ESL Teacher Identity Construction in Omani Higher Education: an Ethnographic Case Study

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Declaration

I hereby declare that the contents of this thesis are based on my original research and analysis and have not been presented for examination elsewhere or another award before.

Signature ………………………………………………………………………………..

Summary

UNIVERSITY OF SUSSEX

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<u>ESL Teacher Identity Construction in Omani Higher Education: an
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This is an account of qualitative ethnographic case study research investigating the identity construction of English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers. This study was conducted at a higher education (HE) college, namely, Public High College (PHC) in Oman over a period of six months. In this study, I explore teacher identities in relation to the particular spatial locations of the teachers as well as the ways that networking and social capital and institutionalised cultural capital intersected with their nationalities and linguistic backgrounds to produce complex hierarchies. The thesis provides a rich exposition of teacher identity construction in Omani HE as theorised through the lens of Bourdieu, recognising the different educational practices, such as assessment and teacher evaluation, as well as the influence of space in the field of struggle within which teacher identities were implicated.

The methodological approach and research design adopted in this study was dictated in part by the nature of the research questions and the theoretical framework adopted. Because I was interested in the embedded struggles in different educational practices between different groups and how these groups articulated and expressed these struggles, I positioned my research within a constructivist-interpretive paradigm. I adopted a case study approach and drew on ethnographic methods, such as semi-structured interviews, observation, and field notes. Over thirty-five local and non-local ESL teachers from western, Arab, African, and Asian contexts took part in this study. Furthermore, I kept a research diary to record my own experiences and decisions about my research. In addition, I analysed official documents from macro, meso, and micro levels. Both content analysis and thematic analysis were conducted to trace the tensions which were observed during my ethnography of teacher identity construction at Public High College in part produced by the emergence of new assessment procedures, and quality assurance agendas, and the Global North's influence on the Omani HE system.

In the analysis chapters (Chapters Five to Seven), I problematise how educational practices were implicated in the production of hierarchical, spatial, and at times, male-female positioning of teachers. In the first analysis chapter, I conduct a documentary analysis of the national standards for the General Foundation Programmes to trace back potential tensions that were embedded in the new assessment processes and teacher appraisal procedures and the potential importance of these for teacher identity production. In Chapter Six, I examine the significance of space in producing hierarchical relations between local and non-local teachers and other hierarchies that cut across these groupings. My analysis shows that research respondents gained social capital from networking and highlights the complexity of this networking.

In my final analysis chapter, I examine both assessment and teacher evaluation as the key processes through which teacher hierarchies at Public High College were produced. My analysis shows that assessment was one of the fields where struggle for positioning and legitimacy took place so that teacher identity production was bound up with assessment practices at Public High College. In addition, my analysis focuses on teacher evaluation processes in this chapter as another field where struggles for teacher positioning and legitimacy took place. My analysis interrogates both implicit and explicit teacher evaluation processes and the implications of such processes for the production of teacher identities. Through its ethnographic approach, the thesis shows the tensions, nuances, and power relations that pervade this HE institution, and examines how these were central in the production of teacher identities. It also shows the importance of taking teacher identity construction into account in the expansion and reform of Omani HE.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACP	Academic Credit Programme
ANQAHE	Arab Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
B.Tech	Bachelor Degree in Technical Education
CELTA	Certificate in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages
CA	Continuous Assessment
CSA	Continuous Summative Assessment
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
DELTA	Diploma in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages
ELT	English Language Teaching
EPP	English Proficiency Programme
ESL	English as a Second Language
GFPs	General Foundation Programmes
HE	Higher Education
HEIs	Higher Education Institutions
HoC	Head of Centre

HoS	Head of Section
IELTS	International English Language Testing System
IMF	International Monetary Fund
INQAAHE	International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education
LEE	Level Exit Exam
MoHE	Ministry of Higher Education
MoMP	Ministry of Manpower
NEST	Native English Speaker Teacher
NNEST	Non-Native English Speaker Teacher
OAAA	Oman Academic Accreditation Authority
OAC	Oman Accreditation Council
OSCED	Oman Standard Classification of Education
PHC	Public High College
PTs	Progress Tests
QA	Quality Assurance
ROSQA	Requirements for Oman's System of Quality Assurance
SA	Summative Assessment
SQU	Sultan Qaboos Univeristy
TOEFL	Test of English as a Foreign Language
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

Chapter 1: Introducing my research

1.1 Research rationale: locating myself in the research context

This study began as a personal journey inspired by the need to find answers to the tensions, contradictions and complexities that emerged in the local context and which were provoked by new national policy discourses. These related to assessment, teacher evaluation and quality assurance practices, and to changes in teacher recruitment practices and processes which resulted in the introduction of teachers from different international contexts (see chapter three for detailed discussion). As a director of one of the Omani Higher Education (HE) English Language Centres, my first direct experience with teachers from diverse backgrounds was in September 2006 when Omani Colleges of Technology started to hire teachers from Australia, Canada, the UK, America, South Africa, and the Philippines. With these changes, new structures started to emerge. The first change I noticed at the time was the emergence of new vocabulary relating to native and non-native discourses, which created divisions between the teaching staff, such as native and non-native speakers and local and non-local teachers. These terms were introduced as neutral, unproblematic and value free (Pennycook, 1994). With these terms, new identities were attached to teachers, including those who had been teaching for a long time. Their position within the language centre changed from teachers of English to non-native English speaker teachers (NNEST). They were moved from the position of enjoying power and status as source of knowledge to a position where they were constantly struggling to assert and negotiate an identity as legitimate teachers of English (Pennycook, 1994). They suddenly became the second class citizen of their own profession.

Second, with the expansion in teacher diversity, there were important changes in a range of professional practices. These included changes in teacher recruitment and teacher evaluation. For example, some teachers were recruited through the Ministry of Manpower and others were recruited through private agencies. Also, the criteria for assessing teacher performance for local and non-local teachers developed in different ways. In the midst of all this, Omani Quality Assurance (QA) processes were introduced in 2004 and new assessments and teacher evaluation structures and procedures were brought in, making them both much more formalised. With these new structures, new positions were created, and new processes were developed, which differed depending on the kinds of contracts teachers had. For example, compared with teachers employed on an Omani contract, teachers recruited by private

agencies had different paid holidays and different pay scales and were evaluated differently. These contradictory structures added more tensions, and struggle over these positions and resources became intensified. Advancing within the wider HE field required navigation of these structures.

Also, with the emergence of Oman Academic Accreditation Authority (OAAA), new vocabulary of assessments was introduced in the local context, such as formative and summative; formal and informal assessments. Again, these new assessments processes were understood and valued differently and fraught with competing interests and contradictions. These highly valued structures of assessments and teacher evaluation were embedded with tensions and power dynamics. These global discourses of student assessment practices and processes; teacher evaluation and quality assurance which are informed by international higher education reflected a number of competing interests which are in tension which each other and at the same time are at odds with local and institutional discourses rooted in particular histories and cultures of institutions (Kishun, 1998). At the same time the emergence of quality assurance frameworks was fraught with tensions between two competing discourses; one which positions educational practices in constructivist paradigm and encourages different forms of learning to take place and at the same time position teaching and issues of access, equity and diversity within behaviourist approach and technical discourses. These two competing discourses are at odds with each other and seemed to contribute to tensions and contradictions in teachers' practices and implications of these for their identities.

The initial aim of my proposed study was to examine the difference between native (western) and non-native teaching (non-western) strategies in the ESL classroom and compare the effectiveness of the two different types of methodologies on student academic success and the effect of these on their identity. And my understanding of research was more in the traditional sense, what Stanley and Wise (1983) described as "hygienic research; a reasonably ordered and coherent process consisting of predictable stages and events. In my first proposal which I submitted with the application to Sussex University I wanted to critique the assumptions that 'native' speakers of English were inherently better teachers than 'non-native' teachers. That assumption was challenged by my view of the social world (ontology), knowledge of the social world (epistemology), and in my role in generating knowledge of the social world (methodology) (Ashwin, 2009). In the light of attending different courses on

methodology and research paradigms which I attended during my MSc programme, I realised teacher identity construction in Oman is much more complex and goes beyond the binary categories of native and non-native. Conceptualising teacher identity from a sociological perspective seemed important to highlight the nuances and complexities of teacher identity construction and which are bound up with policy discourses and institutional practices of colleges.

Therefore, this study through Bourdieu's concepts of 'field', 'capital', and habitus' and 'practice' embarks on a journey to explore what the implications of the emerging discourses of assessments, teacher evaluation and quality assurance which are privileged in international higher education contexts and the embedded interests in these structures and processes are for ESL teacher identity construction in the Omani higher education system. Also, positioning this study within a Bourdeiusian framework give a better understanding about the changing field of English language teaching in this context and how this intersected with different teachers' capitals and habitus to inform their practice. The rigorous literature review that I conducted (see Chapter Three) suggested that the way ESL teachers are positioned within these practices and processes in this particular context had not been explored. According to Hattie (2003), one of the most significant influences on learning is the teacher. By understanding better the dynamics and power of the objective and subjective structuring practices of the different fields, there is a greater opportunity for understanding the construction/production of ESL teacher identity in the Omani HE system. This could be understood as being achieved through both the objective structuring practices of the field (the high status given to assessment and the importance attached to the unofficial teacher evaluation framework) and the subjective structuring practices (the alignment of teachers' habitus and capital to the different fields).

1.2 Research purpose and research questions

In the local context teacher identity is usually examined through the lens of Native Speaker (NS) construct and the dichotomies embedded within Native English Speaker Teacher (NEST) versus non-Native English Speaker Teacher (NNEST). This reduces the complexity of their identity construction, and may serve to strip away their agency. The present investigation will conceptualise teacher identity construction from a theoretical lens and methodological position that has not been given much attention previously in Oman. This will be

demonstrated in the literature review chapter. It draws on the theory of Pierre Bourdieu to illuminate the tensions and contradictions provoked by new national policy discourses associated with assessment and quality assurance and the implications of these for ESL teacher identity construction. It addresses how teachers' habitus and capitals intersect with changes in institutional practices of the Public High College (PHC) notably in relation to assessments and teacher evaluation practices to produce complex hierarchies and struggles for positioning.

Thus this research will fill a significant gap in the current literature and opens up a space, a lacuna for theory in investigating Omani HE. The use of Bourdieu's theoretical concepts not only help to understand the complexity of ESL identity construction in Oman, but also how it juxtaposes with macro level policy discourses of assessments, teacher evaluation and quality assurance. It is hoped that through this, teacher identity will become a more significant part of the educational discourse in the local context, disrupting the continued positioning of HE within technical discourses. How teachers construct their identities not only has implications for their practices, but also marks the social relationship between the teacher and learner and the wider institution community.

Having highlighted the significance and importance of my research and its potential weight to Omani research and knowledge, my study not only aims to fill the gaps in the existing literature but will also be of significance to teacher practitioners, education leaders and policy makers. With this in mind, I now state my research questions.

Following Bourdieu's framework, my overarching research question is:

1. How are ESL teachers' identities constructed and produced in HE in Oman?
Within the above overarching question, I ask:

> 1.a How is space implicated in the construction of institutional and teacher hierarchies?
> 1.b How are ESL teachers' identities constructed and produced in Oman and can that construction be understood at a macro as well as a micro level?

Given the nature, scope and depth of the research questions, I needed to adopt a theoretical stance that was helpful in exploring the complex and contradictory ways teachers constructed their identities and how their identities were entangled with and embedded within macro level

policy discourses of assessments, teacher evaluation and quality assurance that underpinned their practices.

1.3 Theoretical framework of the study

In order to make sense of what emerged from the method applied to investigating how ESL teachers at this particular college construct their identity, the necessity to find a useful theoretical perspective became apparent. I decided to adopt an ethnographic case study using Bourdieu's sociology. In this way the reporting and capturing of the Public High College teachers identity construction can potentially assist in capturing the broader higher education system involving identity, assessments, teacher evaluation, quality assurance and institutional practices. The theoretical approach of Pierre Bourdieu became useful and appropriate not only to explore the complexity of teacher identity construction but also how it juxtaposes with macro level policy discourses of assessments, teacher evaluation and quality assurance and the tensions and contradictions that were embedded in these practices and processes and the implications of these for teachers' identity construction. Most social scientists agree that local culture and locally asserted identities emerge out of power-inflected engagements with national, transnational, and global-level discourses and processes. I deploy Bourdieu's conceptual work as he has systematically included notions of space, identity and power relations in his theorizing of the interrelated concepts of habitus, capital, field and practice. Setting my research within the poststructural epistemology and ontology, is important to trouble the notion of a predetermined, unified, teacher identity. Postructural theorizing suggests that teachers are both constrained and enabled by the relations of power/knowledge embedded in discourses and institutions in which they are located (Rossi, 2011).

I use Bourdieu's concept of capital to explore the capitals that are associated with teachers' nationality and linguistic capital coupled with the institutional practices of the Public High College to explore the unequal positioning of different groups of teachers across two different programmes, one of which was prestigious and the other not. I draw on the concept of field to demonstrate its significance and relevance in the fields of practice of assessments, quality assurance and teacher evaluation. I refer to Bourdieu's notion of habitus to illustrate the underlying logic that structures teachers practices in relation to assessments as well as access to certain administrative positions, physical resources and networking in different educational settings.

I use social and cultural capital as broader theoretical lenses to examine the struggle that took place between male and female teachers over access to light workloads and good timetabling. A Bourdieusian perspective to social capital can consider the hidden inequalities in the distribution of and institutional barriers to resources in social networks. Social capital refers to the resources available within an individual's social networks and group memberships, and is institutionalized as official titles. As elaborated further in Chapter 3, social capital in its practical or immediate state as the resources embedded in networks (Swartz, 1997). This thesis shows that cultural and social capital as well as networking activities offers a particularly fruitful avenue of inquiry for women's lack of access to certain resources and barriers of movement between programmes.

Using these theoretical tools, throughout the thesis I critique the binary identity construction of ESL teachers which are positioned through the dichotomies embedded within Native English Speaker Teacher (NEST) versus non-Native English Speaker Teacher (NNEST). Instead I argued for a theory which examines the complex and contradictory ways teachers construct their identities and how their identities were entangled with global discourses of quality assurance, assessments and teacher evaluation. At the heart of these are not only teachers' nationality, language, power and structures, but also the dynamics of reproduction, stakes and the struggle for accumulation of capitals and interests, which are important determinants of this social game. Therefore, the notion of social and cultural capital as broader sociological concepts help to analyse how teachers develop appropriate practices within different fields of practices of the PHC.

1.4 Structure of the thesis

Chapter One provides a background to the study, and discusses my personal interest in conducting the study and its rationale. Thereafter the chapter discusses the significance of the research study, with an aim to establish it as one of the first and important empirical research works attempted at such a level and detail in the context of Oman. This leads to introducing the main and subsidiary research questions. The chapter then introduces the methodological framework of the study, which has social-constructivist philosophical underpinnings, with a qualitative case study design that uses a number of qualitative research tools for data gathering. Finally, the organisation of the thesis follows, which briefly details the overarching theme and structure of each chapter. Chapter Two provides a contextual background to the

study. Chapter Three provides an overview of relevant literature concerns the different structures/educational practices (quality assurance, assessments and teacher evaluation) that were in play in this particular context and that contribute to teacher identity construction. The literature on quality assurance, assessments and teacher evaluation as fields of practices and site of struggle to accrue and claim identity included is as a number of concurrent themes underpin the discussion, which is of much relevance to the present study.

Thereafter, the chapter focuses on the theoretical framework of the study. This chapter discusses the use of 'capital', 'habitus', 'field' and 'practice' as theoretical tools to help me understand the contradictory ways in which different groups of teachers struggled to accrue and convert capitals in order to claim identity in different fields of practices of assessments and teacher evaluations. It considers literature that has used the conceptual tools of capital, habitus, field and practice to explore their interplay to explore how different groups of teachers use their capitals and habitus to position themselves in different fields of practice. The section then focuses on three key sub-fields of assessments, quality assurance and teacher evaluation as spaces of educational practices. Many positions in the research context were bound up with power relations, local networking, and social capital: there was struggle between teachers to access local networking through those positions. Therefore, it is important to offer background to these fields of practices where struggle for positioning took place. By reviewing national (Oman) and international literature, my aim is not only to understand the complexity of ESL teacher identity construction in Oman, but also how it juxtaposes with macro level policy discourses of assessments, teacher evaluation and quality assurance.

Chapter Four describes the research design of the study and the methods used to obtain data. Thereafter, a discussion of the plan and conduct of the fieldwork follows, which details the various data gathering tools and procedures used for the research, which then leads into the discussion of the procedures and processes of data analysis. Finally, the chapter considers ethical concerns pertaining to the research participants and the overall research practice. Chapters Five, Six, and Seven present the data analysis in relation to teacher identity construction and production at the Public High College: Chapter Five focuses on the macro level analysis. It examines the policy discourses of the OAAA texts. OAAA is introducing new vocabulary of assessments, teacher evaluation and quality assurance and new practices are coming into the local context. Chapter Six examines the intersection of space with the

cultural capital associated with nationality and different varieties of English language (Kachru's, 1985) in producing complex hierarchies between teachers.

Chapter Seven focuses on the micro level analysis. It examines assessments as a field of practice for struggle and positioning and explores what is at stake in this field for different groups of teachers and examination coordinators. In addition, it examines the anomalies between the official discourse, which is claimed to have set in place standardised teacher evaluation practices and the informal practices that were happening in Public High College. Embedded within student assessment practices and processes, teacher evaluation, and quality assurance are power struggles, tensions, and contradictions that are integral to and constitutive of teacher identity production/construction. Thus, the thesis explores fields and sub-fields as social arenas in which different forms of capital are accumulated and where struggles for power and resources take place. A central aim of this thesis is to explore the ways in which different groups of teachers have sought to gain access to privilege and symbolic capital. Chapter Eight summarises the findings of the research study, and indicates its limitations. It makes some suggestions for further research, and concludes with the study's implications for policy and practice.

Chapter 2: Research context

2.1 Introduction

This research study was conducted at an HE institution in the Sultanate of Oman's capital city, Muscat. This chapter provides background information about the Omani HE system in general and the emergence of the Omani QA system. It also describes the geographical, historical and socio-economic situation of Oman.

2.2 Brief history and geographical situation of Oman

Figure 1: Map of Sultanate of Oman

The Sultanate of Oman is located in the eastern part of the Gulf region, sharing borders with Yemen in the south west, Saudi Arabia in the west and the United Arab Emirates in the north. Oman is practically an island surrounded by the Arabian Gulf, the Gulf of Oman, and the Arabian Sea. The fourth side of the country is surrounded by the Empty Quarter (al-Rub' al-KhaIi). Oman's civilisation dates back at least 5,000 years, and at that time, it was inhabited by fishing communities and hunters. In the Sumerian tablets, Oman was known as Majan, referring to Oman's ancient copper mines. It is said that the name 'Oman' originated from Arab tribes who migrated from the Uman region of Yemen (MOI, 1995, p.81). Later, in the

19th century Oman expanded its territory across the Arabian Gulf and into East Africa where it controlled the island of Zanzibar. During this time, Oman established political links with other great powers, such as Britain, France, and the United States (Al-Harthy, 2000, p.16). In addition, this period coincided with heavy migration of Omanis to other Gulf countries (Kuwait, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates) seeking a means of livelihood in different occupations. The discovery of oil in the country and the subsequent economic development encouraged these Omanis to return home (MOE, 2007b).

The geography and climate of the country has facilitated trade relationships with Egypt, India, Greece, and China. The diversity in the natural features of the country has influenced its economic activities, which include agriculture, livestock keeping, mining, and other traditional industries. In the past, Omanis gained their living from both the land and the sea. The interior part of the country is known for its fertile land, especially Jebel Al-Akhdar, the Al-Battinah region, and Dhofar, which is still famous for growing frankincense. Previously, in the Dhofar region, Omanis made a living from agriculture, livestock and tourism during the rainfall period thus, Dhofar became one of the main sources of income for the country (MOI, 2002, p.11). In addition, the export of copper to neighbouring countries both within and outside Arabia played a central role in Oman's economy during ancient times. At present, Oman's economy mainly relies on oil income. However, Oman's policy-makers have paid attention to creating appropriate conditions for investment in the fishing and agricultural industries as well as financial support for tourism and the development of national human resources to help the growth of the country.

It is hoped that such investment will lead to the diversification of sources of income and to attention being directed to other productive sectors, such as gas-based industries, information technology, mining, and tourism (MOI, 2003, p.84). According to the country's official records, more than 100,000 Omanis are employed in agriculture and fisheries (MOI, 2002, p.87). In addition, many inhabitants who live along the long coastline work on the sea as sailors or fishermen, or in navigation. Others work in shipbuilding and trading. Recently, tourism has become an area of high priority in the Oman economy. Attention is now focused on eco-tourism, adventure tourism, cultural and heritage attractions, water sports, and coastal and leisure retreat resorts (MOI, 2003, pp.86-87). Thus, it can be said that Oman has diversified its economy in an effort to minimise its reliance on oil.

2.3 Omani population

According to the Ministry of National Economy census in 2014, Oman has a population of 3.94 million, which represents a sharp increase over the 2010 census calculation of 2.77 million. Nearly 50% of the population live in Muscat and the Batinah coastal plain northwest of Muscat, while 200,000 live in the southern region. The official records indicate that more than 50% of the population are in the age group between 0-15 years of age. Furthermore, Islam is the religion of the country. It has been acknowledged in history books that the Omanis were among the first to embrace Islam in 630AD when the prophet Mohammed sent his envoy, Amr ibn Al-As, to meet the ruler of Oman to invite him to embrace the faith. Standard Arabic is the official language of the country and the language in which all government and business transactions are conducted. However, a diglossic situation exists whereby the Omanis speak a local vernacular of Arabic. For example, a number of different regional languages, such as Shihi, are spoken in the mountainous northern regions, and Jibali which bears little resemblance to Arabic, is spoken in the southern mountainous areas. Besides Arabic, other languages are spoken in the country, such as Swahili, Zadjali, Belushi, and Lawati. However, despite the existence of regional languages, Arabic dominates the country linguistically.

2.4 Higher education in Oman

To better understand the research study, which focuses on the identity construction/production of ESL teachers in Omani HE, it is helpful, first of all, to outline briefly Oman's unique HE system. Higher education provision in the Sultanate of Oman has experienced strong growth in a relatively short period of time (Carroll et al., 2009). Prior to 1970, there was no formal post-secondary education. However, in 2008, there were over 60 institutions providing post-secondary diploma or degree programmes, serving a total population of over 2.34 million people (Carroll et al., 2009). Two thirds of these were public institutions operated through different ministries, such as Higher Education, Manpower, Health and Defence. In order to meet the increasing demand for HE, much of the growth in capacity has been in the private sector. In 2006, three of the four universities in the Sultanate of Oman were privately owned (Al-Bandary, 2005). In addition, by 2006, there were over 600 teachers to respond to all the demands of HE (Carroll et al., 2009). Nonetheless, the majority of teachers were not Omani, but from surrounding countries as well as from Australia, Canada, the UK, South Africa and the US.

Higher education institutions (HEIs) in Oman have been established and are regulated by different ministries, including mainly the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE), the Ministry of Manpower (MoMP), the Ministry of Defence, the Ministry of Health, and the Ministry of Commerce and Industry. The Ministry of Higher Education is responsible for the Colleges of Applied Sciences, and the Ministry of Manpower is responsible for the Colleges of Technology, the Central Bank of Oman is responsible for the Institute of Banking, and the University Council is responsible for the Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) (Al-Bandary, 2005). According to the Oman Academic Accreditation Authority (OAAA) these institutions are all primarily teaching institutions, and offer programmes up to and including Bachelor's degrees (2004). Some of these institutions "offer a variety of programmes, while others specialise in certain fields, offering programmes in one or two professional fields, such as teaching, nursing, engineering or business studies" (OAAA, 2004, p. 12). In addition to degree courses, these HEIs frequently provide courses in areas such as English language, business and IT. These may stand alone or they may be used as credit toward completion of a diploma or degree offered by the institution (OAAA, 2004). However, the increasing number of private HE providers on the scene has led to the need for the establishment of a more systematic QA system.

2.5 Positioning of English in the Omani higher education

English in Oman receives political, economic, and legislative support from those in elite positions in the Omani government and society. Oman does not have a documented national language policy, however, the position of English language as a tool that serves multiple purposes both locally and globally in the Omani HE sector has been discussed at length in many scholarly articles and acts as a point of departure for many educational debates and discussions in education in Oman (Al-Issa 2002, 2006; Weber, 2011; Al-Bakri, 2013; Abdel-Jawad and Abu Radwan, 2011). Such a policy has been inferred from practices in a number of domains in which the role of English language is crucial. This is not unusual, indeed, Bamgbose (1991, 2003) argues that the unavailability of a written language policy does not mean the absence of policy, given that some policies are characterised by 'avoidance' or 'declaration without implementation' (p, 111). Thus, quite often, language policy is covert and can only be inferred from observed practices. The internationalisation of HE has become institutionalised around a linguistic preference for English. The policy adoption of English as the dominant language in HE could be seen as a response to the globalisation of English as an

international language. National, regional and global moves have all worked together to promote the internationally dominant role of English.

2.6 The emergence of quality assurance in Oman

Being directly accountable to the Education Council, the Oman Academic Accreditation Authority (OAAA) agency was established with the objective of regulating the quality of HE in Oman (www.oaaa.gov.om). The agency is governed by a board composed of members from the Ministry of Education, Petroleum Development Oman, the State Council, (SQU), the founder and CEO of a private HE institute, and other educationalists. The current external QA system in the Omani HE system could be perceived as the third generation of QA (Goodliffe and Razvi, 2011). The first form of the external quality system included the licensing of new institutions and programmes by their sponsoring ministers, with the exception of the (SQU), which is set up by law. The sponsoring ministries through a Directorate General supervised these institutions and their programmes. The type and the level of supervision exercised by these ministries were consistent with the compliance model, including policy decisions, approving of all academic staff appointments, and regular site visits (ibid, p.2). Consequently, an informal form of the internal quality assurance system was developed even though it was not formalised. This encompassed of preparing the academic calendar, hiring teaching staff, preparing departmental requirements, establishing and running a central examination system, keeping student admission and progression records and maintaining grading systems. These were regarded as the main policy instruments for assuring quality. This shows that, though formal quality as we perceive it today, assurance was not stated explicitly, each ministry had an internal system for maintaining the academic quality and standards of its educational provisions.

Quality was viewed as an inherent and internal affair of the ministry under which the college was functioning, and hence, the responsibility for ensuring academic quality and standards remained in the hands of academia and the corresponding disciplines. However, the HE providers were not unaware of the need to ensure that the practices were fit for purpose. The second generation of the external QA was developed in 2001 with the establishment of the Oman Accreditation Council (OAC) by Royal Decree No. 74/2001, thus signalling to the Omani HE sector the importance to be placed on the quality of HE (Carroll et al., 2009). According to Carroll et al. (2009), the OAC (2001) commissioned an international consultant

to draft a set of standards for HEIs and processes for institutional and programme accreditation, which then were collated in a thick guide known as Requirements for Oman's System for Quality Assurance in HE, or ROSQA (OAAA, 2004). This document was the first version of the external quality assurance system that made the HE system in Oman into a calculable and governable space (Carroll et al., 2009). This document was later re-named the Quality Management System. Guidelines concerning the description of quality and the relevant standards were also developed as part of the policy document. The guidelines contained some key elements of the national system: namely, the Oman Qualifications Framework; HEIs classifications, institutional standards, and the institutional and programme accreditation processes (Carroll et al., 2009).

After the introduction of ROSQA, external reviews by the OAC (2001) were carried out to assess the effectiveness and relevance of ROSQA for the stage of development in Oman's HE system. By 2006, it was clear from the results of external reviews and from feedback from the sector to the OAC (2001) that the newly established system was not having the desired impact (Goodliffe and Razvi, 2011). Hence, a new and improved system was designed, making this the third generation external quality assurance system in Oman. In 2010, the OAC was replaced by the OAAA via another Royal Decree (No.54/2010) (www.oaaa.gov.om). The new system was more comprehensive and included additional elements, for example, a standard classification for HE, a process for recognising foreign programmes, a process for developing programme standards, and an appeals process (Carroll et al., 2009). The current system is said to be more aligned with the current state of the HE sector in Oman. For example, the institutional accreditation cycle is organised into two stages. The first stage is the introduction of the quality audits as a formative QA step followed by the summative standards assessment exercise. In 2010, the OAAA became a full member of Arab Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ANQAHE) and a member of the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE).

The document on the external audits process makes reference to the Australian QA system as the international benchmark against which the Omani audit process has been designed (OAAA, 2008, p. 1). Although the website does not give a clear definition of the quality of education, the emphasis of the quality audit is on 'fitness for purpose' (Goodliffe and Razvi, 2011). The word 'purpose' in this case means the relevance of HE to the development of Oman, the employability of graduates, and the expectations of stakeholders. Auditing of the

quality and relevance of HE in Oman is accomplished based on the following ten focus areas as identified by OAAA[1] (2008):

1. Vision, mission and educational goals
2. Governance and management system
3. Infrastructure and learning resources
4. Academic and support staff
5. Student admission and support services
6. Programme relevance and curriculum
7. Teaching, learning and Assessment
8. Student Progression and graduate outcomes
9. Research and outreached activities
10. Internal quality assurance

From the above discussion, one can conclude that in Oman, HEIs are judged against their purposes as well as against a set of standards. The first approach is considered more suitable for quality innovation, for example, in Norway, the US, and other countries. The second approach, the standard-based approach to quality, checks overall patterns rather than specific aspects of the institution (Sanyal and Martin, 2007). With the development of external quality audits, the establishment of an internal quality management system was seen as necessary to support the HEIs. In the research context, an internal quality management system was developed and was based in the sponsoring ministry. From my own professional involvement in the research context and in my capacity as a former head of the centre (HoC), I am aware that the internal audit exercise is carried out on an annual basis. The internal audit exercise includes Public High College and the regional colleges. Although the practice of ranking institutions is not part of the external audit process, the internal audit management set up by the MoMP conducts a ranking of the seven colleges (Public High College and six regional colleges).

2.6.1 Omani quality assurance model

Before describing the QA model, it is important to explain how quality is explicated and understood within the Omani QA documents. A review of the documents related to the

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[1] Although the Omani Quality Assurance Agency has changed its name from OAC to OAAA, documents that were created before 2010 still carry the OAC as the formal authority of these documents.

OAAA reveals that the concept 'quality' has been used in these documents, but the word has not been clearly defined. Oman borrowed its QA policies from three different countries, namely, Australia, the UK, and New Zealand, and so these are based on different understandings of quality (Goodliffe and Razvi, 2011). Although, Goodliffe (2011) makes these claims from her position as one of the consultants officially acknowledged in designing the standards for the General Foundation Programmes (GFPs), and Razvi as the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of OAAA, they use little research evidence to support their claim about the different QA policies are in play in the Omani model. In addition, the authors do not specify in the article which part of the Omani model of QA came from Australia, which from the UK and which from New Zealand (Goodliffe and Razvi, 2011). Accordingly, I searched the literature regarding the three international models.

According to the wider literature, a range of external QA mechanisms operate worldwide; however, the three basic approaches are accreditation, assessment (as defined in the European system), and academic audit (Lim, 2001). Furthermore, a review of the literature shows that the QA model followed internationally comes from two QA approaches, namely, the improvement-led internal and accountability-oriented external with a noticeable tension in between (Harvey and Williams, 2010). Such a tension is related to the power relations between the different stakeholders of HE. According to Harvey and Newton (2007), accountability is about value for money, while continuous improvement in teaching and learning is about improving the student experience (Harvey and Newton, 2007, p.232) and quality as transformation (D'Andrea, 2007). Accountability-oriented QA encourages a compliance culture rather than improvement whilst student learning is enhanced through improvement-led quality processes and strategies that improve the core educational processes.

In the US, QA is closely linked with accreditation (Eaton, 2001; Lenn, 1992). However, it is worth noting here that the use and application of the term 'accreditation' is not the same in Oman as in other countries. In the US context, accreditation "is a peer-driven, consultative process culminating in a judgment about whether or not an institution or a programme is (sic) may be designated as accredited" (Eaton, 2001, p. 104), which is not the case in Oman. However, in general, accreditation is associated with processes to determine whether an institution or programme meets minimum acceptable standards and qualifies for a certain status (Schwarz and Westerheijden, 2004). The academic audit system used by the UK

through its Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) has many similarities with accreditation. Like accreditation, the process involves institutional preparation of a self-evaluation document, institutional visits and summary evaluation reports. There are, however, some important philosophical and operational differences between accreditation and audits. For example, the QA does not deal with fiscal, budgetary or governance issues, nor does it look at salaries and conditions of service. In New Zealand, the focus of the QA is on the quality of the qualifications and of the provider. In the Australian scenario, the baseline for the QA framework lies in the establishment of both public and private universities as self-accrediting institutions. In this kind of set up the quality of education provision lays with academic boards and governing councils of institutions including academic standards (Skilbeck and Connell, 1998).

Based on the discussion above, then it seems conceptions of quality and QA in the Omani HE system involve several types of values. These educational policies display a variety of stances, styles and preoccupations, which are positioned differently in relation to teaching, learning, and staff development processes. It seems there are several quality cultures being applied within the Omani QA model. There is, then, an assumption that their educational systems are compatible and can be easily transferred from one context to another.

2.7 Ministry of Manpower: public higher education provider

The MoMP was established by Royal Decree No. (108/2001), issued on 20/Sha`ban 1422 AH. (6/11/2001) (www.act.edu.om). The ministry states that its proposed policies in the general human resource area and the implementation of those policies are in line with the country's economic and social objectives. The ministry runs seven Colleges of Technology and four Vocational Training Centres, making it one of the largest educational providers in the Sultanate of Oman. The Education Council is headed by H.E. the Minister and includes the Undersecretaries and the Directors General as members. The ministry's responsibilities include formulating educational policies, establishing educational objectives and planning projects. The ministry's educational legislation is developed through committees and boards, such as the Board of Trustees, and the Directorate of Educational Technology. Other standing committees include the Teaching and Learning Committee, Staff Development Committee, Student Service Council, Research and Community Service Committee, and Curriculum Review Committees.

