.** (1991). Objectivism versus constructivism: Do we need a new philosophical paradigm? *Educational Technology Research and Development*, 39(3), 5-14.
- Joyce, B., & Calhoun, E.** (2010). *Models of professional development: A celebration of educators*. Thousand Oaks, California: Corwin Press.
- Jupp, V.** (2006). *The Sage dictionary of social research methods*. London: Sage Publication
- Kantanen, H., Manninen, J., & Kontkanen, J.** (2014). Emergent dialogue as a prerequisite of learning and innovation in professional virtual communities. *International Journal of Web Based Communities*, 10(2), 211-231.
- Kember, D., & Gow, L.** (1992). Action research as a form of staff development in higher education. *Higher Education*, 23(3), 297-310.
- Kennedy, A.** (2005). Models of continuing professional development: A framework for analysis. *Journal of In-service Education*, 31, 235-250
- Kennedy, A.** (2011). Collaborative continuing professional development (CPD) for teachers in Scotland: aspirations, opportunities and barriers. *European Journal of Teacher Education*, 34(1), 25-41.

- Kennedy, A.** (2014). Understanding continuing professional development: the need for theory to impact on policy and practice. *Professional development in education*, 40(5), 688-697.
- Kerka, S.** (1999). *Self-Directed Learning. Myths and Realities No. 3*. Columbus: ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education.
- Kerno Jr, S. J.** (2008). Limitations of communities of practice: a consideration of unresolved issues and difficulties in the approach. *Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies*, 15(1), 69-78.
- Khan, I.** (2011). Professional development of English teachers: The Saudi Arabian context. *Interdisciplinary Journal of Contemporary Research in Business*, 3(2), 1583- 1591.
- Kimble, C., & Hildreth, P. M.** (2004). Communities of practice: Going one step too far? *9e colloque de l'AIM*, (May), Evry, France. Retrieved from: <https://scholar.google.co.uk>
- Akinyemi, A. F., & Rembe, S.** (2017). Challenges Encountered by Communities of Practice in Enhancing Continuing Professional Teachers Development in High Schools. *The Anthropologist*, 30(1), 8-16.
- Knowles, M. S.** (1973). *The adult learner: A neglected species*. Houston, TX: Gulf Publishing.
- Knowles, J. G.** (1993). Life history accounts as mirrors: A practical avenue for the conceptualization of reflection in teacher education. In Calderhead, J. & Gates, P. (Ed.) *Conceptualizing Reflection in Teacher Development*. Falmer Press.
- Knowles, M. S.** (1968). Andragogy, not pedagogy. *Adult leadership*, 16(10), 350-352.
- Knowles, M. S.** (1975). *Self-directed learning: A guide for learners and teachers* (Vol. 2, No. 2, p. 135). New York: Association Press.
- Knowles, M. S.** (1980) *The Modern Practice of Adult Education: From Pedagogy to Andragogy*. (2nd ed.) New York: Cambridge Books.
- Knowles, M. S.** (1984). *Andragogy in action*. San Francisco, CA: Josey-Bass Publishers.
- Knowles, M. S.** (1989). *The making of an adult educator: An autobiographical journey*. Jossey-Bass Inc Pub.
- Knowles, M. S., Holton, E., & Swanson, R.** (2005). The adult learner: the definitive classic in adult education and human resource development (6th). *Burlington, MA: Elsevier*.
- Kreijns, K., Kirschner, P. A., Jochems, W., & Van Buuren, H.** (2004). Determining sociability, social space, and social presence in (a) synchronous collaborative groups. *CyberPsychology & Behavior*, 7(2), 155-172.

- Kvale, Steinar.** (1996). *Interviews: An introduction to qualitative research interviewing*. Thousand Oaks, California : Sage Publications.
- Kvale, Steinar.** (2008). *Doing interviews*. London: Sage Publications.
- Kumaravadivelu, B.** (2003). *Beyond methods: Macrostrategies for language teaching*. Yale University Press.
- Kuusisaari, H.** (2013). Teachers' collaborative learning—development of teaching in group discussions. *Teachers and Teaching*, 19(1), 50-62.
- Laforest, J., Bouchard, L. M., & Maurice, P.** (2012). *Guide to Organizing Semi-structured Interviews with Key Informants: Safety Diagnosis Tool Kit for Local Communities* (2nd ed.). Canada, Quebec: Institut national de santé publique Québec avec la collaboration de Ministère de la sécurité publique.
- Lange, D.** (1994). A blueprint for a teacher development program. In J. Richards, & D. Nunan (Eds.) *Second Language Teacher Education*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (pp. 245-268).
- Larsen-Freeman, Diane.** (1983). Training teachers or educating a teacher. In James E. Alatis, H.H Stern, and Peter Strevens (Eds.), *Georgetown University Round Table on Language and Linguistics: Applied linguistics and the preparation of second language teachers: Toward a rationale*. Washington, DC: Georgetown University.
- Lassonde, C. A., & Israel, S. E.** (2009). *Teacher collaboration for professional learning: Facilitating Study, Research, and Inquiry Communities*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Lather, P.** (1991). *Getting smart: Feminist research and pedagogy with/in the postmodern*. New York: Routledge Publication.
- Lave, J., & Wenger, E.** (1991). *Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- LeCompte, M. D., & Goetz, J. P.** (1982). Problems of reliability and validity in ethnographic research. *Review of Educational Research*, 52(1), 31-60.
- Lee, J. S.** (2015). “Am I an ‘insane’ L2 teacher?”: practical suggestions for self-directed teacher professional development in Asian EFL context. *Asian EFL Journal*, 81, 91-102.
- Lewin, C.** (2005). Elementary quantitative methods. *Research Methods in the Social Sciences*, 215-225.

- Lincoln, Y. S., Lynham, S. A., & Guba, E. G.** (2011). Paradigmatic controversies, contradictions, and emerging confluences (4th ed.). In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 97 – 128). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publication.
- Lincoln, Y., & Guba, E.** (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publication.
- Little, D., & DAM, L.** (1998). Autonomy in foreign language learning: From classroom practice to generalizable theory. In A. Barfield, R. Betts, J. Cunningham, N. Dunn, H. Katsura, K. Kobayashi, N. Padden, N. Parry, M. Watanabe (Eds.), *The Proceedings of the JALT 24th Annual International Conference on Language Teaching/Learning & Educational Materials Expo* (pp. 127-136).
- Little, D.** (2009). Learner autonomy in action: adult immigrants learning English in Ireland. *Mapping the terrain of learner autonomy: Learning environments, learning communities and identities*, 51-85.
- Lopes, J. B., & Cunha, A. E.** (2017). Self-directed professional development to improve effective teaching: Key points for a model. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 68, 262-274.
- Loucks-Horsley, S., Stiles, K.E., Humdry, S., Love, N., & Hewson, P.** (2010). *Designing professional development for teachers of science and mathematics*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.
- Low, G.** (1999). What respondents do with questionnaires: Accounting for incongruity and fluidity. *Applied Linguistics*, 20(4), 503-533.
- Lumsden, L.** (1998). *Teacher Morale*. ERIC Digest, Number 120. Retrieved from: <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED422601>
- Macià, M., & García, I.** (2016). Informal online communities and networks as a source of teacher professional development: A review. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 55, 291-307.
- Mackenzie, N.** (2007). Teacher morale: More complex than we think? *The Australian Educational Researcher*, 34(1), 89-104.
- MacKeracher, D.** (2004). *Making sense of adult learning*. Toronto, Canada: University of Toronto Press,.
- Alesa, Ahmad.** (2017). The eight important features found in the draft of the new university system. *Makkah newspaper*. Retrieved from: <https://makkahnewspaper.com/article/613274>
- Mann, S.** (2005). The language teacher's development. *Language Teaching*, 38 (3), 103-118.

- Manning, G.** (2007). Self-directed learning: A key component of adult learning theory. *Business and Public Administration Studies*, 2(2), 104.
- Mansfield, C., & Thompson, G.** (2017). The value of collaborative rounds for teacher professional learning in Australia. *Professional Development in Education*, 43(4), 666-684.
- Mansour, N., Heba, E. D., Alshamrani, S., & Aldahmash, A.** (2014). Rethinking the theory and practice of continuing professional development: Science teachers' perspectives. *Research in Science Education*, 44(6), 949-973.
- Mavletova, A.** (2013). Data quality in PC and mobile web surveys. *Social Science Computer Review*, 31(6), 725-743.
- McNamara, C.** (1999). *Strong value of self-directed learning in the workplace: How supervisors and learners gain leaps in learning*. Retrieved November 11, 2018 from [http://www.managementhelp.org /trng_dev/methods/slf_drct.htm](http://www.managementhelp.org/trng_dev/methods/slf_drct.htm).
- McNiff, J.** (2017). *Action research: All you need to know*. London: Sage Publication.
- Merriam, S. B., Caffarella, R. S., & Baumgartner, L. M.** (2007). *Learning in adulthood: A comprehensive guide* (3rd ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Merriam, S. B.** (1998). *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education. Revised and Expanded from Case Study Research in Education*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Merriam, S. B.** (2001). Andragogy and self-directed learning: Pillars of adult learning theory. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, 89, 3-14.
- Merriam, S. B., Mott, V. W., & Lee, M. Y.** (1996). Learning that comes from the negative interpretation of life experience. *Studies in Continuing Education*, 18(1), 1-23.
- Merriam, S., & Caffarella, R.** (1999). *Learning in Adulthood* (2nd ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Mezirow, J.** (1985). A critical theory of self-directed learning. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, 1985(25), 17-30.
- Merriam-Webster** (2019, July 17). *Emojis*. Retrieved from: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/emojis>
- Merriam-Webster** (2019, July 17). *Codeswitching*. Retrieved from: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/code-switching>

- Merriam-Webster** (2019, June 5). *Transliteration*. Retrieved from: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/transliteration>
- Mezirow, J.** (1991). *Transformative dimensions of adult learning*. San Fransisco, Calif.: Jossey-Bass.
- Mezirow, J.** (1994). Understanding transformation theory. *Adult education quarterly*, 44(4), 222-232.
- Ministry of Civil Service.** (2017). Retrieved from: https://www.mcs.gov.sa/en/informationcenter/news/ministrynews/pages/news14380724_1.aspx
- Ministry of Education.** (2019). Retrieved from: <https://www.moe.gov.sa/en/Pages/default.aspx>
- Minott, M. A.** (2010). Reflective teaching as self-directed professional development: Building practical or work-related knowledge. *Professional Development in Education*, 36(1-2), 325-338.
- Moore, S.** (1999). Understanding and managing diversity among groups at work: Key issues for organisational training and development. *Journal of European Industrial Training*, 23, 208–218.
- Moreillon, J.** (2015). Increasing interactivity in the online learning environment: Using digital tools to support students in socially constructed meaning-making. *TechTrends*, 59(3), 41-47.
- Morse, J. M., & Niehaus, L.** (2009). Mixed methods design: Principles and procedures. In M. Morse (Ed.), *Developing qualitative inquiry* (Volume 4). Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press.
- Richards, L., & Morse, J. M.** (2013). *Readme first for a user's guide to qualitative methods*. (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, California: Sage publications.
- Moston, R. E.** (2008). *Practices of a university learning community-graduate faculty members perceptions and attitudes*. (Doctoral dissertation). Capella University, Untied States.
- Musalam, A.** (2003). Education problems, manifestations of negative and positive aspirations. In *The 11th Annual Meeting of Saudi Society for Educational and Psychology Sciences*, Riyadh, King Saud University.
- Musante, K., & DeWalt, B. R.** (2010). *Participant observation: A guide for fieldworkers* (2nd ed.). Plymouth, United Kingdom: Rowman Altamira Press.

- Mushayikwa, E.** (2011). *Investigating the impact of Information Communication Technology on self-directed professional development of teachers*. Universal-Publisher.
- Mushayikwa, E.** (2013). Teachers' self-directed professional development: Science and Mathematics teachers' adoption of ICT as a professional development strategy. *African Journal of Research in Mathematics, Science and Technology Education*, 17(3), 275-286.
- Mushayikwa, E., & Lubben, F.** (2009). Self-directed professional development—Hope for teachers working in deprived environments. *Teaching and teacher education*, 25(3), 375-382.
- Neumann Jr, R. K.** (2016). Academic Freedom, Job Security, and Costs. *Journal of Legal Education.*, 66(3), 595-605.
- Norton, L.** (2018). *Action research in teaching and learning: A practical guide to conducting pedagogical research in universities*. Routledge Publication.
- Nunan, D., & Richards, J. C.** (1990). *Second language teacher education*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Oppenheim, A. N.** (1992). *Questionnaire Design, Interviewing and Attitude Measurement*. London: Pinter Publications.
- Özmen, F.** (2013). Virtual Communities of Practices (VCoPs) for Ensuring Innovation at Universities--Firat University Sample. *Eurasian Journal of Educational Research*, 53, 131-150.
- Pallant, J.** (2016). *SPSS survival manual*. McGraw-Hill Education (UK).
- Paltridge, B., & Phakiti, A.** (2015). *Research methods in applied linguistics: A practical resource*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Park, S.** (2008). *Self-Directed Learning in the Workplace*, a paper presented at the Academy of Human Resource Development International Research Conference in the Americas. Panama City, FL. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED501595).
- Patton, M. Q.** (2002). Two decades of developments in qualitative inquiry: A personal, experiential perspective. *Qualitative Social Work*, 1(3), 261-283.
- Phan, L. H., & Barnawi, O. Z.** (2015). Where English, neoliberalism, desire and internationalization are alive and kicking: Higher education in Saudi Arabia today. *Language and Education*, 29(6), 545-565.

- Piskurich, G. M.** (1993). *Self-directed learning: A practical guide to design, development, and implementation*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Porter, B. D.** (2014). *Religious educators' experiences with self-Directed learning in professional development: A qualitative study* (Doctoral thesis). Utah State University, Logan, Utah.
- Pring, Richard.** (2015). *Philosophy of educational research*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Punch, K.** (2014). *Introduction to Social Research: Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches* (3rd Ed.). London: Sage Publications.
- Qi, G. Y., & Wang, Y.** (2018). Investigating the building of a WeChat-based community of practice for language teachers' professional development. *Innovation in Language Learning and Teaching*, 12(1), 72-88.
- Ramos, R. C.** (2006). Considerations on the role of teacher autonomy. *Colombian Applied Linguistics Journal*, 183-202.
- Rashidi, Y., Vaniea, K., & Camp, J. L.** (2016). Understanding Saudis' privacy concerns when using WhatsApp. *Usable Security and Privacy (USEC) 2016*. San Diego, United States. Retrieved from: <http://www.vaniea.com/papers/usec2016.pdf>
- Raza, N. A.** (2010). *The impact of continuing professional development on EFL faculty employed in federal universities in the United Arab Emirates* (Doctoral dissertation). University of Exeter, Exeter, United Kingdom.
- Riccucci, N.** (2018). *Managing Diversity in Public Sector Workforces: Essentials of Public Policy And Administration Series*. New York: Routledge Publication.
- Richards, J.** (2011). *Competence and performance in language teaching*. Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press.
- Richards, J. C.** (2008). Second language teacher education today. *RELC Journal*, 39(2), 158-177.
- Richards, J. C., & Farrell, T. S.** (2011). *Practice teaching: A reflective approach*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Richards, J. C., & Farrell, T. S. C.** (2005). *Professional development for language teachers; Strategies for teacher learning*. Cambridge: Cambridge Language Education.
- Richards, J. C., & Nunan, D.** (1990). *Second language teacher education*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Richards, J.C. & Lockhart, C.** (1996). *Reflective teaching in second language classrooms*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Roberts, J.** (1998). *Language Teacher Education*. London: Arnold, a member of the Hodder Headline Group.
- Robson, C., & McCartan, K.** (2016). *Real world research* (4th ed.). London: John Wiley & Sons Ltd.
- Rozimela, Y., & Tiarina, Y.** (2018). The Impact of Reflective Practice on EFL Prospective Teachers' Teaching Skill Improvement. *The Journal of Language Learning and Teaching*, 8(1), 18-38.
- Rubin, H. J., & Rubin, I. S.** (2012). *Qualitative interviewing: The art of hearing data*. Thousand Oaks, California. Sage Publication.
- Saldana, J.** (2016). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers*. London: Sage Publication.
- Sato, M.** (1992). "Japan". In: Leavitt, H. B. (Ed.), *Issues and problems in teacher education. An international handbook*. New York: Greenwood Press.
- Saudi Communications and Information Technology Commission.** (2016). Retrieved from: https://www.google.com/?client=safari&channel=mac_bm
- Saudi Vision 2030.** (2019). Retrieved from: https://www.google.com/?client=safari&channel=mac_bm
- Saudi Press Agency.** (2019, June 21). *Admission Indicators in public universities exceed 87% of the number of male and female students ... More than 311 thousand government seats waiting for high school graduates* [Press Release]. Retrieved from: <https://www.spa.gov.sa/1936828>
- Schensul, J. J., & LeCompte, M. D.** (2012). *Essential ethnographic methods: A mixed methods approach* (2nd ed.). Plymouth, United Kingdom: AltaMira Press.
- Schlager, M. S., & Fusco, J.** (2004). Teacher professional technology, and communities of practice: Are we putting the cart before the horse? In S. Barab, R. Kling, & J. Gray (Eds.), *Designing virtual communities in the service of learning* (pp. 235–256). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Schwartz-Shea, P., & Yanow, D.** (2012). *Interpretive research design: Concepts and processes*. New York: Routledge Publication.
- Seale, C.** (2002). Quality issues in qualitative inquiry. *Qualitative Social Work*, 1(1), 97-110.

- Seifert, C., Newbold, C., & Chapman, R.** (2016). Put me In, coach: self-regulated directed learning as a tactical power. *International Journal of Self-Directed Learning*, 13(1), 1-11.
- Serdyukov, P., & Serdyukova, N.** (2015). Effects of communication, socialization and collaboration on online learning. *European Scientific Journal, ESJ*, 11(10)
- Sharma, A.** (2016). Managing diversity and equality in the workplace. *Cogent Business & Management*, 3(1), 1212682.
- Short, P. M.** (1994). Defining teacher empowerment. *Education*, 114(4), 488-493.
- Shousha, A. I.** (2015). Peer observation of teaching and professional development: Teachers' perspectives at the English language institute, King Abdulaziz University. *Arab World English Journal*, 6(2), 131-143.
- Silverman, D.** (2017). *Doing qualitative research: A practical handbook* (5th ed.). London: Sage Publications.
- Smith, Kathleen.** (2017). *Teachers as Self-Directed Learners: Active Positioning Through Professional Learning*. Singapore: Springer publication.
- So, K., & Kim, J.** (2013). Informal Inquiry for Professional Development among Teachers within a Self-Organized Learning Community: A case study from South Korea. *International Education Studies*, 6(3), 105-115.
- Somekh, B., & Lewin, C.** (2011). *Theory and methods in social research* (2nd ed.). London: Sage Publication.
- Spencer, P., Harrop, S., Thomas, J., & Cain, T.** (2018). The professional development needs of early career teachers, and the extent to which they are met: A survey of teachers in England. *Professional Development in Education*, 44(1), 33-46.
- Squire-Kelly, V. D.** (2012). *The relationship between teacher empowerment and student achievement* (Doctoral thesis). Georgia Southern University, United States.
- Stake, R. E.** (1995). *The Art of Case Study Research*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publication.
- Stanley, Claire.** (1998). A framework for teacher reflectivity. *TESOL Quarterly* 32(3), 584-591.
- Statista** (2017). Retrieved from https://www.google.com/?client=safari&channel=mac_bm

- Statutes and Regulations of The Higher Education Council and Universities.** (2007). Retrieved from: <https://www.seu.edu.sa/sites/ar/Documents/29%282%20%العالي20%التعليم20%مجلس.pdf>
- Steinke, K.** (2012). Implementing SDL as professional development in K-12. *International Forum of Teaching and Studies*, 8(1), 54-63.
- Stuart, J., Akyeampong, K. & Croft, A.** (2009). *Key Issues in Teacher Education: A Sourcebook for Teacher Educators in Developing Countries*. Oxford: Macmillan.
- Sugrue, C.** (2011). Irish teachers' experience of professional development: performative or transformative learning? *Professional Development in Education*, 37(5), 793-815.
- Sullivan, P. B., Buckle, A., Nicky, G., & Atkinson, S. H.** (2012). Peer observation of teaching as a faculty development tool. *BMC medical education*, 12(1), 26.
- Sword, W.** (1999) Accounting for presence of self: Reflections on doing qualitative research. *Qualitative Health Research* (9), 270–278.
- Sywelem, M. M. G., & Witte, J. E.** (2013). Continuing professional Development: Perceptions of Elementary School Teachers in Saudi Arabia. *Journal of Modern Education Review*, 3(12), 881–898.
- Tannehill, D., & MacPhail, A.** (2017). Teacher empowerment through engagement in a learning community in Ireland: working across disadvantaged schools. *Professional development in education*, 43(3), 334-352.
- Tashakkori, A., & Creswell, J. W.** (2007). The new era of mixed methods. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*. 1(1), 3-7.
- Tashakkori, A., & Teddlie, C.** (2003). *Handbook of mixed methods in social and behavioral research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publication.
- Tasker, T., Johnson, K. E., & Davis, T. S.** (2010). A sociocultural analysis of teacher talk in inquiry-based professional development. *Language Teaching Research*, 14(2), 129-140.
- Taylor, L. A.** (2017). How teachers become teacher researchers: Narrative as a tool for teacher identity construction. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 61, 16-25.
- Teddlie, C., & Tashakkori, A.** (2009). *Foundations of mixed methods research: Integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches in the social and behavioral sciences*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publication.

- Tough, A. M.** (1967). *Learning without a teacher: A study of tasks and assistance during adult self-teaching projects*. Toronto: Ontario Institute for Studies in Education.
- Tough, A.** (1979). *The adult's learning projects: A fresh approach to theory and practice in adult learning*. Ontario Inst. for Studies in Education.
- Ulvik, M., & Riese, H.** (2016). Action research in pre-service teacher education—a never-ending story promoting professional development. *Professional Development in Education*, 42(3), 441-457.
- Van Eekelen, I. M., Vermunt, J. D., & Boshuizen, H. P. A.** (2006). Exploring teachers' will to learn. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 22(4), 408-423.
- Van Lankveld, T., Schoonenboom, J., Kusurkar, R., Beishuizen, J., Croiset, G., & Volman, M.** (2016). Informal teacher communities enhancing the professional development of medical teachers: A qualitative study. *BMC medical education*, 16(1), 109.
- Vanderlinde, R., & Van Braak, J.** (2010). The gap between educational research and practice: views of teachers, school leaders, intermediaries and researchers. *British Educational Research Journal*, 36, 299–316.
- Vann, B. A.** (1996). Learning self-direction in a social and experiential context. *Human Resource Development Quarterly*, 7(2), 121-130.
- Villegas-Reimers, E.** (2003). *Teacher professional development: An international review of the literature*. Paris: International Institute for Educational Planning.
- Vygotsky, L.** (1978). *Mind in Society. The Development of Higher Psychological Processes*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Wanger, Susan.** (2018). The Self-Directed Learning Practices of Elementary Teachers. *International Journal of Self-Directed Learning*, (15), 18-33.
- Watkins, D., & Gioia, D.** (2015). *Mixed methods research*. Pocket Guides to Social Work R. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Weir, Chloe D.,** (2017). *Understanding self-directed professional development in mathematics for elementary teachers: A phenomenographical study* (Doctoral thesis). University of Western Ontario, Canada.
- Wenger, E.** (1998). *Communities of practice: Learning, meaning, and identity*. Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press.

- Wenger, E.** (2011). *Communities of practice: A brief introduction*. Retrieved from: <https://scholarsbank.uoregon.edu/xmlui/handle/1794/11736>
- WhatsApp Inc.** (2019). Retrieved from: <https://www.whatsapp.com>
- Wolcott, H. F.** (2008). *Writing up qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications.
- Yazan, B.** (2015). Three approaches to case study methods in education: Yin, Merriam, and Stake. *The qualitative report*, 20(2), 134-152.
- Yin, R. K.** (2018). *Case study research and applications: Design and methods* (6th ed.). Los Angeles, United States: Sage publications.
- Younger, M., & George, P.** (2013). Developing communities of practice in practice: overcoming suspicion and establishing dialogue amongst primary school teachers in Antigua and Barbuda. *Professional Development in Education*, 39 (3), 312–329.
- Zepeda, S. J., Parylo, O., & Bengtson, E.** (2014). Analyzing principal professional development practices through the lens of adult learning theory. *Professional Development in Education*, 40(2), 295-315.

Appendix (1)

Questionnaire

Dear Participant,

I am Sana Alzahrani, a PhD student at the University of Exeter, and I am conducting this research as part of my PhD. Therefore, this questionnaire is designed to gather information on your involvement with self-directed professional development (Please check the definition below). Furthermore, I hope the study might shed light on the importance of this type of professional development and its relation to your actual teaching practices.

Questionnaires will ask about the type of activities you involve with, the context of learning and the factors that contribute to, or impede you from practising self-directed professional development. This survey is comprised of 51 questions, which may take around 20 minutes to be completed. Your response will be recorded, but this recording will be destroyed on completion of this thesis.

Self-directed professional development (SDPD) refers to a form of professional development that empowers teachers, raises their internal motivation towards learning, and promotes their independence and full responsibility for planning, controlling and evaluating their own learning independently from their institutions, which advances their understanding of both their learning and teaching. Moreover, self-directed professional development activities take different forms and can be implemented by the teacher her/himself (individually) or with others (collaboratively).

Your participation is completely voluntary. Also, you have the right to withdraw at any stage, and any information you submit will be used solely for the purpose of this research project. Your responses will be dealt with in an anonymised form.

With kind regards,

Sana

If you proceed to take the survey, this will be understood as your willingness to participate.