The Educational Council is also responsible for major decisions including approval of the colleges' budget and the appointment of college deans and assistant deans. The Education Council establishes accountability frameworks and monitors the performance of the seven colleges. Accordingly, the MoMP has been working towards upgrading the Public High College and regional colleges to HEIs with accreditation from OAC. In 2001, the bylaws of the MoMP also had general policy provisions concerning approval of the schedules of academic posts, instructors' posts, and the laboratory and workshop technicians at Colleges of Technology, staff (including responsibility and authority of staff), education (including academic calendar, student admissions, courses offered, academic advice, examinations and grading systems, teaching load), internal academic organisation, library system, and student affairs and discipline.

2.8 Public High College and the six regional colleges: research focus

Public High College was established in 1984 to train and qualify Omani youth to occupy various positions in the labour market and to participate in the expansion of the national economy. In 2001, the college was regraded by Ministerial Decree No. 165/2001 to enable it to offer higher-level qualifications (www.act.edu.om). Similarly, the other four Vocational Training Institutions were renamed as Colleges of Technology by the same royal decree and two new colleges were built later. The Public High College and the regional colleges were considered to be academic and technological institutions that had the following aims:

> 1. Working towards the application of technical and administrative knowledge in technological and administrative fields in line with the requirements of the labour market.
> 2. Meeting the students' needs by creating opportunities for individual, social, academic, technological and vocational development.
> 3. Bringing up a generation of highly competent technicians through the provision of accredited, high quality technological programs.
> 4. Catering for the private and the public sectors' needs with technically and administratively qualified personnel.
> 5. Offering technological, parallel education (www.manpower.gov.om)

2.9 General Foundation Programmes

A significant area of English language teaching in Oman is the GFPs (Carroll, et al., 2009). These are now offered by nearly all HEIs in order to prepare Omani school leavers, most of whose secondary education has been taught in Arabic, to enter diploma and degree programmes that are delivered in English. The HEIs portray foundation programmes as integral elements of an HE system committed to improving the quality of teaching and learning. In 2006/2007, nearly 88% of school leavers were enrolled in a foundation programme (Carroll, et al., 2009). National academic standards for GFPs were developed by the OAC in 2008 in consultation with the HE sector. GFPs have a complex history, and therefore provide an excellent opportunity for studying institutional change. While GFPs in Oman tend to be associated with academic development initiatives generally, they are often characterised by a social struggle that has a distinctly political dimension. The structure of the GFP, its organisation, delivery, materials, assessment methods, and the progression criteria for the students enrolled in it differ from one HEI to another.

2.10 Chapter summary

This chapter has provided contextual information about the research context at both the institutional level and the national level. It has also given contextual background about HE in Oman and the emergence of the QA system in Oman, pointing to the ways that its development involved policy-borrowing from different international contexts. In the next chapter, I explore teacher identity within the wider literature and the key educational practices and processes with which teachers' identities are bound up, in keeping with my Bourdieusian theoretical framing.

Chapter 3: Positioning ESL teacher identities within the wider literature

3.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a review of the relevant literature that underpins the conceptual framework for the study. I begin the literature review with a reflexive critique of my own starting point in this research study. I then link my initial positioning with linguistic imperialism. Subsequently, I explore teacher identity within the wider literature in section 3.4. In section 3.4.1, I explore Bourdieu's concepts of field, habitus and capital, a resource which I use to analyse my data and theorise teacher identity construction at the Public High College, after which, in section 3.5, I examine the concept of space within the wider literature and its relevance to the research topic. In the subsequent sections, I investigate further key concepts that are integral to teacher identity construction and production: continuous assessments, quality assurance and teacher evaluation.

3.2 Understanding ESL teachers through the constructs native and non-native

My early epistemological position was shaped by ESL professional discourses that underscored the supremacy of the West and native speaker status. At the outset of this research journey, I retained a distinction between native teachers as having superior teaching methods, being privileged with a cultural and linguistic ownership of English, in contrast to myself, a non-native teacher with limited access to western culture and understanding. My theoretical reconceptualisation of the assumed neutrality of the terms 'native' and 'non-native' as well as my positivistic approach to identity as something fixed and static is foregrounded in the section below on native-speakerism and linguistic imperialism. My encounter with such literature made me confront previously held assumptions and unproblematised positionings. The legitimacy of varieties of English within the frameworks of world Englishes frameworks has been shaped by the discourse on colonisation and postcolonial orientations to English (Davies, 2002; Pakir, 2009). Kachru (1985) divides English-speaking countries using a model that has three concentric circles. In the inner circle, English ownership and the establishment of norms is controlled by countries such as Australia, Canada, the UK, and the USA. In the outer circle, English is spoken with well-established local norms in countries such as India, Nigeria, and Singapore. Finally, there is an expanding circle where English is studied as a foreign language. More importantly, the model

established the legitimacy of the new varieties of English in the outer circle, affirming their validity for these communities. Canagarajah (2006a) shows, perhaps ironically, that as a result of globalisation, the current leaking of varieties of English from Kachru's outer circle countries' national borders has generated structural inequities between English in local and global contexts.

Canagarajah and Ben Said (2010) suggest that a particular politics of location provides a different understanding of the spread of English than the dichotomised perspectives that frame the debate for and against native and non-native English. They suggest that different contexts require different norms (for example, lingua franca norms in multilingual interactions or local norms in specific inner-circle contexts). Canagarajah's (2006b) notion of 'shuttling' shows the skill of the expert user's ability in discerning situationally appropriate norms and adopting these accordingly. Shuttling, then is taken to mean that mastery of multiple communities gives users the ability to negotiate diverse semiotic texts through multiple media and modalities and use these for local purposes (Pennycook, 2010; Jacquemet, 2005). These understandings raise the need to question the notions of Standard English and native/non-native distinctions. The politics of location may assist in situating English in multilingual communities; however, the maintenance of linguistic diversity in academic communities remains challenging.

Despite the above, Clemente and Higgins (2008), in their encounter with "the hovering ghost of the *native speaker* of English" (p.18) contend that

> No matter how often one attempts to deconstruct the assumptions about who or what native speakers of English are and no matter how frequently one notes the importance of pedagogical and methodological constructions made by non-native speakers of English, the ghost is ever present' (Clemente and Higgins 200, p.18.)

Indeed, despite increasing acceptance of the 'variation and hybridity' (Mesthrie and Swann, 2010) of varieties of English today, the "ideal native speaker" (Leung *et al.*, 1997; Jenkins, 2006, p.239) permeating the English language teaching (ELT) field and being used as a benchmark for knowledge of a language and criterion for employment within ELT needs problematising within my theoretical framework. For Holliday (2005, 2006) this 'ghost' of native-speakerism is a reflection and continuation of colonial constructs where images of a modern self and traditional other are produced and reproduced. The belief that 'native

speaker' teachers represent a 'Western culture', privileges native speakers ways of speaking English over othered Englishes/ non-native speakers of English. This positions native teachers as owners of proper authentic English-literacy property holders /superior competent speakers of English and effectively grants ownership of English to them, making them "custodians and arbiters not only of proper English but of proper pedagogy as well" (Widdowson ,1994, p.387). Against this, non-native teachers have been credited with more conscious knowledge of grammar, and language learning experiences, offering good learning models and the ability to empathise with language learners (Braine, 1999). Moreover, many scholars have challenged the native/non-native label as too simplistic and claim that it fails to capture the rich complexities associated with being a user of a language (Liu, 1999; Lazaraton, 2003). For example, Rampton (1990) encourages the use of alternatives to describe the knowledge and language proficiency of a skilled language user. He proposes that accomplished language users be given the term 'expert speaker' rather than 'native' or 'non-native', to which Cook (1999, p.204) adds the notion "successful multi-competent speakers, not failed native speakers".

Amin (2004, p.74) argues that the native speaker model divides the ELT profession according to a caste system and that it should be eliminated, while Kachru and Nelson (1996) argue that to view teachers through the lens of the native/non-native dichotomy is to accept "a linguistic caste system" and maintain a monocultural and monolingual point of reference. Native speakers also claim guardianship (Hyde, 1994) of the culture associated with English, perpetuating further the inequality with non-native speakers (Clemente and Higgins, 2008). The discourse on privilege draws on the prescriptive, notion of 'large culture' (Holliday, 1999) from which springs the uncontested belief in the unproblematic Self versus the problematic Other. Non-western students and colleagues are 'othered,' particularly when they struggle with specific types of

> active, collaborative, and self-directed 'learner centred' teaching-learning techniques that have frequently been constructed and packaged as superior within the English-speaking West' (Holliday, 2006, p.385).

Holliday's argument reveals that while the discourses of native-speakerism are disciplinary constructions, they tend to produce stereotypical and racist images of users. Holliday argues that this ideology actually refers more to teaching and learning practices than to language use.

Kabel (2009, p.17) draw a parallel to Holliday (2006) critique of native speakerism, and emphasises how ensuing ideology of native-speakerism have real consequences, as they "produces realities of exclusion, discrimination, and rationalisations for intervention and 'cultural correction''. Although the term 'native speaker' was originally used to reference the geographical location of native English speakers as natives of 'inner circle' nations in which English is the first language (Kachru, 1986), the terms within ELT carry much deeper political connotations and pejorative implications (Phillipson, 1992; Canagarajah, 1999a, b; Holliday, 2005, 2006; Canagarajah and Ben Said, 2010).

A further consequence of native-speakerism is that by strengthening the dominance of the centre professional circles of ELT, the ensuing uniformity enables curriculum developers to conveniently produce course books for universal application, without the need to consider different vernaculars (Canagarajah, 1999b). This linguistic imperialism results in speakers of centre Englishes dominating the speakers of periphery Englishes. This 'native speaker fallacy' (Phillipson, 1992) results in speakers of 'centre Englishes' always being privileged over speakers of 'periphery Englishes', even in periphery educational institutions. Phillipson (1992) argues that nations with periphery status are not free from reproducing the logic of the centres in granting educated versions of local Englishes a very inferior status and legitimacy over non-educated versions of the language. Phillipson (1992) argues linguism functions as an ideology valuing the linguistic resources of the centre and reinforcing their claims to universal 'legitimacy' (see section 3.3).

The fact that native-speakerism remains so rooted within ELT regardless of the theoretical developments that view English as an indigenised and increasingly delocalised language, constitutes a paradox that such perspectives are still not filtering through to ELT practitioners, and teacher trainers are being actively resisted. It should be mentioned here that while the EFL paradigm does problematise the taken for granted assumptions in many contexts of EFL teaching, it does include so-called 'native speakers' of English. Having myself undertaken what Jenkins (2000, 2007) claims to be relatively uncritical, prescriptive ELT teaching, I had little awareness of the pluralisation of Englishes and how native-speakerism went unnoticed and unchallenged in much the same way that Holliday (2005) describes of his experience. However, my increasing engagement with the literature reviewed in this chapter and the debates around native-speakerism have caused me to problematise the assumed neutrality of the constructs of native and non-native teacher. In addition "many speakers consider

themselves to be either native or non-native speakers of a given language, and these self-allocations within or outside a linguistic community are frequently used as a way for people to position themselves as members or as aliens in a particular social community" (Moussu and Llurda, 2008, p.318). However, the superior position of native-speaking English teachers was not always realised in the research context. Moreover, the dichotomisation of 'native English speakers as superior teachers versus non-native English speakers as inferior teachers' is too simplistic and rigid to reliably reflect the complexities involved in positioning ESL teachers from different circles. This is important, as the terms 'native' and 'non-native' were used uncritically in the research context.

3.3 Phillipson's Linguistic Imperialism and Englishes in Oman

In my exploration of the literature on ESL teaching, none of it engaged with the immediate context of my research. There is plethora of literature that positions English within postcolonial countries in Asia and Africa as an imperial superimposition on the reluctant 'other'. In this literature, the relationship between English, the West, and colonialism is well-documented, and the literature problematises the unequal ownership of English and the reproduction of colonial dichotomies between the self/-the coloniser and other/-the colonised, which are embedded in the educational policies, pedagogies and practices (Canagarajah, 2005; Pennycook, 1998; Phillipson, 1992a, 2008). In Oman, English is taken forward as the language of HE and this in part, has contributed to the hierarchical positioning of teachers in the research context, which may be associated with Kachru's (1985b) discussion of the pluralisation of Englishes. However, it does not explain the other hierarchies that were in play and contributed in the differential positionings of ESL teachers. At times, there were differentiations between teachers from the inner and outer circles, and at times, these differentiations were too simplistic, as further hierarchies cut across these groups. Therefore, it is important to engage below with Phillipson's (1992b) Linguistic Imperialism and the relevance of his paradigm for my research study.

The socio-linguist Phillipson (1992b) introduced the notion of 'linguistic imperialism' to draw attention to the political relations between the 'core English-speaking countries' (Britain, the USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand) and the 'periphery-English countries' where English either has the status of a second language (e.g. Nigeria, India, Singapore), or is a foreign and 'international link' language (e.g. Scandinavia, Japan) (1992b, p.17). According

to Philipson (1997), 'linguistic imperialism' is a theoretical construct, devised to account for linguistic hierarchisation between the Centre and the Periphery (p.238). According to Phillipson (1992) English, was originally imposed on a number of countries in the Periphery and has through deliberate contrivance, successfully replaced or displaced some of the indigenous languages of these countries. The dominance of English has also resulted in the "imposition of the Anglo-Saxon Judeo-Christian culture that goes with it so that indigenous cultures have been undervalued and marginalized" (Bisong, 1995, p.123). He further maintains that this linguistic and cultural imperialism has been accompanied by economic exploitation to further the interests of the Centre. Within the linguistic imperialism paradigm (Phillipson, 1992b), the world is "characterized by inequality" (p.46), reflecting power relations between the dominant major English speaking countries, and the dominated Periphery, and the affected countries have become subordinate inter-state actors within this power relationship.

The imposition of English, Phillipson argues (1992b, p.41), has resulted in the legitimation of the linguistic dominance and superiority of the core English-speaking countries' political and economic power. In other words, the relation between the centre and the periphery has been and continues to be one of linguistic capitalism. He goes further to point out that linguistic imperialism has extended to supposedly neutral fields, such as Applied Linguistics and ELT. This functions as a form of linguistic neo-colonialism in promoting language teaching practices that are both educationally unsound and inimical to the periphery Englishes (Bisong, 1995). According to Phillipson (1992b) these fields are one of structural and systematic inequality through which western hegemony and Anglophone powers are established and maintained. English acts as an invisible force that exerts a strong influence over the framing and ordering of languages in play.

Similarly, Pennycook (1998, 2002) supports Phillipson's critique of the role of Applied Linguistics and ELT in "helping to legitimate the contemporary capitalist order" (p.24), and upholds the view that Anglophone countries (Britain and the US), in promoting English as the link to a wider knowledge base and improved socio-economic relations, have compelled communities to choose English over their own language. Canagarajah (1999b) offers stimulating insights into the implications of English language teaching as a function of linguistic neo-colonialism. Similar to Phillipson and Pennycook, Canagarajah (1999b) maintains that ELT and Applied Linguistics have paved the way for structural conditions in

which core-English speaking countries will always occupy dominant institutional positions and will be used as a measure against which power and resources between groups will be divided. The consequence of giving English, a foreign language, the exclusive status of an 'official language' has devalued and marginalised other Englishes as well as indigenous languages, each of which could have become the official language (Bisong, 1995).

Although Phillipson (1992b), Pennycook (1998, 2002), and Canagarajah (1999b) make strong arguments about the negative aspects of the dominance of English in the field of language policy, there is disagreement about the role of imperial languages, both in the construction and maintenance of power relations and in the more linguistic and sociolinguistic concerns of the spread, globalisation, and development of world languages. In addition, in taking forward Phillipson's (1992b) proposition of linguistic imperialism and the symbolic power of English and their relevance to the ideological struggle between different varieties of English in Oman, as well as the division of power and resources between groups based on the differential accorded linguistic value, three corollary arguments are presented here. Oman's refusal to acknowledge English language within its language policy space may suggest the country's resistance to according English the same social and cultural status as Arabic. Furthermore, compared to Asian countries like Japan, Oman has not announced in what capacity English is to be used, that is, as a foreign language (EFL), a second language (ESL), or a lingua franca. Unlike English in the outer circle countries, where the locals have established language norms, the situation is different in Oman. However, the ideological war between the different varieties of English has not been given any space within the educational language policy.

The Omani government's decisions to make English the medium of instruction at the tertiary level would appear to be practical rather than ideological to raise its international profile. As the ELT literature shows (Kehm & Teichler, 2007; Altbach 1999), the introduction of English-medium programmes is perceived to be an essential coping strategy to enhance the internationalisation of the Omani HE system and to allow Oman to take part in the wider global knowledge economy. Nowadays, becoming part of the international higher education system means having English as the medium of instruction, and internationalisation in HE is usually done through English language products and services. In former colonial countries, such as India, Singapore, and Nigeria, there is a legacy of linguistic, social, and cultural hegemony as a result of the superimposition of English, and English is tied up with the

national cultural identity of such countries. In addition, in these countries, English continues to maintain a preeminent position as the official language, as the Anglo-Saxon Judaeo-Christian culture has misplaced and devalued the local indigenous cultures. Moreover, Asian countries, such as China, Taiwan, and Korea, navigate their foreign language policies towards an almost absolute preference for English to achieve their nation building and internationalisation missions (Choi, 2010; Sergeant, 2008; Song and Tai, 2007; Trent, 2012). However, although, the Omani government has recognised the importance of English, English is not the dominant language in Oman. In the local research context, Omanisation (an initiative by the government of the Sultanate of Oman to replace the foreign workforce with Omani workers) has contributed to the shifting dynamics of how different forms of capital are valued. Whereas in former colonial countries, English could be responsible for some linguistic genocide, in Oman, Arabic remains important in the maintenance of the Omani elite, and it signifies power and status (see Chapter One for a discussion of the languages in use in Oman).

In this section, I have tried, by using Phillipson's linguistic imperialism, to examine ways of positioning different forms of English in Oman and to explore to what extent English from inner circle countries is used as the benchmark for linguistic and academic proficiency and for legitimate participation in learning. In the research context, outsourcing education services, such as importing programmes from inner circle countries as well as hiring teachers and consultants, may have contributed to changes in the linguistic capital of different varieties of English. For example, there seems to be evidence of flexible cultural capital conversion (Lan, 2011) where western teachers, given their linguistic habitus and privileged locations in the global geography of power, were able to convert their English-language capital into economic and social capital, gaining them status and privilege. However, the strategy of flexible cultural capital conversion has its limits and drawbacks (Lan, 2011). In the Omani context, teachers of many different nationalities bring many different kinds of English, thus raising the question of how 'linguistic imperialism' might play out and how this might affect the positioning of the teachers themselves. Phillipson (1992b) maintains that since the production and dissemination of English language textbooks is controlled by western corporations, the third world is disenfranchised. To some extent, Phillipson's argument has relevance, given the recognised positioning of international tests, such as TOEFL and IELTS in the research context. However, this positioning of international tests is

accorded only a temporary importance until locally prepared assessments are externally benchmarked.

To some extent, there would seem to be a linguistic hierarchy that has developed within the Omani HE that privileges English from the inner circle countries in certain official spaces. However, different Englishes in their performance play out differently in the local context. As I mentioned earlier, Phillipson's framework of linguistic imperialism fails to connect linguistic issues to diverse social and political contexts (Canagarajah 1999b; Pennycook, 2000, 2001). In relation to global implications of the spread of English, Phillipson is critiqued for neglecting the local contexts of English in multilingual communities. According to Heller and Martin-Jones (2001b, p.7), these multilingual communities result "from a number of different social, economic, and political processes germane to understanding the world around us today." However, Phillipson linguistic imperialism does not seem to take into consideration how and why English is taken up by a particular group.

In considering linguistic capital as an aspect of language ideology within the context of Oman, it becomes less difficult to explain why Phillipson's linguistic imperialism cannot be applicable to the local context given the institutional practices of the Public High College (see analysis Chapters Six and Seven). The institutional practices of the educational system is critical in examining the issue of language and symbolic power since it is deeply involved in the evaluation and inculcation of linguistic competencies, which determine whether the linguistic resources of a given people will function as linguistic capital, giving them a position of dominance. Linguistic imperialism could not entirely account for the complexity of positioning ESL teachers in the Public High College; the situation would seem much more multi-layered and complex than that. Rather, the construct may have some heuristic value in providing a partial explanation for certain important aspects of the emergence of the hierarchical positioning of teachers. In examining the contemporary situation of English in Oman, as discussed above, the tensions in teacher positioning and teacher identity may also be analysed by drawing upon Bourdieu's concepts of field, habitus and capital.

3.4 Conceptualising teacher identity

In the literature, considerable attention has been focused on whether identities are chosen by resourceful and autonomous beings or are ascribed to individuals by historical forces and

institutional structures (Howard, 2000; Jenkins, 1996; Webb, 2006; Brown, 2014). It is important to note that different theorisations of identities are often associated with wider ontological and epistemological discussions. The debate regarding stability and fluidity is one of the most central to the area of identity, and it arises in a continuing dialectic of the concepts of structure and agency, and of subjectivism and objectivism. In the sociological literature, the contrast between structure and agency is perhaps the most prevalent one (Rubinstein, 2001; King, 2004; Sawyer, 2005). Another way of expressing many of these differences is by opposing objectivism to subjectivism. According to Osterlund and Carlile (2005), the split between subjectivism and objectivism has led to two theoretical approaches to conceiving the social world. Both philosophical approaches emerged in France in the late 1950s and 1960s (Jenkins, 1992, p.16). First, existentialism, initiated by Jean-Paul Sartre, flourished in France. Existentialism holds that every action implies a human setting and a human subjectivity (Sartre, 2007, p. 16). Sartre's existentialism perceives the world of action as "entirely dependent on the decrees of the consciousness that creates it, and therefore entirely devoid of objectivity" (Bourdieu, 1990b, p. 42).

Existentialism stresses the social construction of realities and assumes that the social agents develop accurate conscious representations of structures that guide their behaviour, and states that the power of structures works independently of the consciousness of agents (Levi-Strauss, 1963, p. 282). Existentialism can be viewed as a form of subjectivism, which posits that the individual subject is free and has an undetermined power of choice (Brubaker, 1985, p.749). On the opposite side of the intellectual spectrum, structuralism emerged in France, mainly through the work of Claude Levi-Strauss. Central to structuralism is the idea of a system, which is a self-regulating entity that adapts to new conditions by transforming its features whilst maintaining its systematic structure. In order to create such a system, structuralists aim to understand the configurations of our minds by isolating the structures that condition our behaviour (Brown, 1979).

Structuralists "conceive the social world as a universe of objective regularities independent of the agents and constituted from the standpoint of an impartial observer who is outside the action, looking down from above on the world he observes" (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 56). Such a view is also referred to as a form of objectivism, as it focuses on objective structures, whether linguistic, cultural, or social (Lane, 2000, pp.88-9). This kind of division in the theoretical approaches involves polarised opposition between two separate vocabularies. The subjective

grouping includes terms such as-'agency', 'subject', 'individual', 'spontaneity', and 'micro' whilst the objective side values terms such as 'structure', 'object', 'totality', 'determinism', and 'macro (Greiffenhagen and Sharrock, 2008, p.3). Within the objective/subjective dichotomy, these vocabularies are often seen as mutually exclusive, with one thinking of social reality either according to the first or to the other sets of terms. As Hays (1994, p.57) puts it:

> One of the most prevalent forms of contrast is that between 'structure and agency'. […] this contrast is often mapped onto another set of dichotomies common in social theorizing and interpreted to mean, for instance, that structure is systematic and patterned, while agency is contingent and random; that structure is constraint, while agency is freedom; that structure is static, while agency is active; that structure is collective, while agency is individual.

Bourdieu resists the binary understandings of structuralism and existentialism, finding both of them to be inadequate, and reconceptualises the binary of structure and agency through his concepts of field, capital, and habitus. For Bourdieu, the purpose of social research is to understand the role of the person in conjunction with the structures and groups they interact within (Bourdieu, 1986). To transcend this dichotomy, Bourdieu's conceptual model develops "a double reading" of social reality (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). Bourdieu argues that the task of sociology is to "uncover the most profoundly buried structures of the various social worlds which constitutes the social universe, as well as the mechanisms which tend to ensure their reproduction or their transformation" (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). It is within this framework that Bourdieu develops the concepts of habitus, field, capital, and practice. Bourdieu is able to overcome the oppositions posed by phenomenology and structuralism's body of social theory, which are discussed below and are central to this theory of practice. In brief, this is illuminated through his formula of [habitus + capital] + field = practice. While I discuss these concepts separately, they are inter-related concepts.

3.4.1 Exploration of capital, habitus and field within Bourdieu's framework

As stated earlier, in this research study, I draw upon Bourdieu's (1985, 1989, 1992) inter-relational concepts of field, capital, and habitus to study the interactions between agency and structure. Bourdieu's framework is particularly relevant in educational research, as it helps to provide explanations and ways of understanding how teachers' positions are structured by their habitus and capitals and by the fields within which they are positioned. Importantly, this

allows my analysis to take account of the structuring of their habitus by practices such as assessment and QA, and so offers an understanding of the role of such positioning in the construction of their identities.

Habitus

Bourdieu developed his concepts of habitus, field, and practice as a way to transcend the dualism of the structure and agency in sociological debates (Archer, 2003; Calhoun, 1993b; Jenkins, 1992). For Bourdieu (2002), habitus is not something an individual is born with, but is the product of history and social experiences. He (2002, p.29) adds that habitus also can be changed by history, "new experiences, education or training". Thus, habitus is neither completely determined by social structure nor completely subject to individual free will, but exists at the site of interaction between the two; our conceptualisations of our social world are the outcome of how we think and behave at these sites of interaction (Bourdieu, 1990b). The key to agency is one's habitus which can be seen as a

> system of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles of generation and structuring of practices and representations which can be objectively adapted to their goals without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary to attain them and, being all this, collectively orchestrated without being the product of the orchestrating action of a conductor (Bourdieu 1977,p.72)

Habitus comprises historically sedimented dispositions within an individual, which generates ways of seeing, understanding and acting. Most importantly, habitus operates at an unconscious, or preconscious level, giving the feeling of being instinctive (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). These traits allow individuals to negotiate, or 'improvise' within the situations that present themselves in daily life – what Bourdieu refers to as 'practice' (Bourdieu, 1977). Practices are thus the result of the "intersection between the habitus and its dispositions, on the one hand, and the constraints, demands and opportunities of the social field on the other" (Bourdieu, 1977, p.92).

Field

Bourdieu's concept of habitus needs to be thought about as inseparable from objective field structures. As Thomson (2008, p. 67) writes, to fully understand relations between people one must "examine the social space in which interactions, transactions, and events" occur. This is

done by looking deeper than the social practice of actors and their interactions amongst each other and by considering the social space or 'field' and the rules that are created by an actor's practice within it: "A structured space of positions, a force field that imposes its specific determinations upon all those who enter it" (Wacquant, 2008, p.8). Bourdieu conceptualises social space as a series of historically formed relatively autonomous fields, or social contexts, each with their own logic and each composed of structured spaces of objective positions. In Bourdieu's sociology, a field is an arena of social interactions and power struggles:

> I define field as a network, or a configuration, of objective relations between positions objectively defined, in their existence and in the determinations they impose upon their occupants, agents or institutions, by their present and potential situation (situs) in the structure of the distribution of species of power (or capital) whose possession commands access to the specific profits that are at stake in the field, as well as by their objective relation to other positions (domination, subordination, homology, etc.). Each field presupposes and generates by its very functioning, the belief in the values of the stakes it offers. (Bourdieu, 1989a, p. 39).

While positions are structured objectively, a field is not a static system of classification or organisation, instead, it is reproduced by means of actors' constant forms of competition, negotiation and struggles aimed to preserve or improve their objective position by accumulating those forms of capital considered most valuable (Bourdieu, 1984; Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). In this sense, a field is intimately linked to habitus. In addition, a field conditions the development of habitus, a set of endurable dispositions that guide individuals' actions and thinking. Thus, different fields produce different habitus. Therefore, the existence of a field emerges not from the objective distribution of capital, but from the disposition of actors to compete over the possession of certain forms of capital and the implementation of different practices to such effect.

Fields, which are characterised by the continuous struggle between individuals to transform or preserve the field of forces and so the very existence of the latter, are the product of a dialectic relationship between objective and subjective factors (Bourdieu, 1983, p.312). However, it is necessary to think about habitus and field as relational; they affect each other as structuring structures and structured structures that orient practice (Bourdieu, 1990). As Bourdieu states, they operate together as

principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them. Objectively 'regulated' and 'regular' without being in any way the product of obedience to rules, they can be collectively orchestrated without being the product of the organizing action of a conductor (1990, p.3).

Bourdieu also talks about the field of power: this relates to "multiple social fields" (Thomson, 2008, p.70) and the similarities between the logic structuring these fields and the dominant players. Thomson notes how fields are inter-related, which can mean that a player's position in one field can also benefit him or her in another field (e.g. the field of education and the economic field). Because of their progressively imprinted habitus, actors possess a 'practical knowledge' or sense of a field. This is particularly evident in those settings where actors have a doxic experience. Agents, without any conscious planning or rational calculation, develop an intuitive sense of the game, that is, of what is at stake and of how it is played. Individuals entering a field, by virtue of this knowledge, are aware of the costs that a field imposes on those who intend to participate in it. Fields are characterised by an ensemble of unequal objective power relations, and this, in turn, reflects the unequal distribution of positions. Some actors are excluded from participating, and so influence the chances of success of those competing. Actors' involvement in a field, however, depends not only on their objective condition, but also on their respective interest (or 'illusio'). Bourdieu views illusio as part of a deeply socialised feel for the game. It differs from habitus in the sense that it is closer to awareness than our more unconscious immersion in the doxa of the field (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). Illusio refers to the degree of motivation that actors possess to participate in a given field.

What is at stake for illusio is constituted by those objects that are considered of value in the field. These include forms of the various capital – social, cultural and economic – that can be accumulated, circulated and exchanged. The mutual dependency between field and habitus is manifested in relation to actors' attempts to preserve or improve their position in a field via different practices and strategies adapted to their objective reality. However, not everyone is able to demonstrate a practical mastery of the game being played. Some people find it difficult to fit in and to know how one should be in certain spaces and around certain people. As Reay et al., (2009) write, "When habitus encounters a field with which it is not familiar,

the resulting disjunctures can generate not only change and transformation, but also disquiet, ambivalence, insecurity and uncertainty" (2009, p.1105). This mismatch between habitus and field, when a person is conscious of it, is known as hysteresis. This concept was developed by Bourdieu (1984) to try to understand how a person can be out of place in certain fields. When actors are unable (for whatever reason) to invest their illusio in the dominant stakes, this creates a mismatch between habitus and field, leading to alienation and exclusion. It may also create a better perception of the game and its rules by virtue of that mismatch (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p.173).

Capital

The above discussion of habitus and field leads to a consideration of what is valued in particular fields, so I focus now on Bourdieu's definitions of different forms of capital. According to Bourdieu (1986), capital has three basic forms: economic, cultural, and social. The different forms of capital exist in complex connections with one another, and one of the features of fields is how the 'game' of particular fields governs the conversion of one form of capital into another. Bourdieu argues that some capitals and the particular ways they are converted is what make "the games of society" more than just a simple game of chance (Bourdieu 1986, p.241).

Economic capital

Economic capital is accumulated through an individual's acquisition of many forms of assets, such as tangible and intangible property and cash. These may be used, for example, to monopolise a market for personal wealth maximisation and other money-making activities. It is worth noting that economic capital is easier to transmit, preserve, manage and calculate than the other forms of capital (Swartz, 1997, p.80). This means that all types of capital can be derived from economic capital. Moreover, economic capital can convert easily into cultural and social capital (Swartz, 1997, p. 80). This is because the type of power invested in economic capital gives an immediate access to many different things, such as education, books, land, etc. and hence leads to the individual gaining other forms of capital. Bourdieu (1986, p.52) posits that "economic capital is at the root of all the other types of capital" as the other types of capital are "transformed, disguised forms of economic capital". What is significant in Bourdieu's theory of capital, however, is that individuals are driven by more than economic interests. Individuals make economic choices designed to maximise their

symbolic capital, or to increase their prestige, their cultural capital (including through education), or their social capital (contacts, networks) as discussed below.

Cultural capital

Bourdieu (1986, p. 46) distinguishes between three types of cultural capital, namely, embodied, objectified, and institutionalised. First, cultural capital is "linked to the body and presupposes embodiment" (Bourdieu, 1986, p.243). As a set of dispositions, it can be accumulated consciously, but is also developed unconsciously over time, usually through socialisation, culture, traditions, and social class. It becomes ingrained in an individual's habitus and develops as a property of that individual's disposition. For Bourdieu (1986), it can be converted into an economic asset. For example, a set of skills acquired through education or abilities mastered through a family trade enables the holder of this capital to engage in mercantile exchange in return for their knowledge or skills. The effects of scarcity give rise to power struggles and struggles over the dynamics of the distribution of capital.

Second, the objectified form of cultural capital is accumulated by having material objects "such as writings, paintings, monuments, instruments, etc." (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 246). Unlike embodied cultural capital, these physical assets may be readily exchanged for economic capital. However, this transmissibility relates only to the transfer of the material ownership of a cultural good and does not include the transfer of the habitus, that is, the means of 'consuming' it. That is to say, cultural goods can be assigned both materially, which "presupposes economic capital", and symbolically, which "presupposes cultural capital" (Bourdieu, 1986, p.247). Objectified cultural capital exists 'materially' and 'symbolically' as long as it is "implemented and invested as a weapon and a stake in the struggles which go on in the fields of cultural production" (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 248).

Third, institutionalised cultural capital appears in the form of formally ranked credentials or qualifications, which "confer on its holder a conventional, constant, legally guaranteed value with respect to culture" (Bourdieu 1986, p.248). The value these qualifications are given also relates to the field in which they are produced and presented. In economic terms, all these forms of capital carry value in particular fields and, depending on the specific laws of conversion in each field, these forms of capital allow one to control one's own future and that of others. Therefore, the value of particular practices depends on the field in which they are

put to use (Bourdieu 1986). In addition, the institutional recognition process enables the actors of the field to 'compare' qualifications or to put a monetary amount on the value of the education gained that enables the actor who acquired it to transform cultural capital into economic capital. Bourdieu (1986, p.250) asserts that "the certification of cultural competence through academic degrees allows for establishing conversion rates between cultural capital and economic capital by guaranteeing the monetary value of a given academic capital".