SECTION ONE

1. What is your gender?

- Male
- Female

2. What is your qualification?

- Bachelor
- Master
- PhD

3. What is your English related major?

- Education
- English literature
- Translation
- Applied linguistics

4. Kindly, specify the category of your years of experience in EFL teaching:

- Less than two years
- From two to five years
- From five to ten years
- From ten to fifteen years
- More than fifteen years

SECTION TWO:

According to the mentioned above definition, you can answer the following questions:

5. What type of self-directed professional development do you prefer to engage with?

- Individually initiated self-directed activities (*i.e. planned, implemented and evaluated by the teacher her/himself*).
- Collaboratively or group initiated self-directed activities (*i.e. planned, implemented and evaluated by a group of teachers, including two or more*).
- Both individually and collaboratively initiated self-directed activities.

6. If you felt a need to develop yourself as a foreign language teacher in a certain area, what context would you like to use for learning:

- Offline learning means.
- Online learning means.
- Both off- and online learning means.

Rank the following Individually initiated activities according to the level of frequency of your use: Note: some terms are defined for you to avoid confusion

<i>Individually initiated activities</i>	<i>Always</i>	<i>Usually</i>	<i>Sometime</i>	<i>Rarely</i>	<i>Never</i>
7. Practising reflective teaching *A process where teachers think over their teaching practices, analysing how something was taught and how the practice might be improved					
8. Writing reflective teaching journal *A journal where teacher keeps writing about her teaching practices to improve them					
9. Conducting action research *you conduct a research to solve an existing problem					
10. Reading books and papers					
11. Attending conferences and workshops (as a personal choice)					
12. Joining professional development courses either online or offline (as a personal choice)					
13. Conducting self-evaluation					
14. Conducting self-observation					
15. Consulting online websites, blogs, or social media platforms, such as (YouTube, Twitter, WhatsApp, LinkedIn etc.)					

16 . If you prefer individually initiated self-directed activities, why do you prefer this type?

.....

17. How often do you use individually initiated activities?

- Always
- Usually
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

Rank the following Collaboratively initiated activities according to the level of frequency of your use: Note: some terms are defined for you to avoid confusion

<i>Collaboratively initiated activities</i>	<i>Always</i>	<i>Usually</i>	<i>Sometime</i>	<i>Rarely</i>	<i>Never</i>
18. Informal teacher discussions					
19. Informal peer observation *Your peer observes your teaching informally based on your request					
20. Informal peer coaching a confidential process through which two or more professional colleagues work together to reflect on current practices; expand, refine, and build new skills; share ideas; teach one another; conduct classroom research; or solve problems in the workplace					
21. Conducting collaborative action research *Conducting research with other teachers or researchers to solve an existing problem					
22. Informal communities of practice either online or offline * a group of teachers form a community for learning purposes.					

23. If you prefer collaboratively initiated self-directed activities, why do you prefer this type?

.....

24. How often do you use collaboratively initiated activities?

- Always
- Usually
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

SECTION THREE:

25. What is your main purpose of adopting self-directed professional development? You can choose more than one option:

- Social purposes (e.g. social reputation)
- Academic purposes (e.g. professionalism)
- Administrative purposes (e.g. obtaining promotions/ high ranking positions)
- Cultural or environmental purposes (workplace requirements, e.g. higher education)
- If other, please specify

Based on your experience, rank the following factors that drive you to pursue self-directed professional development according to the level of its importance:

<i>Items</i>	<i>Very important</i>	<i>Important</i>	<i>Moderately important</i>	<i>Slightly important</i>	<i>Not important</i>
26. Willingness to learn					
27. Willingness to identify my learning needs as a language teacher					
28. Willingness to read					
29. Willingness to conduct research					
30. Willingness to solve problems related to classroom practices					
31. Willingness to achieve self-efficacy (self-effectiveness)					
32. Willingness to inform teaching policy					
33. The interest in the content area					
34. The match between SDPD and my learning characteristics					
35. The occurrence of SDPD in a respected environment chosen by the teacher					
36. The development of teacher's autonomy (independence)					
37. The empowerment of teacher					
38. The development of teacher's professional identity					
39. Teacher evaluation reports					
40. The flexibility of the learning pattern, either individually or collaboratively					

Based on the literature, the following are the most common factors that inhibit teachers from pursuing SDPD? Rank the following options based on your experience according to the level of agreement:

<i>Items</i>	<i>Strongly agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Neither agree or disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly disagree</i>
41. Personal life responsibilities					
42. Daily chores					
43. Inadequate funding					
44. Stress					
45. Lack of time					
46. Lack of motivation					
47. Lack physical energy					
48. Low quality of PD programmes * programmes that are provided by the university					
49. Social restrictions e.g. restrictions on females' freedom to traveling alone to attend or participate in any SDPD activity as a personal choice)					
50. Social and cultural restrictions; the separation between male and female teachers (e.g. in case of collaborative SDPD activities)					
51. Teacher academic and social reputation					

52. Please add any information you would like about your SDPD:

.....

If you are willing to take part in an online interview with me regarding the self-directed professional development, I would like to ask you to use the space below to write down your email address:

Thank you for your participation

If you have any further inquiries, please do not hesitate to contact me on this email: sa534@exeter.ac.uk

Appendix (2)

Interview Schedule (one) of the mixed-methods stage

No.	Focus	Main questions, prompts and probes
1.	(Past/current/future experience of offline SDPD)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are your current and previous SDPD offline activities? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. When did you start practising it? And why these forms in particular but not others? (Explain) 2. How often do you pursue these offline activities? 3. Do you see yourself continuing with these activities in the future? If so, why?
	(Peer observation)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Statistics from the previously administrated questionnaire show that there is little use of peer observation as a form of SDPD, what is your experience with this method? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. If you use it, then why? How often? 2. If not, why?
	(Informal teacher discussions)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Statistics from the previously administrated questionnaire show that informal teacher discussions whether (online or offline) are considered as one of the favourite forms of discussion by the majority of teachers, if you agree with this, why do you think they are popular? • What do you think are the points of strength and weakness from discussing your teaching practices with your colleagues? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Give examples (explain)
	(Self-evaluation)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Statistics from the previously administrated questionnaire show that self-evaluation, as a form of SDPD, is much practised, <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How often do you use this activity? and why? 2. What are the challenges facing you as an EFL university teacher when you practise it? • Do you often evaluate your SDPD? In what ways, explain?
2.	(Past/current experience online SDPD)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How about online SDPD, what forms of activities do you usually engage with? And why? (Explain)
	(Social media platforms)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When consulting online social media platforms (e.g. Twitter, WhatsApp, LinkedIn, Telegram, YouTube, ...etc.) as a context and medium of SDPD, <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What are the applications (apps) that you frequently use, whether via smartphones or computers? 2. What do you think are the limitations of these apps?
	(Online communities of practice 'VCoP')	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Statistics from the previously administrated questionnaire show that there is a tendency towards having communities of practice (CoP) in the Saudi university context, if you are a member of such a community, <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What types of challenges have you faced when pursuing PD through this model? Or, 2. What challenges might arise in the future?
3.	(Policy system)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you have any thoughts about the policy system of teacher professional development in your university? If yes,
4.	(Challenges of SDPD)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being an EFL university teacher, have you ever faced challenges while pursuing SDPD whether online or offline? If so, <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What are they? 2. How did you overcome such challenges? and

		3. What other solutions do you think will assist in supporting teachers in SDPD?
	(Challenges of offline SDPD)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Joining professional development (PD) courses as a personal choice is a form of SDPD, if you have experienced this form, <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What are the challenges that you have faced? or you might face, in the future?
5.	(Impact of SDPD on the teacher + practice)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If you have practised SDPD, how has it developed your autonomy (independence) as an EFL university teacher? • If you have practised SDPD, how does it relate to your empowerment as an EFL university teacher? • If you have practised SDPD, how does it contribute to your teaching practices? In what ways? Can you elaborate more by giving examples?

Appendix (3)

Interview Schedule (two) of the case study stage

No.	Focus	Main questions, prompts and probes
1.	Why/ reasons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> From your experience, what are the reasons behind your participation in discussions related to your development in the English Teachers' WhatsApp group?
2.	Advantages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> From your experience, what are the advantages of using this WhatsApp group?
3.	Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> From your experience, what are the challenges of this WhatsApp group?
4.	Experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do you participate in and engage with every topic? If yes, what drives you to participate? If no, what are the things that stop you from doing so? Can you describe the importance of this group is to you, in terms of the allocated time and effort? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Have you searched the internet or any other sources of new valid information to participate? Do you specify a certain time for reading and thinking about group discussions? Do you apply what you have discussed immediately, or do you need to consult other sources to verify the information obtained?
5.	Nature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can you describe the activities there? How do they relate to your teaching needs?
6.	Feelings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How do you feel when you see replies to your post? Do you find these chatting encouraging? Do you think that teachers should be encouraged before chatting? Explain
7.	Why/ field observation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I have noticed an absence of theoretical discussions in this WhatsApp group, being an EFL university teacher, how do you find that absence? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> What do you think are the reasons behind it? I have noticed an absence of evaluating educational research as a form of SDPD in this WhatsApp group, being an EFL university teacher, <ol style="list-style-type: none"> how do you find this absence? what do you think are the reasons behind it? 2. From my observation, I have noticed that all of the group discussions concentrate solely on practical issues related to EFL teaching, being an EFL university teacher, <ol style="list-style-type: none"> what do you think are the reasons for limiting the discussion around such practical issues? 3. From my observation, I found that when I suggested changing the language of discussion from English into Arabic, most of the teachers liked it and started to participate more than before, from your experience, <ol style="list-style-type: none"> what are the reasons that drive you to do this? what suggestions do you make for improving the effectiveness of this group in the future? 4. From my observation, I have noticed that all of the group discussions concentrate solely on practical issues related to EFL teaching, being a university EFL teacher, <ol style="list-style-type: none"> what do you think are the reasons of limiting the discussions around such practical issues?

		5. From my observation, I have noticed an absence of having any discussions related to your SDPD during vacations and exam periods, (1) what are the reasons behind this absence?
8.	Impact	6. Being a member of this WhatsApp group, how do these online informal discussions relate to your teaching practices? (1) How does it influence it? Give example.
		7. Have you ever used any of the posted multimedia contents to diversify your teaching? or to motivate your students to learn English?
		8. Have you seen any change in their attitudes since applying this method?
		9. In practising this form of professional development, have you noticed any effects on your professional identity as an EFL university teacher? If yes, what are they?

Appendix (4)

Interview (one) Transcript Sample

1. Researcher: What are your current and previous SDPD offline activities?

Participant: Last January, I finished a professional teaching diploma programme in Jeddah, I went to Jeddah every weekend to do the course for about four to five weeks, just to improve myself. It's something purely self-directed and nothing to do with the university, it was something that I wanted to do for myself, it's a personal choice. The programme is called master English teaching and training, professional development courses for teachers. Actually, I'm going to another programme this weekend called the TOT course, Trainer of Trainers. I have been to different conferences and seminars across the kingdom, just for myself. Actually, the job doesn't provide much in the way of PD, especially for teachers who aren't Arabic speakers.

2. Researcher: How often do you peruse these offline activities?

Participant: Every semester and, once, I realise a need for it.

3. Researcher: When did you start practising SDPD? And why these forms in particular but not others? (Explain)

Participant: A long time ago when I started teaching at university.

4. Researcher: Do you see yourself continuing with these activities in the future? If so, why?

Participant: Yes, because professional development is an ongoing process and knowledge is consistently changing. So, I need to keep abreast of the new strategies, technologies and theories discovered in the field of English language teaching.

5. Researcher: Statistics from the previously administrated questionnaire show that there is little use of peer observation as a form of SDPD, what is your experience with this method? Why/why not? How often?

Participant: Actually, we are doing a research project here at the University of (A) with regard to teaching medical terminology and English for specific purposes (ESP). We use this course to improve other teachers' performance. We, as the programme administrators, observe EFL teachers, we have found some of them using outdated methods and practices in the classrooms. So, we are taking the teachers who are not or less able in the classroom and asking them to sit in classes as students. We give lessons using the newest and most innovative methods and then we hold a round-table discussion about what worked and what didn't work in the classroom, particularly when it comes to novice teachers. That means we're promoting peer observation because it actually helps. Yes, over the years I've had a couple of my colleagues attend my classes to give me feedback about my teaching but, being the programme director, teachers may be afraid of telling me that I've done something wrong. Here at the university, usually it's a formal situation because we are used to having informal peer observation but it's because they are free and they will say, "Oh, I'll sit in in my friend's class because I have nothing else to do." It's not seriously taken because it's reflective, it's more or less like, "I want to hang out, let's go to her classroom." It's not for learning and giving real feedback. That's why we try to keep it more formalised to be more beneficial; so, when a teacher does this kind of observation, she gets a form, while she's doing that observation, and she should be taking notes, she should be really involved in the observation, not passively observing, just like, "Oh the class is just going on." No, she should be looking to see what are the things I might implement in my class, like things that worked and things that didn't work, I don't know if my students are going to do this thing the same way because my students are different from hers; and afterwards, these teachers are being re-observed in their classes to see what they implemented and how they benefited from their observation. This situation of re-observation is when a teacher has failed her observation. So, she had an observation in her class and it was not successful. The specific criteria for evaluation are set out by the programme director. There was a group of us who developed the teacher evaluation criteria, because no one gave us criteria to evaluate our teachers, there was nothing from the university for classroom observation. Regarding overall teacher observation, yes, the university sets out the criteria for evaluating teachers. But classroom observation, teaching methodology, pedagogy and things like this, none of these have official criteria we can follow. So, all of the observation list and points are

a self-initiative from us because we recognised the need to have such things in order to improve the department, help other teachers and be consistent in our work, whereby we all adhere to a similar way of teaching and evaluating.

6. Researcher: What do you think are the points of strength and weakness from discussing your teaching with your colleagues?

Participant: With myself I know that my biggest weakness is with regard to grading and keep up with paperwork, I just like being in class, interacting with the students and having fun with them. I'm not so interested in evaluation and marking papers, and this is where I have my main weakness. The strongest point of discussing your teaching with your colleagues is getting a different perspective, because other people may look at the same situation with a different view and ideas about how to handle things in the classroom. That's why we use round-table discussions, we give a scenario to a group of teachers sitting in a circle and discuss what is the best way to handle that scenario in the classroom. In that way we can see other points of view, because sometimes we believe that our way is the only way and the best way, we don't know about other possibilities. After such discussions, we might realise that my way, for example, is not the best way in this situation. Hence, we can identify our weaknesses that we never thought existed. Such discussions are a good opportunity for reflection, which teachers tend to neglect, especially after gaining considerable experience in EFL teaching. So, it's a good reflective tool. Weakness resides in the fact that sometimes they become boring or not very fruitful sessions, with teachers just complaining about everything, I don't like this, I don't like that, after which it's going to be like, "What you are going to do to improve that situation?"

7. Researcher: How about online SDPD, what forms of activities do you usually engage in? Why?

Participant: Actually, I have started some online courses, particularly free online university courses. So, I've started some of those courses and successfully finished two of them. But I think when you pay it's more motivating to complete one, but when it's free you can say, "Oh I'll do it tomorrow." And you become a procrastinator. In general, I do them according to my commitment and motivation.

8. Researcher: When consulting online social media platforms (for example Twitter, WhatsApp, LinkedIn, Telegram, YouTube etc.) as a context and medium for informal

SDPD, what are the applications (apps) that you frequently use, whether via smartphones or computers? What do you think are the limitations of these apps?

Participant: I have used LinkedIn, WhatsApp and YouTube, I use them on both phones and computers. But the problem you have is to look at the source of the information (its validity). In my case, I have a new Saudi teacher, she used to ask a lot of questions regarding grammar, and then I asked her, as a native speaker, ‘Where did you get the rule or this point?’ This is garbage, I don’t get information from these sites anymore, because it’s really invalid information, it’s actually inaccurate, so I think this is the limitation with regard to online sources, because there is so much information out there and you have to be careful where you get your information. YouTube is the same, there are many good sources if I want to teach certain topics, but it takes time to watch several YouTube videos, to find out if they work for you and match your needs. Then you might say, ‘Oh, let’s go to the next one to find better content.’ It’s time consuming.

9. Researcher: Do you often evaluate your SDPD? In what ways, explain?

Participant: Not really, if for whatever I do I have an official evaluation, then I recognise the importance of evaluating my work before anyone else does. Every now and again, I do self-evaluation, mostly at the end of the semester each year. I usually say to myself, ‘‘So, what is going to happen next year? What are your plans, what are your goals?’’ Because I’m a person who sets goals and then I ask myself, ‘How well did you achieve your goals? Did you reach them or not?’ So, this is what prompts me to do some self-evaluation. I need to see where I’m going and where I need to go. And then re-evaluate my goals and set new ones. Then I start all over again. Regarding the way I evaluate my work, I have a list of goals and I look at my list and then I measure in that way.

10. Researcher: Informal teacher discussions whether (online or offline) are considered one of the favourite forms of discussion by a majority of teachers, according to the results of the previously administered questionnaire, if you agree with this, why do you think they are popular?

Participant: I think because there is no stress with them. No one is evaluating you with regard to anything, so it's easy to have a discussion because no one will come and say, "Oh! What are the results of that discussion? Who did you implement that thing?" It's easy and stress-free.

11. Researcher: Do you have any thoughts about the policy system for teacher professional development in your university?

Participant: No, we set things by ourselves, I know that there is a system but it's in Arabic, and we non-Arab teachers can't read it. Actually, the university has a forum, you can go online and search for it, you can find all of the courses listed and you can pick the courses you need. But all of these are in Arabic. So that's not applicable to me. There should be a clear readable policy system for EFL teachers' PD. Teachers need to be aware of what is expected of them. I need to shed light on this matter. I need to bring light to this issue. In my case, at KSU, we don't know if such policies exist or not, we haven't read a single paper regarding our PD. And we just do things the way we like, we lack professional guidance. Comparing the situation to the USA, we have a policy that states that each teacher should have completed a list of PD teaching hours and activities each year. So, each teacher decides earlier on when to go based on their needs, for example 20 hours during the year. So, the teachers do this. The teachers keep working consistently to finish these hours effectively.

12. Researcher: Being a university EFL teacher, have you ever faced challenges while pursuing SDPD whether online or offline? If so, (1) what were they? (2) How did you overcome such challenges? and (3) What other solutions do you think will assist in supporting teachers in SDPD?

Participant: Yes. Basically, once I joined an online programme, I didn't like it that much because I realised I like face-to face courses; however, with face to face, the challenge here in Saudi Arabia is getting to the venue and sometimes getting time off from work to go to a conference or something similar to this. And there is the financial issue. Regarding cultural and social barriers, I don't suffer from those because I'm an American and I go wherever I want, and there is no need for a chaperone. I have no problem with these matters. The university

could offer an incentive to teachers who do SDPD, even if it's not something for their own benefit because in the end it will enhance the output of the university. So, if the university doesn't offer it by itself, it should give incentives to go out and do it. If they don't give us money, they could give a couple of days, they could say, "You can use emergency leave time to attend." But they don't. Teachers need to be motivated by their administration and the department they work for.

13. Researcher: Self-evaluation, as a form of SDPD, is much practised according to the results of the questionnaire, (1) how often do you use this form? and (2) what are the challenges facing you as a university EFL teacher when you practise it?

Participant: Self-evaluation is consistent, it's an ongoing process, you should always be looking into yourself, reflecting on your practice, reflecting on how well you're doing your job. I can't give a formal questionnaire unless it's a formal questionnaire. I didn't distribute any evaluation questionnaires, it's not permissible to give students anything like this. But at the end of each class, I ask the students if they have any problems with it. Do they want me to change the way I'm teaching them? They must tell me. If there is anything else I can do to help them, to facilitate their learning in a better way or if there is anything they'd like me to change or add, I want them to tell me. And because my students get to know me "as being honest with them", they share their ideas freely without being afraid of me taking their comments the wrong way. The only challenge is being too busy to do reflection.

14. Researcher: Joining professional development (PD) courses as a personal choice is a form of SDPD. If you have experienced this form, what are the challenges that you have faced, or you might face, in the future?

Participant: Just needing to travel to attend face-to-face courses. Location is a big factor especially if you are work in a less developed or remote city, being in Hail is not like being in Riyadh or Jeddah, where it is easy, you can attend any of the provided courses. Regarding travelling abroad to attend PD, they don't let us take leave. In the vacations we can do that, but it's our time to relax and spend more time with family, it's not for professional development. With regard to the short vacations, they are finished now and so no longer can we take advantage of them to develop ourselves.

15. Researcher: According to the questionnaire results, there is a tendency towards having online communities of practice (VCoP) in the Saudi university context. If you are a member of such a community, what types of challenges have you faced when pursuing PD through this model? Or what challenges might arise in the future?

Participant: We have an informal WhatsApp group, it's optional if a teacher wants to be part of it or not, a lot of teachers send information, and sometimes there are incidents with university students, sometimes you just want to know how others deal with such situations. For me, I tried every now and again to send an article to other teachers to read and help them improve their teaching, or to motivate them to adapt new techniques in class, it's not formal but informal, and we need to activate it more and take more advantage of this tool.

16. Researcher: If you have practised SDPD, how has it developed your autonomy (independence) as an EFL university teacher?

Participant: In order to do SDPD we need to be autonomous, it makes you independent and it makes you responsible, and it's empowering when you do something for yourself, instead of waiting for someone to tell you must do something, it's ok, I'm motivated to do this on my own.

17. Researcher: If you have practised SDPD, how does it relate to your empowerment as an EFL university teacher?

Participant: I answered that before.

18. Researcher: If you have practised SDPD, how does it contribute to your teaching practice? In what ways? Can you elaborate more by giving examples?

Participant: In the first semester I taught in the College of Engineering and in the second semester I taught in night school. I haven't taught in the prep. year, in fact I have tried not to teach our students in their prep. year, because there's a conflict, being the director of the department, they feel they have more rights than other students. So, I try to teach outside the prep. year to avoid this problem. Of course there is an effect because you do it to learn what's new out there, to improve what you're doing for your students. Your job is to help your students understand it. The whole purpose behind going to those courses or pursuing SDPD is to improve your teaching practice and help your students to learn, that's why we are here, we need to facilitate learning for our students, not spoon-feed the students information but teach

them how to learn, some teachers treat their student like baby birds. They take information and just put it in their mouths. In the PD course they teach you how to facilitate learning, not just how to transfer knowledge to your students. As times have changed, education has changed, and you need to keep up with what your educational field for the benefit of your students, like you said, so you looking at WhatsApp as a way of promoting SDPD with teachers. You learn about new things when you go to conferences, workshops and things like that. Now, roles in the kingdom have changed with regard to students being able to bring smartphones into universities and schools. And this has opened up a new whole world for use in the classroom.

Appendix 5

Interview (Two) Transcript Sample

1. Researcher: From your experience, what are the reasons behind your participation in discussions related to your development in the English Teachers' WhatsApp group?

Participant: I believe that the best way to professional development is to build on experience, whether our own experiences or others'. So, having a group where some people are trying something out leads the way to other ideas you've never tried and things like that, for example BSA mentioned the idea of students not knowing how to study, although they have the information. They don't know how to study and so she suggested using mind maps. That was really like opening my eyes, before that, when I was teaching my students grammar, I used to use mind maps to summarise each grammatical rule, but the idea of grouping the rules for each unit or unit by unit is something useful I learned from the group, it is like an outline for each unit which helps students recall and retrieve the rules of the whole course/book in a simple way. I used to use outlines, but when I changed my outlines using mind maps, I found the majority of students preferred them and were active in using them, either handwritten or through mind-map applications, which produce them in a colourful style. I will tell the group how students actually applied this method in practice. However, I found a small number of students still preferred the outline method and I support all students to use the method they like, according to their individual abilities and differences. At the end I said them, "I want you to write a summary because you are the ones who are going to have to understand it and use it later on etc." They all made amazing mind maps and I started doing them tense by tense. BSA suggest unit by unit and in groups, but I started by asking each student to do it on their own for the first two units until they got used to it, and I found that each student does it in a different way, so then I decided to keep it individual (I will provide you with a sample of the mind maps produced by my students). So, at the end of each unit, I ask them to summarise grammatical rules using mind maps or an outline (in a way that helps them remember it better). So, I got some mind maps and some outlines.

2. Researcher: Have you seen any change in their attitudes since applying this method?

Participant: Yes, and it wasn't something subtle, one of the students actually expressed it verbally out loud, saying, "Miss, I really love how we are doing these mind maps because it is sticking in my mind, the grammatical rule is sticking in my mind." Actually, I felt it before from their participation and faces, and class assessments, but she confirmed it out loud to me and to the rest of the class.

3. Researcher: From your experience, what are the advantages of using this WhatsApp group?

Participant: It is its convenience, it's there at your fingertips. Today, for example, when I brought up a grammar issue, the students were doing an exam and it just crossed my mind, thinking about the issue of using the first language when teaching a second language. It was a question and I needed to know how other teachers dealt with this issue or if they had any evidence regarding certain ways or theories to test it. And another thing, sometimes even if we want to look for a certain issue or ask about it we forget it later because of our busy lives. Having WhatsApp facilitates posting any issue easily because I don't want to forget to discuss this issue. Not only that but it allows me and others to revisit chats when we are free or when we need specific information. I don't think this feature exists in other mediums. And then I look at their replies as soon as I'm back from work. It is convenient, whenever an idea pops into your head you can ask immediately about it and share it. The ease of using WhatsApp and the variety of its features is what I like. And also, because it's an informal community, it's more comfortable, it gives you the space to express things freely, to talk about any issue you like any time you like, with the language you like, not really worrying about am I saying this right or not, they are all friends no one is above others, no one judges. "Being informal leaves you free and open to share more."