Social capital

Central to Bourdieu's theory is the role social capital plays in the process of preserving and reproducing class structures within society, especially through mediating economic capital. For Bourdieu (1985), social capital refers to the resources inherent within an individuals' network, and therefore, it is concerned with both the structure and resourcefulness of the network. Bourdieu defined social capital as: "the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition" (Bourdieu, 1986, p.248). For Bourdieu, social capital is made up of two elements - the interaction between actors' networks of relations and the social resources that can be mobilised through them as part of the objective order of the field's circulation, reproduction, and accumulation of diverse forms of capital that lead to power struggles. This double understanding of social capital helps to problematise the notion that networks or associations can be considered social capital per se. For example, network indicators are not useful in expressing whether those connections do indeed facilitate access to resources, and nor do they help to recognise the particular conditions upon which those resources are given or the volume and quality of the resources to which they grant access. By introducing social relations, Bourdieu thus transfers the analysis of social capital from an official understanding of connections to a practical and empirical understanding of them; that is, as "relationships continuously practised, kept up, and cultivated" (Bourdieu, 1977, p.37) and "the product of history of economic and symbolic exchanges" (Bourdieu, 1977, p.27). Although the premise of social capital is built upon actors' networks, Bourdieu's conceptualisation centres on the transformation of such connections into useful relations, those that could be depended upon in order to access diverse forms of capital with a certain degree of regularity.

Within Bourdieu's conceptual framework, the capacity of social resources to improve one's objective condition and social position is not taken for granted. The value of social resources is contingent upon the systems of exchange in which actors are inscribed, specifically, to the particular forms of capital accumulation and transformation that shape the dynamics of any given field of action. In other words, social resources result in the accumulation of social capital only to the extent that they are or can be converted into forms of capital over which actors compete and struggle for dominant positioning that allows them to overturn capital exchange operating within those fields. Bourdieu (1986, p.49) suggests that economic, cultural and symbolic capital are "never completely independent" of each other and that the larger amount of each is directly related the volume of social capital any particular actor possesses. This duality is critical. It is the quality of resources that can be accessed and their respective interaction with actors' own initial endowment of capital that is important (Bourdieu, 1980, 1986, 2005). These social relationships bring about the reproduction of privilege in society (Fine, 2007). Indeed, that is the role that doxa and misrecognition play in maintaining and perpetuating the social order. As Bourdieu (1986) suggests, these transfers of social capital can often be taken for granted and are achieved through the mutual recognition of 'legitimate exchanges' (such as occasions, places or practices), which attempt to be as homogenous as possible in order to bring their members closer together.

Equally, since "a capital does not exist and function but except in relation to a field" (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p.101), information about an individual's linkages could constitute part of that individual's social capital only if they are functional to the operation of a given field, that is, they facilitate the accumulation of economic capital within economic fields. Both aspects of social capital - social relations and social resources - are linked with each other. Social capital is built and maintained upon actors' investment in both material and symbolic exchanges (Bourdieu, 1986). In other words, it is produced by the totality of the relationships among the agents of a field. Social capital is contingent upon the size of the network of connections an agent can mobilise and on the volume of the capital that he possesses in relation to those to whom he is connected: "The profits which accrue from membership in a group are the basis of the solidarity which makes them possible" (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p.101). However, this does not necessarily mean that they are consciously pursued or naturally produced. They are likely to be continuously used by actors as part of their unconscious strategies. This is particularly evident in cases where useful relations acquire an institutionalised form by assuming the form of tradition, which masks the

practical implications embedded within them. In addition, the impact of actors' social resources in their effort to preserve or improve their objective conditions and social position is shaped by the nature of the relations of exchange that actors establish with each other. The circulation of capital in a given field and its convertibility into other forms of capital are shaped by the state of power relations, competition, negotiation, and conflict.

Symbolic capital

Symbolic capital refers to the capacity of certain actors to make use of their reputation of competence, prestige or recognition, honourability, or even popularity, to access other forms of capital. Bourdieu defines symbolic capital as (1985, p.204) "nothing other than capital, in whatever form" that can be acquired through the "internalization (embodiment) of the structure of its distribution, i.e. when it is known and recognised as self-evident." This form of capital, similar to others identified by Bourdieu, embodies an objective or subjective form which, when the subjective and objective form are taken together, contribute to a shared meaning of value and prestige that can lead to a form of symbolic power. Bourdieu (1986, p.53) refers to symbolic capital as the most authoritative capital for an individual. Symbolic capital has a complex relationship to other forms of capital. It increases from the "successful use of other kinds of capital" (Bourdieu, 1990, p.122), and it is this misrecognition that makes up social reality (Bourdieu, 1990). Symbolic capital occurs when one of the different kinds of capital is converted into prestige (Bourdieu, 1998; Wacquant, 2006). Holders of symbolic capital are not only able to justify their possession of other forms of capital, but also are able to change the structure of the field in which they apply their trade and the rules by which the field operates (Bourdieu 1990).

This form of capital is unlike other forms of capital, as it is gained only through recognition by others (Bourdieu, 1986, p.52). Therefore, according to Bourdieu (1985, p.204), it cannot be incorporated into an individual's habitus. Actors within the field who ascribe value to a selected ways of doing things or to specific objects often do not recognise that the value given is arbitrary (Bourdieu, 1990). Therefore, there is a strong connection between symbolic capital and the way people defend and choose to invest in what they value as capital according to the structure of the habitus (Bourdieu, 1990) or through the 'lens' of their habitus (Lehmann, 2007).

The "convertibility of the different types of capital is the basis of the strategies aimed at ensuring the reproduction of capital (and the position occupied in the social space)" (Bourdieu 1986, p.254). The principle of conversion also presupposes that the other three forms of capital are not entirely reducible to economic capital, but they have their own specificity. Nevertheless, economic capital is at their root (Bourdieu 1986, p.253). As Bourdieu describes it, the more disguised the economic aspect of the exchanges, the riskier the investment. Capital in its three forms cannot be fully understood in isolation from Bourdieu's conceptualisation of human agency. To enact Bourdieu's theory of practice in social research, practice has to be studied to expose the habitus and doxa, the very foundation of his practical theory. These thinking tools are applied to identify and investigate the modes of producing teacher's practices, differentially valued places and positions in the field, the capital at stake, the struggles between the field's occupants, and the influences of the wider field on this particular field. The negotiation of the different forms of capital is made possible by the habitus of the actors in any given field. Equally, capital, habitus, and field are explained individually and in relation to each other in social actors' practices. For example, capital and habitus must align with the doxa of the field to claim their legitimate status and practical efficacy. This happens through the "subjective process of adjustment of the habitus and practices of individuals to the objective and external constraints of the social world" (Jenkins, 2007, p.78). Bourdieu (1990b, p.91) thinks that there is a link between habitus and practices, as the dispositions that structure the habitus are the generative bases of practices. In other words, practices are produced in and by the encounter between the habitus and its dispositions. Furthermore, they are produced in relation to the constraints and demands of the field to which the habitus is appropriate and in which it is produced (Bourdieu, 1990b, pp.52-65):

> Agents merely need to let themselves follow their own social 'nature,' that is, what history has made of them, to be as it were, 'naturally' adjusted to the historical world they are up against (Bourdieu, 1990, p.90).

Correspondingly, the field is where capital and habitus function and claim their legitimacy and power in practice. The intertwining among capital, habitus, and field (doxa) makes the three an ontological "triad" (Griller, 1996, p.7): one cannot exist without the existence of the other two, and they must be examined relationally.

3.5 The significance of space for the production of teacher identities

During my fieldwork, I became alerted to the importance of space in the production of differential teacher identities and in structuring the hierarchies in which teachers positioned themselves and positioned each other. Massey (2005) conceptualises space in a relational way that fits well with my main theoretical framework of Bourdieu's concepts of field, capital and habitus. Developing her theory from Lefebvre's ideas on the interdependence of time and space, I found Massey's (2005) concept of space was relevant to the production of teacher identities. Its significance lies in exploring teacher identities in relation to teachers' positions and the material conditions of the space they occupy, thus making possible the understanding and analysis of spatial processes at different levels and across different fields. The relational and dynamic character of space points to the interconnectedness between space and social relations, as argued by Massey (2005).

Massey writes that "the particularity of any place is…constructed not by placing boundaries around it and defining its identity through counterposition to the other which lies beyond, but precisely (in part) through the specificity of the mix of links and interconnections to that beyond" (Massey, 1995, p.5). According to Massey (2005), space is an arena where negotiation of intersecting trajectories is forced upon us and where identities are continually moulded through a myriad of practices of quotidian negotiation and contestation. When taken together, these notions of space and place have profound implications for the construction of power relations and social identities, as the relationship between space and identity is mutually constitutive. Following Massey's conceptualisation of space, I understand space as being situated and socially constructed. This implies that it is not a fixed or static concept as it is often seen, and nor is it merely a background, context, or physical place.

Massey's approach to space-time is fundamental in her theorisation. She argues that simultaneity is not the same as stasis. As Massey puts it, "Space is not static, nor time spaceless; space is itself inseparable from time" (1992, p.80):

> Seeing space as a moment in the intersection of configured social relations (rather than as an absolute dimension) means that it cannot be seen as static. There is no choice between flow (time) and a flat surface of instantaneous relations (space). Space is not a 'flat' surface in that sense because the social relations which create it are themselves dynamic by their very nature. It is a question of a manner of thinking. (Massey, 1993, p.153)

As she puts it in For Space, "Space can never be that completed simultaneity in which all interconnections have been established, and in which everywhere is already linked with everywhere else" (Massey, 2005, pp.11-12). The possibility of reconfiguring space is one of her most interesting ideas in relation to what concerns the present research: "Space as relational and as the sphere of multiplicity is both an essential part of the character of, and perpetually reconfigured through political engagement. And the way in which that spatiality is imagined by the participants is also crucial" (Massey, 2005, p.183).

Theorising space as the product of social relations leads to the understanding that the different programmes and spaces within which these programmes are located are not an emptiness that enables freedom of movement and equal access. The location of a teacher's office and classroom is a product of heterogeneous and sometimes conflicting and unequal social identities/relations. Identities are produced within the complex power-geometry of social/spatial relations and, in turn, how individuals experience and imagine spatiality reshapes the power-geometries of social/spatial relations (Massey, 2005). Massey, for example, in her exploration of the notion of place in relation to space, time and identity construction, makes the following observation:

> The identities of place are always unfixed, contested and multiple. And the particularity of any place is, in these terms, constructed not by placing boundaries around it and defining its identity through counterposition to the other which lies beyond, but precisely (in part) through the specificity of the mix of links and interconnections to that "beyond".

For Massey, power geometry is produced constantly by flows and connections. In other words, the power one possesses emerges not from the actual space one inhabits; rather, it emerges from the way that one conceives of and uses one's *place* within that space, which affects the way others conceive of and use that same place. Massey's conceptualisation of space is particularly relevant to the present research regarding how the everyday practices of teachers are constitutive as well as productive of space. Linking Massey's theorisation of space with Bourdieu's concept of field, the following sections provide literature on different forms of assessments, quality assurance and teacher evaluation as fields/spaces of practices and site of struggle to accrue and claim identity and which underpin the discussion of my data in Chapters Five, Six, and Seven.

3.6 Conceptualisation of summative, continuous summative and formative assessments within wider literature

This ethnographic research has shown that there are some tensions in the ways continuous assessment (CA) was used in this context (see Chapter Seven). In this research study these are analysed as spaces/field of practice where teachers at times asserted, defended and/or claimed their identity and at other times resisted to conform to the rules of the field. The literature illuminates a lack of shared understanding of terms such as summative, formative and continuous assessment. Therefore, I will briefly elaborate on the understandings and theorisations of different forms of assessment in the wider literature.

'Continuous assessment' as a term of assessment has been used to refer to a variety of forms, and considerable debate has occurred within the literature about their relative roles and merits (Broadfoot, 1988; Gipps, 1990; Torrance, 1993). CA in the literature appears in different guises, bounded within either behaviourist or constructivist theories (Tunstall and Gipps, 1996). The theory of behaviourism focuses on overt behaviours that can be measured (Good and Brophy, 1978). According to this view, the mind responds to observable stimulus, thus paying little attention to the capability of thought processing that occurs internally (Skinner, 1968; Thorndike, 1912; Watson, 1919). Learners within this theory are located as external to learning, and information and skills are viewed as things that must be transmitted to learners from authoritative sources. Within behaviourism, students are viewed as recipients, while the teacher's role is to arrange the environment to elicit the desired responses. Therefore, assessment is used to determine whether all pupils have achieved the desired responses. Learning within a constructivist approach suggests that students can and should create their own meaning and analyse their own context to create new knowledge (Klenowski, Askew and Carnell, 2006); thus, students are viewed as equal partners in creating and deepening their understanding of assessment and quality of work through formative assessment and feedback process. Teachers are often seen as either promoting a constructivist learning environment or a behaviourist learning environment for their students and at times, they incorporate both purposes, thus creating tension.

This kind of division in the theoretical approaches involves the creation of two separate vocabularies, leading to confusion and problems when it comes to implementing assessment. Theoretically, each assessment function has a different role to play (Harlen and James, 1997),

and each should therefore have quite different properties and qualities from the other (Black, 1986; Gipps, 1994). A distinction between formative and summative assessments within official documents is based on timing. Formative assessment occurs during instruction and summative assessment takes places at an end point, thus suggesting that timing is the key difference. However, Sadler (1989) criticises such a method of differentiating between the two forms of assessment, and he further adds that "the primary distinction between formative and summative assessment relates to purpose and effect, not to timing" (p.120). Nevertheless, policy makers introduce the two forms of assessments as unproblematic, signalling that formative and summative assessments are well understood by teachers (Harlen and James, 1997; Torrance, 1993). Sadler further argues that many of the principles appropriate for summative assessment are not necessarily transferable to formative assessment (1989). He further adds a different conceptualisation, stating that technology is required to develop formative assessment if it is to contribute directly to helping students learn. Torrance and Pryor (1998) suggest that positioning formative assessment outside theories of learning is contradictory to its role as a teaching and learning tool and instead urge that more attention be paid to the "theoretical discussion of the different models of learning which might underpin" the discourse (1988, p.157).

According to Farrant (1997), CA is being used increasingly as a strategy to prepare students for terminal examinations. For instance, the results obtained from CA can be used to identify the students' weak areas so that teachers can give them special support in those areas. CA results can also inform decision-making in terms of determining whether students should be promoted from one class to another. However, for Rogers (1974), CA is simply a means of gaining more and better information about the student and using it as the course develops. He places emphasis on the information-gathering role of CA and stresses that the various assessment methods it employs are merely tools that provide the relevant information the teacher or student requires to improve learning. Likewise, Macintosh (1976) compares CA to a flexible teaching programme, which is modified while it is being implemented as a result of data received from student and teacher. Harrison and Harlen (2006a) endorses this view and further argues that the premise of behaviourism is to reinforce the required behaviour with rewards and to deter unwanted behaviour with punishments. Therefore, pupil assessment is generally used as the vehicle for applying these rewards and punishments. They can be derived from the teacher's observations made during normal learning activities. For Mweemba and Chilala (2007, p.31), assessment involves the systematic collection of data on

all aspects of an educational enterprise. They emphasise that CA is an ongoing, diagnostic, classroom-based process that uses a variety of assessment tools to measure learner performance. Thus, it could be said that much of the first generation of formative assessment research focused on the cognitive processes of 'becoming' more expert and developing competence in learning processes.

Furthermore, a recurring theme within research and discussion in HE is the need to embed feedback within dialogue and interaction between students and their teachers. Again, the process of feedback and the way this teacher and learner relationship is conceptualised is fraught with confusion, which could explain some of the tension in the literature. Hattie and Timperley (2007) define feedback as "information provided by an agent (e.g., teacher, peer, book, parent, experience) regarding aspects of one's performance or understanding. It occurs typically after instruction that seeks to provide knowledge and skills or to develop particular attitudes" (p.102) while according to Black and William (1998a), feedback needs to be of high quality and to focus on mastery rather than performance, and it needs to be given to individual students so they can advance in their specific areas of weakness. For them, feedback can also be applied formatively to scores derived from summative assessments to help students know where they need to improve. According to Shepard (2006), "one of the oldest findings in psychological research is that feedback facilitates learning" (p. 631). Similarly, McDonald and Boud (2003) have shown that training in self-assessment can improve students' performance in final examinations. It seems, then, that from a behaviourist perspective, the feedback that teachers provide to students should be evaluative; it should be in the form of rewards or encouragement for mastering content, and of punishments or discouragement for failing to master content (Tunstall and Gipps, 1996).

Torrance (1993) criticises the behaviourist perspective as 'exceedingly mechanistic' and as comprising only short-term goals, clear assessment objectives and detailed feedback on what has or has not been achieved, and what must be done to improve subsequent performances. Pryor and Torrance (1995) refer to this approach as 'Convergent Teacher Assessment' where the teacher's emphasis is on finding out if the learner knows a predetermined item. The constructivist perspective, Torrance points out, focuses on creating an environment for assisting the learner to comprehend and engage in new ideas and problems. Essentially, it is an active collaboration between the teacher and learner to improve performance (Wood 1991). Therefore, it is closer to the conceptualisation of formative assessment as a process for

helping the learner develop their own learning skills. Pryor and Torrance (1995) refer to this as 'Divergent Teacher Assessment'. Teachers' language to learners is considered critical; thus, creating opportunities for teacher/student interaction is important to learning (Bell and Gilbert, 1996). Specifically, Sadler envisions a situation in which students, as well as teachers, are engaged in the process of interpreting the meaning of assessment results with respect to their own learning goals and their progress toward those goals. This style of interaction is beneficial to students, as it leads to the achievement of shared meanings that elicit answers to stimulate learning as opposed to a student/teacher interaction that functions simply to check a student's understanding (Torrance and Pryor, 1998). In examining this process of negotiating meaning Pryor and Crossouard build on earlier work (Torrance and Pryor, 2001), which explored how teacher-researchers engaged their students in formative assessment.

An important emphasis in Pryor and Crossouard's (2008) work is how language is used within the formative assessment process and how identity production is also implicated. An ongoing assessment dialogue and negotiation is developed between teacher and pupil to construct new knowledge. It suggests that learning is more than a delivery and reward of procedural concepts; rather, it is an interaction between the teacher and the learner. The teacher acts as a facilitator through the assessment and subsequent managing of learning, thereby promoting not only procedural independence within the learner, but also enhancing the personal independence of learning within the pupil. Thus, in some ways, situated learning can be seen to be part of the 'linguistic turn' experienced elsewhere in the social sciences and humanities, that places increased importance on discourse. Overall, this review demonstrates the contested nature of assessment practices, and prepares the ground for my analysis of the ways they became the site of teacher identity contestations.

3.7 Locating Omani higher education in terms of Policy transfer in a Globalising World

There is growing understanding that combination of globalisation and neoliberalism has resulted in an internationally hegemonic approach to education that encompasses policies for teacher evaluation, assessment, quality standards, teacher training, curriculum, teaching and learning approaches (Jotia, 2010). HEIs in developing countries find themselves under a strong pressure to adapt to a global model while at the same time responding to national forces (Meyer and Rowan, 1997). These competing forces have points of both tension and

alignment, a situation which results in contradictory and dialectical processes that are not easily predictable (Mittelman, 1996:231). Global and national factors put in place equally compelling imperatives to transform higher education system in the Omani context. This is reflected in the country's education policy which is underpinned by a range of competing interests, such as different forms of assessments, teacher evaluation and professional development and quality assurance. Indeed, Omani HEIs have been recently forced to apply quality assurance processes in order to take advantage of what are seen to be educational advances in international contexts and improve teaching and learning processes.

Equally there is pressure to produce the knowledge and skills to serve the economy and enhance global competitiveness. Oman's efforts in transforming its education system can be traced to the Vision Conference: Oman 2020, which was held in Muscat in June 1995, with the aim of moving the Omani economy into a new phase of development leading to higher growth and prosperity (Al-Belushi et al., 1999). Globalisation of Oman's economy and human resource development was one of the items on the conference's agenda along with upgrading the skills of the Omani workforce (Ministry of Information, 1999). The agenda of the conference included calls to reform the current educational system in Oman that consists of 12 years of study. More recently concerns over what to teach and how to teach as well as how teaching standards will be enforced and assured has dominated discussions in Gulf universities in response to globalisation in higher education.

UNESCO (Rassekh, 2004) shows that to achieve the required changes to Oman's education system, the outcomes based approach to curriculum and assessment and the quality assurance practices that now dominate international higher education had to be adopted. HEIs started responding to discourses that circulate international higher education. There is no doubt that these discourses have affected the education policies of Oman, and have created pressures to align its higher education system with the international context. Some of these discourses relate to the knowledge-economy, life-long learning, English as a global language, teaching techniques, assessments, quality standards, national curriculum, teacher evaluation and professional development and others that shape education policy globally (Al-Belushi et al., 1999). These discourses have not only contributed in shaping the education policy of developing countries, but also become a driver of a push for more efficiency and effectiveness within their education systems. Oman started borrowing education practices and processes.

In theorising globalisation and neoliberal discourses and the effect of these on the education in the gulf states, Donn and Al-Mantheri (2010) discusses how international organisations such as World Trade Organisation, European Union and World Bank influence policy by creating global consensus. These international agencies demand that higher education systems become more socio-politically and culturally responsive. This includes increasing access to higher education, and recognising different knowledge forms and different learning cultures. This is informed by the social justice discourse which is underpinned by universal conceptions of access, equity and respect for difference (Suarez and Ramirez, 2004). These organisations' discourses regarding higher education, both in Oman and in the broader Middle East are filled with neoliberal values.

The global context constructs a rhetoric of global imperatives which have been instrumental in shaping many of Oman's reforms in tertiary education, including those specific to QA, student assessments and teacher evaluation. All in all, the growing spread of international conventions and agreements also signals the emergence of a complex international institutional structure consisting of networks facilitating the flow and subsequent implementation of policy ideas among and within nation-states and policy actors. For example, the establishment of the Oman Accreditation Council (OAC) in 2001, which is "a member of the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE)" (Oman Accreditation Council [OAC], 2008, p. 9), required Omani HEIs to adopt a national quality assurance (QA) framework. Since the establishment of this Council, the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE) has put more emphasis on the adoption of QA systems. Further, to maintain and enhance quality education, HEIs in Oman had to adopt new approaches, such as Quality Assurance (QA) and Total Quality Management (TQM).

Globalisation has therefore been associated with contemporary discussions and debate about policy transfer, diffusion and convergence (Ladi, 2005; Common, 2001). There are two approaches that frame the debates on the nature and effects of globalisation of policy transfer in education; one uses a 'small lens' to focus on simple/linear transfers of ideas, the other a broader lens on the processes of mediation, contestation and deliberation of global discourses: the notion of 'travelling' and 'embedded policy' (Jones and Alexiadou, 2001; Ozga and Jones, 2006). Both perspectives help us to grasp the global dimension of the policy process. The politics of borrowing and lending has been well documented in empirical research across countries and contexts both within the education field and in political science literature

(Steiner-Khamsi, 2010, 2012; Steiner-Khamsi and Quist, 2000). Modes of transfer have been widely discussed in the subsequent literature and various frameworks have developed which seek to strengthen cross-national, international and historical analysis of social policies (Dolowitz and Marsh, 2000; Wolman and Page, 2002). A classic definition of policy transfer was provided by Dolowitz and Marsh (1996), where they referred to "a process in which knowledge about policies, administrative arrangements, institutions etc. in one time and/or place is used in the development of policies, administrative arrangements and institutions in another time and/or place" (p.344).

Traditionally, policy borrowing and lending happened between two countries: the borrower and the lender. In Britain, the influence of American domestic polices has framed much of the background to the debate on policy transfer (Dolowitz and March 1996). There is a very clear perception that the United States has been either the direct source of, or at least the inspiration for, a number of the policy developments in Britain over the past 20 years. This includes: climate control (Smith 2004), higher education (Smith et al. 2002), crime control (Jones and Newburn 2002), the labour market and social welfare reforms of the 1990s (Dolowitz 1998; Deacon 2000). Multi-level frameworks for examining the movement of policy ideas and practices have been developed within the field of policy transfer. An emphasis in the literature has been on the role of local policy actors in shaping global agendas, as well as the role of global actors in shaping local agendas. The rise of generic agendas and policy platforms that are *global* in reach - for example, contained global discourses of effectiveness, quality, diversity and choice which contribute in shaping the parameters of education reforms. At this level, global and supranational agencies have an influence on the range of policy options that are available to domestic policy makers.

Importantly, Ball (1998) points out, however, that these policy ideas are never translated in the same way. Nor can the resistance and negotiation to the pressures of multilateral agencies be explained in universal terms. Smith et al. (2002) argue that analysis of policy transfer and lesson drawing should consider the specific national political infrastructures, policy networks and ideologies that frame the actions of the policy actors. In this respect, it is not just the individual actors directly involved with the diffusion of ideas that are important, but also institutions, political organizations and their interplay. Therefore, policy borrowing theorists argue that a multiplicity of cultures, beliefsystems, and preferences among various actors and competing interest groups within a nation, especially in the realm of education policymaking,

exist and are important factors in determining the process and product of policy borrowing (Steiner-Khamsi, 2000, p. 162). For the purposes of my study, this implies the need for attention both to the policy literature in the local context, as well as the practices that emerge in response, without however assuming any direct linear transfer from one to the other. Rather, from a Bourdieusian perspective, the negotiation of policy change and practice will always be a site of struggle.

Depending on the context of the transferring agents, policy transfer can be either voluntary or coercive (obligated transfer), direct or indirect. Most studies suggest that the primary factor that accounts for voluntary policy transfer relates to dissatisfaction or problems associated with the current practice. In these cases, international standards and models act as a 'stamp of approval' from international organisations to reform the educational sector in the recipient countries. A coercive transfer, on the other hand, could be direct or indirect. The former refers to a situation where one government forces another to adopt a policy. The supra-national institutions usually engage in this policy approach. The International Monetary Fund (IMF), for instance, provides loans at cheaper interest rates to developing countries, but with policy and practice strings attached to them for the loans to be granted. Although scholars share a common interest in exploring the rationale of why so many countries decide to adopt a particular policy in their context, their explanations rest on differing epistemological assumptions and hence result in various outcomes. The logic of rationality and the normative belief of learning from "best practices" still provide the commonsense explanation for the process of borrowing and policy transfers. Curran (2000) and Gibb (2000) argue that policy makers and scholars neglect 'embeddedness' considerations relating to the transferred elements of programmes. Consequently, attempts to introduce programmes into environments where institutional arrangements are not favourable are unlikely to have the desired impact.

According to the policy literature, 'policy transfer' is one of the most controversial concepts. Policy transfer is used as an umbrella term for all versions of policy movement processes such as 'lesson drawing' (Rose 1993), 'policy learning' (Haas 1992) 'policy diffusion' (Berry and Berry, 1999), 'policy emulation' (Bennett 1991) and 'policy convergence' (Coleman 1994). Steiner-Khamsi (2002) perceives policy transfer as an inclusive term that means a combination of borrowing and learning, whereas Hulme (2005) argues for a broader vision of policy transfer. Social scientists from different disciplines developed concepts and metaphors in an attempt to track the movement of policy and practice from one context to another.

Diffusion studies the patterns of movement of ideas, or a "successive or sequential adoption of a practice, policy or programme" from a perspective that suggests "spreading, dispersion and dissemination of ideas or practices (across space and time) from a common source or a point of origin" (Stone 2001, pp. 4–5; cf. Eyestone 1977). In other words, the diffusion literature suggests that policy 'percolates or diffuses gradually over time' (Stone, 2000, p.4). Diffusion is often framed within apolitical and neutral discourses (Peters, 1997, p.76). Its framework is often limited to theorising policy diffusion within broad historical, spatial and socio-economic reasons for a pattern of policy adoption (Freeman & Tester, 1996, p. 9) neglecting political dynamics involved. By contrast, the term 'policy convergence' is a more general macro-level idea that arises as a consequence of structural forces. Policy convergence implies a dominant pattern of "increasing similarity in economic, social and political organization between countries that may be driven by industrialization, globalization or regionalization" (Stone 2001, p. 6). Four causes of convergence have been identified by Colin Bennett (1991) i.e. penetration, emulation, harmonization, and elite networking and policy communities.

In contrast to policy diffusion the emphasis of the policy transfer literature (see Dolowitz and Marsh 1996) has tended to be on understanding the process by which policies and practices move from exporter to importer jurisdictions. According to Dolowitz and Marsh (2000) relatively few studies tackle the transfer process directly, or with conceptual precision. Dolowitz and March (1996, 2000) developed a conceptual framework which is based on a number of key questions: 'who transfers policy', 'why is policy transferred', 'what is transferred', 'from where are lessons drawn' and 'what factors constrain or facilitate change'. Their later formulation differentiates between two types of transfer: "voluntary transfer (lesson-drawing, emulation)" and "coercive transfer (harmonisation, imposition)" (p.4). Most studies suggest that the primary factor that accounts for voluntary policy transfer relates to dissatisfaction or problems associated with the current practice. It suggests that dissatisfaction with the current policy and a view of policy failure (either by the government or the public) is the impetus for lesson drawing. Dolowitz et al. (1996) contend that if there is "uncertainty surrounding the cause of problems, the effect of previous policy activity, or the future, then the result is likely to be a search for other policy experiences and solutions" (p.347). These studies offer frameworks rather than models or complete theoretical perspectives and accordingly have been criticised as case studies in search of an international theory of policy change (Wolman and Page, 2002).

Various studies have reported on attempts by countries to transfer policies in relation to QA, this being a classically modern concept which assumes the possibility and desirability of uniformity of practice and uniformity of judgement across different contexts in the interest of maintaining standards of provision (see also below). According to Billing (2004) pressure has been exercised on many countries in Central and Eastern Europe to develop national external QA systems for their HEIs. These pressures come from internationally funded projects by organisations such as the World Bank and the European Union. Billing and Thomas (2000) provide a useful summary regarding whether QA frameworks can effectively be transferred from one country to another. They review the Turkish experience of establishing QA systems, based on the UK model; they conclude (as already suggested above) that transferability is not a straightforward activity and that a number of factors influence the transfer of systems across different cultures. From the review, they conclude that the cultural, structural, political, and technical issues greatly affect the transfer of the UK system. Ryan (1993), after assessing the applications of Total Quality Management (TQM), self-evaluation and formal accreditation in Central and Eastern Europe, concludes that it is necessary for countries upholding international norms of quality to contextualise the evaluation and accreditation systems they adopt so they are compatible with specific cultural and national factors.

Advocates of the policy borrowing and lending framework encourage readers to question the normative assumption and move beyond naïve explanation (Steiner-Khamsi, 2012). *)*. In approaching the globalization of social policy making through a policy sociology perspective, the concepts of 'travelling' and 'embedded policy' are useful. Understanding global social policy requires close attention to policy process of mediation and recognition of complexity (Ozga, 1987 Ball, 1990, 1994; Whitty, 2002). What sets these studies aside from the previous works is the close attention to language, discourse and socio-political context that contributes to the emergence of policies. Central to this perspective is Ball's dual conceptualisation of policy as text and policy as discourse (Ball, 1994a). Perceiving policy as text, as Ball argues, rests upon the findings of literary theory, which views policies as:

> representations which are encoded in complex ways (via struggles, compromises, authoritative public interpretations and reinterpretations) and decoded in complex ways (via actors, interpretations and meanings in relation to their history, experiences, skills, resources and context). (Ball, 1994a, p. 16)

The texts themselves are the products of multiple agendas and compromises. In addition, according to Ball the problem of policy interpretation is complex because "at all stages of the policy process we are confronted both with different interpretations" and with 'interpretations of interpretations' (Ball, 1994a, p. 17). This confusion leads to what Ball (1994a) defines as "a play in and play of meanings". Ball (ibid.) claims that policy as text reflects compromises between competing interests and privilege specific interests as they move into practice. The production of the text itself is not one static moment, but a process. Texts themselves are the products of compromises and power struggles. Moreover, texts are never complete; they have interpretational and representational history and 'policy sediment' builds up around them. Therefore, a researcher is always dealing with a particular piece of policy which should be considered in connection with other policy texts and the history of responses to policy.

3.8 The concept of quality and quality assurance: a working definition

A key sub-field of educational practices in my research was that of QA practices. Again it is important to highlight here that there is no consensus in the wider literature that can provide a universal definition of the term 'quality'; it is a contested concept and has a variety of meanings for different scholars informed by their different epistemological and ontological positionings (Shields, 1999). For Gibson (1986), 'quality' is a term that is "elusive of prescription" (p.28) and that is value laden because it is associated with being worthwhile and good. Similarly, Pfeffer and Coot (1991) characterise quality as a slippery concept, while Harvey and Green (1993), in their seminal work, point out that quality is a relative concept. However, for Boyle and Bowden (1997), quality lacks clarity, and they therefore see it as a dynamic concept. Some scholars focus on the intrinsic and extrinsic dimensions of quality (Ball, 1985; Barnett, 1992; van Vught, 1994) whilst other scholars consider quality a philosophical concept that lacks a general theory in the literature (Green, 1994; Westerheijden, 1999). However, Harvey and Green (1993), in their attempt to define quality, present five different perspectives on quality.

In the first category, quality is perceived as exceptional. This notion relates to the traditional and elitist academic view that sees quality as something special and relating to high standards. In educational terms, it epitomises excellence and high-level performance, and includes passing a minimum set of standards unattainable by most. The second notion considers quality as a consistent or flawless outcome. According to this notion, consistency and

perfection involve a one-to-one correspondence of achievement to quality. In other words, if consistency can be achieved then quality will be attained as a matter of course; the main emphasis is on ensuring that things operate correctly each time or to a consistent standard every time. The third classification perceives quality as fitness for purpose, where quality is understood as conformity with institutional missions as well as the capacity to fulfil customers' requirements. This approach suggests that quality only has meaning in relation to the purpose of the product or service (Ball, 1985). The fourth notion of quality refers to the classic notion that views quality in terms of the learner changing from one state to another. In educational terms, the focus is on ensuring that students are genuinely empowered as a result of their learning. This view of quality presupposes a fundamental change of form in terms of transforming the life experiences of students. The final approach perceives quality in terms of value for money and return on investment or expenditure. The value for money approach is closely related to the notion of efficiency, effectiveness, and accountability. To sum up, the various arguments on what constitutes quality are rooted in the values and assumptions of different authors about the nature, purpose and fundamental processes of HE; little consensus over this can be assumed.

3.8.1 The concept of quality assurance

Similar to the concept of quality, there is a wide range of discussion on the concept of QA in the HE literature. The concept has entered the new policy discourse of HE through the business and manufacturing sectors (Lim, 2001). As the interest in quality in HE grew, new definitions started to emerge. To Vroeijenstijn (1995), QA is both maintenance and enhancement, a view which further requires formalised structures and continuous attention. International multilateral organisations, such as UNESCO and INQAAHE, share this view of QA. For example, UNESCO (2004) describes QA as a "systematic review of educational programmes to ensure that acceptable standards of education, scholarship, and infrastructure are being maintained." Equally, INQAAHE (2005, p.) defined quality assurance as "all those attitudes, objects, actions and procedures, which through their existence and use, and together with the quality control activities, ensure that appropriate academic standards are being maintained and enhanced in and by each program." Similar views are shared by Wilger (1997), who perceives QA as a collective process by which a university ensures that the quality of educational processes is maintained to the standards it has set itself. In general, the term 'quality' is understood to refer to issues of maintenance and the improvement of quality and standards, embedded in the demands for accountability (Lim, 2001; Woodhouse, 1999).

3.9 Teacher evaluation

Another key sub-field of educational practices of my research was that of teacher evaluation. Many positions in the research context were bound up with power relations, local networking, and social capital: there was struggle between teachers to access local networking through those positions. This ethnographic research showed both formal and informal teacher evaluation processes were at play and that local and non-local teachers were evaluated differently. There is little research on Oman in relation to tenure criteria and how well these are articulated in institutional policy and/or linked to institutional goals and priorities. Therefore, I briefly elaborate on the teacher evaluation literature that focuses on tenure and teacher evaluation frameworks.

Teacher evaluation has surfaced recently as a tool to promote teachers' professional growth and to improve tenure policies and frameworks. A review of the literature reveals that teacher evaluation is a heavily researched topic. For example, teaching evaluation in Canada has been identified as an area that requires significant improvement (Knapper, 2003). The notion that teaching contributions are difficult to measure effectively is raised frequently in the literature (Bercuson et al., 1997; England, 1996; Knapper, 2003). This is because teaching approaches vary significantly. Others have questioned how judgments of faculty work are made, by whom, and based on what criteria and evidence. Many have expressed concerns that tenure decisions lack objectivity and are based on arbitrary judgment guided by personal perceptions or beliefs about the type and value of academic work (Bercuson et al., 1997).

3.9.1 Teaching evaluation systems

Most teacher evaluation systems include both summative and formative evaluations. The focus of the formative evaluation is on teacher professional development, and this type of evaluation is not concerned with employment status. According to Evans and Tomlinson (1989, p.15), when teacher evaluation is linked to professional development, the aim should not be a reward and punishment mechanism, but rather a process that results in the development of the skill and the career prospects of teachers. Summative evaluation, on the other hand, is used to determine if teachers have met the minimum requirements. Some scholars hold that a single teacher evaluation system, when properly conceived, might be able simultaneously to serve as a source of employment purposes and teacher development (McLaughlin and Pfeifer, 1986; Poster and Poster, 1992; Danielson and McGreal, 2000).

Other scholars, such as De Clercq (2008), maintain a single evaluation instrument for two diverse purposes tend to coexist uneasily. De Clercq (2008) believes that different purposes naturally lend themselves to different evaluation methods and procedures. Like De Clercq, Popham (1988) holds that, if both systems are separated, both purposes can readily be accomplished. He further criticises many school principals for mistakenly believing that one evaluation system can both support their staff's development and continue to issue verdicts on their staff's performance. De Clercq (2008) further asserts that teachers involved in the professional development scheme must be able to discuss their problems and constraints and must be given the space to engage in constructive criticism of aspects of school management. According to De Clercq (2008), this will ensure the success of the teacher development scheme.

Teacher evaluation scholarship advises that institutions articulate the purpose and goals of evaluation when designing teacher evaluation systems (Cannon, 2001; Cashin, 1996; Johnson and Ryan, 2000). As Knapper (2001) cautions, the benefits of teaching evaluation will be gained only if institutions, units, or individuals carefully consider the motives for evaluating. Knapper (2001) further recommends that evaluation frameworks should clearly identify whether the assessment serves formative or summative purposes, or both. To this end, teacher evaluation scholarship recommends that institutions develop a clear statement of purpose for tenure and promotion. This will help to provide a context and framework for the development of tenure and promotion policies and procedures (Miller, 1987; Seldin 1999a).

3.10 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed the key concepts that were implicated in ESL teacher identity construction within the wider literature. Since my research sample is ESL teachers, and these are usually constructed through native and non-native dichotomy, it was important to discuss the relevance of such constructs for my research (see section 3.2). In section 3.3, I discussed Phillipson's linguistic imperialism and its usefulness for my research study, while in Section 3.4, I explored teacher identity construction from a Bourdieusian perspective, focusing on his key concepts of field, habitus, and capital. Then in Sections 3.6, 3.7 and 3.8, I explored key sub-concepts that contributed to the teacher identity construction within the wider literature: assessment, QA, and teacher evaluation, showing how contested they all are, in preparation

for my Bourdieusian analysis of teacher identity constructions, which were similarly contested.

Chapter 4: Research methodology and research methods

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I set out to describe the research approach and research design of this study. First, I will explore the epistemological and ontological positioning that underpins this research, before turning to the research design and research methods.

4.2 Research paradigm: ontological and epistemological positioning

The mode of inquiry is said to be guided by a research paradigm, "a basic set of beliefs that guide action," the action being the research activity (Guba, 1990, p.7). Embedded within the paradigm are ontology (defining the form and nature of reality) and epistemology (defining what can be known and how it can be known) guiding the chosen methodology (Crotty, 1998). A paradigm is based on our ontological and epistemological assumptions about reality; it shapes the way we view and interact with our social world. This, it is important to take into account Usher's caution (1996) that "all research is based on an epistemology even though this is not always made explicit (p.11), as ignorance of this leads to research being considered only as 'technology', that is, as simply a set of methods, skills and procedures applied to a defined research problem." In response to this observation, I will discuss the epistemological and ontological underpinnings that have guided my research study. Questions of epistemology and ontology have their significance both in the philosophy of social science and in designing the methodology and research techniques of a particular investigation.

The ontological position relates to the questions of "What can be known?" studying the nature of reality itself. Two viewpoints can arise from this question, that is, whether the world observed by a researcher actually exists, independent from a subject's individual perception (ontological realism), or whether the observed world is constructed from subjective influences (constructionist ontology). Epistemology is concerned with the nature and forms of knowledge (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 7). Epistemological assumptions are also "concerned with providing a philosophical grounding for deciding what kinds of knowledge are possible and how we ensure it is adequate and legitimate" (Maynard, 1994, p.158). Epistemological and ontological questions are interconnected, as what can be known (epistemology) depends on our assumptions about what exists (ontology). Similarly, the nature and form of existence (ontology) determines the way it can be known (epistemology). According to Walsham, (1995a), the underlying philosophical assumptions of the researcher in qualitative research,

such as a case study, can be positivist, interpretive, or critical realist, which leads to much contention in social science research. Each of these ways of knowing structures the method for conducting research. The distinction between these different traditions lies in the ontological philosophy to which each school of thought adheres. Ontological positions can be described as realist or relativist. A realist ontology sees the world as made up of stable, independent structures and objects that have cause-effect relationships with one another. A relativist ontology, in contrast, rejects such a view of the world and maintains instead that the world is not the orderly, law-bound place that realists believe it to be.

The ontological positioning of positivism is one of realism. Realism begins from the position that the social world is much like the physical world available for systematic analysis. Realism is the view that objects have an existence independent of the perception of the knower or observer (Cohen et al., 2007). While positivism rests on the assumption that the social world is governed by general laws and social phenomenon follow a cause and effect relationship. This view emphasises the human behaviour can be controlled though discovering and altering the overarching casual relationships (Esterberg, 2002). Adherents of the positivistic paradigm believe that researchers can go forth into the world impartially, discovering absolute knowledge about an objective reality. Hence, knowledge is advanced through the process of theory-building in which discoveries add to what is already known. Meaning resides solely in objects, independent of the researcher's consciousness. Positivists' aim is to formulate law, thus yielding a basis for prediction and generalisation. Therefore, the researcher and the researched are seen as independent entities. According to Walsham (1995a), the positivist position maintains that scientific knowledge consists of facts while its ontology considers reality as independent of social construction. Within this framework, the discovery of observable and non-observable structures and mechanism, independent of the events they generate, is the goal of realism (Outhwaite, 1983).

Madill et al (2000) distinguish between three realist epistemologies: naïve, scientific, and critical. Naïve realism assumes a simplistic position to truth; it considers that the world is largely knowable and is just as it appears to be, provided the research instruments and methods are adequately crafted (Niiniluoto, 1999), while scientific realism states that we can and actually do have some knowledge of the observable and unobservable aspects of the world, although this may sometimes be fallible. Critical realism, however, rejects the positivist paradigm and its claim to objective and value-free knowledge (Hatch, 2002).

Critical realism takes the position that knowledge of reality is inherently subjective, and reality itself can remain relatively objective and unchanging. Critical realism shares the epistemological positioning of the constructionist and ontological positioning of realism. For critical theorists, the world is made of the structures that have a real effect on the lives of the individuals that have a place in the course of history (Hatch, 2002). It contends that our perception of knowledge is shaped by social conditioning and cannot be understood independently of the social actors involved in the knowledge derivation process. Within the critical realism paradigm, knowledge is both socially constructed and influenced by the social structures and power relations that circulate through them. Thus, according to the critical theorists, researchers should be looking for the "political and economic foundations of our construction of knowledge." (Gage, 1989, p.5). In a critical realism paradigm, the aim is to emancipate human beings (Lather, 2006).

Given that the research carried out in this thesis assumes that reality is socially constructed by and between the participants who experience it, the existence of multiple-constructed reality is my espoused position, reflecting a relativist ontology. This assumes that meaning is embedded in the participants' experiences and that this meaning is negotiated through the researcher's own perceptions (Merriman, 1998). This is because the data collected and the results of this thesis have been interpreted by me as the researcher. In contrast to the paradigms discussed above, a constructivist-interpretive paradigm underpinned my research study (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994). Constructionism holds that knowledge, truth and reality can never be truly known because an objective world that can be discovered, measured and quantified does not exist (Pring, 2004). Truth and meaning do not exist in some external worlds, but are created by the subject's interactions with the world. Meaning is constructed, not discovered, so subjects construct their own meaning in different ways, even in relation to the same phenomenon. Hence, multiple, contradictory, but valid accounts of the world can exist. For constructivists, the reality is the product of human mind, which is developed socially; as people's developers change, their reality also changes. Thus, constructivists aim to investigate, describe and interpret the intersubjective meanings that are embedded within cultures, languages, and symbols (Schwandt, 1990); in a constructivist paradigm, the aim is to understand the phenomenon (Lather, 2006).

Since there are multiple realities, according to constructivists multiple interpretations related to the different researchers are valid. Guba (1990) maintains that if realities exist only in the

mind of the participant, to reach them, then would seem to be through subjective interaction. This approach privileges subjectivity over objectivity and examines the multiple experiences and shared meanings held among groups of people. Researchers and participants join in the reconstruction process in the study together, and therefore, it is neither desired nor possible for researchers to be distant and objective (Hatch, 2002). An interpretive researcher examines a particular case. Thus, such research fits well with a constructivist view of knowledge, which holds that knowledge is not independent of the knower, and for that reason, it will sit well with the philosophical understanding on which this study is based. Furthermore, Creswell (2009) suggests that the way interpretivist researchers and informants interact, their dialogue, and the context are critical aspects of data that influence the meaning that is constructed. Finally, a constructionist view acknowledges that meaning cannot be absolute and objective. Thus, my own understandings, influenced by my background and social surroundings, as well as my academic knowledge, will have a bearing on the findings. It is important, therefore, that I account for myself in the conduct of the research.

4.3 Research approach: a case study with ethnographic tools

The research paradigm that best fits this understanding and knowledge of reality is that of ethnography. Although, according to the pioneering anthropologist, Bronislaw Malinowski, the goal of ethnography was "to grasp the native's point of view, his relation to life, to realise his vision of the world" (1922, p.25), ethnography has moved on from this naïve idea of a reproduction of reality and Geertz's contributions in the development of ethnography with the focus on 'thick descriptions', and "continuous dialectical tacking between the most local of detail and the most global of global structures in such a way as to bring them into simultaneous view" (Geertz, 1999, p. 61). For Geertz, the aim of ethnography is to capture concepts that for another person are experience-near, and position them in experience-distant theories. Thus, my research aims to reflect Geertz's emphasis on thick description while observing the limitations within which educational research is conducted. In view of the above, the research was designed as an ethnographic case study. Both ethnographic methods and case study designs offered the guidance and support that I believed my research would require. Therefore, I include case study as well as ethnographic reporting methods in this study. As defined by Lecompte and Schensul (1999), ethnography promised to support the development of insights into the questions of interest. They wrote:

Ethnography is an approach to learning about the social and cultural life of communities, institutions, and other settings that is scientific, is investigative, uses the researcher as the primary tool of data collection, uses rigorous research methods and data collection techniques to avoid bias and ensure accuracy of data, emphasizes and builds on the perspectives of the people in the research setting, and is inductive, building theories for testing and adapting them for use both locally and elsewhere. (p.1)

A main reason for employing ethnographic methodologies was that one ethnographic feature is an "analysis of data that involves explicit interpretation of the meanings and functions of human actions, the product of which mainly takes the form of verbal descriptions and explanations, with quantification and statistical analysis playing a subordinate role at most" (Flick, 2002, p. 228). Ethnography is a social science research method that involves not just observation, but up-close, personal experience and possible participation. An ethnographic approach allows the researcher to study people in their everyday context and to employ a wide range of sources for gathering the material (Hamersley et al., 2007): "The central purpose of ethnography is to describe a social world and its people with empathy" (Emerson et al., 1995, p. 68). Erickson (1986) describes ethnography as "a description of people and their actions or behaviour. It describes the everyday, routine of culture."(p.71). It aims at developing descriptions of society or social groups and, thus provides organised explanations of the details of people's daily lives. Therefore, it is suggested that ethnographic researchers immerse themselves in the particular culture or social structure of a social group in order to achieve an in-depth understanding (Robinson 2002).

According to Lather (2001), ethnography's popularity lies in "getting close to the practical ways people conduct their lives and a deeper understanding of how the everyday gets assumed" (p.202). Ethnography involves 'immersement,' in which "what must be taken into account is what has been overlooked" (Strathern, 1999, p. 5). Although it was not possible for me to 'immerse' myself in the assessment, teacher evaluation, and QA at the Public High College, my aim was to get as close as possible to these activities as they were played out by different participants, both through observation and semi-structured interviews. Ethnographic description also sets the scene for the macro analyses by drawing on different data sources, thus taking into account the wider context that was active in ESL teacher identity construction. I thereby adhered to a thick description, which, according to Geertz (1975), is the most defining feature of ethnography. In paying attention to details in description, the aim

of the researcher is to unravel webs of meaning within cultures and more accurately and empathetically interpret meaning and form an understanding of the particular culture. Ethnography's strength is the role the researcher plays in analysing the web of 'cultural structures, knowledge, and meaning through observation and then questioning the meaning of the behaviour through interview. Ethnography, then, is a detailed way of witnessing human events in the natural context in which they occur (Hammersley and Atkinson 1983). An important aspect of ethnography and of engagement in fieldwork is that it allows rich, longitudinal and in-depth analysis of the research field (Denzin, 1997). Typical ethnographic research employs three kinds of data collection: interviews, observation, and documents.

Ethnographic fieldwork could have constituted the whole approach in this research. However, as the phenomenon of identity construction is a complex issue and could be seen to be bound up by the practices of a particular field, I combined ethnography with a case study approach.

Case study is a method that enables a researcher to interpret larger social processes and to examine the data closely within a specific context. Drawing on Yin (2009), Visconti (2010) interprets case study as most useful for generating theory. According to Stake (1995), case study is a "strategy of inquiry in which the researcher explores an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single functioning unit that circumscribes the investigation" (p.21). He further added "cases are bounded by time and activity, and researchers collect detailed information using a variety of data collection procedures over a sustained period of time" (as cited in Creswell, 2009, p.13). Case study was appropriate for this study, since I am particularly interested in exploring, interpreting, and generating in-depth understanding of 'the case' of the ESL teachers' identity construction in Omani HE. First, a geographical boundary needs to be clearly established: I focused on a public college in HE in the elite area of Muscat. Regarding the time boundary, the research is limited to between 2012 and 2015. The boundary around the topic studied is the most difficult to define, yet it is crucial to do so to avoid collecting too much data or degenerating into simple description. The limitation of boundaries has a theoretical dimension, involving the selection of only the data relevant to the research questions. The use of case studies is an established way of doing ethnographic research in which a larger social process is interpreted through careful examination of an indicator group. Creswell (2009) explains that the strength of case studies is that they employ multiple sources of evidence to investigate a contemporary phenomenon, within its real-life

context, particularly when the limits between phenomenon and context are not closely apparent.

Overall, rather than aiming for breadth, this study concentrates on depth. In most cases, a case study method selects a small geographical area or a very limited number of individuals as the subjects of study. The key characteristic that singles it out from other research methods is that it focuses on an object of research in a real setting. Case studies allow researchers to concentrate on the experimental knowledge of the case while paying close attention to the influence of its social, political, and other contexts (Stake, 2005). A case study is like a snapshot image of a place, group, or individual, where "the general objective is to develop as full an understanding of that case as possible" (Punch, 2005, p.144). It is about the process rather than the outcomes, discovery rather than confirmation, (Merriam, 1988, p. xii). Sociologists (Merriam, 1988; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003) have categorised case studies in a variety of ways. Yin (2003) divides them into exploratory, descriptive, and explanatory. The first is most relevant here, as it moves beyond pure description and links the case to generating theory. It allows the case study to be placed in a conceptual framework, rather than it being viewed in isolation. This fits well with my research aim in that I am looking to generate theory from data, rather finding data to test a theory.

The following sections describe the researcher's identity, setting, participants, data sources, and data collection procedures, and data analysis.

4.4 Managing and navigating research identity: Insider/ outsider

It is said that a researcher's identity and background influence the research questions and interactions as well as access to the research site and research participants and the kinds of data that they generate (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow 2006). Therefore, it is important for researchers, especially for those utilising a qualitative methodology, to clarify their roles to make their research credible. Researchers who undertake qualitative studies take on a variety of member roles when they are in the research setting. These roles can range from complete membership of the group being studied (an insider) to being a complete stranger (an outsider) (Adler and Adler, 1994). Furthermore, I consider that researcher identity or positionality is never fully fixed; it is always moving between domains, such as the field, academia and the personal. This section presents some reflections on the research process when researching

involves the researcher's home country, as is the case with my research. It reflects on the positions and roles I have played as researcher and the divisions between fieldwork and academic life. I reflect on the researcher's role when detached from the research space and subjects, whilst at the same time being theoretically engaged with the problem.

This recognition of positionality requires reflexivity, which helps to shape this ethnographic case study thesis (Rose, 1997). By reflexivity, I mean the ability to reflect on the positionality and experiences of 'I' in the fieldwork (Rose, 1997). That is, the researcher has to be aware of the ways in which biography, that is, the self; the social structures of gender, class, and ethnicity; and the economic and political conditions of the researcher may influence both the research process and the research outcomes.   In my case, being an international student and a 'native' in the field enabled me to bring both insider and outsider perspectives. I was able to highlight the advantages and challenges of being at the same time a local in the field and an outsider in the academic space. I have experienced the feelings of being an insider and outsider, in both places. Being an insider and having professional experience meant that I had an advantage in being able to identify, understand and adapt to different cultural groups. As a local in the field, I could read codes of behaviour, which helped me to access the research participants, and obtain more spontaneous responses.   Feeling local in the field also challenged me to treat the familiar as unfamiliar.

Hamersley and Atkinson (1995) suggest that when the researcher is studying a familiar setting, it is necessary to look at it as a stranger in order to make explicit the assumptions that are taken for granted in that culture. Furthermore, Asselin (2003) suggests that it is best for insider researchers to gather data with their eyes open, by which she means that although the researcher might be part of the culture under study, he or she might not understand the subculture, which points to the need for bracketing assumptions. Therefore, I questioned attitudes, behaviours, and options usually seen as normal and taken-for-granted by some interviewees or myself, tackling the problem from an outsider's perspective. Thus, doing a PhD abroad has enabled me to gain an outsider view.

I will now shift from considering my insider/outsider location to examining participants' perceptions of me. Although I felt myself to be a local in the field, my interviewees may not have perceived me as a peer. Thus, I tried to keep to a marginal positioning, e.g., not attempting to intervene and presenting myself as neutrally as possible. In other words, as

explained by Thomas (2011), most overt ethnography involves moving between the observer-as-participant and participant-as-observer roles. In this respect, most writers agree that marginal positioning is the best place to be. I found that one of the most tiring aspects of doing ethnography was finding a balance between the different roles one has to play. Being constantly alert to how one is being positioned by the participants in the field as well as positioning oneself to get the best out of the situation is emotionally tiring. I found that keeping on good terms with teachers while avoiding looking strained or irritable required a significant degree of thought and emotional management. I was constantly questioning whether the host community sees the researcher as an expert and thus someone to be welcomed, or views them as a critic and therefore as very unwelcome.

I was perceived by some teachers as an expert, and by others, I was perceived as a critic who was going to disrupt and disturb the status quo. Some teachers were very protective of the college and its management and perceived my research a threat that would disrupt what they perceived to peace in the college. Others perceived my research as a tool to find dirt on the management. On the other hand, some of the teachers wanted to use my research as a vehicle to improve the situation and bring in changes; for example, one said: "Why don't you suggest these changes to your friend in the management?." These teachers perceived me as an authority figure and wanted me to talk to the management to make improvements. In contrast, teachers who were in positions of leadership tended to control my research by continually interrogating my intentions and my methods, and by questioning the credibility of my research. I was constantly negotiating these different roles while simultaneously trying to manage research relations. I played all these roles within the research process. Indeed, locating myself in different positions in the field and academia challenged my comfort zones and, at the same time, allowed me to develop good field skills. It also helped me to tackle the research problem from a double perspective, that is, both as insider and as outsider.

4.5 Research design and methods

This section provides a short overview of the research and of its timeframe, e.g., entry to the field, selection of the research site, negotiating access, documentary analysis, conducting the observations, period of observations/informal interviews, semi-structured interviews, selection of respondents, keeping a diary, and the research ethics.

4.5.1 Entry to the field

The timeframe for entering the research field for data collection was from mid-December 2011 to mid-July 2012, as stated in the research proposal. After seeking ethical approval from the University of Sussex, in early December, and prior to data collection, a letter was sent to the officials in the Ministry of Manpower explaining the research and requesting written permission to conduct the research (see Appendix A). I had well-established professional relations with the officials at both ministry level and college level, so entry to the field was immediate. My professional relationship with the officials at the ministry level and the college level dates back to 2006 when I was promoted to the position of head of the English Language Centre at one of the seven colleges under the ministry. In my professional capacity, I had met with these officials many times and shared views about teaching, curriculum, and policies. Equally, I shared with them the same language, religion and ethnicity. These factors facilitated my access to teachers and meetings and secured me a desk in the teacher's office.

After I had successfully established contact with these officials, the head of the English Language Centre at the Public High College invited me to attend their end-of-term meeting to introduce myself and my research to the teaching community. This meeting took place on the last day of the first semester (29 December 2011) just before the teachers' break. I was introduced to the teachers by the HoC as the former head of the English Language Centre at one of the regional colleges who was currently working on a research project. Being introduced as a previous head of department at an affiliated college caused me to have some genuine concerns about some possible interference or limitations regarding my interactions with these teachers. I re-introduced myself, placing an emphasis on being a researcher as well as having a background as an ESL teacher and as having previously served as head of the English Language Centre for some time. In addition, in my commitment to be open about the context and purpose of the research project and about my own positionings, I distributed an information sheet to all my participants at this meeting. The information sheet was part of the supporting documents that I had presented to the ethical review committee at the University of Sussex (see Appendix B). Prior to its circulation, the teacher information sheet had also been piloted with teachers at another HE institution (see Appendix C). The feedback had been positive, with just a few typing mistakes noted by the teachers. All the teachers had felt the invitation letter was clear. Based on the teachers' feedback, the invitation letter was amended prior to copies being made for the research site and research participants.

4.5.2 Research site

As stated in my research proposal, I had consciously refrained from conducting my research at the college where I had worked as a teacher and had held my last position as HoC some months before starting my doctoral programme at the University of Sussex; this was for several reasons. The first reason is that at this college, I was more likely to identify key players, power differentials, differences and dynamics, and although these advantages were immediately available to me as an insider researcher, I had other concerns. The benefits of being a member of the group one is studying include acceptance, trust and openness; therefore, one has a starting point (the commonality) that affords access into groups that might otherwise be closed to 'outsiders'. It is generally presumed that access is more easily granted to the insider researcher and that data collection is less time consuming. However, in my own case, these potential benefits could have caused more harm than good to my research. First, I had been one of the key players at this college, and this could have increased the power dynamics between myself and my potential research participants during formal and informal interviews. I was concerned that the teachers would perceive me as their HoC rather than as a researcher from the University of Sussex. Undoubtedly, "people's willingness to talk to you, and what people say to you, is influenced by who they think you are" (Drever, 1995, p.31). In addition, the senior local teachers held me responsible for the tension and power dynamics that existed between the local teachers and the non-local HoC. There was resentment about this non-local HoC from some of the senior local teachers, which was vocalised on different occasions. The current HoC had been appointed to the position as a result of my having recommended them for a less senior position at the time when I was HoC. Because of these circumstances, my research would have suffered, and my presence would have caused more tension.

The second reason I refrained from conducting my research at the college were I had worked was that I was familiar with the teaching community there. Clearly, insiders will undoubtedly have a better initial understanding of the social setting because they know the context; they can understand the subtle and diffuse links between situations and events, and they can assess the implications of following particular avenues of enquiry (Griffiths, 1985, p.211). What is much more debatable is whether or not this heightened familiarity leads to thicker description or greater credibility. This familiarity, I reasoned, might blind me to certain aspects of the setting that I took for granted. I was concerned that my insider knowledge and experience could lead to a loss of 'objectivity' (DeLyser, 2001). It is also possible that the researcher's

perceptions might be clouded by his or her personal experience; thus being a member of the group, they would have difficulty separating their personal experience from that of the participants.

The third reason I refrained from conducting my research at this site was the location. The college where I had worked was considered a regional college; thus, I had experienced less contact with the MoMP, and the college was not perceived as a hub that linked the seven colleges with MoMP. Moreover, it was less influential in terms of developing the practices and processes that were linked to the teaching, assessment, and hiring procedures. Therefore, I was concerned that my location within this regional college would limit my access to broader and wider context. Instead, I chose to move my research to Public High College. Although I was familiar with teaching, assessment, and teacher hiring and appraisal practices in Public High College, I had no prior contact with the teaching community there. Similarly, I was not familiar with the processes and procedures this particular college followed in implementing educational practices.

4.5.3 Research participants

When I started the study, I had a strong sense that there were differences in the ways native and non-native teachers of English were treated in the workplace. However, when I started my fieldwork, I realised the differentiations were much more complex. There were important hierarchies in which sometimes the fact of being local was important in the distinctions made between different groups, but at other times, other hierarchies were in play. Therefore, to let the reader understand what might be involved, I have indicated the backgrounds of the teachers, that is, their national and linguistic background as well as gender, as in some locations and in some settings and contexts, these become important whilst in other settings, they have no importance. There were two significant groups. The first group comprised local teachers and included a variety of ethnic groups in terms of the language and the dialects and prominent tribes. In the context chapter, I have discussed how there are different ethnic and language groups in Oman. However, these were not felt to be significant in the hierarchies that were evident in the research context. Therefore, a single term is used for that group, and there is no differentiation between those ethnic or language groups. The second group of teachers was the non-local teachers, and this was a larger demographic group. There were teachers from Kachru's (1985b) core English countries and others from the Indian sub-

continent as well as teachers from Kachru's expanding circle (see discussion of Kachru in Chapter Three).

I use the terms 'local teachers' or 'locals' to refer to Omanis and 'non-local teachers' or 'non-locals' to refer to groups other than Omanis. I use the terms 'local' 'and 'non-local' as the overarching terms to later highlight the hierarchies and privileges that were embedded within the official structures and which were reserved for Omani nationals only. The non-locals or the non-Omanis were not included in these official structures or in privileges that were embedded within these official structures regardless of their nationality, gender, and linguistic background, while the locals had their own positioning within these official structures. However, in other settings, there were other hierarchies that cut across nationalities, linguistic background, and gender. In order to indicate the different hierarchies that were in play in producing further hierarchies between the non-local groups, I also highlight teachers' nationality and gender. I am aware how broad these categorisations are, and in my analysis, I will be stressing how networks sometimes cohered around these groups, but sometimes cut across them. I am focusing on the complexity of these social networks, and I do not make claims that are based on radicalised assumptions of my respondents' affinities. Respondents gained from social networking and the complexity of these networking.

In my sample, I included teachers from different nationalities, genders, and linguistic backgrounds and in different positions within the college. I wanted to hear from teachers, teachers who were in administrative positions, and the administration. My sample included fourteen local teachers; 7 of these local teachers were in teaching positions and the other 7 teachers were in various administrative positions. My sample also included eighteen non-local teachers. Again, the non-local respondents were a diverse group from different nationalities, genders, and linguistic backgrounds. Some of these non-local respondents were in teaching positions, and others were in different administrative positions. My sample also included management from the regional colleges. Furthermore, it was important to include the views of the management in the regional colleges, as further hierarchies and power differentials cut across between the college where I conducted my research and the regional colleges.

4.5.4 Managing anonymity and confidentiality

As stated in the ethical form submitted to the University of Sussex, I have given and will continue to give the colleges, the teachers, and members of the management team pseudonyms in all presentations of the research study to ensure confidentiality. However, complete anonymity was difficult to achieve in this ethnographic case study. In one of my analysis chapters, I have demonstrated the struggle that existed over different administrative positions and the differential value and locations of these positions within the official structures. Therefore, it was important to use the actual title as indicated in the official documents, and this raised a concern for me. However, all my research respondents in managerial positions have since left Public High College and no longer work under the same ministry. In addition, some of the research respondents in administrative positions have left to conduct doctoral studies, and others are still in their positions. My decision to use the actual title as stated in the official ministry and college documents could indicate to their immediate teaching community who these respondents are. However, there is only a slim chance that their identification will be known to the outside community, especially as the college has been given a pseudonym, and the administrative positions created by the college internally are not announced to the outside community.

Equally, I have provided figures to illustrate colleges in Oman. These are for illustrations and they are not actual representation of the college where I did my research study. All computer data were kept on my personal laptop, to which I alone had access through a password. The recordings will be erased once the study has been fully completed. In addition, hard copies of the data will be destroyed after the dissertation has been successfully defended and all papers have been published. The recorded interviews were identified by number and semester and not by name and were stored on one device kept securely with access restricted to myself. During transcription, the use of headphones ensured that no one else could hear the audio-taped interviews. Additionally, any publications arising from the research will be presented in such a manner so as to ensure that participants and the location remain anonymous as much as possible.

4.5.5 Documentary analysis

According to Atkinson and Coffey (1997), documentary materials have frequently been used to provide secondary data or what Hodder (2000, p.703) refers to as "mute evidence". Documents can be important to qualitative researchers, as they yield valuable information.

For Atkinson and Coffey (1997), documents reflect what they call 'documentary reality,' which may differ from that which is available in a spoken form. Nevertheless, Hamersley and Atkinson (1995) argue that although the spoken is usually favoured over the written, to ethnographers, the scrutiny of documentary evidence is considered equally useful, as cultures are self-documenting. Furthermore, Hodder argue that documentary evidence offers another means of exploring the cultural context that is taken for granted by insiders and therefore unlikely is to be articulated. Discourse in the form of written data highlights types of knowledge that may be privileged and the corresponding concepts, values, and beliefs that might be legitimised through such privileging (Fairclough, 2001b; Gramsci, 1971). Indeed, the importance of using documentary materials as a method for collecting data for a case study has been highlighted by a number of scholars, i.e., Bogdan and Biklen (2007); Cohen et.al (2007), and Punch (2005).

I focus below on the discourses that frame teaching practices and student assessment processes in the Oman Academic Standards for GFPs (www.Oaaa.gov.om). For example, grammatical modes (indicated by the finite verb-declarative, interrogative or imperative), voice (active or passive), and semantic chains in the choice of lexicon are common features of formal documents. All these different grammatical modes contribute to positioning social actors in different ways (Fairclough, 1992). Similar to many official documents, the GFPs (OAAA, 2008) make use of modal verbs, such as 'can', 'may', 'must', 'would', 'should', 'could', 'ought to', and 'shall'. When these verbal processes are linked to various actors indicated by the GFPs, a relationship between these different actors emerges. I have not conducted a full CDA as understood by Fairclough (2001b). Rather, the logic of using CDA techniques in this research study was to uncover tensions and contradictions in the GFPs (OAAA, 2008) standards, which may contribute to the production of teachers' identities and their practices and so help to understand how values and practices compete with each other to be represented in the policy statements in the context of Omani HE. In other words, critical policy analysis seeks to investigate aspects of the language in the GFPs standards to examine the part that language plays in producing and reproducing social relations (particularly power and domination between groups of teachers), along with the connections between these relations (Fairclough, 2001b).

Moreover, in addition to policy documents, I reviewed the following documents to help me gain a better insight into the context under investigation: samples of placement tests, and

summative and continuous summative tests. Some of these documents were available online, and others were requested in person through Public High College. These documents supplemented the data that I had collected from other research instruments and so help to provide a rich description of the case, which is important for case study research. The documents uncovered power relations, tensions, and contradictions in different educational practices and processes, which were intertwined with ESL teachers' identity construction at Public High College. Although I included documentary analysis in my research proposal, in the initial stages of data analysis, I did not consider documentary materials as an important source of data. However, once themes began to emerge from interview and observational data, I revisited these documents for more analytical purposes. For instance, some of the contradictory practices that emerged in my interview data in relation to assessment and teacher evaluation that troubled teachers were also visible in the documents.