4. Researcher: From your experience, what are the challenges of this WhatsApp group?

Participant: The only challenge is finding the time, but to tell the truth WhatsApp makes this challenge easier. Sometimes, I say I will discuss this with the group but then I don't find the time to follow up or be there when the rest are discussing it, and then the topic changes and they start to talk about something else. In fact, because of our teaching loads and busy lives, we might not find the time for our PD, but being on WhatsApp actually makes the problem of time less challenging. Before, I could never find the time, but now things have changed and I

can find time when my kids are sleeping and as my phone is to hand, I can have access anytime if I have free time. I used to tell myself, “When the semester is over, I’ll read about this or whatever, but being in this group gave me the chance of not postponing such things.”

5. Researcher: Do you participate in and engage with every topic? If yes, what drives you to participate? If no, what are the things that stop you from doing so?

Participant: Yes, I do try, and I think so far I’m engaging in all the discussions. What makes me participate is because I think that’s how I’m going to learn. If I share an idea with someone then someone is going to confirm it with results of empirical research or someone is going to add to it. So, at least I put the idea out there. So, I think it’s important to share knowledge and experiences to see others’ views, opinions and experiences regarding the issue discussed. Particularly when other people have experienced the same thing you’ve experienced or they are looking for evidence from practice on the effectiveness of such a method or technique.

6. Researcher: How do you feel when you see replies to your post?

Participant: I get a great feeling when I see replies to my post or participation because I feel that teachers are more engaged, they like my ideas and are interested in what I’m discussing. In fact, this motivates me to learn more, share more, be more effective in this community and enhance my identity as a university lecturer. It motivates me to try things out more, so when there are replies that is awesome. So, I can say that this group is a source of motivation and this semester it motivates me a lot compared to before as regards engaging in PD via WhatsApp.

7. Researcher: Can you describe the activities there?

Participant: They are like suggestions and replies and people actually doing something, like when BSA mentioned mind maps, she went and gave a workshop on that topic. Then people shared their own experiences of their own students’ mind maps, sharing pictures, so I think it starts with a suggestion and then teachers build on others’ experiences.

8. Researcher: How do they relate to your teaching needs?

Participant: Multiple or different suggestions from teachers suggest different ways of doing the same thing, which accordingly might meet the different needs we have. For example, BSA suggested mind maps and I liked the idea because it met my needs at the time, though other teachers might suggest something different which does not meet my needs and interest. So, when we find a suggestion is useful we can benefit from it and try it out. In fact, these activities shed light on areas of need, where I didn't know that I needed to improve myself. It shines a light there and drags my attention to unrecognisable things, then I realise that I do need to read about this and that right now or I do need to develop this method. Being in the group in the first place wasn't because I felt that I needed to develop myself in certain areas, but the discussions themselves attracted my attention to many different needs and I started doing reflection on my practices to see whether I used this or not, and if not why? Is it because it's new or because I didn't do it on any course before? Is it my fault for not knowing about such critical issues regarding teaching EFL or the fault of my institution? So, being in this group made me realise the importance of the teacher having a learning role and the fact that no matter what degree I may have, I need to keep learning about new teaching methods. This group is like a reminder, because we all felt a reduction in motivation in the last period. As I told you before, I was running away from teaching 101/102, I was avoiding teaching beginners' courses because I preferred teaching courses in other colleges where students' level is better, their courses are harder, but now I've changed. Before being in this group I was less motivated and frustrated and disappointed that I wasn't working anymore in the writing centre or in the common year, but then my attitude changed, I became more motivated and I realised that the problem is not with the students or this environment, we can make the change we want to see. So as long as we have that motivation we can make a huge difference.

9. Researcher: Do you find this chatting encouraging? Do you think that teachers should be encouraged to chat? Explain.

Participant: Yes, very encouraging. No, I think there is no need for any prior motivation, posting any topic and the discussions themselves are sufficient motivation, as long as others know a problem exists within the same context, and we all have similar situations. Moreover, I think that if you are really interested in self-development, you don't need someone to encourage you to do so. I want to clarify that being silent in the group is not an indication of less motivation, sometimes it's because the teacher doesn't know about this issue but at the

same time she keeps taking screenshots and notes from what we all post. One way or another, being in the group is motivating in itself, regardless of the participation rate recorded by each teacher. Each teacher may benefit in her own way, chatting is not a necessarily an indication of motivation or interest, or benefit, from this group. For me, I actually prefer chatting back and forth. It helps a lot, but some people like to be listeners. This may stem from individual personality differences.

10. Researcher: Can you describe the important this group is to you, in terms of the allocated time and effort?

Participant: Time is really an issue for me, but when I find free time, I really try go and see what people have been talking about. It is something important and I really wish that it will be like a permanent thing, I don't want this WhatsApp group to fold or shut down because development is an ongoing process and sometimes you cannot see the results in one semester, you need to more time. The other thing is that being in a group with others encourages you to try things out and compare your performance to others. As long as you are in the teaching profession, you need to develop yourself.

11. Researcher (1) Have you searched the Internet or any other sources of new valid information to participate? (2) Do you specify a certain time for reading and thinking about group discussions? (3) Do you apply what you have discussed immediately or do you need to consult other sources to verify the information obtained?

Participant: Yes, I searched the Internet to know more about the use of mind maps, it was a quick read. It just confirmed something I believed, for example that summarising something helps to understand it and remember it later on. I also searched about the use of L1 in teaching L2 and read about it thoroughly. This reading started when the director of the writing centre told me that NNET teachers are at an advantage in using L1 to make sure learners understand what is meant by a rule or task, this is an advantage because we share a native language with the learners and visitors to the writing centre. So, when she left I had a big question mark in my mind because they keep saying don't use L1, but while reading I found out that this is not true, so we should verify any information or instruction we get around our teaching. It's better for example to use Arabic in speaking classes because it will help them engage, also when explaining any grammatical rule to make sure that they understand what you are saying.

Because in teacher assessments, one of the points is not to use Arabic while teaching English. But now, being a coordinator, I can say no and it's time to remove this point from the evaluation list because it's wrong. So, yes, there is an effect of this group on changing the policy regarding teacher evaluations.

12. Researcher: I have noticed an absence of theoretical discussions in this WhatsApp group, being a university EFL teacher, how do you find that absence? (1) What do you think are the reasons behind it?

Participant: I've noticed this absence and I think it is because of the time issue, everyone is busy with their lectures and correcting assignments and exams, but I think we should encourage it. Today we raised a theoretical issue and we should do the same every now and then because this is what going to differentiate us from normal EFL teachers in schools. Another thing is that it may be because not all of the teachers are PhD holders, only one is a doctor in our department and so the culture of discussing theoretical issues is a bit limited and not activated, since we teach BA and Diploma students, not student-researchers. In a master's you start to get an idea of the importance of research and theoretical debates, but when you start your PhD you become more familiar and involved in this kind of discussion. I just realised the importance of theoretical research after you asked me about, but I do think a lot. Because we lack having academic meetings, this group helps to bring up such discussions and we can raise issues in a friendly way. We should help each other until we make a difference.

13. Researcher: I have noticed an absence of evaluating educational research as a form of SDPD in this WhatsApp group, being a university EFL teacher, how do you find this absence? (1) What do you think are the reasons behind it?

Participant: That's right, to tell the truth I hadn't realised this absence until you asked me this question. And yes, we should read, discuss and evaluate educational research.

14. Researcher: From my observation, I have noticed that all the group discussions concentrate solely on practical issues related to EFL teaching, being a university EFL

teacher, what do you think are the reasons for limiting the discussion around such practical issues?

Participant: Answered above.

15. Researcher: I have noticed an absence of having any discussions related to your SDPD during vacations and exam periods, what are the reasons behind this absence?

Participant: It's true, I think I it is an absence of realisation. We needed to hear this from you or from someone else. Actually, I do some reading in the vacations but not in exam periods. This reading is because a question pops into my mind. And most of my reading is for my PhD proposal and a small percentage for PD, but I think I should read more for my PD.

16. Researcher: Being a member of this WhatsApp group, how do these online informal discussions relate to your teaching practice? (1) How does it influence it? Give an example.

Participant: They directly relate because when we suggest any method or activity, we try to implement it and apply it in our classes. As you know, results are not something that happen within one day or one week, it takes much time to see any difference. In general, the influence is positive, for example students started to become more engaged when we used mind maps, when we used games and I used Arabic in teaching grammar. Students told me loudly that they liked this change and asked me to keep using the new strategies as they helped them to understand more than before. It was very beneficial, I noticed also that their marks were getting higher and their attitudes in class better. Regarding myself, I started getting the idea of PD, I was a tutor since I was in middle school, I used to teach my friends. I explained some grammatical rules in Arabic while using some English words to make sure that they understood them and it worked well with them. So later, in one in my classes, from my experience with these techniques I applied them, and after I read about this I found evidence supporting it. I remember my friend used to say, "I wish my teacher would use Arabic while explaining grammatical rules. "As an example, once I started to use Arabic in my classes I noticed an advance in students' engagement and participation, and marks as well. And I realised that this was because they started to understand, I had removed a barrier by no longer neglecting L1 when teaching L2. We deal with student cognition. Other teachers have that barrier because

they don't speak Arabic, but we are not the same. We have the advantage of speaking the native language of the learners to clarify things and communicate the rules. I saw a difference in me and my students as well.

17. Researcher: Have you ever used any of the posted multimedia contents to diversify your teaching? Or to motivate your students to learn English?

Participant: Yes, mind maps. And I forget now about other multimedia I used but mind maps were very effective in teaching grammar, in understanding, and in recalling the rules later on, the majority love it. They started to do it in every lecture and with every grammatical rule, so I looked at their work

18. Researcher: From my observation, I found that when I suggested changing the language of discussion from English into Arabic, most of the teachers liked it and started to participate, more than before. From your experience, what are the reasons that drive you to do this? (1) What suggestions do you make for improving the effectiveness of this group in the future?

Participant: For me, it was fine to have discussions in Arabic or in English because I grew up in the States and I acquired the language when I was little, so for me I find it easy to have discussions in either Arabic or English. However, I've noticed that other teachers have become more engaged and interested, willing to participate once the language has changed. I think they feel more comfortable, more expressive due to the command of Arabic, because it's our native language. And no one will avoid discussions in Arabic as we all speak it all day and it's more friendly than English in our context. But I've noticed a jump in their involvement in the discussions. The numbers doubled and keep increasing, I can say that most of them started to participate in most of the discussions. And it is the same when using L1 in teaching L2, we can use L1 in PD because it facilitates learning and removes the language barrier. We can compare this to the use of L1 in teaching L2. When it comes to learning, even EFL teachers who are competent in both languages prefer to use L1.

Participant: It would be nice if someone threw in an idea or instigated a group now and then. It's like throwing something on the fire to burn more. Perhaps discuss having a bank in the drop box for exams, quizzes, games and activities, that would be a helpful resource for all the teachers to go back through. Plus Nada's example of bringing teachers' books. Having sample tests or a test bank would reduce the conflicts among teachers, teachers could have credit for their extra work or contribution to this bank as a form of professional development. Plus we talk about teacher evaluation and how to liken it to professional development. She is still working on the evaluation criteria for teacher evaluation.

19. Researcher: In practising this form of professional development, have you noticed any effects on your professional identity as a university EFL teacher? If yes, what are they?

Participant: Yes, the difference is here in my mind, but what I realise is that I do need be more academic than I am, we don't do anything that makes us look like academics, like theoretical discussions and evaluating education research, holding seminars and workshops. And we as colleagues need to remind each other. Even if the participation is not as expected, I can see a change, this group is like a seed which starts to grow, not only in our minds but reflected in our practice and I'm sure it's going to be very fruitful.

Appendix (6)

Sample of WhatsApp Chat

المقرر.

[22/01/2018, 9:44:50 am] BSA: 2- *تقسيم الطالبات الى 8 مجموعات* و بعد شرح القواعد في كل وحده أطلب من المجموعة عمل *خريطة ذهنية او مفاهيمية* و تقوم المجموعة بعرض خريبتهم و شرحها للطالبات قبل البدء بحل التمارين في كتاب workbook. الهدف ان الطالبة بالمجموعة تتعلم مهارة تلخيص النقاط المهمة و بالنسبة لباقي الطالبات مراجعه لهم لاهم القواعد قبل البدء بالتمارين. طبعاً الطالبات سيكون تعرفوا على اهمية الخريطة و كيفية عملها بالدورة الي سبق و اعطيتهم اياه. و الوحده الاول سيكون انا الي عملت الخريطة حتى يفهموا المقصد اكثر.

و بعد كل وحده انزل خريطة المجموعة في موقعي حتى يستفيد منها المجموعات الثانية.

[22/01/2018, 9:44:52 am] BSA: 3- *Muddiest point* او مجموعته تكتب لي ايش كانت الفقرة الاصعب من غير ذكر اسماء و بكذا اعرف النقاط الي مافهموها الطالبات و اركز على شرحها في المحاضره الي بعدها. و كمان هالطريقه تنبهني اذا كان الاغلب مجمع على عدم فهم نقطه معينه يعني طريقتي في شرحها ما كانت صحيحة و لازم اغيرها.