4.5.6 Interviews

Privileging the person's right to personal autonomy was a guiding concern throughout the research. An important aspect of respecting personal autonomy is gaining informed consent from all participants. However, as Mason (2002, p.82) warns, the issue of informed consent in qualitative research entails a duty for the researcher to engage in "a reflexive and sensitive moral research practice". Therefore, when participants received information about the research, it was presented in a non-technical and understandable manner so that participants were capable of comprehending the information and their right to choose whether or not to participate in the research (RCN 2004b). Aull-Davies (1999) suggests that informed consent must include an explanation that is full and that is presented in meaningful terms, with the researcher identified and with clear identification of other agencies financing or supporting the research. I incorporated this advice into my consent approach: it was made clear to the participants that their right to withdraw their agreement to the interview could be exercised at any time without any negative consequences.

The interview method of data collection makes talk central to the research, as is the case in most qualitative research. Hence, how the interviewee talks and what is said becomes crucial to the credibility of the study's outcomes. Holstien and Gubrium (1995) understand the interview as an occasion for meaning making, where the interviewer interjects him or herself into the interview in various ways. For example, the interviewer and interviewee draw on

mutually familiar events, experiences or outlooks (Holstein and Gubrium, 1995, p.77), not only to establish a rapport, but also to focus the conversation on particular horizons of meaning. In that sense, getting close is not only about intimacy or gaining access to the interviewees' reality, but is also about exploring the processes of arguing and assembling different resources. My appearance, approach, personality, voice, intonation, and overall manner and other aspects of me may have also contributed to gaining access and to obtaining a good response from participants. Thus, I tried to be familiar and not threatening.

In this section, I discuss the strategies I used to connect with my interviewees and to make them feel comfortable and willing to participate. For instance, at the beginning, I was afraid to approach teachers, so I would always approach a teacher whom I considered friendly. I felt a bit out of place, as if I were in unfamiliar territory. Thus, I would always enter a teacher's room with the fear of being ignored, and feeling as if I would be seen as an additional load on their schedule. I interviewed participants in their offices or in a small meeting room. During the collection of personal data, the interviewer aims at creating a welcoming, non-threatening environment in which the interviewees are willing to share personal experiences and beliefs. Scholars refer to this non-threatening environment as creating a feeling of empathy for informants that enables people to open up about their feelings (Taylor and Bogdan, 1998, p.48). Intimacy can be achieved by the unstructured, informal, anti-authoritative, and non-hierarchical atmosphere in which the qualitative researcher and participants establish their relations in an atmosphere of power equality.

Power is always present in the transactions of the interview, as it is in all human interactions. In interviews, power takes many forms and degrees, and we can conceive of the various forms of power constantly shifting back and forth between the interviewer and the interviewee. In this form of power, "both the interviewer and the interviewee are constantly seeking to (dis) equalise their respective authorities" (Nunkoonsing, 2005. p. 699). Many scholars have recognised the fluidity of power dynamics in the interview; therefore, the presumed dominant position of the interviewer within the hierarchical research relationships has been questioned (D'Cruz 2000). I question the presumed dominant position of the researcher in the interview process of researching both up and down. The power of the interviewer rests in his or her authority as a seeker of knowledge and methodological expertise, and the role of the interviewee is as a more or less privileged knower. The interviewer is also in a power relationship with his or her research community. We all want to

do worthwhile, publishable work, and in this respect, the approval of the research community might have to compete with our research relationships with the people we interview. Much of the reason for our ethical emphasis on anonymity is due to the fact that the interview makes public what is often considered private thoughts and behaviours.

The interviewer has to wait and negotiate to build an enabling relationship with the interviewee so that he or she can find new insight into a situation. The interviewer has to attend to what is and is not remembered, pains and pleasures, ego defences and ego expressions, facts and fantasy, needs and wants, desires and hopes, and both expressions and repression. Nonetheless, it might not be possible or desirable to attend to all these tensions before establishing how such dichotomies might be discoursed into being. Despite positioning myself as a researcher having a background as an ESL female, within the context of developing relatively secure research relationships, it is interesting to elaborate how shifting relations between participants, as mediated by these identifications, can be used as a resource within and across interviews. There was no consistency in the way I was identified within the interview contexts; variations occurred depending on which participants I was interacting with (Mullings, 1999). On the one hand, I was a head of the English Language Centre in one of the HEIs, and some of my interviewees were my former colleagues at the same HE institution. Thereby, we shared the similarity of group membership, background knowledge, and understanding. However, this seemingly equal social status, in addition to my insider status, was countered by the social, cultural and personal differences between myself and my interviewees. While some teachers were my colleagues or academic participants, others were not.

Ribbens (1989) highlights differentials power structures embedded within academia itself as felt by both the interviewer and the interviewee and which can cast shadows on the ideal non-hierarchical relationship when interviewing peers. In Oman, importance is given to social status. For example, being a PhD student is not considered a privileged status unless it is associated with a career position. Within this power structure, when interviewing a western woman who was in a managerial position, as a PhD student, I was conscious of my relatively inferior status to my interviewees, who were full-time academic staff. On several occasions, I was asked to wait outside the office of my interviewee until she had completed the tasks at hand, although it was the time for the interview appointment. She was establishing her authority and power through the interview space.

I constructed three interview guides (Appendices F) to assist me in the interviewing process. An interview guide is a list of questions one intends to ask in an interview (Merriam, 2009; Seidman, 2006). The interview guide is not a rigidly structured schedule or protocol, but rather, it is a list of general areas to be covered with each informant. In the interview situation, the researcher decides how to phrase the questions and when to ask them (Seidman, 2006; Taylor and Bogdan, 1998). The interview guides vary slightly due to the different roles of the individuals being addressed (e.g., administration, teachers, teachers in administrative positions), but all of the interview guides address the same topics; I asked parallel questions across all the interviews.

4.5.7 Observations and field notes

In qualitative research, observation is a data collection procedure, and the field notes are the data (Merriam, 2009). Observation was employed to contextualise the data generated in the interviews. My activities are best described as participant-as-observer. Observation added breadth to the research and often provided answers to questions that arose from the interviews. The purpose of the observation was to observe the participants in as natural a setting as possible and to describe the settings. In the early stages of the research, I deliberately assumed the role of a stranger who watches and asks questions in order to make sense of different perspectives raised by the respondents from different levels.

I developed a set of observation guidelines on the physical, the official, and the informal aspects of the college. At the official level, I examined the college rules, learning outcomes, teacher QA files, teacher appraisal form, student exam papers, and other documents. At the informal level, I examined interactions between teachers from diverse backgrounds in the college meeting room and teachers' lounge. I focused on space and embodiment, seating arrangements, movement, the physical distance between teachers and the management during meetings as well as the rules and norms embodied by different groups. The purpose of such guidelines was to sensitise my gaze. These guidelines gave me an opportunity to train myself to notice and to take notes. My particular interest in the physical college-space and embodiment helped in directing my gaze to stillness and silence and to non-events.

The observations were undertaken in the meeting rooms, in teachers' offices, and in the office of the head of the centre. Meeting places are important sites for influencing curricular and resource decisions, and thus are a site for the construction of professional identity. Such

meeting places act as a social space in which certain behaviours, attitudes, and dispositions are sanctioned and reinforced while others are perhaps marginalised, dismissed, or ridiculed. This shows the workings of a professional culture or community that limits, but also unites, groups of teachers. I was interested in how the routines of the meeting room were established and maintained as well as negotiated and challenged. In the meeting room, I made observations of who attended these meetings, the norms of the meetings, who talked and who listened, who set the agenda, what was discussed, and more importantly, what was not discussed. Conducting observations over a six-month period similarly followed the logic that a greater length of involvement with people will lead to a greater depth and breadth of knowledge about them (Wolcott, 2005, p.75). Finally, participant observation further complemented the study in terms of the recruitment of interview participants. The time I spent conducting observations in meeting rooms gave me easy access to potential interview participants. Being present in teachers' offices, the lounge, and meeting places not only gave me an idea of how teachers from different backgrounds were positioned within the college, but also, the process of conducting observations meant that the respondents I approached recognised me as someone familiar to them.

In addition to interviews, I drew on field notes as an important source of data. Field notes as a qualitative method are considered a useful tool in contextualising the data. In addition, such notes add to the thick description in data analysis and make processes and findings more transparent (Bauer and Gaskell, 2000). For Gervais and Jovchelovitch (1998), field notes are important to reveal and understand the gestures and rituals of a given community which are not necessarily spoken about. Bogdan and Biklen (2003) define field notes as the written account of what the researcher hears, sees, experiences, and thinks in the course of collecting and reflecting on the data in a qualitative study. They further highlight that the successful outcome of a participant observation study in particular relies on detailed, accurate, and extensive field notes. Moreover, field notes can be an important supplement to other data collection methods. They can provide any study with a personal log that helps the researcher to keep track of the development of the project, to visualise how the research plan has been affected by the data collected, and to remain aware of how he or she has been influenced by the data (Bogdan and Biklen, 2003, p.lll). In this study, I kept both the descriptive and reflective field notes. As the names suggest, descriptive field notes aim to provide a word-picture of the setting, people, actions, and conversations as observed, whilst reflective field notes are the part that captures more of the observer's frame of mind, ideas and concerns

(Bryman, 2001). For my research case study, field notes were of interest, as they provided another layer of captured analysis.

Through the lengthy progress of collecting interview data with teachers and management, I collected a large amount of field notes as a way of recording my observations. During this period, I took the position of a complete observer (Mulhall, 2003), while aiming to stay flexible in the roles and observe unspoken representations. Being an 'outsider' at Public High College, my attendance allowed me to get to pay particular attention to the structure of the place, how teachers were selected to teach in different programmes, who were the prominent figures in the college, and teachers' roles outside the classroom, resulting in several in-depth conversations (Bonner and Tolhurst, 2002). Careful observation and analysis of the people, activities, and interactions that make up these spaces, and of participants' positions, roles, and identities in different location demonstrate the social geographies of a place: "These micro geographies can offer new insights with respect to research questions and can help researchers understand and interpret these situated institutional" (Elwood, 2000). According to Giddens (1984, p.135), in educational institutions, individuals' positioning and movements are constantly regulated by the timetable. In my research, observational data informed my ability of a 'thick description' and deeper understanding of the way different teachers interacted. Field notes were taken at different official levels of meetings with teachers and with middle managers and at the level of senior managers of the college. The note taking generally followed the pattern suggested by Spradley (1980), focusing on space, actor, activity, object, act, event, time, goal, and observer's feelings.

4.5.8 Research Diary

Although keeping a research diary may seem an informal and personal research tool, it can be a valuable source of data. It provides a logical link to data the researcher has collected through other research instruments. In addition, it helps the researcher gain a better insight into the social event under investigation. Keeping a self-reflective diary is a strategy that can facilitate reflexivity, whereby researchers use their diary to examine the various choices and decisions they undertake during the process of researching (Northway, 1998). Therefore, I kept a research diary during the data collection process. This was influenced by Bourdieu's framework. For Bourdieu, reflexivity promotes awareness of how the field distorts perceptions of reality (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). A research diary is "presented in ways that make it clear how the researcher's own experiences, values, and positions of

privilege in various hierarchies have influenced their research interests, the way they choose to do their research, and the ways they choose to represent their research findings" (Harrison, MacGibbon, & Morton, 2001, p. 325).

In qualitative research, the researcher is considered the primary source of data-gathering. Knowledge gained from qualitative instruments is jointly constructed with the researcher's reflections. Brodkey (1987) suggests that the researcher is "not so much an eye-witness, but rather the creator of its story" (p.112). Therefore, a notion of 'data co-creation' or co-construction is preferred here, as this notion acknowledges the socially-mediated nature of knowledge, making an epistemological departure from the stance that suggests that data 'waits to be uncovered" (Hall and Weiler, 1992, p.4l). Data are regarded here as providing one of many possible such constructions. To be specific, I used a research diary as a means to record the research activities that had taken place during the day and kept reflective accounts on the data collection processes. I also used the research diary space to record my feelings and biases. In addition, I also kept an account of what needed to be done in the following step. For example, by listening to the interviews, I would find out whether I would need to probe some aspects for further clarification in the post -observation interviews or whether the field notes would assist me in focusing on a specific scenario so that I could understand the participants' rationale underpinning their practices.

4.6 Ethical issues

4.6.1 Gaining access and gatekeeping

Gatekeepers are those who give access to a research field. Their role may be allowing researchers into a given physical space, or it may go further in granting permission for research to be conducted in a particular way (Sanghera and Thapar-Bjorket, 2008). Gaining access via the HoC was helpful to ensure that I had access to the teaching community at Public High College and gave my research credibility among teachers and other level managers working within the centre. Although I found that my work relation and friendship with the primary gatekeeper, the HoC, enabled me to gain formal access to the teachers and thus sent out the message that it was safe to talk to me, I needed to negotiate with the informal gatekeepers on number of levels. As part of my permission included having access to the department email system like all other teachers, I requested if emails from examination coordinators, HoC and section heads to teachers could be copied to me. The reason for such request was twofold: I could ask the teachers about their reaction to these memos, and I could

become immersed in the college community. However, I found that the management filtered all the memos; they decided which ones I would receive and which ones would be sent out to the teachers only. This happened quite often.

The primary gatekeeper provided me with entry into the college and first contact with the teaching staff, but not with the trust I needed to build with the teachers in order to establish relationships with all participants and get closer to the everyday life of this community. On the contrary, my initial institutional identity only gave me access to the physical resources and limited access to the centre's email system. It was only with time and the negotiation of relations with the participants that I was able to develop a real insight into the teaching community.

In the following section, I discuss my observations, reflections, and concerns as recorded in my research diary

4.6.2 Balancing between ethical dilemmas and research interests:

In this section, I address the practicality of following ethical guidelines and what Code (1984) refers to as "recognizing the ethical dimension of knowing" (p.7). Ethical frameworks are considered necessary as a way of regulating what the research can, cannot, or should not do in certain areas. These ethical guidelines are important, as they not only prevent researchers from causing harm to research participants, but also, these ethical frameworks are in place to protect researchers from being exploited or put at risk (Coffey, 1999), where research is done in sensitive and dangerous environments. As noted by Hallowell et al. (2005), these ethical frameworks also give credibility to and help to legitimise research. Thus, it is important to observe the university's ethical guidelines through which this research is permitted; equally, it is important for researchers to create their own code of ethics based on their personal and professional understanding of the research field. The suggestion is not that researchers have to make up research rules as they go along; however, observing ethical rules can be challenging and requires constant negotiation. According to Harvey (1990), ethics in research is processional, requires self-regulation (Hallowell et al., 2005), and is mediated through self-reflexivity (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2000).

Observing these ethical codes while conducting the fieldwork, I was constantly challenged with the issues and uncertainties of my ethical decisions, one of which was related to

recognising all research respondents in the knowledge production process and acknowledging that the knowledge both researcher and research respondents bring is not free from tension and complexity (Mauthner and Doucet, 2002). I was uncertain of my interview questions, my level of participation with teachers, and the agenda of my interview questions. I started the fieldwork after being influenced by academic discipline's dominant theoretical framework, which shaped the process of my knowing coupled with institutional and professional processes (Rose, 1997). It was not always easy to hold and bracket my own views about things. One of my observations, which I found from spending many hours at the research site and chatting with teachers from diverse backgrounds, was the way institutionalised practices and processes of assessment had become ingrained in teachers' dispositions. I had these observations as a researcher coming into the centre and had my concerns regarding what to do. I was concerned that any discussion might make visible what was invisible or might make neutral what was laden with issues of power and knowledge. I would constantly ask myself whether I was redirecting teachers' attention to my observations. I queried whether it was my job to record teachers' understanding of things, of the centre, and of teaching, or to help them form a new understanding by disrupting things. Or was I contaminating and overshadowing teachers' reality with my own reality and understanding? Therefore, I kept interrogating my own techniques and my own intentions as a researcher.

As discussed earlier, my main aim of moving my fieldwork to a site other than the one indicated in my research proposal was to increase my gaze. I indicated in my proposal that I was interested in reading teachers' body language and gestures, and that the layout of meetings was a valuable indicator for tension. However, at Public High College, there were no such meetings where debates, discussions between teachers and the administration or amongst teachers themselves were encouraged. This was a constant source of worry; should I move my research back to the college on which I had based my proposal, or should I carry out my research at this college? These concerns about research can be intensified during a long period of ethnographic fieldwork (Hockey, 1996). However, most studies, not just ethnographic research in remote locations, are plagued by constant worries: What am I doing? Am I asking the right questions? Am I missing something obvious? Will they speak to me? Have I got enough data? Have I done it correctly? Feelings of despair that the research lacks clear direction, or feeling overwhelmed by too much data are intellectual struggles that may linger and cause much anxiety throughout the research process, especially during the writing up (Punch, 2004).

4.6. 3 Research processes and building trust

In this section, I describe and reflect on the process of accessing interviewees, why it worked for my research, and how the strategies used were informed by the ethnographic approach. For example, gaining informed consent from research participants is a standard principle in a variety of professional practices as well as in social research; it is the "formulation of a widely recognised moral obligation to respect others and take into account their interests" (Homan, 1991, p.25). Its intention is to ensure that human subjects are aware that they are taking part in research and that their participation is voluntarily. I had prepared a consent form as part of the university ethical regulations; however, I did not ask any of my participants to sign a consent form, as I sensed this would have discouraged them from taking part in my research.

I accessed my participants via different entry points. For example, I used personal contacts (e.g. previous colleagues, friends) to access my research participants. As mentioned earlier, as the interviewer, I had to wait, to negotiate, and to build an enabling relationship with the interviewee so that they could find new things to reveal through acquiring new insights about the situation. Initially, I did not have any selection criteria to apply in choosing these participants. The western section head offered me a list of teachers whom I could approach and whom she thought would give sensible answers and would fit within the institutional framework rather than some teachers who would give inappropriate answers, that is, not some crazy teachers with crazy answer. I did not want to approach the teachers right away. I thanked her for the list, but asked whether, if those teachers were too busy, I could approach teachers who were not on her list. With this arrangement, I started spending time in the teachers' lounges as a way to get to know the teachers and become better acquainted with them by chatting with them first. This, I felt, would make them feel comfortable during our meetings. I would occasionally go to different teachers' offices and chat informally with these teachers.

Initially, I had informal conversations with teachers, and these were not recorded. Later, I felt that I should record these conversations, so I could remember what we talked about and so I could build my interview questions on these informal conversations. I then sent individual emails to all my research participants with a request for permission to record our conversations. All participants welcomed the idea, and one teacher offered to sign a waiver. Two Arab participants declined, but were happy to continue our informal conversations as

long as they were not recorded. One of the teachers felt that with the presence of the digital recorder, he would be less transparent and more reserved with his answers. He said, "I want to be transparent and want to be able to give you an accurate account with no reservations." I respected their position and decided to continue our conversations by taking notes. A total of forty in-depth interviews with 35 participants were carried out. These interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed. There was also a series of more informal conversations, which were recorded as well. The interviews were carried out after meetings, exams, and other occasions when teachers gathered in official settings. In general, the interviews lasted between thirty to forty minutes. The interviews were conducted in teachers' offices, meeting rooms, or on one occasion a suitable space in the college cafeteria.

4.7 Data Collection and analysis

Following the research plan, the data for this research were collected in two phases. The aim of the first phase (from mid to end December 2011) was to discuss the plan and the design of the research with the officials at the MoMP, request the respondents to sign a consent form, and gather any available documents about the college (study site) and the programmes. It was hoped that this would ease the execution of the study as well as grant access to the respondents.

In the second phase (from mid-December 2011 to mid-July 2012), I employed two integrated ethnographic data collection methods, namely, observation and in-depth semi-structured interviews, both of which I discuss in more detail below. Bourdieu (1979) argues for using observations and interviews to create accounts of life, which are multi-layered representations capable of articulating the same realities. Transcribing the field notes and tape-recording the discussions objectifies the subject, and so the task for the researcher is to enable the interviewee to speak about who they are and what their position is, without either collaborating or setting up the objectivising distance that reduces the individual to a specimen in a display case**.**

Data were therefore gathered from a range of sources, such as semi-structured interviews and day-to-day interactions with teachers, and observations in formal settings, such as meetings. As the importance of lengthy and sustained engagement is encouraged in this kind of research inquiry, I spent eight to nine hours at the college every day for a period of six months.

Sustained engagement in research sites using multiple data sources is a distinguishing feature of ethnography as a methodology, rather than a method, and it is central to the research goal of contextualisation. The purpose of multiple data sources collected through sustained engagement is to enable both thick description (Geertz, 1973), that is, observing and collecting everything that may be significant; building up detailed pictures of places, people, and resources; and thick participation. It involves a form of socialisation in order to achieve a threshold of interpretive understanding. Thick description and participation enables the researcher to explore what is significant and what is at stake at specific moments and, importantly, thus to engage with what is significant contextually for understanding teacher identity in a structured setting. Documentary, interview, and observational data were used to contextualise the research and inform my thinking in different ways. Documentary material was particularly helpful in developing focused insight, while the observational data provided a useful account of the hierarchical spatial relations which framed my research context.

4.7.1 Organising the data

In this section, I will explain the data analytical procedures I employed to assist me manage the voluminous amount of data obtained from the main data sources to manageable amounts for data interpretation. As many scholars have pointed out, one of the most crucial stages in conducting the qualitative data analysis is organising the data. Huberman and Miles (1994) suggest that" how data are stored and retrieved is the heart of data management (p.109)". Berg (2007) further affirms that a clear and working storage and retrieval system is critical if one expects to keep track of the reams of data that have been collected, to access and use the data flexibly, and to ensure systematic analysis and documentation of the data. According to Levine (1985) and Wolfe (1992) data management and data analysis are interrelated: there are, in fact, no rigid boundaries between them. In this study, the data consisted of interview transcripts, field notes, and relevant documents. Additional data were in the form of a research diary and artefacts. The interview transcribing processes were rather time-consuming because I had collected such a large amount of data.

4.7.2 Data analysis

According to Bryman and Burgess (1994), the work in which researchers engage in the analysis phase of research is as much implicit as it is explicit, resulting in difficulties in articulating how data have been analysed. Here, I will describe the approach that I employed to analyse both my interview and documentary materials. To analyse my interview data, I

employed a thematic analysis approach. Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, describing, analysing, and reporting themes and patterns within a data set in rich detail (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The process of thematic analysis is to generate meaningful categories, themes and patterns by carrying out a conceptual mapping from the main data sources, namely, the interview transcripts and the field notes. I decided to use this method for its flexibility and relative ease of application for a novice qualitative researcher such as myself (Braun and Clarke, 2006). First, I identified the main themes that emerged from my data and helped answer my research questions. The themes provided a rich description of the data set related to a broad research question, from which three sub-research questions were developed (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The thematic approach was later supported by the theoretical approach, enabling both data and theory to work together in constructing the social reality at the Public High College (Bourdieu, 1986).

When I analysed the data, I paid particular attention to the threads that tied together separate pieces of data by examining the relationship between elements that contributes to teacher identity production. Data were analysed manually without the use of any special software programmes. The key themes that emerged from the data in relation to ESL teacher identity production at Public High College include how assessment, QA, and teacher evaluation practices were implicated in teachers' identity struggle, the significance of the physical location of the teachers and the colleges for their identity production, and the changes that were emerging with the restructuring of the Omani HE system. To answer the first research question (see section 1.3), I analysed the documentary materials that I had collected during my fieldwork. To answer my second research question, I analysed both interview and observational data, while for my third research question, I engaged again with my interview data, which were manually coded, now using a different highlighter. In keeping with the case study approach, the aim of the analysis was not to make grand claims concerning identity formation in Omani HE or to make claims about the generalisability of the research; rather, the aim was to focus on the particularistic and context-specific ways that teachers' identities were constructed.

The documentary analysis involved both content and thematic analysis, which helped in providing insights into the emerging tensions and themes, the emergence of new assessment procedures, the emergence of QA agendas, and the western influence on the Omani HE system. I analysed the relevant documents using content analysis. Content analysis is a

thematic and categorising approach used both in qualitative and quantitative research (Berelson, 1952). The aim of this approach is to analyse different types of data, such as textual, verbal, printed and/or electronic communicational messages (Elo and Kyngas 2007; Zhang and Wildemuth, 2010). In analysing the documents, I used a summative approach to qualitative content analysis. Given my linguistic background, I applied some elements that are associated with discourse analysis. Both methods were useful in further explaining the overarching research question. First, I identified general features of the text, such as the tone of the text, the official level of the text, and its linguistic features, such as the modal verbs the text used to establish the kind of relationship between the OAAA and the HE providers. This also helped to understand how the Omani QA model positions itself globally.

4.8 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed my research methodology, my research design, and my research methods. Furthermore, in this chapter, I have given a depiction of the research context and the different participants, and I have provided some insights into the way I made these decisions. In summary, qualitative research methods were an appropriate match for the purposes of this study. This study provides both description and analysis, which made it possible to answer the research questions. I now turn to the presentation of my data analysis.

Chapter 5: Positioning Student Assessment and Teacher Evaluation within the Omani National Education Frameworks

5.1 Introduction

This chapter answers my research question 1.b through macro level analysis: How are ESL teachers' identities constructed and produced in Oman and can that construction be understood at a macro level? It examines the anomalies between two discourses; the discourses of teaching practices which are positioned in social constructivism and the discourses of learning and issues to student access, diversity and equality which are constructed in behaviourism and technical discourses as well as the positioning of teachers as constructed within these policy texts. The focus of this chapter is on the QA texts as spaces/fields that framed the practices of assessments, learning, teaching and teacher evaluation and the potential tensions within these practices, which were then explored during my ethnographic fieldwork at Public High College. Also, since the aim of the research is to explore the emergence of new fields of practices and new vocabulary in Omani HE system through the lens of capitals and field, it is important to highlight these fields of practices and the differential values that are attached to them. Policy is more than a stagnant document; the way different social actors are positioned and the way educational practices and processes are explicated in policy affect both the positioning of teachers and their practices, without there being any assumption of any direct 'transfer' of policy into practice. Although policies are usually dealt in a technical way, they are here seen as spaces for struggle, always co-implicated in teachers struggle for identity positioning.

These official texts on assessment and teacher evaluation practices and processes were analysed by considering the language that was used in framing the document, the objective and the purpose of such documents (see 4.6.2 for methods used in analysing these documents). The general description of the text, sections, and sub-sections, and the tone of the text were considered in the analysis. Documents analysed for this study included the Omani National Education standards for the GFPs (OAAA, 2008), in particular, selected sections in relation to the student placement test, formative and summative assessment, and teacher evaluation (see Appendix D). In addition, my analysis focused on ROSQA (OAAA, 2004). Other documents analysed were the Public High College sample placement test, and sample summative and continuous summative exams (see Appendix E). Official documents from the OAAA website are resources and reference tools available for the study

(http://www.oaaa.gov.om). Having access to and an understanding of documents on the research topic improves the richness of information for the qualitative study and provides insight into the policy context. Apart from sample tests, templates for documenting grades, and result reports, which comprised pass and fail, there were no other official documents in Public High College that explained how different kinds of assessments were to be understood and realised. Furthermore, there were no documents in relation to grading practices. Therefore, some of the analyses in this section are drawn by comparing different kinds of tests that were conducted at Public High College, of which, in my professional capacities, I have personal experience as, of course, I also have of wider practices. On occasions where there were no documents, I supplemented certain points with a commentary drawing on my professional experiences in this context.

5.2 Academic Standards for the General Foundation Programmes: Textual Features

Prior to undertaking an analysis of the standards for the General Foundation Programmes (GFPs, OAAA, 2008), I will provide a brief background and description of the text. Between 2001 and 2004, a set of standards for HEIs and processes for institutional and programme accreditation, along with the first iterations of the Oman Standard Classification of Education Framework (OSCED), an institutional classification system, were collated and published in one document, the aforementioned ROSQA. Unlike the standards for the degree programmes, which are all collated in one document (ROSQA, OAAA, 2004), the standards for the GFPs were developed in 2006 and published in a separate document. The need for clear standards for the GFPs was identified by the HE sector itself. In 2005, three conferences were held to develop these standards. SQU held the first of these three conferences in May 2005 with the recommendations of establishing broad standards and QA measures to guide foundation programmes. The second conference was held by the MoHE, and a third conference focusing on HE entrance standards, called 'Bridging the Gap', was conducted between SQU and the MoHE (Caroll et al., 2009). Although the standards proposed as a result of these conferences held no formal status within the Omani National Education Framework, they were considered an important first step towards the establishment of a set of standards for accreditation purposes (Caroll et al., 2009). In 2006, the OAAA led a project to establish internationally benchmarked academic standards for the GFPs. All these documents are publically available via the OAAA website (www.oaaa.gov.om).

The OAAA's purpose in writing this document is to give information to HEIs regarding its minimum requirements for the management of teaching, learning and assessment for GFPs accreditation. Whilst the OAAA is supposedly only providing information to the HEIs, it is also implicitly demanding action. The document is thirty pages long, including the content pages and appendices. The inclusion of a logo with a national emblem in the document indicates its official status. The document is structured into six sections, and its format is similar to that of many policy documents. It begins with an introductory section, which starts by making a direct reference to a ministerial order, thus positioning the document within a national legal framework: "Following the decision of the HE Council No. 13/2008, H.E. the Minister for Higher Education issued Ministerial Decision No. 72/2008 stating that the General Foundation Programmes should be adopted by all public and private HEIs operating in the Sultanate of Oman" (OAAA, 2008, p.4). The two rationales for the GFPs accreditation criteria, positioned within the introductory section of the document are assurance of minimum quality standards and efficiency of provision. Statements such as "Oman's Academic Standards set the minimum requirements that the programmes of study are expected to attain" and "these standards seek to help ensure that those programmes are of an appropriate quality and are effective in helping students attain the prescribed student learning outcomes" (OAAA, 2008, section 1.2) establish the framework for the GFPs accreditation standards.

After providing the rationale for the GFPs accreditation criteria, the document positions the standards within the international HE context by making reference to international benchmarking in developing the English language standards, requirements, and guidelines. For example, in section 1.5, the text states, "The process (of developing standards) involved national and international benchmarking, a review of past and current national experience, and leading national and international academicians." Section two describes the conceptual design framework of the GFP standards. Pertaining to the four subject areas of learning (English language, mathematics, computing and general study skills), sections three to six list the learning outcomes and related standards, resource requirements, and teaching resources, and each section concludes in a less formal tone, making suggestions other than the set policy. The purpose of these sections is to explain to the HEIs the context, goals, and rationale for the GFPs accreditation and to prepare these HEIs to comply with these requirements and the accreditation process. Having provided a brief background about the document, my analysis

will now focus on section three, the learning outcome standards for the English language and the focus of my research.

In analysing the field of the text, it is possible to identify various readerships; these are mostly explicit, but sometimes implicit. The first and foremost reader is the MoHE and various public and private HE providers. Being an official text, it is also addressed to the various stakeholders who participated during the consultations. The text is also the presentation of the OAAA's declared intentions, and it addresses the general public and international QA agencies by appearing to follow the educational practices and processes that are recognised by these international organisations. Although the Omani HE sector does not make explicit the borrowing of educational practices and processes, and references to formative and summative assessments as well as to international professional qualifications, such as CELTA and DELTA, and to teacher appraisal and professional development, the text signals its entry into this major international trend of regulating and promoting quality education. The GFPs accreditation criteria document as a whole signals the Omani HE sector's conformity to strategies advocated by the INQAAHE process (see context chapter, section 2.6).

The text makes use of verbal processes to construct the benchmarking process of the GFPs and uses the future tense to indicate the high modality and strong agency of the different actors in different contexts. For example, in contexts where the OAAA is the actor, the verbal processes are in the declarative mood, with the future tense indicating high modality and strong agency of the actors; for example, *will utilize standardised duration of study* (2.3d); *OAAA Accreditation Panels will assess GFPs for the purpose of programme accreditation* (1.3c); *Accreditation will involve assessment of the GPF against these standards* (1.6b); and *each accreditation exercise will involve a single Review Panel* (1.6a). Positioning these verbal processes in the future tense declarative mood gives the OAAA strong agency as well as indicating that the processes that are associated with accountability and accreditation definitely will happen. This kind of use of high modality suggests that for accreditation, the OAAA is clear on what it wants from HEIs and more confident about asserting its authority and the authority of the MoHE in this regard. For example, the document states, "All assessment shall be criteria based and not normative references" (2.4h). A further example appears in section (2.5f), which states, "Any breach of the standards in this section shall

result in disciplinary action by the MoHE and shall, in the case of accredited GFPs, result in immediate forfeiture of the GFP's accreditation."

The text makes use of modal verbs not only to assert the authority of the OAAA over the HEIs in the accreditation process, but also to define the authority of the MoHE. In Oman, programmes recognised by the Qualifications Framework (OQF) must be licensed by the MoHE prior to the first intake of students. For example, section 2.5f states, "This list (referring to students who received GFP certificate) may be audited by the MoHE at any time, and will be included in the scope of accreditation assessment by the OAC." However, for most of the verbal processes of which the HEIs are actors, the text uses the verbs of obligation, that is, the 'must', 'shall' or 'have to' forms of the finite verb, and these are, in fact, commands: *HEI must demonstrate* (2.4f); the HEI shall submit (2.5e); HEIs shall present non-credit certificate of attainment (2.4a); and HEIs shall utilise an appropriate and broad range of assessment mechanisms.

The text also makes use of abstract nominal groups. For example, section 3.3.1c states, "It is desirable that institutions provide evidence of regular staff professional development opportunities in order to maintain and upgrade staff teaching skills." In another example, the text states: "The HEI must demonstrate that the chosen assessment method is effective in determining whether the student has attained the required learning outcomes" (2.4f). These statements reveal that the OAAA is more interested in the management of these arrangements than in performance itself. The OAAA does not want to know simply that these arrangements are in place; it wants to check that they are effective, that is, that they lead to better quality, which in this construction, remains an undefined and empty concept. The implications of this text are that at the decentralised level, HEIs are free to develop their own assessment plans as long as they demonstrate the effectiveness of these methods. It is important to note that the text does not define 'effectiveness' in terms of student assessment. This not only illustrates a certain kind of dilemma, but also adds further to the confusion as the text fails to define the different terminology used in the assessment practices.

The pattern of using abstract nominalisation with relational processes is typical of technical discourse (Fairclough, 1992). This serves to hide more contentious or complex processes in nominal groups that are represented as neutral agents in technical processes. In addition, the use of such grammatical patterns serves to hide the agency of the OAAA, particularly when

the action being described is related to accountability. For example, the agency of the OAAA is deleted in the following examples: *these outcomes are the result of carefully planned and executed formal programmes of study* (1.3), *the standards seek to help ensure that those programme are of an appropriate quality* (2.4) *and the process involved national and international benchmarking* (1.5b). The grammatical pattern closes off questions such as 'Whose definition of quality is advocated here?', 'Whose plan?', and 'Whose interests are involved in the development of the GFP standards?', and the effect is to make the process appear value-neutral and objective.

5.3 Silences in the Omani National Education Frameworks: ROSQA document

The Omani National Education Framework through ROSQA (OAAA, 2004) makes the claim that its standards for good practice are inspired by practices in international HE. This is evident in this quotation: "This chapter describes what is generally considered good practice in quality assurance in Higher Education internationally and includes suggested quality indicators and performance measures" (OAAA, 2004 p.57). From having been a research student in a UK HEI, I am aware of QA texts in the UK context claiming to attend to principles of equity, fairness, and inclusion. However, my documentary analysis below will show that the Omani QA model fails to make a connection between what is considered code of practice in HE in programme design and student equity to access, equality, and inclusion, which are at the centre of HE in the UK. For example, in ROSQA (OAAA, 2004), student access to Omani HE is defined in terms of technical equity and takes two meanings. In the first instance, it means making HE available to a large student population through paving the way for private HEIs, as reflected in the statement below:

> Because of the need for equitable access throughout the Sultanate, new private universities were approved for the major regional cities of Sohar, Nizwa and Salalah, as well as for the capital, Muscat. (OAAA, 2004, p.10)

In other words, student equity in access is understood to be achieved by the massification of HE and the rise of private HEIs in major regions in the Sultanate of Oman. In the second instance, regarding access to HE, in Section 5.3.5, ROSQA appears to suggest that equity in access could be achieved by providing "access to necessary learning resources for all courses offered" (OAAA, 2004. p.77). It seems, then, that equity in access to HE in ROSQA is to be

conceptualised and addressed from a technical perspective, thus positioning these concepts within technical discourses. This could be perceived as contradictory and exclusionary, and it could lead to problematic practices within HEIs. This focus on technology within ROSQA seems unlikely to address student access issues. Furthermore, use of this kind of technical definition could be perceived as a tactic to overcome exclusionary practices, as I also suggest later in my data analysis.

I also explored how the concept of diversity is explicated in ROSQA (OAAA, 2004.) Diversity has multiple meanings in HE (Chang, 2002a). It frequently refers to racial diversity (Chang, 2002a). Some research findings link students' ability to communicate in English with advantages of flexibility and adaptability to various work environments (Crossman and Clarke, 2010; Kehm, 2005). A similar notion is noted in Oman, as connections are increasingly drawn between the importance of HE, competitiveness, and economic development. Accordingly, HE is viewed as central to economic development and vital to competitiveness in an increasingly globalised knowledge society. As explained in the context chapter (see section 2.4), because English is taken up as the language of communication in Omani HE, communication in English is viewed as a key tool for integrating and maximally benefitting for students.

Thus, English language proficiency becomes a central tool for students to penetrate, integrate, and work within different work environments. However, ROSQA does not explicate how diversity should be understood and be taken forward in the Omani HE system. ROSQA refers to diversity in two occasions without positioning it within a theoretical framework or linking it with student outcomes. In the first instance, diversity is associated with the emergence of different programmes or areas of studies, which both public and private HEIs offer to students, as in this example: "This diversity (referring to programmes that are outsourced from outside the country as well as programmes generated locally) has the advantage of offering a range of choice for students. At the same time, diversity also creates the possibility of confusion" (OAAA, 2004, p.11). In this instance, diversity is perceived negatively and as a concern for the accreditation processes.

In the second instance, diversity is related to the "breadth and diversity of the background of academic staff, the country where the highest qualification was obtained, ethnic background, and other relevant criteria." (OAAA, 2004, p.88). Then, the understanding of diversity and

its agenda is limited; apart from making reference to academic staff and qualifications obtained from different countries, and different degree programmes, there is no reference to diversity in relation to proficiency in English in expanding and maximising students' learning experiences. Such limited and technical views seem likely to affect the ways Omani policy makers and educators place importance upon diversity or understand their mission in terms of educating global citizens. Equally, the document does not make any reference or acknowledgment to indicate that students are to be perceived as diverse. There are no opportunities within the official space to interrogate ethnicity, gender, language, tribal affiliation as factors that could contribute to discrimination. The same is reflected in the avoidance of discourses of diversity. Therefore, all educational reform efforts appear to focus on issues such as enhancing teaching quality and updating the curricula, and on the efficiency and effectiveness of HEIs, thus reducing education to merely technical problems and solutions.

Furthermore, it seems ROSQA avoids the inclusion of words such as 'minority', 'disadvantaged', and 'underprivileged'; these groups of students are not mentioned either in ROSQA (OAAA, 2004) or in GFPs (OAAA, 2008). It seems there is acknowledgment within the GFPs that "some students require substantially more English tuition than that for which the GFP provides. In these cases, it is recommended that the HEI provide such students with access to appropriate additional support, either directly or by referral" (OAAA, 2008, p.11). However, the text was careful not to categorise these students using terms referring to learning difficulties or dyslexia. This kind of positioning is problematic and creates barriers in the development of academic support infrastructures for access, equity, or equality of opportunity. Again, my analyses of students' results reports and of internal audit reports show that apart from academically weak students, any references to students using terms such as 'learning difficulties', 'dyslexia', or 'mental health difficulties' are absent from these official discourses. This does not mean there are no dyslexic students or students with other learning difficulties; it simply means there is no proper infrastructure to support these students. This could mean their problems could be misrecognised, and they could be perceived as problematic students and/or students with behavioural and attitude issues. However, in that case, how these students are handled could raise questions. The construction of and attention to student diversity is constrained by such discourses. Again, this kind of language could be perceived as exclusionary by not recognising students with learning difficulties.

One could conclude that the way diversity and equity to access are conceptualised and understood is distant from the way they are positioned elsewhere in international HE. Then the claim made earlier in ROSQA about borrowing its higher educational practices from international contexts is not substantiated, as shown in my analysis. Moreover, there is the assumption that positioning these issues within technical discourses produces equitable assessment processes for students, a position I will challenge through my document analysis. Because student equity of access to HE in ROSQA is not explicated and not linked to assessment design, wrong practices and barriers to student access to HE are still influential in Omani HE. This is also evident in the documentary analysis in the following sections.

5.3.1 Student admission processes to higher education

In the previous section, my analysis focused on the OAAA's standards for good practices and the claims it makes about the legitimacy of these standards by positioning them within international HE contexts. My analysis focused on the problematic positioning of discourses in relation to student equity to access and diversity. In the following section, my analysis will focus on the implications of such problematic positioning in relation to student assessment practices, that is, the placement test at Public High College. As explained throughout this thesis, embedded within student assessment practices and processes are power relations, tensions, and contradictions that were integral and constitutive of teacher identity construction. Therefore, it is important to provide a textual analysis of these different tests and the differential value attached to different assessment practices and processes at Public High College and to consider the impact of these on teacher practices.

However, first, it is important to provide the reader with a brief description about the student admission processes in Omani HE. Student admission processes to HE in Oman are relatively opaque, and with no publicly available admission criteria and/or policy, it is hard to make any significant comment on the process at the national level. There are two entrance selection criteria in place; the first is based on student secondary school marks, and the second aims to facilitate the social mobility of students from disadvantaged backgrounds. However, there is no access to information on social mobility criteria or on how many places are reserved for these students each year. Moreover, there is no information about how the group of disadvantaged students can be further categorised, that is, whether based on marks alone, and/or other socio-economic factors. Such information is not available to the public and remains far from public scrutiny and formal QA processes; thus, student application forms

are treated covertly. Although transparency on quality is said to be one of the important conditions set forth by the OAAA to regulate the Omani HE sector, the lack of transparency in the admission processes contradicts such positioning. In such an unregulated environment, one would query the extent to which the admissions process can be considered to be equitable, transparent, and publicly accountable.

However, a brief account is presented here based on my own professional involvement as head of the English language centre in one of the public colleges (2007 to 2010). The term 'admission' is used to refer to the process from when a potential student develops an interest in entry to HE until enrolment in a particular HEI and course takes place. Admissions to public colleges and the SQU, in Oman are the responsibility of a centralised admission authority. Admission to HE is open to all those who have successfully completed secondary education and passed all their final examinations. Student admission into HE is based solely on the national secondary school leaving examination. Students apply to HE through an online central admission process. They twice complete an online form on the central admission website corresponding to their first and second semester results. Then, at the end of the secondary school year, the automated system filters and classifies students into different categories. A quota system is used to determine access to HEIs. Using this system, the higher a student's score on their school leaving results, the greater the chance they have of being accepted.

Access to HE is through two pathways. The first pathway is through government funded HEIs, which are further classified into Colleges of Technology and Vocational Training Centres. The second path for students into HEIs is through non-government funded private HEIs. Students with high marks in the national examinations are given a choice to study either at what is considered to be the top public university in Oman (SQU), or abroad in America, Australia, Canada, the UK, and other international destinations. Students who score above average marks are placed into one of the government-funded HEIs or non-government funded private institutions under a full local scholarship. Students with average or below average marks are placed on a partial scholarship, either locally or internationally, if they fulfil other conditions. There are students who pass the national examinations, but do not meet government funding criteria for a full or partial scholarship. The families of these students, if financially capable, fund their education, and those with no financial support are forced to join the job market or the vocational centres.

Public High College receives a quota from the national admission centre to equip students with English language skills, general study skills, and mathematics and computing skills as a requisite to fulfil the GFPs requirements as established by the OAAA. The student quota is divided into two intakes: the September intake and the January intake. It is the responsibility of Public High College to accommodate students from both intakes; they must make available all educational provisions to these students and prepare students for technical college education for a minimum of one academic year and/or extend their resources and prepare students in four semesters. The academic year at Public High College is divided into three semesters, and the length of the semester varies. The first semester, which starts in September, lasts for 14 teaching weeks excluding exam weeks, while the second semester, which starts in January, lasts for 12 teaching weeks, and finally, the third semester, which starts in April, lasts for 8 teaching weeks.

5.3.2 Placement test at the Public High College: problematic practices

HE at the technical education level takes place through the medium of English (Caroll et al., 2009). The introduction of the GFPs in 2008 represented a compulsory entrance qualification for Omani degree programmes (Caroll et al., 2009). As discussed in the context chapter (see section 2.9), GFPs are designed and used to provide English language and other academic support to students who are about to embark on their educational journey in the Omani HE system. Based on the same official statement, "A GFP entrance assessment is required to determine whether a student already has met the required GFP learning outcomes" (OAAA, 2008, p.7), the GFP entrance assessment is considered a tool to determine students' English competency level and has implications for students' access into and attainment in Omani HE. Despite suggesting that the student entrance and exit have to be the same, as reflected in the statement: "Assessment for GFPs is unique because the assessment for the entry and exit are essentially the same, i.e. designed to determine whether or not the student meets the learning outcome standards" (OAAA, 2008, p.7), the document does not explicate how the GFP entrance assessment is to be realised by HEIs. p.7), the document does not explicate how the GFP entrance assessment is to be realised by HEIs. Equally, GFP (OAAA, 2004) does not provide a framework of reference for English competency levels, even though proficiency in English is considered crucial for students' academic success. Furthermore, the document does not provide the English language descriptors necessary to discriminate between different competency levels and leaves the reasonability of developing GFP entrance and exit

assessments to individual HEIs, as indicated in this statement: "Each HEI will have the responsibility for developing its own methods of assessment" (OAAA, 2008, p.7).

This means that the criteria for determining English proficiency levels might be different for different HEIs. In addition, this might lead to disparity between private and public HEIs. For example, in public institutions, where there is pressure for the government to fund English language programmes for students who come from public mainstream schooling with limited English, it seems possible that issues of quality, equity, access, and educational outcomes might be in conflict with administrative burdens and expenditure. Equally, the pressure might be in the opposite direction for private HEIs, where students pay for English language programmes, and other academic programmes may tend to keep students in language programmes longer. A lack of explication regarding how language proficiency is defined, and what tools and criteria are to be used in evaluating students' proficiency level, may further create social barriers for students when moving between different HEIs and open up room for problematic practices. Then, one would query the OAAA's claim in adopting standards for good practice, as explicated in ROSQA (OAAA, p.7), without linking this, for example, with assessment practices. In addition, it seems there is an assumption about the neutrality of assessment tools within the OAAA's documents and the ability of these tools to produce fair and equitable student outcomes.

Before focusing my analysis on the paper-based placement test used in Public High College and the regional colleges, it is important to explain why, in the research context, 'placement test' is used as opposed to 'entrance exam', as it is understood in international HE contexts. Public HEIs use the term 'placement test' for students who have been given a provisional acceptance to complete their HE, but have not yet demonstrated their competency in meeting requirements for the General English language standards, as explicated in GFPs (OAAA, 2008). As explained in the context chapter (see section 2.9), mainstream education in the public sector is delivered through the medium of Arabic with little emphasis on English, and students must go through a GFP, a necessary transition stage from Arabic to English. The placement test is used as a tool to determine students' proficiency level in English language and determine the level of English language support students will require to help them to succeed academically. Therefore, a placement test is perceived to be crucial in signalling students' language skills in English and the level of linguistic support students require to ensure equitable access in integrating into the academic life.

The placement test at Public High College is paper-based, and it is used to categorise students across the four language levels: pre-elementary, elementary, intermediate, and advanced. It is important to note that the definitions of the four English language competency levels used in the research context do not necessarily correspond to international classifications of students' competency levels. Furthermore, there are no official documents in Public High College that demonstrate how the four English competency levels were developed and what proficiency framework Public High College adopted in defining the different proficiency levels. Public High College used cut-off scores as a complementary process to help determine students' English attainment level and thus categorise students across the four levels. Although in some countries, the cut-off scores are set by state policy, in Oman, there is no policy at a national level that decides the cut-off scores; HEIs have the freedom to design their student placement tests and to decide the cut-off scores. Public High College introduced a cut-off mark plan with the aim of determining the beginning and end of each level. However, there is no evidence in the college documents about the criteria the Public High College used in developing these cut-off scores or the scientific basis of such a decision.

The table below shows the cut-off score for each proficiency level used in the Public High College.

Cut-off score marks	Corresponding levels
0-20	Pre-elementary level
21-50	Elementary level
51-70	Intermediate level
71-85	Advanced level
Above 85	Skip the foundation programme; full or part

(MoMP, n.d.)

To show how the placement was perceived at Public High College and its value within this educational structure, I compared it to the exit test (summative test) or, as it is known at Public High College, the Level Exit Exam (LEE). According to the OAAA, both entry and exit exams should be designed to determine whether the student meets the learning outcome standards (OAAA, 2008). However, my analysis of the LEE and placement test shows that both tests differed on many grounds. First of all, the value attached to the LEE was high stakes compared to the value attached to the placement test, which was perceived as low

stakes. In other words, if a student scored zero on the placement test, s/he would still be qualified to pursue a degree in HE. However, the same situation was not applicable when assessing students' results on the LEE. In fact, the college bylaws state that if a student fails the LEE twice throughout the English Foundation Programme, s/he will be dismissed from the college:

> The foundation year comprises three semesters. In case the student fails in any of the semesters, he/she will have the opportunity of repeating *only* one semester….student's registration at this stage will be cancelled, if the allotted time ends before the student passes…. level exit exams (College Bylaws, 2004, page 33)

Second, the placement test, in principal, should assess to what extent students have met the learning outcomes as outlined in the GFP standards and as it is reflected in this statement: "entry and exit are to be designed to determine whether or not the student meets the learning outcome standards" (OAAA, 2008, p.7). In order for the placement test to measure adequately these learning outcomes standards, the placement test should follow the content and format of the LEE. Content analysis of both the placement test and LEE shows that both tests differ in terms of format and content. First of all, LEE for exiting the programme had four components; listening, speaking, reading and writing. The writing component is forty minutes long; the reading component is 40 minutes long; the listening component is 35 minutes long; and the speaking is ten to fifteen minutes long. Because of the long duration of the LEE, the speaking component is administered separately on a different day. The placement test comprises 100 questions: 52 are 'fill in the blanks' vocabulary items and 48 are multiple choice grammar items. The placement test lasts two hours. The objective of including these details is to demonstrate that the design of the placement test allows little room for measuring the standards of the English language as explicated in the GFPs standards (OAAA, 2008). For example, the specified English language competencies that students should acquire according to the GFP Standards (OAAA, 2008, page, 10) are communication skills, critical thinking, and study skills. The LEE measures these competencies through the four language skills: listening, reading, writing, and speaking. The placement test, on the other hand, measures only students' grammar knowledge and vocabulary; there are no writing, listening, or speaking components to measure students' abilities in these skills.

In addition, the placement test was not subjected to the same standards of reliability and validity as the LEE. In order to ensure the reliability and validity of the score obtained

through the LEE, Public High College introduced systematic moderation processes. However, there was no evidence that similar processes were in place to check the reliability of the placement test results. The college used teachers' judgment to refine the results to support student placement decisions as long as teacher judgment did not put additional strain on physical and human resources. After students were put in different English classes, home group tutors were advised in the first week to encourage student interaction and to give students writing tasks to further refine the placement test decisions. At the end of the week, the home group tutors sent to the administration a list of those students who were recommended for a higher level. The college administration then gave a more comprehensive test to these students to make a further decision about their English competency. If the students, for example, had been placed in the intermediate level, and their home group tutor recommended they be placed in the advanced level, they would have to pass the LEE for the intermediate level. However, based on the college internal plan, the administration did not accept any recommendations for the students to go a level lower than their current level. These were some of the processes that were developed in Public High College to complement the design of the placement test. In other words, student self-assessment and teacher judgment were considered only if the decision helped to place the student a level higher. On the other hand, the same criteria would not be applied if it meant the student had to go to a lower level, as this decision would have financial implications. Furthermore, there was no evidence that showed teachers were provided with any kind of training to refine the placement test decisions. Equally, there was no evidence to demonstrate how consistency across teachers in implementing these guidelines was measured by Public High College. In my view, the above issue raises questions regarding the reliability and validity of such results for classification decisions. In addition, one might ask if local expediencies (e.g., the numbers of students to be accepted in particular classes) might determine student class allocations, as well as how this might affect student progress.

We can see from the analysis the differential values attached to entry and exit exams and the tensions and contradictions that are embedded within these assessment practices and processes and the implication of these for teacher practices and in particular the likelihood that such texts would contribute to contradictions and conflicts within these (see sections 7.2, 7.3, 7.4 and 7.5).

5.4 How assessment and teacher evaluation are conceptualised in the Omani National Qualifications Framework

Before I present my analysis here, it is important to mention the lack of research into QA in this context. The OAAA website gives information about standards and procedures for quality audit and institutional and programme accreditation of HEIs. However, there is no background information about the QA model adopted in Oman. My extensive search of the literature included using key terms, such as 'QA model' and 'Oman' using three main search engines, namely, Ethos, Google scholar, and Scopus, coupled with some snowballing from one text to another. The search led me to 25 articles, a book chapter, and 3 theses. None of the theses I searched provided an analysis about the Omani QA model.

5.4.1 How teaching and learning are taken up in the GFPs

The desire for the Omani HE system to be acknowledged within the international HE context led to its engagement with the kinds of assessment that have been developed within these international contexts. The OAAA introduced new assessment processes for teachers and institutions to draw upon: "in order to ensure that the learning outcomes have been achieved and to avoid institutions focusing solely on exam results, a variety of formative and summative assessment methods could be considered" (OAAA, 2008, p.11). Two interesting points can be noted from this move to introduce formative and summative assessments. The first is the recognition by the OAAA that both summative and formative assessments should form the framework for assessing students' learning experience. Secondly, and more importantly, is the apparent confidence in introducing formative and summative assessments, which seems to imply that these assessment policies are straightforward and can be easily transferred from one context to another without any discussion of the underpinning theories that might guide these different forms of assessment.

However, the GFPs (OAAA, 2008) do not provide any working definition for these assessment methods nor do they introduce any guidelines as part of this new intervention. Equally, the document was silent about teachers' role in formative assessment and about how it expected teachers to combine formative assessment with teaching. Was it, for example, for certification purposes and/or to promote access to HE or for the development and improvement of learning? There is only one reference to summative and formative assessments in the entire document (OAAA, 2008, p.11). It seems of paramount importance

that policies introducing aspects of formative assessment need to leave the understanding of their intention open to interpretation if they are to be successful in promoting learning. The assumption in the Standards for the GFP (OAAA, 2008) that assessment could be realised with no overt reference to values, beliefs, or theory is problematic.

For example, the concept of formative assessment has evolved in a western context, conditioned by certain assumptions about the teachers' occupational culture, the systems of support for promoting quality in teachers' assessments, and the characteristics of the educational system. Equally, the brief mention of assessments in the GFPs and placing these under the section for offering advice may have contributed to potential tensions and the way these were deployed at Public High College. Equally surprising is that in international contexts, such as the UK where I was a doctoral student, assessment designs are linked to issues such as student equity of access, although in the Omani context, no such reference is made. In addition, this brief introduction about assessments is positioned under "Advice from the GFP Academic Committee" (OAAA, 2008, p.11); this gives the impression that these assessments are not given serious consideration by the OAAA.

There is no deliberation in the standards for the GFP (OAAA, 2008) about the underlying structure of formative assessment procedures in relation to its purpose or practice nor does the text discuss issues such as validity and reliability. Such positioning of assessment discourses suggests a tacit acceptance of their orthodoxy. Further analysis of the GFPs and ROSQA (OAAA, 2004, 2008) shows that there are two contrasting discourses at play in relation to teaching and learning. The reference in GFP (OAAA,2008) to CELTA (Certificate in Teaching English to Speakers of other Languages), DELTA (Diploma in Teaching English to Speakers of other Languages), and Trinity TEFL (English Teachers Training Course) indicates a commitment to a constructivist understanding of learning and a shift in the role of the teacher from being a transmitter of knowledge to being a facilitator, as is further expressed in this statement: "Methods of teaching are designed to develop specific student attributes and skills, rather than simply to transmit information" (OAAA, 2001, p.68).

However, at the same time, the document positions the learning standards within Bloom's taxonomy (1956): "In order to ensure their androgogic effectiveness, the standards were crafted taking into account a learning taxonomy derived from work started by Bloom et al" (OAAA, 2008, p.5). The use of Bloom's hierarchical (1956) *Taxonomy of Educational*

Objectives in the GFPs suggests an implicit positioning of learning that is associated with behaviourism. Each of Bloom's taxonomies is hierarchical, with any higher level subsuming all objectives beneath them in the hierarchy. Whilst the taxonomy relating to the cognitive domain has proved useful for analysing cognitive demand, whether at the stage of constructing curricula or of assessing students' performance, it has to be used with reference to the epistemological level of the subject material. For example, the word 'comprehension' can be identified in, for example, writing skills at various language competency levels from beginner to advanced, but carries very different meanings as progressively more content is subsumed. However, an important issue to consider is that this approach is highly teacher-led and operates in a top-down way, rather than actively engaging a fully involved learner. One could argue, then, that whilst teaching methods have moved in the direction of constructivism, approaches to learning are still heavily couched within behaviourism. This raises questions about whether assessment has remained inappropriately focused on testing.

It seems that the OAAA has adopted elements from both behaviourist and cognitive constructivist learning theories in developing GFPs, thus potentially creating tensions between teaching, learning, and assessment.

5.5 Teacher positioning within the GFPs standards

This section investigates how teachers are discussed in the GFPs (OAAA, 2008). The types of authority those teachers and other social actors are seen as holding in making decisions in relation to teaching, learning, and student assessment practices and processes, what they are obliged to do, are the focus of the analysis. One would expect teachers to be highly visible as social actors in GFPs (OAAA, 2008). The term 'teacher' occurs on seven occasions: eight in relevance to student grading practices, once in the context of student behaviour in class, and once in reference to student assessment practices. In reference to teacher contributions to student grades, GFPs specify the number of marks a teacher can give that contribute to student certification. It states that a teacher may give: "a few marks (3 to 5 marks) to students for their in-class participation, attendance, punctuality in turning in homework and coming to class" and in another example it states that a "teacher can give (2 to 4 marks) to (students) for keeping and updating a log of new vocabulary they learn in all courses" (OAAA, 2008, Section 6.4.1a, d and e). In reference to teacher involvement in designing assessment methods, GFP states that "comprehensive exams could be prepared either by the teacher or

the institution" (OAAA, 2008, Section 3.4.2). In relation to a student's respect for the teacher, GFP states that as part of the student accepting their responsibility, they should "show respect for teachers and others and their rights to have a difference of opinion" (OAAA, 2008, Section 6.2.1e). In GFP (OAAA, 2008), discussion of aspects such as curriculum design and implementation and assessment design is directed towards higher education providers (HEPs). In GFPs (OAAA, 2008), for instance, accreditation is granted to an HEP or licensee (person who holds a license) subject to ensuring the GFPs are effective in helping students attain the prescribed student learning outcomes in at least four areas, namely, English, mathematics, computing, and general study skills, and provide high quality teaching and assessment of students" (OAAA, 2008, Section 1.2). The GFPs (OAAA, 2008) make very little reference to teachers, although it offers extensive discussion of the role of HEPs, for example, in relation to curriculum development and delivery, as well as teaching, learning, and assessment. Although there is likely to be an implicit expectation of teachers' compliance within their HEIs, the ways teachers' contributions are misrecognised in these texts indicates the ways QA developments can contribute to a de-professionalisation of teachers' work. In relation to assessment, teachers' contributions are largely reduced to the marking of prepared tests. Although, there is an attempt in GFPs (OAAA, 2008) to move away from a culture of testing or examinations to a mixed system of assessment comprising quizzes, observation, research projects, portfolio and presentation, the emphasis on giving grades for student participation and coming to class places value over grades that contribute to student certification. In addition, allocating as few as 5 marks from the overall number of marks diminishes teachers' control over student marks and gives the power of rewarding marks to the institution (s). Furthermore, not explicating the teachers' role in designing assessment mechanisms diminishes their authority in writing and designing exams to a technical role of grading students' exams only.

However, the role of teachers in assessing students' English language skills and the intended learning outcomes is implied in the accreditation process: "The HEI must demonstrate that the chosen assessment method is effective in determining whether the student has attained the required learning outcomes" (2.4F), rather than being directly stated. The probable effect of teacher invisibility in the GFP standards may result in teachers having little or no agency. In contrast, it is likely that named social actors, such as HE providers, will hold some agency as they are referred to in the standards. Not naming teachers in the sections of GFP that guide curricula, teaching, and assessment practices, disregards teachers' qualifications. Teachers'

authority is potentially affected by the way the practice of teaching, learning, and assessments are outlined in GFPs (OAAA, 2008).

Equally, the text makes a brief reference to teacher evaluations; these are not linked to career track and tenure. Furthermore, the field of teacher professional development is more associated with QA requirements in the research context, where it is taken up to address QA requirements. However, in the Omani context, teacher professional development is taken up differently. Teacher development is understood more as responding to the need to meet the criteria of accountability in QA and is less concerned with improving teaching and learning. This has contributed to the both formal and informal teacher evaluation practices being operated side by side, as I will further argue in Chapter Seven.

5.6 How assessments were conceptualised at Public High College

The analysis of this section is based on content analysis of the summative test or, as it is locally known, the LEE; continuous summative tests, which in the research context are referred to as Progress Tests (PTs); and teachers' role in class assignments and homework assignments (see Appendix F). In addition, my analysis includes observations I carried out during my fieldwork of exam conditions and procedures. My observation during exams included positioning myself, before tests were administered, in the collection room where teachers collected tests packs as well as accompanying exam coordinators on rounds during exams as part of the monitoring exam procedures. I observed exam conditions for both LEEs and PTs. In addition, I carried out observations in rooms where the grading of LEEs was taking place. However, I could not observe any marking of PTs, as the grading of tests took place in private places or off-campus places, such as teachers' offices, their home, or coffee shops. Finally, I make general comments about the speaking test and the way it was administered based on my own professional engagement and in my capacity as a teacher in the research context and later as an HoC. Speaking tests were not recorded in the research context and therefore, again, I present no detailed analysis; because of such issues, it was difficult to rely only on content analysis to depict how assessment procedures were realised at Public High College.

In the research context, two forms of tests were in use: summative tests (LEEs) and continuous summative tests. The continuous summative test comprised two forms, namely,

formal (PTs) and informal (teacher designed tests/assignments). In the formal dimension, PTs follow the same format, content, procedures, and structured conditions as that of LEEs. The PTs performed a summative function and contributed to certification. PTs were expected by college officials to reflect a cumulative process of achievement that fed into the final LEE and classification of the student. Owing to their role in grading and certification, PTs were standardised and took place under structured conditions using clearly defined assessment procedures and plans. The term 'standardised' in this context usually refers to consistency in test design, content, procedures, criteria, grading, and documentation to ensure comparability of the results across students. PTs occurred twice a semester under Progress Test One (PT1) and Progress Test Two (PT2), and LEE took place once.

As its name suggests, the purpose of the LEE is officially to mark a student's exit from one level and entry to the next, and it takes place only at the end of the semester. First, similar to LEE, PT1, and PT2 were designed by the examination coordinators and administered and graded by teachers to sum up achievement as a grade or mark on which promotion or certification was based. Second, modelled on the LEE, PT1 and PT2 consisted of four components, namely, listening, reading, writing, and speaking, which were tested separately. Listening, reading, and writing were organised within a criterion-referenced framework. For example, students' performance in listening, reading, and writing was measured against stated criteria in the GFPs to ensure comparability of results across students. In other words, students' performance assessed by the tests in listening, reading, and writing were compared with a stated criterion in the GFPs.

Although I have not observed speaking tests, from my own experience and discussions with teachers after speaking about the tests, it was evident that the grading of the speaking test was organised within a norm-referenced framework. In other words, students' achievement or performance was compared to that of other students within the same class. As for the speaking component, evidence from the content analysis of tutors' assessments showed that the actual content items varied widely in their scope and depth from group tutor to group tutor. Furthermore, there was no consistency in the test duration; tests ranged from five minutes to ten minutes. Although grading was guided by explicit grading schemes or assessment criteria, there was no mechanism in place to validate tutors' assessment procedures and to check for the reliability of marks derived from them. Third, similar to the LEE, PT tests were subjected to some limited form of moderation. There was no double

marking, and only teachers who were new to the system were asked to submit graded tests to the Section Head for Curriculum and Teaching Methods for vetting to ensure consistency and fairness in grading. In the research context, home group tutors were involved in grading their own class for PT1 and PT2 as well as documenting these grades, whereas for the LEE, home group tutors were not allowed to grade their class nor they were allowed to see the graded test scripts of their class. There was the assumption that assessments where home group tutors were involved in the grading of their class were formative in the research context.

The second dimension of informal continuous summative assessments (CSA) encompassed marks from homework assignments and in-class assignments. Compared to formal PTs, the informal component was loosely defined, and there were no formal guidelines regarding how informal CSA was to be operationalised to aggregate marks consistently. Teachers were advised by the college officials to give a minimum of two homework assignments and two in-class assignments per unit and per skill - mainly reading, writing, and listening. However, there was no evidence that tutors were conducting their assessments under a clearly defined structure or plan. Some teachers prepared their own assignments, and others used old formal PTs from the common test bank, which was made available on the college server. With no clear suggestions outlined to guide college tutors about how they were to incorporate informal or teacher-made assessments into their teaching plans and delivery, many tutors used these old PTs as the reference for what should go into CSA practice. Frequently, the task items for assignments were the same as those used for the summative examinations, but broken down into mini assessments. These mini assessments (each of which was summative in character in that the results were aggregated into students' overall test scores) were considered to be a formative form of assessment in the research context.

Thus, though college officials were labelling teacher-made assignments as formative assessments, the only difference between teacher-made assignments and standardised tests was that students were allowed more time to complete them. Equally, there was no mechanism in place to promote consistency and fairness in the grading of informal tests; nor did the college officials develop any procedures to moderate teacher-derived marks. In addition, not all assignments were graded, and not all graded assignments were used as part of a student's aggregated CSA score. There was no evidence that these grades were audited by the college officials although they provided teachers with a template for gathering, processing, and recording the marks students obtained in all activities for their records. The

template only allowed numerically produced marks to be recorded to describe a student's attainment. In addition, the template required teachers to record summative marks only and did not make any provision for descriptive statements of students' progress, which could have helped teachers to address any difficulties that were hampering learning. This kind of template design suggests the purpose of informal CSA was for certification rather than for improving students' learning. At the end of the semester, teachers derived two best marks from the range of activities for each component, that is, listening, reading, and writing. The aggregated marks from individual tutor assessment were combined with marks derived from the PTs, and the result was used to inform decisions about students' progress to the next level.

Then, students' aggregated marks were sent to the college officials to be added to the LEE results for the purposes of grading. This practice could be problematic, as there were no mechanisms in place to ensure the reliability of such practices. Besides, such a method of aggregating scores from various assessments without any clear description of the learning domains they represented would make it difficult to interpret the total score in terms of what has or has not been achieved. These practices would therefore make it possible for CSA to be used as a mechanism to improve students' chances of meeting the exit standards for the GFPs. The distinction between both forms of assessment was blurred, and both assessment activities were designed to sum up achievement as a grade or mark on which promotion or certification would be based. Moreover, some CSA was high stakes, and some was low stakes (this being the formal/informal element). The extent to which any of it was 'formative' (i.e. contributing to student learning) was not clear. The key point, therefore, is that whilst CSA can incorporate formative intentions, it can also involve grading for the purposes of accrediting learning in that students can be subjected to ongoing summative assessments and testing.

5.7   Conclusion

In this chapter, I have analysed two official documents, namely, the GFPs (OAAA, 2008) and ROSQA (OAAA, 2004), in relation to student assessments, learning, teaching, teachers, and teacher evaluation (www.Oaaa.gov.om). In addition, I have carried out a content analysis of the forms of sample assessments that were in use at Public High College, drawing on my professional experiences in this context to supplement this analysis with a commentary. The focus of this documentary analysis chapter was on how teachers, learning, teaching, teacher evaluation, and student assessment practices and processes were constructed in these

documents and the differential values attached to them. The Omani QA model clearly borrows from different international practices, including the introduction of discourses relating to learning outcomes and objectives, and to formative, summative, and continuous summative assessments, without however clarifying how these interrelate. For example, there is disjuncture between the discourses of teaching practices which are positioned in social constructivism and the discourses of learning and issues to student access, diversity and equality which are constructed in behaviourism and technical discourses. Therefore, it is important that the procedures which are used to develop different assessment practices are based on learning theories that derive them, which at the moment are not explicated in the OAA texts. In contrast to other international HE contexts, there seems to be a lack of concern for student diversity and for issues of access and equality.