[22/01/2018, 9:44:52 am] BSA: 4- *Evaluation of another student's work* عجبتي فكرة [REDACTED] و راح اضيفها في تدريس مهارة الكتابة

[22/01/2018, 9:44:53 am] BSA: 5- *Writing Quiz* بعد الانتهاء من كل وحدتين راح اطلب من كل مجموعته تكتب اختبار و الاجابات النموذجيه. هالفكرة تخلي الطالبة تذاكر و تعطيني انا فكرة على ايش الطالبة مركزه عليه و ايش مهملته في الوحده

[22/01/2018, 9:44:54 am] BSA: 6- *التحفيز*: احس اني مقصره الترم الي* : راح في تحفيز الطالبات. فهالترم كنوع من التحفيز

بحط في نهاية شرح كل وحده سؤال و اول طالبة تجاوب صح عليه لها bouns بعد توزيع الدرجات راح اذكر اسماء اعلى خمسهم و امدهم. هذا ينمي الثقة بالطالبة المتفوقه و يزيد من روح الحماس و التنافس.

[22/01/2018, 9:45:20 am] BSA: 7- المحاضرة مدتها طويلة و تحتاج شي ملهمة و *youtube* يكسر الجمود اثناء المحاضره. فباختار مقاطع من ممتعته بنفس الوقت احطها في نص المحاضره للطالبات تكسر الروتين و تجدد النشاط.

و كنوع من الفائدة في كل محاضره راح اشرح للبنات *3 new idioms* بالصور و اطلب منهم يحفظونها و في الامتحان راح احط سؤال عليهم و يكون *bouns*

[22/01/2018, 9:46:16 am] BSA: و بودي اسمع 😊 اعتقد هذا كل الي عندي و بودي اسمع
تعليقاتكم و اقتراحاتكم 💜

Appendix (7)

Reliability statistics

Scale 1 Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Item
.899	16

Scale 2 Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Item
.911	15

Scale 3 Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Item
.773	11

Appendix (8)

Certificate of ethical Approval from University of Exeter



GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

St Luke's Campus
Heavitree Road
Exeter UK EX1 2LU

<http://socialsciences.exeter.ac.uk/education/>

CERTIFICATE OF ETHICAL APPROVAL

Title of Project: The possibilities and restrictions of self-directed professional development: A case study of EFL teachers in Saudi tertiary institutions

Researcher(s) name: Sana Alzahrani

Supervisor(s): Salah Troudi
Hania Salter-Dvorak

This project has been approved for the period

From: 01/10/2017
To: 01/09/2019

Ethics Committee approval reference:

D/17/18/09

Signature:  Date: 25/09/2017
(Professor Dongbo Zhang, Graduate School of Education Ethics Officer)

Appendix (9)

Ethical form



Ref (for office use only)

COLLEGE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

When completing this form please remember that the purpose of the document is to clearly explain the ethical considerations of the research being undertaken. As a generic form it has been constructed to cover a wide-range of different projects so some sections may not seem relevant to you. Please include the information which addresses any ethical considerations for your particular project which will be needed by the SSIS Ethics Committee to approve your proposal.

Guidance on all aspects of the SSIS Ethics application process can be found on the SSIS intranet:

Staff: <https://intranet.exeter.ac.uk/socialsciences/staff/research/researchenvironmentandpolicies/ethics/>

Students: <http://intranet.exeter.ac.uk/socialsciences/student/postgraduateresearch/ethicsapprovalforyouresearch/>

All staff and students within SSIS should use this form to apply for ethical approval and then send it to one of the following email addresses:

ssis-ethics@exeter.ac.uk This email should be used by staff and students in Egenis, the Institute for Arab and Islamic Studies, Law, Politics, the Strategy & Security Institute, and Sociology, Philosophy, Anthropology.

ssis-gseethics@exeter.ac.uk This email should be used by staff and students in the Graduate School of Education.

Applicant details	
Name	Sana Alzahrani
Department	School of education
UoE email address	Sa534@exeter.ac.uk

Duration for which permission is required		
You should request approval for the entire period of your research activity. The start date should be at least one month from the date that you submit this form. Students should use the anticipated date of completion of their course as the end date of their work. Please note that <u>retrospective ethical approval will never be given.</u>		
Start date:01/10/2017	End date:01/09/2019	Date submitted:11/09/2017

Students only	
All students must discuss their research intentions with their supervisor/tutor prior to submitting an application for ethical approval. The discussion may be face to face or via email.	
Prior to submitting your application in its final form to the SSIS Ethics Committee it should be approved by your first and second supervisor / dissertation supervisor/tutor. You should submit evidence of their approval with your application, e.g. a copy of their email approval.	
Student number	650049278
Programme of study	Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)
Name of Supervisor(s)/tutors or Dissertation Tutor	Prof. Salah Troudi Dr. Hania Salter-Dvorak
Have you attended any	Yes, I have taken part in ethics training at the University of Exeter

ethics training that is available to students?	<p>For example, I attended the Research Integrity Ethics and Governance workshop: http://as.exeter.ac.uk/rdp/postgraduateresearchers ii) Ethics training received on Masters courses</p> <p>If yes, please specify and give the date of the training: Understanding Research Ethics 25/10/2017</p>
--	--

Certification for all submissions

I hereby certify that I will abide by the details given in this application and that I undertake in my research 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 ethics proposal form.

Sana Alzahrani

Double click this box to confirm certification

Submission of this ethics proposal form confirms your acceptance of the above.

TITLE OF YOUR PROJECT

The Possibilities and Restrictions of Self-directed Professional Development: A case study of EFL teachers in Saudi tertiary institutions

ETHICAL REVIEW BY AN EXTERNAL COMMITTEE

No, my research is not funded by, or doesn't use data from, either the NHS or Ministry of Defence.

MENTAL CAPACITY ACT 2005

No, my project does not involve participants aged 16 or over who are unable to give informed consent (e.g. people with learning disabilities)

SYNOPSIS OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT
Maximum of 750 words.

This research is an exploratory-interpretive in nature using a sequential mixed methods design, which aims at exploring the current status of self-directed professional development pursued by university EFL teachers in Saudi Arabia. Being an under-researched topic in the Saudi context; in addition to my interest in this form of professional development, drive me to explore (1) the types of self-directed professional development activities teachers prefer to use; (2) the factors that contribute to, or impede teachers from pursuing this form of professional development through a mixture of closed/open-ended questionnaire. Not only this, since there exists a virtual community of practice (VCoP) initiated informally by teachers themselves through a WhatsApp group in one Saudi university, as a form of self-directed professional development, I intend to explore why and how teachers use this online community to develop themselves through informal discussions and how it relates to their EFL teaching practices. Finally, I am seeking to end up with a model of self-directed professional development based on the preferences and characteristics of university EFL teachers.

To achieve this purpose, this research aims to answer the following questions:

1. What is the nature of the self-directed professional development initiatives developed by Saudi university EFL teachers?
2. What are the underlying factors that contribute to the self-directed professional development of

Saudi university EFL teachers?

3. What are the underlying factors that might hinder Saudi university EFL teachers from pursuing self-directed professional development?
4. How does participating in a virtual community of practice through a 'WhatsApp group' as a form of self-directed professional development relate to their EFL teaching practices?
5. According to the characteristics and preferences of university EFL teachers', what is the best model of self-directed professional development might they prefer to have in the future?

The research will involve empirical elements to answer these questions:

- A. An online questionnaire for university EFL teachers from six public universities.

To obtain descriptive information about the current status of self-directed professional development practised by university EFL teachers in Saudi universities, I need to administrate a closed/open ended questionnaire to capture the big picture of the situation from participants in different universities across the country. Sticking to one institute or university will not allow me to provide a comprehensive and reliable description of the status of self-directed professional development in this context. Not only this, the results of the questionnaire (phase one) will help me in developing the questions of the semi-structured interviews for (phase two) to gain a deep understanding of the situation.

- B. Virtual participant observation of a WhatsApp group established by university EFL teachers in one Saudi university.

As long as university EFL teachers in the Applied Sciences and Community Services (ASCS) college at the Central University (pseudonym) established an online learning group to exchange experiences and solve existing teaching problems, I intend to observe teachers' daily discussions and explore how it relates to their actual EFL teaching practices. Being a member of that group will allow me to conduct participant observation. In addition, as long as the group is an online 'virtual group', I need to conduct this observation virtually.

- C. Semi-structured interviews with university EFL teachers who participated in the WhatsApp group and the questionnaire.

Following the observation, in order to understand why teachers participate in this online community, and how they relate their participations and discussions to their actual EFL teaching practices, it is necessary to interview them individually through face-to-face semi-structured interviews (1) to get multiple views, experiences and different facts about the use of this self-directed activity as a form of professional development; as well as (2) to ask them about issues resulted from the questionnaire for further information.

- D. Focus-group discussion with university EFL teachers who participated both in the WhatsApp group and in the questionnaire.

After analysing the questionnaire and conducting the observation and interviews, I will end up with some recommendations and suggestions regarding the effective model for university EFL teachers. In the focus-group discussion, I will ask teachers to suggest the most applicable model that they wish to follow in the future. Seeking collective minds and opinions in this stage is important to end up with suggesting an applicable and effective model.

INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH

This research will take place in Saudi Arabia. It is intended that this research will involve mixed methods: first, a questionnaire for University EFL teachers from six public universities in Saudi Arabia. Thus, I will be committed to the ethical requirements and regulations set by the Saudi ethical committees in all these universities; therefore, I need to obtain an official approval to officially administrate the questionnaire from the head administration of each English department in these six universities. As long as we have ethical research committees in my country (Saudi Arabia), it is required for any researcher who wants to administrate a questionnaire on a sample form any public organisation (e.g. university) to obtain an official approval from the admiration of that organisation before even asking the participants to give their consent. Therefore, I will obtain the approvals by myself through contacting them via emails and phone calls. I will send them a letter asking for their approval with a full explanation of the procedures and the content of the questionnaire. Most importantly, I will not employ any person other than me to carry out either the questionnaires or to get the approvals. Finally, I will ensure that no harm will be caused by this questionnaire and I will make sure that the content of the questionnaire will not target any sensitive issues at all. In general, the questionnaire will contain two main sections: the first one addressing the types of self-directed professional development activities; and the second one addressing the factors that contribute to, or impede teachers from pursuing this type of professional development. The questionnaire items will be sent to my supervisors as being experts in this field for testing and examining their suitability to the participants.

Regarding the other methods, I intend to conduct a virtual (online) participant observation for a WhatsApp group initiated by EFL teachers in the ASCS college at the Central University in Riyadh. Since this group is initiated informally by teachers, there is no need to get an official approval form the English department in the ASCS college for this observation. What is needed is the approval of each member of the group, which will be done through sending them an online informed consent form in English alongside with an information sheet, explaining all the required information regarding this observation including the aim and purpose of the observation through their emails asking for their approval prior to the observation. To explain, I will send the information sheet including the consent form to all of the group members to inform them about my observation, explaining that the observation is going to be as my routinely observation for our daily discussions. I will offer them two choices to give their consent for; (1) an option for only observation without taking screen shots of the participant's discussions, and (2) an option for agreeing on carrying on both observation and taking screenshots of the participant's discussions. I will explain that the screen screenshots will be taken for some of the related discussions to the self-directed professional development and it will be used just for the purpose of analysis and some of them might be included in my thesis but under pseudonym names. In case if any teacher refuses to give her consent (even if one), then I will not conduct the observation and I will try to look for another applicable method to collect my data. Regarding those who give their consent only for the observation, I will not record, discuss and analyse or even refer to their discussions. That means I will work only with the discussions provided by those who give their full consent. As long as I am an insider researcher (an original member of this group), I am hoping that my observation will not influence the flow of the discussions as all of us are on the same level, which means that there will not an issue of power.

Following this observation, I intend also to conduct face-to-face interviews with those who participated in both the WhatsApp group and the questionnaire to gain in-depth insight about (1) their participation and discussion within the WhatsApp group and how it relates to their teaching practices; and (2) the issues resulted from the questionnaire for further information and clarification. Finally, I intend to hold a focus-group discussion with university EFL teachers (who participated in the questionnaire, observation, and interviews) to hear their suggestions regarding the characteristics of the best applicable model of self-directed professional development for EFL university teachers. Conducting these interviews and the focus-group discussion, I need to obtain teachers approval through sending them in advance informed consent with the information sheet, explaining the aim and purpose of conducting this empirical study.

The following sections require an assessment of possible ethical consideration in your research project. If particular sections do not seem relevant to your project please indicate this and clarify why.

RESEARCH METHODS

This research will consist of:

1. Questionnaire (a mixture of closed and open ended) for university EFL teachers in Saudi Arabia;
2. Virtual participant observation of a WhatsApp group initiated informally by EFL teachers at ASCS college at the Central university in Saudi Arabia;
3. Semi-structured interviews (face-to face) with those who participated in both the WhatsApp group and the questionnaire; and
4. Focus-group discussion with those who participated in the questionnaire, observation and interviews.