The documentary analysis points to many tensions, which may be important for teacher identity production. For example, the analysis shows that there were tensions in the way assessments and learning were explicated and aligned. These documents made no mention of how different assessment structures should be positioned within an educational system and the values that should be attached to these assessment systems. Furthermore, the documents give the HEIs more authority over teaching, learning, assessments and curriculum planning and so fail to acknowledge teachers' contributions and professionalism. Thus, official texts are full of contradictions and complexities which as I will show in my analysis Chapter 7, then resonate through the practices of the Omani teachers as they struggle for positioning in the field.

Chapter 6: Space and the production of teacher identities

6.1 Introduction

Chapter Five addressed the aspirations of the Omani National Education Frameworks in promoting particular understandings of teaching, assessment practices, and teacher evaluation across Omani HEIs and the supposed neutrality of the texts that propose such practices. This chapter answers my first research question (1a) and aims through observational and interview data to examine the intersection of space with the cultural capital associated with nationality and verities of English language in producing hierarchies between teachers, who were constructed in the research context as local versus non-local at times, and, at other times, were constructed between non-local from inner circle contexts and non-local teachers from outer circle contexts (Kachru, 1985). In this chapter, I also explore how networking within the timetabling processes led to the unequal positioning of teachers from diverse backgrounds across space and time as well as how male networking contributed to the production of male-female hierarchies. To answer research question 1.a (see section 1.3), first, I will map out the different fields/spaces of practices as understood by Massey and Bourdieu (see sections 3.4 and 3.5) and the value that is attached to each field/space and then will highlight the role teachers' habitus and capitals in positioning them in different locations where struggles to accrue and claim identity was perceived as important. People may be distinguished from each other in a field because they have different forms of capital, both in types and in values. Thus, use of the terms 'locals' and 'non-locals' signals differently valued forms of habitus, which gave rise to hierarchical positioning between different teachers. In working with habitus alongside capital, we can see, too, how different groups of teachers' positions in the field can be understood dynamically through space and time.

The focus of the analysis in this chapter is on social capital and institutionalised cultural capital as well the complexity of local networking that, at times, cohered around those considered locals and non-locals and, at other times, cut across these hierarchies, although, as shown below, further hierarchies were produced. The analysis starts with a vignette, which represents the felt hierarchies between different groups of teachers in different locations (see section 5.2). Section 5.3 gives a spatial depiction of the differently valued locations in Public High College and the symbolic capital of these locations. Next, Section 5.4 of my analysis highlights two entry points where struggling for positioning took place: the English Proficiency Programme (EPP) and the Academic Credit Programme (ACP). It also describes

the value attached to these entry points through the differential allocation of physical and human resources and then further describes how programmes' gatekeepers used timetabling and course allocation to reproduce male-female and differential hierarchies and to mask power relations. My analysis shows how course timetabling distributes teachers into different spaces, which are valued differently. Timetabling procedures were therefore implicated in spatial allocations and in the production of hierarchies between different groups of teachers.

6.2 Hierarchical processes: programme allocation and timetabling

This section begins with a short vignette from my interview data with two non-local female teachers from the outer circle, one a Pakistani national and the other from South Africa. Both teachers taught on the ACP at Public High College (see section 5.4 for a detailed description). I draw upon this vignette to illustrate how space was intertwined with institutional practices dominated by male networking and with teachers' nationality as a critical aspect of their habitus to produce male-female and spatial hierarchies. In addition, this vignette is an illustration of the differential symbolic values accorded to the two programmes: the EPP and the ACP (see section 5.4). To identify what forms of capital are the bases for distinguishing between people in a field, Bourdieu paid much attention to the voices of those who are disadvantaged or marginalised. In his view, there is more awareness of the range of varieties and forms of capital by those who are lacking in them than by those who have them (Bourdieu, 1972).

Samira: *We are considered if you talk about the administrative part, we are considered as a part of the Public High College, but we are left with our problems. Whatever time they (making reference to the management) have and whatever resources they have, they use mostly for teachers on the other programme (EPP).*

Amal: It is interesting that some of us are struggling with twenty eight students whilst some of our male colleagues are lavishly sitting and marking seventeen or fifteen papers. We, the three ladies, are doing writing classes and have classes until six o'clock whilst some men teach Public Speaking and finish at two o'clock every day.

Amal: Western teachers can't cope with the work load. We had a few who came and just went; only for one semester, like Sara (western teacher). They were hardly here for a semester. The head of the Centre took them back and put them on the other programme (EPP). I did not ask, but my colleagues asked to be moved onto the other programme (EPP) and were denied. I don't know if the head will take me back as well.
Interview data, second semester
Samira: Non-local, female, Pakistani teacher
Amal: Non-local, female, South African teacher .

The extract from Amal and Samira's interview (both are pseudonyms) vividly indicates the felt hierarchies between teachers on two different programmes at Public High College: the EPP and the ACP. Amal's reference to male teachers and teachers of a western nationality is indicative of the intersection between space and male networking and between space and nationality in producing male-female and spatial hierarchies between teachers. In the following two sections, I will describe the EPP and the ACP as entry points for both local and non-local teachers. Embedded within these programmes were differential material benefits and positions of authority within teacher networks. The focus of this section will be on highlighting the role of teachers' habitus and capitals in distributing them across the two programmes. Before exploring this in detail, I will give a brief outline of how the ethnographic methodology alerted me to space and the way it was implicated in the differential spatial positionings of teachers. I then started looking more closely at programmes, timetabling, and course allocation, which were used as tools to legitimate and to justify the hierarchical positionings of teachers and to distribute their contributions spatially across different parts of the college, which were valued to different degrees.

Drawing on my field notes and observation data, I now provide an account of the hierarchical spatial relations that framed the research context and analysis of this chapter. In my depiction of Pubic High College, I treat the physical space as part of my analysis. This will help the reader understand the differentially valued places within Public High College and the type and volume of resources-material and symbolic attached to each place. Where people are located matters, and a spatial view of a teaching community can capture many things, such as male-female relationships, inequalities, and power struggles. Spatial and geographical distribution is seen not only as an outcome of social processes, but also affects these processes (Massey, 1990).

6.3 Mapping Public High College: my first ethnographic stumble

Bourdieu suggests a researcher should map the field in the early stages of a research project. The mapping out is to identify different positions for different people in the field in terms of their capitals (Bourdieu, 1984, 1996, 1998; Swartz, 1997). I conducted my fieldwork at Public High College, which was located in the elite area of Muscat. Public High College had two campuses as a result of the increasing population of students and teachers. The original campus comprised an older building, to which had been added a new modern large extension.

The second campus was built later for the English Language Centre, my research field. The old part of the original campus housed around twenty per cent of the English Language Centre's teachers, and the other eighty per cent of its teachers moved to the second campus with its administration. I conducted most of my fieldwork in the second campus. The second campus was surrounded by brick walls and the entrance was through barriers. When I first arrived at the entrance barriers, I was approached by one of the two guards, and I explained to him that I was here to meet with the Head of the English Language Centre. I gave the guard my name, and the second guard called the administration for confirmation whilst the first guard stood next to my car. The confirmation was received, and the entrance barriers were lifted for me to drive through. There were three car parks; two car parks had no shade, and these were not assigned, while in contrast, the third car park was shaded and had had three parking bays reserved for the Head of the English Language Centre, the Section Head of Curriculum and Teaching Methods, and the Section Head of the English Language Programmes.

Figure 2: a photograph of a similar Omani college

Access to the car parks was restricted to teachers and authorised visitors. Students were not allowed to park except for disabled students and students with medical conditions. These students had to get a permit from the college administration to park inside the centre. The entrance to the English Language Centre's building was through a large reception hall. On each side of the reception hall was a meeting venue. The meeting venue on the left was grand,

with a ceramic floor plan and modern furniture. The meeting venue on the right was smaller than the other venue but just as modern. The other side of the reception hall overlooked a marble open floor with a grand marble staircase in the middle that led to the first and second floors. The building was circular and, from inside, resembled a palace reflecting a sense of power. Around the grand staircase, there were sofas for students to sit and relax. There was an elevator in one of the corners, which went directly to the HoC's office on the second floor. There was an additional staircase for use by both teachers and students. Teachers' offices were located on the ground, first, and second floors but tucked away from students' gaze for privacy. There were classrooms and small meeting rooms, and outside one of the teachers' offices, a separate kitchenette.

The new campus was divided into three blocks, namely, A, B, and C, and Block D, which was in a different building on the second campus's premises called 'the villas'. The Head of the English Language Centre was a non-local Arab from the outer circle. His office was in Block A with a door leading to the first coordinator's office and a second door that connected the first coordinator's office to the office of the second coordinator. Both coordinators managed the HoC's calls, visits, and other administrative work, such as liaising with the ministry and the other six colleges in the periphery. Two section heads helped the HoC with running the programmes. The Section Head of Curriculum and Teaching Methods was a non-local teacher from a western context, and the Section Head of the English Language Programmes was a local Omani teacher. The western section head had her own office, which was located across from the HoC's office. She ran all the teachers' meetings and was always present at meetings with the HoC. The Omani section head had less presence at meetings and shared an office with the student registrar and student social consultant. There were four teachers' rooms, and these were mainly located in Block C, levels 1, 2 and 3. The other three teachers' rooms were located in Blocks A, B, and D.

The use of glass panels across the three floors and alongside the staircase gave a sense of transparency and accessibility, while the open design created an initial impression of a united and continuous teaching environment. The intersection between the administration, teaching, and working space from upstairs to downstairs suggested the elimination of the hierarchy between teachers, students, and the management. However, access codes and access cards re-established hierarchical relationships between teachers and students, between teachers and exam coordinators, and between teachers and the administration. Classroom doors, teachers'

offices, and meetings rooms were all card protected. Teachers were given access cards so they could have access to their offices, washrooms, classrooms, and meeting rooms. However, not all teachers had access to all rooms, but rather, some were limited to their offices, laboratories, classrooms, and washrooms. The head of the English Language Centre had unlimited access to the entire building, that is, staff rooms, classrooms, meeting rooms and meeting lounges, and the examination coordinators' room. Compared to the HoC, the western section head had less access, and this included teachers' offices in all the blocks, some of the meeting rooms, and the resource room. The Omani section head's access was limited compared to that of her western peer. Going down a level in terms of position and authority meant reduced access to different places. Initially, in my role as a researcher, I was issued with an access card so I could move around to different teachers' offices, but later, it was limited to the teachers' office where I was assigned a desk.

Students were not allowed to walk into the teachers' lounge or access any laboratories or classroom without a teacher's supervision. If a student wanted to visit their teachers in their offices, they had to knock on the door, whereupon, a teacher would open the door, and then the student had to shout the name of the teacher they wanted to see. Teachers met their students outside the office for brief conversations. My office was in Block A on the other side of the HoC's office and was on the same level. It was a large, bright office with two sofas and a small table at the entrance for teachers to sit and relax. There were five cubicles with four desks in each cubicle. Behind the cubicles and away from immediate gaze was a small kitchenette with provisions and a water cooler. There was a computer on each desk, and there were two printers connected to all the computers. There was also an internet connection. The office was well lit and air-conditioned. The other teachers' offices which I visited were located on three floors. They all looked beautifully structured with new, working computers, desks, internet access, a nice lounge with a sofa, access to cold water, and a small kitchenette with facilities.

Figure 3: Spacious and bright offices on EFP

Figure 4: Dark and cramped offices on EAP

Not all my research respondents were located in this part of the building. My research respondents also included examination coordinators and these were located in Block D in the villas. They were all located in one part of the floor, and their offices were kept locked all the time which meant teachers could not visit casually. At the beginning, I thought the separation was normal and was because of the physical layout of the building and for security reasons, that is, to keep tests in a secure place. Nonetheless, I had visited their offices many times and had not noticed any teacher presence in their offices. Indeed, I found this amount of security

and isolation unusual and different from the set up in the regional college where I had worked as a teacher and later as HoC. I was not sure if this had to with the security of the exams or if the isolation was intentional and was to separate teaching from assessment or to eliminate any space for potential tension and disruption. After visiting my research respondents in Block D, I decided to visit my respondents in the original campus. Just like the hierarchy of the different points of entry, my visits to the different locations at Public High College began with the HoC, and then I gained access to the teachers in the new campus, and then to teachers in the original campus. These respondents were located in the old part of the main campus. Similar to the second campus, the original campus had two security entrances. The HoC gave me rough directions for how to find these teachers.

I walked past the car parks and through a small back entrance, wide enough for two people to walk through, which was like a short cut to the road that separated the two campuses. I crossed the road and walked through the security barriers to visit my respondents for the first time in their offices. My respondents in this part of the campus were female, and they shared the same office with the other seventeen male teachers. When I first opened the door, I was greeted by the male Programme Coordinator; his desk was by the office door, and every visitor had to go through him. I greeted him and explained I was there to see the female teachers. He cleared his throat and pointed for me to walk towards the end of the room. I went past all the male teachers' desks before I found my respondents' desks. They had been allocated one cubicle, which was located at the back. There was no space between the cubicles. The office was dark; it had no ventilation and had a strange smell of food. Walking through the teachers' cubicles reminded me of one of our oldest markets in town. My female respondents were present and immediately commented on the lack of space and lack of facilities to make tea or coffee. They apologised for not offering me any water, as there was no water cooler in the office. My respondents asked if would be possible for us not to sit and talk in the office, as noise travelled easily between the cubicles and because they were known among the male teachers for having loud voices.

These respondents had no access to any facilities or resources in the new campus. The spatial range of these teachers was more restricted. When they visited teachers in the new/second campus, they were treated like the students and had to be let in. Their access to teachers' offices, meeting rooms, classrooms, and the kitchenette was blocked. Teachers' location either in the centre or in the periphery not only indicated their degree of participation in

administrative activities, but also provided locations from which teachers could claim a position of authority over others. As I show below, not all locations had equal importance and weight. Each space was bounded and regulated by timetables, and, at times, by male-female positioning. The physical space arrangements, academic programmes, courses, and timetable therefore emerged as important in signalling teachers' hierarchical positioning. Although in professional communities, one would assume that teachers would experience and navigate professional space in the same way, navigation and movement was contingent upon the teachers being associated with particular academic programmes, teaching courses, and timetables.

What struck me as I was moving between the two campuses, the different building blocks, the meeting spaces, and the different teacher and coordinators' offices, was the seemingly uncontested division and imbalances in the distributions of physical resources, facilities, and access. Although I had not considered this aspect in my research proposal, movement between the different places and my own shifting positions within these different places alerted me to the need to consider space as part of my analysis of teachers' identity constructions. This aspect of movement, access, and restriction between two campuses and between the two academic programmes (see section 6.4) encouraged me to consider the physical dimension in the research context and added new depths to my analyses in terms of understanding hierarchical and male-female differentiations. While I could have conveniently presented teachers within the dichotomy of native speakers of English and non-native speakers of English or local and non-local teachers, that would not have explained the complexity of these hierarchies.

Equally, I found it problematic to rely only on teachers' nationality, language, and gender in explaining the hierarchical construction of teacher identity. The processes through which teacher identity is expressed and reproduced cannot be divorced from the structuring of space. Therefore, it was important to focus on the spatial arrangements at Public High College in constructing teachers' different subject positions. Although gender did not seem to play a key role in one location, in the second location, it was central to the differential positioning of female teachers. My early understanding of male-female discrimination practices was very simplistic and very much tied up with pay and job opportunities. Since there were more female teachers than men teachers and some had prominent managerial positions and equal pay scales, I had eliminated this aspect from my research proposal. In addition, my initial

understanding of place as a container where things happen and teaching and learning activities take place did not encourage me as a researcher to give much thought to place and space. However, both elements became surprisingly important and led me to question and rethink gender through spatial practices.

Drawing on my field notes and observation data, my analysis in the following section will focus on two entry points, each with its own differential location, symbolic value, and symbolic capital, as determined by the institutional practices of Public High College. These entry points are the two programmes offered by the English Language Centre of Public High College.

6.4 Academic programmes and the production of spatial and male-female hierarchies

At the micro level, my data highlighted two entry points where struggling to accrue and claim identity took place: the EPP (pseudonym) and the ACP (pseudonym). According to Bourdieu, struggles over material and symbolic resources take place in different fields or the social and institutional space (Bourdieu, 1986). Each of these sub-fields is a field in its own right, with its own stakes and struggles. Both these programmes were offered by the English Language Centre of Public High College and were designed to provide support to the students, who were expected to complete their HE through English (see section 2.9 on GFPs). Students usually went first through the EPP and then through the ACP. Both programmes were positioned and valued differently, and this was reflected in the unequal distribution of physical and material resources and time and attention given to them. The following sections identify the different forms of capital and the kinds of teacher habitus that were valued in each.

6.4.1 The English Proficiency Programme (EPP) and teachers' habitus

The EPP was better resourced than the ACP, and a separate budget had been allocated to build a new modern campus with modern offices, designated meeting rooms of different sizes and layouts, and many other facilities. Teachers' offices were equipped with computers, printers, a kitchenette, and a sofa for teachers to relax between classes. Other facilities included access to small meeting rooms, which were modern and nicely decorated, for teachers to meet with their students, either for oral lessons or for providing academic advice.

In addition, the classrooms within this building had working computers, which were connected to smart boards. This gave the teachers on this programme the advantage of doing their administration, such as attendance and typing warning letters whilst students worked on in-class tasks. The privileges that came with the EPP had a high symbolic status within the wider college community. These included institutionalised cultural capital, such as official titles associated with administrative positions. Just like cultural capital, symbolic capital can also be objectified through titles that guarantee recognition, that are institutionalised through regulations, and that can generate further cultural and economic capital (Bourdieu, 1992). Some of these administrative positions were recognised in the college bylaws; they had been given official titles, and they included monetary rewards, such as Head of Centre of the English Language Centre, Section Head for Curriculum and Teaching Methods, and Section Head for the English Language Programmes. Other administrative positions were not recognised in the college bylaws and had no monetary rewards (see Appendix G). The administrative positions recognised within the English Language Centre's structure included examination coordinators for different skills, Pre-Elementary Level Coordinator, Quality Assurance Officer, Assistant Quality Assurance Officer, Timetabling Coordinator, Coordinator for Social Events, Coordinators for Multimedia Labs, Chief Examiner, and Student Registrar. As with the college, other administrative positions were not recognised in the college bylaws and had no monetary recognition. Therefore, there were struggles between teachers for such positioning.

This programme attracted staff with local experience, who designed the EPP and the ACP, the student assessments system, and teacher evaluation of Public High College. This group was perceived by the MoMP as the knowledge elite, and they were located within the EPP. The ministry depended on this knowledge elite of Public High College to design teaching and learning programmes and assessment systems. They were the main contributors in producing and disseminating academic knowledge to the six colleges in the periphery and, at times, designing courses for other non-teaching governmental organisations. The knowledge elite's association with the EPP accentuated its perceived symbolic capital. Therefore, teachers on this programme had better opportunities for promotion and for constructing the social networks that were crucial in career advancement. Because of the high symbolic value of the EPP, access to this programme seemed to be strongly associated with differences in teachers' habitus.

At the time of my research, the country was affected by the Arab Spring, which involved protests against several practices. One such practice, which was relevant to my research study, was the recruitment practices and changes in the different forms of capital that were valued in this field. For example, in the past, prominent administrative positions had been occupied by non-local teachers. After the protests, these were reserved for the Omani locals, although it seems less prominent positions were not affected by these protests. At the time of fieldwork, most of these administrative positions were still occupied by non-local teachers, who had been in these positions for years. However, there was an understanding that replacements had to be local teachers. This new pressure on the English Language Centre's administration to reserve any new openings for local teachers was evident in the interview with the western head of section for Curriculum and teaching Methods (HoS) : "I think priority is given to the Omani teachers right now in terms of promotion and coordination and so on which I honestly completely support."

There were no official documents articulating the shift in recruiting practices; nonetheless, this was felt and echoed by other non-local teachers. In one of my interviews with Hiba, a non-local Arab teacher from Morocco, she discussed her experience in managing exams in her position as the examination coordinator in one of the regional colleges. I asked her if she had applied for the position of examination coordinator after moving to Public High College. She responded to my question as follows: *These opportunities are only for the Omanis and I understand that even the Head of Centre had been pushed to choose Omanis."* Even though there were no official written documents that reflected the shift in hiring practices, there was enough evidence in the interview data with the HoC, section head and other non-local teachers that indicated this new shift. These protests had led to a change in the field, particularly in relation to hiring practices, which further accentuated the recognition of the cultural capital of the local teachers for both teaching and administrative positions. For example, Omani locals were given priority in hiring for teaching positions, as the non-local Head of the English Language Centre commented:

> *I personally give priority to Omani nationality to have the chance of joining the system. Sometimes it is true that their experience is limited, or they might not have the experience at this level...we take them and at the same time we provide them with training with continuous support. This is just an exception because they are nationals. (HoC, PHC, second semester)*

Omani teachers were able to operate with security and confidence, which are both instilled by having the right kind of habitus and capital. They had a sense of entitlement and of belonging to a social space, which enabled them to trade up effectively through networking into symbolic capital. Omani local teachers, including new and senior teachers, were also given priority for teaching in this programme. Their nationality had a strong currency, and they were protected by the institutional practices of Public High College.

Local teachers enjoyed the many privileges that came with their nationality. One such privilege that local teachers enjoyed over non-local teachers was that of job security. Local teachers were hired through a different recruitment process, which immediately placed them in tenure track positions and with protection from dismissal, as commented by the western section head for Curriculum and Teaching Methods: *"You have got the old thing; as I said, the Omanis can't be got rid of…It is understandable…when we come to work, we are guests; we foreigners."* However, this kind of job security and protection from dismissal was not extended to non-local teachers. The cultural capital of local teachers had a more symbolic value compared to the capital of non-local teachers. Their nationality gave them the freedom to move outside the boundary of time and space. This contributed to constructing hierarchies between local and non-local teachers.

Furthermore, as I argued in my literature review in Chapter Two, the way English was positioned within Oman means there is recognition of teaching pedagogies that are associated with Englishness from inner-circle countries, such as communicative language teaching and student centeredness. Equally, the Omani National Education standards for the GFP gave rise to policies and assessment systems that are privileged within the HE of inner-circle countries, such as teacher evaluation, teacher professional development, summative and formative assessment, IELTS and TOEFL (see Chapter Six). These new structures seemed to contribute to the development of a hierarchy within the Omani HE that added value to the linguistic capital of teachers from inner-circle countries. Changes in the field meant that social positions, such as being a teacher, opened up space for teachers from the inner circle and allowed new classifying practices such as 'native' and 'non-native', 'local' and 'non-local', to mark habitus, and this subsequently defined the social power (advantage) of different social groups. The habitus of teachers from western contexts was valued, and so they were positioned within the EPP to accentuate further the symbolic capital of the programme.

The presence of teachers from-inner circle countries (as described by Kachru, 1985) was seen as desirable not only by the policy makers, but also by the local teaching community, as stated by Othman, a local Omani teacher: *"When we look at the natives, -many people-even the society- look at their nationality and that they have the language [...] because English is their native language."* An aspect of linguistic competence is the mastering of linguistic techniques, such as grammars and vocabularies. Bourdieu (1992) points out that linguistic context is embedded in the wider socio-political structure. Being a native speaker of English conferred value and legitimacy on such teachers' habitus and capital, as expressed by Mohammed, an Omani local teacher; *"They are native speakers of English. So whatever they say is correct. We are Omanis. We studied grammar, unlike native speakers, but we don't know anything [...] That is the projection given to the students."* Other characteristics or qualities that were associated with teachers from the western context were their professionalism in their day-to-day teaching and administration, as explained by the Section Head for Curriculum and Teaching Methods: *"I think partly it is culture. Western teachers are more likely to be strict for time and recording absence... they tend to be more likely to stick to the rules. I don't want to say they are more ethical."* Keeping good documentation and holding up institutional rules and regulations in dealing with students are qualities that are valued in the QA system. There was, therefore, an alignment between western teachers' habitus and capital and the field created by the Omani QA system, which put them in advantageous position.

The cultural capital of the teachers from the western context expanded the professional spaces that they could access. Certain administrative positions were still open to non-local western teachers, particularly those which were seen as requiring an 'expert' level of English. This placed them automatically in a better position in terms of accessing teaching and administrative positions. For example, on one occasion, the western Section Head of Curriculum and Teaching Methods approached a western teacher to work as an examination coordinator, but was turned down by the western teacher, who explained, *"I wouldn't mind doing something else if it was actually a promotion with a pay increase because I can put that on my CV, but I don't want to sit in an office all day writing exams and no teaching."* The non-local teachers from non-western contexts did not move in different professional spaces. Their professional spaces were decreasing to include teaching positions only. There was also the understanding that western teachers worked better in a relaxed environment and would stay longer when were not bounded by a structured timeframe. The western HoS often

echoed this view by western teachers as stated in this comment: *"One teacher said to me 'Well I like the fact that I can go home and mark papers while having a glass of wine. It makes me feel relaxed; I don't want to sit at my desk and get interrupted'."* This possibility of movement across time and space was associated with non-local teachers from a western context and produced further hierarchies between non-local teachers. This was expressed by my non-local respondents working in different positions and in different programmes. For example, one of my respondents, who was a non-local from India and held an administrative position in the EPP, expressed to me frustrations about the freedom of movement teachers from western contexts were given. He explained to me that one of his responsibilities was to find substitutions for teachers who called in sick.

He said that he found it frustrating when he would call non-local western teachers who, according to their timetable, were supposed to be at their desk for substitutions, but instead they were on the beach. He commented: *"When I did not find him at his desk (referring to a western teacher), I called him, and he told me he was on the beach."* This western teacher my respondent was referring to was on the 8:00 to 15:00 teaching shift. This meant the teachers had to be in college for the duration of the shift, even though they were not teaching the whole time. However, this teacher was on the beach at 8:00, enjoying the morning. My respondent further added that this was not an isolated incident and that western teachers were given freedom of movement and the administration did nothing about this situation. As he further commented: *"Your friend (referring to the head of centre) does not speak to these teachers about being at their desk and, instead, he asks me to find someone else to teach the substitution."* These time slots and empty spaces were filled by non-local teachers from non-western contexts. It seems, then, that language and nationality were salient in constructing the hierarchies between the teachers.

Senior teachers from outer-circle countries like India, who had a long history in developing the educational structures and practices of Public High College, were also positioned in the EPP. They were also considered as belonging to the knowledge elite, who had developed and maintained old practices and processes. Other teachers from outer-circle countries were mainly Indians. They were preferred for financial reasons, as they represented cheap labour. They were seen as mediocre teachers and as speaking English with 'Indiaism,' as expressed by the western Section Head for Curriculum and Teaching Methods: *"The Indians take less money. Well, they are not native speakers, so there is that as well…non-native speaker*

teachers write with Indiaism." Indian teachers' habitus was marked as lacking teaching techniques and methods that were considered progressive and student-centered, and they lacked teaching methods that are inquiry driven and organised around problem-solving and investigation. This was expressed by Othman, an local teacher:

> *"The Indian teachers don't have any techniques in language teaching…natives always have new teaching methods. When I go for observations and when I'm observing a native, I, myself, expect to learn something new. When I observe an Indian teacher's class, I feel I'm still in the late eighties."*

Indian teachers were constructed as lacking the qualities necessary to be part of this new field of teaching practices. The cultural capital and habitus that came with the Indian teachers were associated with practices that were now seen as inferior and lacking in value, so their capitals were functioning as negative symbolic capital (Bourdieu 1998, p.104). However, Indian teachers were still desired in the EPP, and their presence was linked with bringing stability to the programme and offering help outside their main duties and responsibilities without expecting any rewards. Their presence was valued, as they helped in protecting and reproducing the educational and institutional system in place, as expressed by the Chief Examiner from India: "*Teachers who have been here for long, they definitely know the system and have gone through the system and survived the system, and are definitely good people, and with the new teachers, you can't know."* This was further echoed by Gemma, a teacher from South Africa: "*Many of these teachers have been here for a long time. They know exactly how the structure works at Public High College, how the syllabus and things are set up. They are familiar with that."* Although the Indian teachers did not possess the same cultural capital as teachers from local and western contexts, they had a 'feel for the game' that allowed them to uphold the institutional expectations of Public High College.

6.4.2 The Academic Credit Programme (ACP) and teachers' habitus

Teachers on the ACP were mainly from India or the Philippines or were non-local Arabs except for two male local teachers and a local female PhD holder. The local female PhD holder, who had re-joined Public High College after completing her PhD studies, had her own private office with all the necessary resources. Significant for my participants in this programme was their non-local Omani identity as well as their identities as non-native speakers of English from outer-circle countries. Teachers on this programme were located in the oldest part of the original campus. In addition, the ACP was poorly resourced. Unlike

teachers on the EPP, these teachers did not have access to modern bright spacious offices. Access to administrative support, working computers, printers, and facilities to make provisions did not come with this programme. There was one working toilet for all the female teachers on this programme, and this was shared by female staff from other departments. Teachers' offices were in a poor condition with wobbly chairs and old furniture. This group seemed to be less privileged in terms of their offices, furniture, and resources, and the attention to programme development. Moreover, teachers in this programme did not have access to modern air-conditioned classrooms; rather, the classrooms were shabby and were exposed to extreme sunlight. All twenty teachers on the ACP were located in one room with hardly any walking space between the cubicles. None of the teachers on this programme was from western contexts.

Spatially, the ACP was male dominated and male oriented. Similar to the EPP, there was a symbolic struggle between the teachers on this programme. Many of the struggles they were concerned with were around wanting to be treated equally and as respectable and dignified teachers rather than doing 'donkey work' that nobody wanted as commented by Samira: "*We work like donkeys over here. Sometimes we come in the afternoon and leave in the evening with no time for a cup of tea. I'm not exaggerating. There is a lot of marking. And we are not marking, we are preparing worksheets and if we are not preparing worksheets then we are in the AVA photocopying.*" This was further echoed by Amal: "*We don't mind doing all that, Nihad, we don't mind because we are working for this college and we are part of the system. We don't mind working accordingly, but everyone should be treated equally. The respect teachers get on the EPP we don't get at post foundation. WE want our dignity.*"

This section depicts the struggles of female teachers to accrue and convert capitals in order to claim a positive identity and access to certain privileges that were not immediately available to them. Struggles between teachers to establish a positive identity and accrue symbolic capital took place through administrative positions. However, few administrative positions came with the ACP. Although these positions were not linked with any monetary rewards, they had their differential symbolic value at Public High College. Nonetheless, using administrative positions to establish a positive identity and to accrue social capital and networking had mixed outcomes for teachers on this programme. Although becoming a coordinator for a course (Technical Writing 1) gave Samira, a non-local female teacher from Pakistan, a sense of honour and achievement, she was not able to capitalise on the networking

and privileges that came with this administrative position. She had a full teaching load in addition to writing course learning outcomes, delivery plans, course outlines and writing exams. Samira gives a clear depiction of the differential value of these positions:

> *I did not get any privileges. For me, it was a title because I had a full teaching load. I had to hold meetings with course teachers. I had to prepare the course outline. I had to order photocopies and was responsible for collecting question papers. I had to prepare the minutes of the meeting. All this was extra work besides my full load. (Samira, non-local teacher, interview data, second semester).*

Samira's comment is an illustration of the felt hierarchies and differential positioning between teachers in the ACP. Samira did not benefit from the same privileges that were available to coordinators in this programme. In addition, she was expected to attend to responsibilities that came with the position of coordinator but without the benefit of any resources. As she explained: *"Last semester, there was no power, and our computers are out-dated so I couldn't complete my course outline on time."* In addition, in contrast with EPP coordinators, who were located in secured offices with all the necessary resources, Samira, though a coordinator, did not have her own office; she shared cubicles with other teachers. This further devalued her position, as she was treated the same way as the teachers in this programme. However, EPP coordinators had zero teaching hours as well as having private offices that they did not share with the teachers. Thus, the ACP had very little symbolic capital compared to the EPP.

Samira's potential accrual of capital as a Coordinator for Technical Writing 1 was further devalued when the local Omani female PhD holder was assigned as the senior manager of the ACP. Samira had been a coordinator for Technical Writing 1 for five years before the local senior teacher re-joined Public High College. The local senior teacher put further demands on Samira, asking her to revise the course outline fifteen times, as Samira further explained in a rather sad voice:

> *She made me change the course outline fifteen times. She is a perfectionist. She is tough and knowledgeable. She has more expectations, and she needs things to be perfect. In the past, she used to be flexible. Now, she wants professionalism in everything. In one way, it is good and in one way, it is bad because you can't take a strict environment. You can't take someone keeping a tab on you all time. You should have room and be able to move here and there. (Samira, non-local teacher, interview data, second semester)*

Samira's quote highlights the bitter disappointment of realising that the habitus and cultural capital that had enabled her to achieve professional honour and dignity through landing the position as the Coordinator for Technical Writing 1 course were being constantly undermined. She felt threatened by the Omani-local female senior teacher's knowledge. The habitus which equipped Samira for navigating and managing the field of Technical Writing 1 course and had earned her the respect of her team was put in question, and this disjuncture engendered an underlying sense of powerlessness as she elaborated: *"I didn't like it because I was working for five years as a coordinator. I'm not praising myself, but I must say I did a good job in keeping good balance. All my team members were happy; they never once complained about me."* Further demands from the Omani-local senior teacher to work on the course outline with no resources made Samira realise that her accumulated capital had no value and that she had no power to defend her professional identity. As she explained,

> *The local senior teacher was rude to me and complained to the Head of the Centre about me not finishing the outline on time. I said to the head, 'I didn't have a working computer or internet access.' The Head of the Centre replied that I should have taken work home and used my personal time and resources. (Samira, non-local teacher, interview data, second semester*

She described how she found it harder to commit to the job when the administration showed no understanding and expected her to show dedication with no support from them. As she further added,

> *"If you feel like that when you are working with such dedication and such hard work, and after that somebody (referring to the local Omani senior teacher) is complaining about you instead of understanding your problem. She says my work is not up to the mark. She tries to keep the standards high because she is in this position." (Samira, non-local teacher, interview data, second semester)*

Her identity as the coordinator had been gradually eroded and transformed from a coordinator as Samira put it, *"respected by her team for managing the course requirements with no complaints;"* to someone who is perceived as inadequate and who crumbles under pressure. Samira recognised that she did not have much cultural value as a coordinator: institutional mechanisms had fixed the value of her institutionalised cultural capital and had inculcated in her a belief in that value to the extent to which she was unable to occupy the social space with any degree of authority. She was constantly aware that she did not have sufficient

knowledge, so she felt out of place and suffered from constant doubt and insecurity about her ability to succeed as an efficient coordinator. What Bourdieu refers to as the "feel for the game" or the "almost miraculous encounter between the habitus and a field, between incorporated history and an objectified history" (1990, p.66) was absent. The cultural capital that it had taken her so long to acquire was considered inferior and lacking in value. Samira felt her professional identity was being constructed as lacking in the qualities necessary to generate valuations of self-respect and dignity. Faced with such symbolic denigration, Samira decided to quit her administrative position before being removed from it; as she explained, *"I was lucky enough not to be insulted and told you are no longer a coordinator…I was lucky that I quit this position with dignity, and I was given certificate of appreciation."* To use Bourdieu's (1992) analogy of the game, Samira knew the written and unwritten rules and was aware of what might be the most effective strategies to ensure an exit with little damage. Thus, Samira's institutionalised cultural capital as the Coordinator for Technical Writing 1 had very little symbolic value.