Characteristics of the questionnaire sample:

I aim to distribute 210 questionnaires to university EFL teachers (these teachers are from six Saudi public universities). These teachers must be EFL teachers, and have been teaching English at least for two years to ensure that they have had enough time to experience the self-directed professional development.

Characteristics of virtual participant observation:

I aim to virtually observe teachers' daily informal discussions regarding their teaching practices as well as the problems they face and how they solve them.

I am an original member of that group since its establishment in 2013 as I teach English in the ASCS college in the Central University. Although I am a way now in the UK, I am still a member of that group and still receive messages and participate in the daily discussions. The most important thing is that I will start collecting the data after I obtain the approval for the observation from all the group members, then I will take screenshots for the conversations provided by those who consented to do so. Teachers will be notified that it is there right to stop me from observing their discussions at any time they want and they will know that they can withdraw at any time they wish and if any teacher asks me to stop recording her responses, I will directly stop doing so.

PARTICIPANTS

I intend to survey 210 university EFL teachers (ideally 35 participants from each university).

I intend also to observe online 12 university EFL teachers participating in a WhatsApp group; then I intend to interview them to understand how these informal discussions relate to their EFL teaching practices. After that, I intend to hold a focus-group discussion with same 12 teachers to explore their suggestions regarding the best model of self-directed professional development for a university EFL teacher. Participants of the observation, interviews, and focus group discussion will be from those participated initially in the questionnaire.

THE VOLUNTARY NATURE OF PARTICIPATION

After receiving the approvals from the English departments at the six universities. I aim to recruit participants through sending them emails asking them if they would like to participate in this research project by giving them some details about the study. To do so, I will target the English department website of each university to get email addresses of their EFL teachers. Then, I will send an email explaining the aim and purpose of the research as it will include the information sheet. I will use my

university email address (sa534@exeter.ac.uk), to preserve confidentiality and to distinguish my professional and academic roles (see further below).

I will seek online written consent from participants and sample information and consent forms are below. Participants will be informed that they should enter freely and willingly. All of them are university EFL teachers, which means that they have the ability to understand what they agree at. They will be also informed that their anonymity and confidentiality will be maintained. It is important to note that I am going to use English language in writing all letters of invitations to participants in this research (e.g. approval letters, consent forms and information sheets) because all of the participants are English teachers as well as the heads of the English departments are English teachers. Also, the interviews and focus group discussion are supposed to be in English; however, with my participants being native speakers of Arabic, there might be a code switching between English and Arabic as all the participants including the researcher are native speakers of Arabic and are using English as a second language. Therefore, there will not be a language barrier in the interviews and focus group discussion. If there is a need for a translation of these data, I will be the one who is in charge of translating and nobody will have access to the data for the purpose of translation. One more thing, I will tell the participants that they are free to respond in the language they feel comfortable with either English or Arabic.

The questionnaires, observation screen shots, interviews and focus-group transcripts will be anonymised and confidentiality will be preserved. Participation will also be voluntary.

At the start of the online observation, I will ask participants whether they agree to me capturing the screen and saving any multimedia content posted in the group and explain to them that they can stop me from doing so at any point before, during or after the discussion. If any of them doesn't like me to take screenshots for certain discussions I will stop doing so. The observation screen shots will be anonymised and confidential as I will save their numbers under pseudonym names.

At the start of interviews and focus-group discussions, I will ask participants whether they agree to me recording the session and explain to them that they can stop the recording at any point during the session. The interviews and focus-group discussions will be also anonymised and confidential.

Participants will be able to withdraw from the research at any time. The information sheets emphasise that all participation is voluntary and consent can be withdrawn at any time.

SPECIAL ARRANGEMENTS

Not applicable

THE INFORMED NATURE OF PARTICIPATION

The two sample consent forms attached include information about the nature of the project that I will conduct with the participants. First, regarding the questionnaire form, I will summarise the key points in the beginning of the questionnaire sheet. Second, regarding the online observation, I will summarise the key

points of conducting this observation at the start of the observation session. Third, prior the start of each interview and focus-group discussion, I will also summarise the key points of conducting this research project and If participants raise any questions (whether at that stage or before or after the observation, interview and focus-group discussion) then I will answer them.

ASSESSMENT OF POSSIBLE HARM

Questionnaire with EFL teachers

I will ensure that no harm will be resulted from filling out the questionnaire form. I will ask general questions about facts. None of the questions will be directed to personal or sensitive information

Online observation of EFL teachers

No harm will result from my online observation. As I am an original member of the WhatsApp group, I will have access to the group at any time. To explain, this group is a private group initiated by teachers themselves; thus, only its members have access to the chatroom. We have access to the live chat as well as to the previous discussions in case we miss any discussion. So, after obtaining teachers informed consent for the observation; (1) I will save teachers' names with pseudonym names to ensure their anonymity; and (2) I will just take screen shots to the discussions that are related to their professional development. If any of the teachers asks me to not capture her messages, I will stop and once her discussion is over, I will carry out the observation and I will remind them again before the start of capturing new discussions. All participants will be promised confidentiality; thus, I will try my best to ensure that no harm will result from my observation.

Interviews and focus-group with university EFL teachers

All interviewees will be promised confidentiality. Their identities will be anonymised and pseudonyms assigned prior to transcription. Identities and any distinguishing characteristics indicated in the interview or the focus-group discussion will be omitted from the interview and focus-group discussion transcripts to ensure that participants cannot be identified from the text. I will also make sure that interviewees know they do not have to answer any question they do not want to, and that they can withdraw at any time. When I feel that a participant does not want to carry out talking about certain point, I will move smoothly to the next question to make sure that the participant feels comfortable. In relation to university teachers, there is less risk of psychological harm.

DATA PROTECTION AND STORAGE

All the used data will be protected by keeping them in a safe place.

I will only capture confidential information about participants on their consent forms and will not record any personal information about participants on tape at the start of the interview and focus group discussion.

Following the interviews and focus group discussion, I will record pseudonyms and actual names on a

password protected spreadsheet that will be uploaded onto U drive. I will only store this document on U drive and not on my home computer or any portable devices. Same thing will happen to the observation data. As teachers' names will be saved under pseudonym names, all of the screen shots and any uploaded multimedia content related to their discussions will be saved in the U drive and not in any of my personal or portable devices.

My consent form explains how data will be stored and contains written privacy notice:

- Consent forms will be scanned and uploaded into a separate file on U drive from the password protected spreadsheet and the original forms will be confidentially shredded.

- Digital recordings will be deleted as soon as I have an authoritative transcript of the interview and focus group discussion.

- I will ensure that any analysis of the data which is not stored on U drive only uses the aliases.

- Data that includes confidential details (including contact details) may be kept for up to 5 years so that, if necessary, I can contact participants during my PhD. It will be destroyed as soon as my PhD is awarded.

- Anonymised data may be stored indefinitely.

- Anonymised data may be uploaded to the UK Data Service in accordance with ESRC requirements. Data will be kept confidential unless for some reason I am required to produce it by law or something in the interview causes me concern about potential harm to participants. In the case of the latter, I will first discuss with my supervisors what, if any, further action to take.

DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

My PhD is funded by King Saud University. This is explained on my information sheet.

My information sheet will also explain that I am a lecturer at King Saud University, but this will not be acting in a professional capacity when conducting the research. Thus, I will make sure that this will not affect teachers' decision about whether or not to participate.

The results of this research project will concern university EFL teachers as well as policy-makers in the Ministry of Education (higher education department) and will be used for academic purposes only. This will include my PhD thesis and other publications, for example journal articles. I am also planning to present the results of my study at academic conferences.

USER ENGAGEMENT AND FEEDBACK

Given the practicalities of participant review of oral transcripts, this approach is not intended. Participants will, however, be able to request a copy of their own interview transcript (see information sheet).

A summary of key findings will be prepared for participants once the research is concluded.

Appendix (10)

Ethical approval for distributing the questionnaire from a Saudi university

جامعة الملك سعود (034)
+966 11 467 01 08 هاتف
+966 11 467 79 99 فاكس

المملكة العربية السعودية
ص.ب. الرياض 2454 11451
www.ksu.edu.sa

جامعة الملك سعود
King Saud University

مكتب وكيل الجامعة
للدراسات العليا والبحث العلمي

المحترم

سعادة وكيل جامعة الملك عبدالعزيز للدراسات العليا والبحث العلمي
السلام عليكم ورحمة الله وبركاته، وبعد

أفيد سعادتكم بأن طالبة الدكتوراه بكلية الدراسات التطبيقية وخدمة المجتمع/ سناء الزهراني تقوم بإعداد دراسة علمية بعنوان (التطور المهني الذاتي لأساتذة اللغة الإنجليزية بالجامعات السعودية: اسبابه ومعوقاته) واستكمالاً لمتطلبات الحصول على درجة الدكتوراه، ترغب الطالبة تطبيق الأداة المرفقة (الاستبانة) على أعضاء هيئة التدريس.

أشركم سعادتكم الموافقة وتسهيل مهمتها، متمنين لها التوفيق.

وكيل الجامعة
للدراسات العليا والبحث العلمي

أ.د. أحمد بن سالم العامري

7/11/18
2/14/18

Appendix (11)

Information sheets and consent forms

Information sheet one for the questionnaire

The Possibilities and Restrictions of Self-directed Professional Development: A case study of EFL teachers in Saudi tertiary institutions

Details of Project

My name is Sana, a lecturer in the English Department, the College of Applied Studies and Community Services at King Saud University, Riyadh. I am currently a PhD student at the University Exeter doing my PhD in TESOL. As part of my exploratory study, I have to carry out a large-scale survey, and I chose to focus on self-directed professional development as it constitutes my main interest as a university EFL teacher who regularly needs this form of professional development. The current survey will allow me to gather information regarding the types of self-directed activities of professional development you, as a university EFL teacher, engage with as well as the factors that facilitate and inhibit you from pursuing this form of professional development. Therefore, you will be required voluntarily to answer a series of basic information questions regarding the models or activities as well as the underlying factors that contribute to, or impede you from carrying out self-directed professional development. To fill out the questionnaire, it will take roughly from 15-20 minutes.

Participating in this survey is voluntary. Moreover, you can withdraw at any stage, and you can answer all or skip any question you do not want to answer except the demographical question (the year of your experience) for descriptive purposes.

Contact Details

For further information about the questionnaire content, please contact:

Name: *Sana Alzahrani.*

Postal address: St. Luke's campus, South Cloister, G29, EX1 2LU.

Telephone: 00 44 (0) 7400578006.

Telephone: 00 966(0)555225825.

Email: *sa534@exeter.ac.uk*

If you have concerns/questions about the research you would like to discuss with someone else at the University, please contact:

1. Prof. Salah Troudi, S.Troudi@exeter.ac.uk; or
2. Dr. Hania Salter-Dvorak, H.M.Salter-Dvorak@exeter.ac.uk

Confidentiality

Questionnaire data will be held in confidence. They will not be used other than for the purposes described above and third parties will not be allowed access to them (except as may be required by the law). However, if you request it, you will be supplied with a copy of the result. Your data will be held in accordance with the Data Protection Act. Finally, if you wish to be given a copy of any reports resulting from this research, please ask me to put you on my circulation list. Your participation will be highly appreciated. You will not be identified in any report or publication. Your institution will also not be identified in any report or publication.

Data Protection Notice

The organisation in control of the processing data is (University of Exeter), the purpose of this questionnaire is to obtain descriptive information about the current status of the self-directed professional development pursued by university EFL teachers in Saudi Arabia. The data will be kept with me and will be stored in the 'U drive' until my PhD is awarded and then it will be destroyed. Results of the questionnaire will be published within my PhD thesis or other publications, such as journal articles. I am also planning to present the results of my study at academic conferences. It is important to note that this research is funded by King Saud University.

The information you provide will be used for research purposes and no personal data will be asked in this questionnaire in accordance with current data protection legislation and the University's notification lodged at the Information Commissioner's Office.

Anonymity

Questionnaire data will be held and used on an anonymous basis, as you will not be asked to write your name on the form or to give any information related to your identity.

Consent

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

I understand that:

- there is no compulsion for me to participate in this research project and, if I do choose to participate, I may withdraw at any stage;
- I have the right to refuse permission for the publication of any information about me;
- any information which I give will be used solely for the purposes of this research project, which may include publications or academic conference or seminar presentations;
- all information I give will be treated as confidential;
- the researcher(s) will make every effort to preserve my anonymity.

.....
(Signature of participant)

.....
(Date)

.....
(Printed name of participant)

.....
(Email address of participant if they have requested to view a copy of the interview transcript.)

.....
(Signature of researcher)

Sana Alzahrani

One copy of this form will be kept by the participant; a second copy will be kept by the researcher(s). Your contact details are kept separately from your interview data.

Information sheet two (case study) for the observation, interviews, focus group discussion

The Possibilities and Restrictions of Self-directed Professional Development: A case study of EFL teachers in Saudi tertiary institutions

Details of Project

My name is Sana, a lecturer in the English Department, the College of Applied Studies and Community Services at King Saud University, Riyadh. I am currently a PhD student at the University Exeter doing my PhD in TESOL. As part of my exploratory study, I intend to conduct a case study to explore a virtual (online) community of practice (VCoP) initiated informally by university EFL teachers through the use of a WhatsApp group and how this online community of learning relates to their EFL teaching practices. In addition to further exploring some issues related to the nature of your self-directed professional development. Thus, I need to conduct an online observation to the teachers' daily discussions in this group and then I am going to interview you and hold with you and the other EFL teachers participated in this study a focus-group discussion to discuss the best model(s) for university EFL teachers. I chose to focus on self-directed professional development as it constitutes my main interest as a university EFL teacher who regularly needs this form of professional development. The observation will allow me to gather information regarding the use of virtual community of practice (VCoP) as a form of self-directed professional development. Interviews will allow me to gain deep insights and multiple views and experiences about the use of VCoP and how it relates to teachers' EFL teaching practices, in addition to further my understanding of the nature of this form of professional development in terms of type, models, factors that contribute to, or inhibit you from pursuing this form. Lastly, the focus-group discussion will allow me to gather suggestions about the best model of self-directed professional development for university EFL teacher. Therefore, you will be required to provide your consent regarding the observation and you will be required voluntarily to participate in face-to-face interviews and a focus-group discussion. When you provide your consent regarding the observation, you are required to choose the type of your participation in the observation: (1) just observing you without taking screenshots to your discussions; and (2) observing and taking screenshots to your discussions. Once you choose just observation, this means that I will not take any screenshots, discuss or refer to your participation in a way or in other. I am explaining all of these issues just to make sure that my observation does not influence your participation. It is important to note that you are free to use code switching (English-Arabic) and respond to the interview and focus group discussion with the language you feel comfortable with either English or Arabic.

Contact Details

For further information about the research /interview data (amend as appropriate), please contact:

Name: *Sana Alzahrani*.
Postal address: St. Luke's campus, South Cloister, G29, EX1 2LU.
Telephone: 00 44 (0) 7400578006.
Telephone: 00966 (0) 555225825.
Email: *sa534@exeter.ac.uk*

If you have concerns/questions about the research you would like to discuss with someone else at the

University, please contact:

3. dr. Salah Troudi, S.Troudi@exeter.ac.uk; or
4. dr. Hania Salter-Dvorak, H.M.Salter-Dvorak@exeter.ac.uk

Confidentiality

Observation mobile screen shots, Interview and focus-group tapes and transcripts will be held in confidence. They will not be used other than for the purposes described above and third parties will not be allowed access to them (except as may be required by the law). However, if you request it, you will be supplied with a copy of your interview and focus group transcript so that you can comment on and edit it as you see fit (please give your email below so that I am able to contact you at a later date). Your data will be held in accordance with the Data Protection Act.

Data Protection Notice

The organisation in control of the processing data is (University of Exeter), the purpose of this case study is to obtain thorough information about the current status of the self-directed professional development pursued by university EFL teachers in the Central University. In addition to exploring the nature of a VCoP through a WhatsApp group as an existing form of self-directed professional development. The observation, interviews and focus group discussion data will be kept with me and will be stored in the 'U drive' until my PhD is awarded and then it will be destroyed. Results of the whole case study as a second phase of my research will be published within my PhD thesis or other publications, such as journal articles. I am also planning to present the results of my study at academic conferences. It is important to note that this research is funded by King Saud University.

The information you provide will be used for research purposes and no personal data will be asked in the interviews and focus group discussions or written about through my virtual observation in accordance with current data protection legislation and the University's notification lodged at the Information Commissioner's Office.

Anonymity

Mobile Screenshots, Interview and focus-group transcripts will be held and used on an anonymous basis, pseudonym names will be used instead of your real names. Thus, no mention of your name or any indications of your real identity. If you use Arabic language in your responses or through code switching with English, I will be the one who translates the discussions and no one will have access to the data you provide.

Consent

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

Regarding the WhatsApp group observation, I agree to be

- Only observed without taking screenshots of my discussions**
- Observed and to take screenshots of my discussions**

I understand that:

- there is no compulsion for me to participate in this research project and, if I do choose to participate, I may withdraw at any stage;
- I have the right to refuse permission for the publication of any information about me;
- any information which I give will be used solely for the purposes of this research project, which may include publications or academic conference or seminar presentations;
- all information I give will be treated as confidential;

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

.....
(Signature of participant)

.....
(Date)

.....
(Printed name of participant)

.....
(Email address of participant if they have requested to view a copy of the interview transcript.)

.....
(Signature of researcher)

Sana Alzahrani

One copy of this form will be kept by the participant; a second copy will be kept by the researcher(s). Your contact details are kept separately from your interview data.

CONSENT FORM

Consent

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

I understand that:

- there is no compulsion for me to participate in this research project and, if I do choose to participate, I may withdraw at any stage;
- I have the right to refuse permission for the publication of any information about me;
- any information which I give will be used solely for the purposes of this research project, which may include publications or academic conference or seminar presentations;
- all information I give will be treated as confidential;
- the researcher(s) will make every effort to preserve my anonymity.

.....
(Signature of participant)

.....
(Date)

.....
(Printed name of participant)

.....
(Email address of participant if they have requested to view a copy of the interview transcript.)

.....
(Signature of researcher)

Sana Alzahrani

One copy of this form will be kept by the participant; a second copy will be kept by the researcher(s). Your contact details are kept separately from your interview data.

Appendix (12)

Thematic analysis map of theme ONE

Codes	Subcategory	Category	Sub-theme	Theme one
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Freedom of choosing learning context • Freedom of choosing learning content • Freedom of choosing learning style 	Freedom of decision-making (control)	Reasons for adopting individual SDPD activities	Individual SDPD activities	Type of SDPD activities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Full control of time • Practice immediately • Consistency • Less time consuming 	Time flexibility			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flexibility of use • Absence of fixed/strict learning policies • Absence of external power • Practicing according to preferences • Lack of stress (relaxed experience) • Absence of peer pressure • Less distraction 	Convenience and comfort of learning			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allowing and promoting focus on self-development • SDPD offers additional space to reflect 	Focusing on the self			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promoting confidence and the ability to solve problems 	Enhancing self-confidence			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning from and with others • Learning through constructing meanings and exposing an individual's thoughts and experiences • Sharing and receiving knowledge, skills and experiences • A socialising activity • Implying a spirit of cooperation • Providing a sense of community • Promoting the building of relationships 	Learn through social interaction	Reasons for adopting collaborative SDPD activities	Collaborative SDPD activities	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing different types of knowledge • Learning from multiple and distinct views, opinions, perspectives and experiences • Showing different ways of doing things 	Provides me with multiple views and perspectives			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Primarily driven by external motivation. • External motivation leads to an avoidance of procrastination • Proving beneficial when a teacher begins to lose his/her motivation toward learning 	Externally motivating			

Thematic analysis map of theme TWO

Codes	Sub-categories	Categories	Sub-theme	Theme two
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I am an independent kind of person It makes me independent and responsible A core quality of professional teachers 	Autonomy	Teacher control	Personal reasons	Reasons/ factors for the pursuit of SDPD
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is empowering when I do something for myself Increases teacher's confidence Decision making and ability to take the initiative 	Self-empowerment			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I want to be a professional EFL university teacher 	Teachers' professional identity			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Intrinsic motivation Extrinsic motivation from context Direct/positive outcomes Knowledge stimulates further learning 	Teacher motivation	Psychological reasons		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A match between SDPD features and teacher's learning characteristics Addressing teacher's distinctive needs Providing opportunity to identify areas of weakness 	Fits learning style and needs			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Self-evaluation is an opportunity to identify learning needs then addressing them Developing self-evaluation strategies Importance of external feedback (peers/students) It is difficult to be professionally performed 	Teacher self-evaluation			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To refresh my existing practical knowledge Keep up to date with newly discovered concepts 	To improve my academic knowledge	Practical reasons		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Doing research to address existing practical problems Publishing papers Making presentations to disseminate research findings 	To conduct academic research			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Willingness to inform the curriculum system To change the scenario of language teaching 	Contributing to curriculum development			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introduction of any new curriculum Introduction of any new technology Meeting curriculum requirements 	The introduction of a new curriculum			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Needed before formal observation 	Teacher evaluation reports	Practical reasons	Administrative reasons	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Getting leading positions 	Obtaining administrative positions			

Thematic analysis map of theme THREE

Codes	Sub-categories	Categories	Sub-theme	Theme three
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Overload of teaching sessions Doing extra administrative work 	Workloads	Time issues	Offline SDPD challenges	Challenging factors and limitations inhibiting teachers from the pursuit of SDPD
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Kids responsibilities Personal responsibilities 	Family responsibilities			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inflexibility of the timing of some offline PD sessions Contradiction with work time 	Inflexibility of time			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Travelling issues e.g. (time, money, effort) 	Being in remote cities	Geographical mobility		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No permission to be away from work to travel for SDPD (local or abroad) 	Travel polices			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No thank you No acknowledgment of SDL efforts No encouraging environment for SDPD Jealous programme leaders 	Lack of morale support	Lack of Institutional support		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not paid No financial rewards 	Lack of financial support			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not approved for foreign teachers No flexible work policies supporting the pursuit of SDPD 	Lack of policy support			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Means nothing when applying for a job Not counted in evaluation reports Not acknowledged as a part of a recognised PD 	It is not acknowledged			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No idea of renewing contracts Current political and economic changes happening in Saudi Arabia 	Lack of job security			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not specialised in TESOL Doesn't match my pedagogical needs Repeated same content of PD 	Content	Low quality of formal PD	Online SDPD challenges	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Incompetent presenters (i.e. not specialised in TESOL) 	Presenters			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Abundance of online sources and materials Distracted by irrelevant chats Distracted by irrelevant advertisements Different international time zone 	Time consuming	Time issues		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not every source is valid Some lack of authentic references Not every content is peer reviewed by experts Subjectivity of some sources of information 	validity	Content issues		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Misunderstanding or difficulty to understand Less interactive than face-to-face 	Misunderstanding of content/discourse	Communication issues		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not always guaranteed Revealing phone numbers/emails 	Personal information	Privacy issues		

Thematic analysis map of theme FOUR

Codes	Subcategory	Category	Sub-theme	Theme one
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Using L1 in L2 teaching Reflective teaching 	Teaching methodology and theories	The nature and content of activities used in the VCoP	importance of WhatsApp as a context for learning	Impact of self-directed VCoP (via WhatsApp) on practice
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Using idioms Developing test banks 	Teaching materials			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Applying student peer assessments, Sharing and developing evaluation rubrics 	Student assessments			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Using mind maps Using games Giving bounces 	Student motivation			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unifying exams questions Teaching students the same skill throughout the academic year 	issues related to policy			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Practice immediately Accessible through smartphones Availability of chat history Reducing procrastination 	Ease accessibility and use	Allows collaborative learning	Reasons for implementing a VCoP via WhatsApp	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Friendly environment No hierarchies/ external power No evaluation/ judgement No restrictions on the topics discussed No use of titles 	Informality of environment			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Freedom of speech Use of informal English Use of informal Arabic Use of code-switching Use of transliteration Use of Emojis 	Informality of language			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of experience and TESOL knowledge Negative peer pressure Lack of discussion skills Lack of nonverbal cues in online discussions Changing topic Large number of WhatsApp groups 	Less participation	Limitations of using WhatsApp as a setting for a VCoP		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Taking another path of discussion would be a problem 	Changing topic			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Being a member of many WhatsApp groups impact participation 	Large number of WhatsApp groups			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The low proficiency level of the students prevents me from learning advance method of teaching 	the level of students' English proficiency			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Being busy with work duties (exams correction) It is time to get break from PD It is time to relax Absence of realisation of the importance of PD in vacations 	Absence of discussions in exam and vacation periods			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Acquiring new knowledge Emergence of new ideas and strategies 	The acquisition of knowledge	Impact of VCoP (via WhatsApp) on teaching practice	Impact of self-directed VCoP via WhatsApp on practice	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Abandoning using some outdated/conventional teaching methods 	Refreshing teaching styles			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learning about students' various learning characteristics 	Learning about student learning			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The history of the teachers' chats, including a wide range of content Documenting a list of readings and a list of topics to research 	Using it as a teaching/learning resource	Impact of VCoP on teachers themselves		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improving teacher's confidence in her performance Enabling teachers to view themselves as professionals Changing the perception of her professional identity 	Teachers' professional identity			

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Realisation of a need to be more professional 				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing positive feelings and attitudes towards learning • Changing attitudes towards teaching 	Teachers' attitudes towards learning			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improving teachers' motivation to learning through interactions with the other group members. • Receiving positive comments from the WhatsApp members 	Teachers' motivation			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhancing students understanding of grammatical rules. 	students' understanding of the subject matter			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhancing students' understanding and motivation for learning • Increasing the level of students' engagement in the class • Changing students' attitudes positively toward learning English 	Students' motivation and attitudes towards learning English	Impact of VCoP on students		