It seems, then, the cultural capital and habitus of teachers from different contexts were valued differently within the institutional practices of Public High College and were integral to teachers being positioned differentially across time and space, notably across two different programmes, one of which was prestigious and the other not.

6.5 Significance of timetabling processes and local networking and the production of gendered and spatial hierarchies

In the previous section, my analysis mapped out the larger field of Public High College and the sub-fields and the habitus and capital of teachers in relation to the different fields. In this section, my analysis will focus on the timetabling processes and the significance of social capital and networking in accessing material benefits. Struggle for positioning in both programmes was manifested in different ways. In this context, getting a good timetable meant teaching from 8:00 to 13:00, and these slots were limited. In addition, teaching within Blocks A, B and C was considered another privilege teachers competed for. Not all classrooms were located within the main building, and teachers had to walk in the heat to access classrooms outside the building. Not all teachers had access to these privileges. Such privileges were determined by the institutional practices of Public High College. However, this was a complex process and had to be examined in relation to networking and, at times, in relation to

male-female relations. It seems the capital of the local teachers had no recognition in this context; they were outside the networking. My observation data and conversations with different participants show that there were three gatekeepers who influenced the way these time slots were distributed: the HoC, who was a non-local from Jordan; the college registrar, who was a non-local from India; and the timetabling coordinator, also a non-local from India.

The HoC would send to the timetabling committee a list of teachers to be considered for the 8:00 to 13:00 slot, and the list was regarded as top priority, as explained by Fawzia, a local teacher: *"The head of the centre emails to us the list of teachers for these time slots, and we must consider his list first."* Fawzia was a local teacher who also gave assistance to the timetabling coordinator. The teachers who were on the HoC's priority list for the 8:00 to 13:00 slot shared the same nationality as the HoC and they had a long history of working together as teachers many years ago. A second list was emailed to the timetabling committee by the student registrar, and his 'people' had to be considered for the remaining privileged time slots. The timetabling coordinator also reserved certain timeslots for certain teachers with whom she shared the same office. Indeed, the timetabling coordinator used her position to obtain favours from teachers in exchange for good timetabling and to construct networks with certain teachers. I shared the same office with the timetabling coordinator, and in that office, she befriended four teachers, two from western contexts, a South African teacher, and an Indian.

It was not clear why the timetabling coordinator favoured the teachers from the western contexts and from South Africa. However, she had clear interests in favouring the teacher with whom she shared the same nationality. From my interview with Lekha, an Indian teacher, it became apparent that the timetabling coordinator wanted to arrange her daughter's marriage with Lekha's son. Lekha was looking for a female suitor for her son, and so the timetabling coordinator used her position and the benefits that came with it to give Lekha a good timetable. For several semesters, Lekha taught within the air-conditioned building and was teaching in the 8:00 to 13:00 slot. However, when Lekha arranged her son's marriage elsewhere, the timetabling coordinator got upset and removed all these privileges from her. Lekha was suddenly given a bad timetable for consecutive semesters and was given classrooms outside the comfort of the main building. As Lekha commented, *"When I announce my son's engagement, the timetabling coordinator was upset and for several semesters, I got a terrible timetable."*

Non-local teachers who shared the same nationality as the head of the centre accessed all the benefits of a good timetable. These teachers were given the 8:00 to 13:00 slot, and they were given classrooms within the main building. As Khalil, a local teacher stated, *"I don't know why these teachers finish classes at twelve o'clock every day."* Khalil was referring to non-local teachers from Jordan who were perceived as the HoC's friends and who shared the same nationality as the HoC. This group of teachers were all in their sixties and were also given a light teaching load without the responsibilities that came with being a home group tutor. Teachers gained social capital from networking; the complexity of this networking contributed in constructing further hierarchies between teachers and created resentment, as expressed by Khalil: *"If they are too old to handle late classes and give 100%, such as doing a full load, handling late classes, and other admin duties, then why they are kept?"* Khalil further added that these teachers never made his audit list of teachers for inspection for the QA file. The Quality Assurance Officer, who had Omani nationality but shared the same ethnicity as the HoC and these non-local privileged Arab teachers, provided Khalil with a list of names for QA inspection. Khalil explained, *"And regarding auditing teachers' files, I get a list ready which is more for new staff."*

However, the capital associated with the nationality of teachers from local context had no value in this setting. Equally, my observation data and informal conversation with Fawzia, a local teacher, who gave assistance to the timetabling coordinator, show that she did not benefit from similar privileges. Since my fieldwork required me to book slots with participants for interviews, this gave me access to their timetable. Fawzia had classes outside the comfort of the main building, and her teaching hours were spread out. In my informal conversations with local teachers, they also expressed similar frustrations over timetable. In this context, the nationality of Khalil and Fawzia had no currency; instead, networking of the timetabling coordinator cut across those established hierarchies.

On other occasions, male-female relations intersected with timetabling processes to create further spatial hierarchies. The struggle for conflict was over teaching Public Speaking and teaching the 8:00 to 13:00 shift. Public Speaking was considered one of the easiest courses to teach compared to the other two courses mentioned above. The nature of the course did not require long essays; evaluation was based on a Power Point presentation at the end of a term. Access to Public Speaking was contingent upon informal male networking and male-female relations as expressed by one of my female participants:

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> *Salim, Programme coordinator, and some male teachers have two public speaking classes and one writing class while other male teachers only have two public speaking classes and that's it. This is not fair. We - all the three ladies - are doing writing classes. (Soraya, interview data, second semester)*

This excerpt offers a clear illustration of the hidden inequalities that were embedded in workload allocations between male and female teachers. Public Speaking and Technical Writing were taught by men, and women were given Writing One and Writing Two. Furthermore, the class size for this course was much smaller than for the writing classes, which affected the number of assignments to be graded, one-to-one feedback, time required for doing attendance and for academic counselling, and other administrative requirements. To meet the same requirements associated with the course the women were teaching, they had to take students' assignments home for grading, as Samira explained *"We are working seven hours here and seven hours at home…no day passes when I do not take a bag home with me home…we are marking reports until two o'clock in the morning."* There was a lot of grading involved in this course, partly because of the nature of assessment requirements, and also because of the number of students as Soraya further commented: *"It is interesting that one teacher is struggling with twenty eight students and another teacher is lavishly sitting and marking seventeen or fifteen papers."* Soraya is here making reference to the male teachers, who monopolised the courses with a smaller class size while the women were given the larger classes. Although Samira was a coordinator, her social capital had no value in this location. This was further exacerbated by institutionalised male privilege and by traditional cultural expectations, which continue to assume a gendered division of labour between male and female.

These norms regarding segregating courses based on the male-female hierarchy were established through informal male networking. The coordinator for the ACP was a man, as was the timetabling coordinator. These networks included both local and non-local men and functioned informally to facilitate men's contact with the knowledge elite of Public High College and the subsequent progression through higher levels of administrative positions for local males. Women were excluded from such networking and ended up with a demanding workload and bad timetabling. Men benefited from the informal networking and male bonding, receiving access to a light workload and a good timetable. Women, however, were denied the opportunity to teach Public Speaking through the creation of barriers and due to

the assumed roles for men and women. Men employed a variety of strategies to maintain women's subordination and to discourage women from teaching Public Speaking. The first strategy is through asserting their expertise and knowledge in teaching the course, as they informed Samira, *"Actually, the teachers who have been teaching these courses from the beginning, they feel they are experts in that, and they have more experience in teaching Public Speaking."* Thus, the men perceived themselves to be more experienced and more competent in teaching Public Speaking. Second, the men monopolised the Public Speaking course by excluding women from any knowledge that travelled through the informal networking. Course outlines, course information, assessment requirements, and course materials were not made available to women teachers; these were only circulated among men through these informal networking processes. Men did not want women to have access to course information and outline, thus breaking the perceived myth men created about the difficulty involved in teaching Public Speaking.

When Samira was finally put on the timetable to teach one class of Public Speaking after exerting pressure on the programme coordinator, she was faced with many challenges. First, Samira had many visits from male teachers, who warned her about the difficulty of the course and the physical effort the course required, as she explained: *"People came to me and warned me, threatened me in a way not to do this because it is something very awful and all that."* Thus, it can be seen that men used threats to exclude women from teaching Public Speaking. They further used other tactics to prevent women from teaching Public Speaking. Samira was warned by male teachers about the physical effort involved in teaching Public Speaking; as male teachers told her, *"You have to carry a projector, and a camera, and you have to carry a recorder."* They kept telling her she was not strong enough to carry the equipment. Male control was clearly demonstrated by establishing social norms that were set out to construct academic territory. They would tell Samira that she was not competent enough to teach Public Speaking or that she was not strong enough to carry a projector. In other words, Public Speaking was linked with maleness and visible physical skills, thus positioning male qualities as superior.

As explained earlier, Public High College catered to a large student population, and this meant extending the available resources. Classes in this college ran from 8:00 to 18:00 hours. Again, men and women were positioned differently. Women were always given the late classes, and men finished work early; as Amal stated: *"it's fine when it is obligatory for*

everyone to have classes until six o'clock, so how come some teachers finish by two every day?" Amal is here referring to male teachers, who always finished their day early. The normalisation of men's privilege was evident in the men's monopoly of the timetabling. It seems the practice of excluding women from informal networking was intentional to maintain and preserve the rewards that were associated with teaching Public Speaking and accessing good timetabling. Therefore, women found themselves unable to improve their work conditions or move to the EPP where there were many more privileges. It seems, then, that timetabling and the institutional practices of Public High College functioned as an apparently neutral mechanism, but masked problematic power relations that served the interests of certain groups.

6.6 Meeting Spaces

At one level, a meeting space provides a context for the practices and processes that take place between different groups. However, my observation data show that the spatiality of these meetings spaces involved more than the context. In shaping these educational practices and processes, meeting spaces contributed to producing differential and hierarchical relations between different groups. Decisions about how the meeting space is to be used, who attends these meetings, who sets the agenda, and who steers the discussion - these kinds of spatial arrangements were not only about shaping educational practices and processes; they were about power relations and hierarchies as well. Observational data from different levels of meeting spaces was also useful to provide a better understanding of the way teachers in the EPP and the ACP were positioned within the wider college. Meeting spaces of different levels were observed for a period of six months, and each meeting was immediately followed by interviews. I recall the first teacher meeting I observed after PT1, a high stakes test that contributes to student certification. I had expected the meeting to be long, as teachers in their offices expressed a range of concerns surrounding this particular test regarding some of the test items; the quality of recording for the listening section, and the sequencing between the listening questions and the recorded script.

I also expected a heated debate between the teachers and the examination coordinators. I thought there would be interruptions, disruptions, and disagreement and expected the general tone of the meeting to be conflictive. However, to my surprise, the meeting was chaired by the Section Head for Curriculum and Teaching Methods, and none of the examination

coordinators were at the meeting. My eyes were fixed on the door of the meeting room expecting the examination coordinators to walk in at any moment. My disappointment was confirmed when the section head started the meeting. The meeting lasted for ten minutes, and the tone of the meeting was giving instruction about materials which needed to be covered for PT2, practice tests, photocopying and books. The examination coordinators were absent from these meetings, and the teachers' concerns were not discussed. Furthermore, these meetings were short and were more about the logistics of the exams. Issues such as exam validity and reliability were also absent from these meetings. This seems to have been a strategic manoeuvre on the part of the Public High College administration to maintain the value of its exams. Public High College did not want to give teachers opportunities to undermine the institutional value of these exams, especially because Public High College was in the middle of selling its assessment system to regional colleges, and the acknowledgement of faults regarding the construction of the tests would weaken their value in terms of accreditation, and would weaken the position of the institution itself.

However, it was surprising to find that none of the teachers challenged the regulations of these meetings, and all seemed to be satisfied with how quickly these meetings finished. I asked the testing coordinators after the meeting if they ever attended meetings with teachers. Their answer was no and they added, *"We don't feel the need to attend such meetings; we pass our instructions to the teachers through the western section head, and besides, it is difficult to satisfy all teachers."* I understood that the general structure of the context was hierarchical in nature, but I assumed there would be times and spaces where the hierarchy would be challenged and overturned, and where tensions, struggles and frustrations would emerge. However, frustrations over such regularities were taking place in less official and more private spaces. These frustrations took different forms and shapes. For example, on various occasions, teachers emailed the western section head to arrange a separate meeting with the examination coordinators to discuss these issues. Some teachers asked the examination coordinators to be included in reviewing the exams, while other teachers invited examination coordinators to visit their classes to know the actual standard of student proficiency level. Yet other teachers took a more direct approach and marched to the examination coordinators' office to highlight what teachers perceived as bad exams. Instead, teachers were accused of being aggressive, and the college management considered these incidents as invoking tensions, which led to further regulation of the unofficial space. Teachers were only allowed to email their feedback on exams to the middle management;

there seemed to be no opportunities in these formal meeting spaces for teachers to express any concerns.

The second meeting I observed was on a different campus with teachers in the ACP. The meeting was in an old classroom, and the aim of the meeting was to discuss students' exam results and to mark the end of a term. All the female teachers sat in one place, and the male teachers sat at the other end of the class. The coordinators of the different courses were reporting the results with comments to the senior manager. The AC Programme Coordinator started the meeting by welcoming the HoC and initiated the meeting; this was followed by a short report from the coordinator of each course. There was food across the room to mark the end of the term, as is culturally customary. At the end of the meeting, the HoC allowed time for teachers to present more general concerns. Two of the female teachers started expressing concerns over the lack of physical resources, the poor state of their offices, and the unequal time and course allocation. For a while, there was a general climate of unhappiness, disappointment, and anger, but it did not last. No one seemed to pay any attention to their complaints, and the HoC's aloofness indicated his masculinist distance from the turmoil that was brewing within the meeting and by implication, the women's complaints about work. Perhaps it was all too familiar, as the EPP teachers made various comments in this respect: *"ACP teachers always complain about the workload", they teach one course to four groups, one preparation and yet they are constantly complaining."* The women were constrained by these discourses, which reproduce and increase the male privilege they wished to challenge. It was clear none of the men were happy about their complaints, and there was a clear struggle and obvious male-female tension.

Meeting places were implicated in the way the hierarchical relations and power differentials between different groups were structured and maintained; any reading of the meeting spaces required an examination of the hidden rules that were in operation in establishing these norms. This was evident in the way official meetings were arranged, the way members were involved in the meetings, and in the space and time allowed for discussions. Meeting spaces enforced the norms of relations between the teachers and the coordinators, and between the teachers and the college management.

6.7 Conclusion

Through my observation and interview data, I have explored the intersection of space with teachers' habitus and capitals and the institutional practices of Public High College in producing spatial and male-female hierarchies. In some locations, cultural capital associated with nationality and varieties of English language were implicated in producing hierarchies between locals and non-locals and between non-locals from the inner circle and non-locals from the outer circle. In other settings, the social capital and networking that cohered around teachers from outer-circle contexts cut across these hierarchies and produced further hierarchies between non-locals from the outer circle and local teachers. Section 5.3 gave a spatial depiction of the differently valued locations in Public High College and the symbolic capital of these locations. Mapping out the 'objective structure of positions' that makes up the larger field, and the relationships between them in terms of the struggle over the capital characteristic to the field in question, was important in analysing teachers' habitus and capital and so in positioning them within the locations of power and networking. Section 5.4 of my analysis highlighted two entry points where struggling for positioning took place: the EPP and the ACP. It also described the value attached to them through the differential allocation of physical and human resources. In Section 5.5, my analysis described how programme gatekeepers used timetabling and course allocation to reproduce male-female and differential hierarchies and to mask power relations. It seems, then, that the cultural capital and habitus of teachers from different contexts were evaluated differently within the institutional practices of Public High College and were integral to teachers being differentially positioned across time and space, notably across two different programmes, one of which was prestigious and the other not.

Chapter 7: Assessment and evaluation practices at Public High College: formal procedures and informal processes

7.1 Introduction

In Chapter Five, my analysis showed the contribution of the QA texts in the conceptualisation of assessments and teacher evaluation and the differential values attached to these practices and processes as well as the way in which teachers are positioned within these practices and processes. Chapter Six provided a depiction of Public High College and its sub-fields (its two programmes) and their differential symbolic values. This chapter addresses research question 1.b through micro level analysis: How are ESL teachers' identities constructed and produced in Oman and can that construction be understood at a micro level? It examines the differential capitals, stakes, and interests embedded in the different assessment practices and processes, which become sites of struggle, tension, and conflict between teachers and examination coordinators and across different colleges. This chapter examines the assessment practices of teachers and examination coordinators and explores what is at stake in these practices for these different groups. In addition, it examines the anomalies between the official discourse, which is claimed to have set in place standardised teacher evaluation practices and the informal practices that were happening in Public High College.

Entangled with assessment and teacher evaluation practices and procedures were teacher identity construction and struggles for positioning and legitimacy. Both assessments and teacher evaluation are sub-autonomous fields, with each having its own logic and capital. Section 7.2 starts with a vignette that illustrates the tensions between teachers' desire for their assessment to work to support students' learning as opposed to only grading students (summative assessment). Section 7.3 highlights the struggle between teachers and examination coordinators over the validity and reliability of the continuous summative assessment (CSA). Next, Section 7.4 examines how teachers resisted the test procedures to claim back authority in the assessment regime in Public High College. After this, Section 7.5 explores the contradictory and problematic ways both teachers and management used assessment procedures to rally the students to their cause and undermine the whole purpose of assessment while Section 7.6 focuses on the centralisation process, a third entry point (a macro-field) through which Public High College and the regional colleges enter into struggle to defend their interests, which were embedded in different forms of assessments. Finally, Section 7.7 examines the non-official practices that worked in conjunction with the official

teacher evaluation system which were bound up with teacher identity construction and that were also intertwined with power relations and conflict.

7.2 Vignette –asymmetric relations between examination coordinators and teachers

This section begins with a short vignette from my observation data and field notes, where a presentation on exam invigilation sparked a heated discussion over exam procedures. I am drawing upon this vignette to illustrate the tensions between teachers' desires for their assessment to work formatively (i.e. to support students' learning), as opposed to only grading students (summative assessment). This vignette illustrates wider tensions regarding the way assessment functioned as an apparently neutral mechanism, which masked the contradictory practices, power relations, and networking that contributed to the accumulation of Public High College's institutionalised cultural capital.

The room was packed with teachers. This was one of the few occasions where teachers, the chief examiner, examination coordinators, and the senior management were in the same room. The presenter was a teacher trainee presenting a paper on exam administration. Questions were posed by the presenter to the audience in the room. The questions developed into a debate about one particular issue: how do teachers understand their role during exam administration?

The question sparked a heated discussion over assessments between the teachers, examination coordinators and the management.

Hiba: *My students were trained to write a paragraph about a street, but the exam said neighbourhood. I had to explain the question to them*.

Chief Examiner: *You are their invigilators; your job is not to interfere with the exam*.

Mohammed: *I will explain the question to my students. We should have some room to apply our own judgment to the situation*.

Senior manager: *The rule says it is not your job to explain questions to students. (observation data, presentations by teacher trainee, second semester*)

The heated debate continued for some time. There was a lot of tension in the room, and every side was trying to make a point. The teachers seemed very upset, as one of the questions on the writing skills test was for the students to write a 250-word paragraph describing a street,

but as indicated above, the exam rubrics said 'neighbourhood'. Many students did not understand the word 'neighbourhood'. However, some teachers explained the word to their students whilst others did not. The heated discussion described above reflects the conflicting views between the college administration and the teachers on assessment practices and procedures, as we will see below. During my interviews, teachers questioned the arrangements in place where there was a clear division between assessment and teaching, and queried the complete authority of examination coordinators over assessment practices and processes. Teachers were asking for involvement in the actual practice of assessing students instead of their role being confined to exam administration and grading, whereas the Chief Examiner viewed such divisions as good educational practice.

7.3 Assessment as a field of struggle

Expanding on the above vignette, my analysis focused on the struggle that took place between the teachers and the examination coordinators over test delivery. My analysis shows that part of the tension between the teachers and the examination coordinators could be attributed to the way the validity (the extent to which a test measures what it purports to measure - in this case, writing skills) and the reliability (consistency of the assessment scores across time, place, conditions, and markers) of the tests were accorded differential values, which resulted in the struggle between them. Broad (2000) and Huot (2002) provide summaries of the tensions between reliability and validity, which have dominated theoretical discussion and practical approaches to assessing writing. Because centralised CSA in the research context incorporated both formative intentions and involved grading for the purposes of accrediting learning, it had this double slightly ambiguous positioning. Competing demands for both assessments to work formatively as well as to produce results from CSA that were consistent and dependable (Hoste and Bloomfield, 1975) created conflict between the teachers and the examination coordinators.

Public High College had put mechanisms in place to ensure the quality control of its CSA results. For example, the administration of Public High College ensured that in each room, there were two teachers invigilating the CSA to ensure students did not have any opportunity to share answers. In addition, a lot of thought went into preparing lists of teachers to invigilate the CSA. As the Chief Examiner explained, *"We pair a new teacher with an experienced teacher…so the experienced teacher knows the procedures."* It was equally

important that all tests across each level started and finished at the same time. Any discrepancy in start and finish times was considered serious, as it would cast doubt on the reliability of the CSA results, which were used as part of certification process as expressed by the Chief Examiner: *"if a group gets five minutes, ten minutes extra, and their results should never be compared of that of the other groups….that five minutes make a lot of difference….exam administration is very important if you want to compare the results."* It was important for the Public High College administration that the CSA was amenable to standardised administration to engender high reliability and therefore offer a trustworthy standard (Kahn, 1990). Teachers were not allowed to give any help to the students during the exams and were to act only as invigilators. As the Chief Examiner further added: *"An invigilator's duty to see that a test is done without interference and without changing, giving the exact time, keeping the time is the number one, no cheating, no cheating."* The Chief Examiner perceived that 'control and reliable test situation and gathering of evidence for third parties' (Torrance, 1995, p.340) should be given importance as it was felt necessary to instil public faith in the exams and maintain objectivity and teacher confidence in the assessment process. This was further expressed by the Chief Examiner: *"You can compromise on certain things… If you compromise it will be at the risk of quality."*

In the research context, there were other procedures in place that supported the reliability of the tests and the consistency of marking. For example, workshops at the beginning of each academic year were conducted as part of the orientation programme where new teachers went through the student assessment processes and practices. These addressed exam templates, exam procedures, group marking, and the use of marking criteria. Helen, a new teacher from Cameroon explained this as follows: *"Those of us who came in the last batch of teachers, they called us for induction of marking, so we know how marking is done around here."* During this session, the Chief Examiner and examination coordinators explained to teachers what to ignore, what to eliminate, and what to take into consideration whilst grading LEE (summative) and PTs (continuous summative assessment). Irene, a new teacher from Canada, elaborated further on the marking procedure:

> *We had like a forty or fifty minute session. We had a practice exam where we had to mark a guided essay and another one for free essay and then we talked about why we had different marks. So that was really helpful to show that everybody was on the same page.*

For Public High College, setting the criteria and the translation of such criteria was seen as important and sound practice to ensure the reliability of the CSA results, to provide more accurate measures of student achievement, and to establish fair assessment processes. Because CSA was operating within the context of a high stakes assessment system, further procedures were introduced that ensured the application of equitable standards and that were associated with the technical reliability of the tests. Similar to SA, CSA went through a moderation process. For CSA, the grades were validated by the Section Head of Curriculum and Teaching Methods, as she stated: "*We sample the progress test marking… We randomly collect samples of students' graded tests from teachers for moderation purposes.*" The aim of this process was to ensure that teachers were consistent in their grading practices of CSA across the levels. As Ruby, a non-local teacher from India, added: "*The section head randomly selects teachers and take the packs to check marking… They look at how it is marked… When they do this, teachers are more conscious in grading.*" During this initial process, if the section head felt a teacher's grades were not consistent, the teacher would then be asked to submit the entire graded test pack to be subjected to a further moderation process, as Ruby explained: "*You might be asked to submit your tests pack for double marking.*" The inspection of grading suggested that the college invested time and effort in improving teachers' competence in grading the procedures to ensure CSA reliability.

The desire for the CSA results to achieve high reliability was a common theme that emerged from the Public High College's administration's responses. The college administration perceived the technical credentials that were associated with CSA administration and moderation as involving 'objectivity.' For example, the Head of the Centre commented:

> *We thought of centralising CSA because of the type of results at that time… They were high; inflated because question papers were made by the teachers; marked by the teachers... Now the results are reliable.*

In addition, it seems the CSA results were associated with the reputation of Public High College. It was important for Public High College that its assessments gained the same currency as international English proficiency tests, such as TOEFL. The HoC added: "*Maybe, in the future, our assessment will decide the students' future and could do the job of TOFEL.*"

The teachers felt that the college had paid rigorous attention to developing procedures that promoted the reliability of the CSA. However, they felt the CSA validity was not given equal importance. As noted in Chapter Five, different assessment procedures were not explicated in GFPs (OAAA, 2008). The CSA system in the research context operated in a context and under conditions that were at odds with an understanding of CA as having a formative role. From the teachers' interviews, it seems that the focus of the CSA was much more orientated towards measurement than learning. This frustrated the teachers, and they felt it was guiding their teaching towards testing. As reflected in Gemma's interview: *"It is, kind of, you have three exams in one semester and what happens is, kind of, almost like chasing to get the one finished."* Furthermore, teacher data suggests that students were not able to use assessment to enhance their learning because of the limited range of CSA tasks. Thus, as Gemma put it, *"I'm sad for the student who is a little bit off the ball, who has creativity and originality flowing in his veins because there is no place for that in the (assessment) system."* Teachers perceived that having the centralised tests in place did not help their students to acquire embodied cultural capital to operate in wider fields. Gemma also realised the only way the skills she referred to in her interview could gain institutionalised cultural capital was through tests.

Gemma felt the current CSA scheme was making very little contribution as far as supporting and promoting the processes of teaching and learning. The same point was also noted by Norah: *"The exam does not give them the pin to express more and explain and show their analytical skills. It is too much fact based."* Teachers were aware that analytical skills and critical thinking were not institutionally valued forms of cultural capital and were not transformed into symbolic capital as the case was with other skills. The focus of these tests were on true and false questions and multiple choice items and teachers perceived these questions did not have much value in the overall teaching and learning; as Hiba stated, *"True and false questions should be a no."* Teachers perceived true and false questions as poor tests indicators of students' progress. Equally, Diana, a non-local teacher from the UK made the same comment:

> *They (the Public High College examination coordinators) are testing, as I say, main ideas; key vocabulary, this referral thing, and sometimes, true and false. I mean, it is too limited for what they (the students at Public High College) are capable of. I know them (the students); they are really bright here.*

Diana felt her students were capable of developing new repertoires of cultural capital. In the phrase *"I know them"*, Diana is asserting an identity as a teacher who knows her students' capabilities better than do the exam coordinators, who are distanced from the classroom and yet have the authority to decide what her students can and cannot do. In other words, Diana felt that the current assessment system, under which centralised CSA was functioning, focused entirely on outcomes and did not sufficiently emphasise the learning processes. Equally, teachers felt that CSA tests were mostly geared towards measuring students' skills in memorising vocabulary, such as finding synonyms or antonyms. Other skills that were tested were skimming and scanning and finding factual information. As Maryam explained: *"The listening exams test students' memory skills; not their listening skills."* Teachers felt the centralised CSA used at Public High College did not make space for skills that were meant to develop students' critical and analytical thinking. There was a struggle and conflicting views amongst the teachers and the examination coordinators as to what was generative of cultural capital in relation to teaching, learning, and assessment.

Although skills that were associated with analytical and critical thinking were acknowledged in the learning outcomes, according to the teachers, these were not included in the centralised CSA. The design and content focus of tests did not help to encourage the students to engage in critical self-evaluation and reflection. Some teachers tried to teach skills that were associated with critical, analytical, and evaluative skills, and to give such skills the importance they deserve, but the students refused to engage with this high level of thinking and analysis. For example, Diana tried to attach value to and confer legitimacy on the critical and analytical skills through a project and presentation course, which teachers were supposedly in control of and which was conducted outside the centralised tests, but she met with resistance from both the management and the students. The students filed a complaint against Diana for asking them to carry out their own research for the project. To Diana's shock, the head of the centre contacted the course coordinator about the incident. The course coordinator then told Diana to provide students with notes on different topics, just like other teachers did. Dina was outraged by the course coordinator's demand; as she put it: *"I said, 'I'm sorry!' I said you call this a research project and I'm giving them the research…. How could that be a research and a presentation project if they don't even do the research?'"* Diana chose to assert her identity from a position of showing resistance and refusing to conform to the demands and rules of the field. She further added: *"They told me you need to spoon feed these students. I said I do that often; I do that with writing, but this is a research*

project. I've guided the topics. There are key information; they got to engage in it." Analysing the interview quotation, Diana appeared to be ready to guide students' knowledge, meaning making, and interpretation to a certain extent and accepted that students at Public High College need to be guided through assessment, but she resisted prescribing knowledge and constraining students' interpretation.

She further added: *"You deliver a service, and you want to get a good result. You want to realise the potential of each student. And you try to have to have as much quality as you can. You have got to work with the system."* Diana was confronted with the twin tasks of getting her home group to complete the research/presentation project and giving them some understanding of how to use research skills and tools on their own to complete their project. Diana was aware of the duality of her identity as a teacher who wanted to instil certain learning qualities in her students and as a service provider whose job was to achieve good results and make achieving certification easy for her students. Diana perceived that her students were capable of demonstrating analytical skills, but she also acknowledged the importance of compliance with the institutional demands of the exam: *"You have got to work with the system."*

However, Diana thought it was important to negotiate with the field and to assert other teaching practices from time to time. As she further explained: *"Its knowledge as well as evaluation, and these are the key steps of learning… You have to encourage as much as you can. Encourage independent thought, yeah."* Diana could see the advantages and the embodied cultural capital her students were gaining from her teaching. Similar to Diana, Gemma was an experienced teacher from South Africa and came from a family of teachers who valued education and teaching; as she stated: *"I probably come from a family of teachers. I always enjoy educating students as a whole person… It is important for me that I've made a difference… I see a difference in my students."* She tried to find a home for her habitus where identity as an experienced teacher was affirmed and her desire to do best for the Public High College students was recognised as legitimate. Through her teaching, Gemma tried to instil in her students the need to engage in learning with a critical mind and continuously criticise and question things; she commented: *"I wanted my students to think outside the box and learn to analyse things."* Gemma valued this as embodied cultural capital and felt students should be asked to demonstrate this in their classroom interactions. However, she, too, met with resistance from her students; as she explained:

> *My students became very irritated because to everything they say, I say, 'Why?' and they say, 'Why what, Miss?' and 'If you say, "Use whichever structure you're comfortable with", we need to know what we must write first and what we must write second or else you're a bad teacher'.*

It seems that Public High College saw certification and the award of marks as doxic within their understanding of institutionalised cultural capital. Gemma further added: *"They (the management) do things in a certain way and marks are everything whereas for many of us, learning and obtaining knowledge is everything, not scoring marks."* Gemma was asserting a teaching identity through differing from rather than conforming to the prevailing doxic understanding of Public High College. Although Gemma realised that other identities are possible and that teaching could be practised and performed differently, she could not perform these identities. She further added:

> *I do think they (the management) can tap 60% or 70% of more into the experience of the people they have at the college. I think sometimes there isn't a sense of awareness of what people are capable of or what they have done.*

This suggests that Gemma felt that the institutionalised cultural capital she had accumulated in her training in South Africa and her vast experience did not have much value in this new field. Bourdieu's focus on the relational aspects of fields was evident in this discussion. Gemma's identity had been affected by her being able to examine the differences in the fields she had been exposed to and been a part of and the one she had come from. She was aware of how this would result in a sense of dislocation.

Similar to Gemma and Diana, Helen, also came to the Public High College with ingrained dispositions about teaching and learning, as she stated: *"My expectations of the students are quite high, and to tell you the truth, Cameroonian students anywhere in the world excel."* Helen wanted to instil certain embodied cultural capital in her students through her teaching and work ethics but found herself constrained by the practices of the field and the institutional ethos. As she added: *"Students here told me that their previous teacher was much more relaxed with them…. I said. 'I can't do that as it goes against my ethics and against my normal societal standards.'"* Helen at first asserted an identity of a teacher that was well aligned and legitimated in her previous field by refusing to adapt to the norms of the current field and by expecting more from her students. However, as she spent more time at

Public High College getting to know the teachers, the students, and the overall expectations of Public High College, she started to compromise and negotiate a new identity. Helen's first reality of the norms of the field came through substituting classes in the third week she arrived at Public High College. She felt both shock and disbelief when she realised that teachers at Public High College provide students with answers or with full essays on the board for students to copy. Helen said: *"I went to substitute one of the intermediate writing classes and I found all of them wrote the same essay. I said 'What?'…They copied what the teacher used on the board….same words and same sentences."* She realised that teachers at Public High College give a lot of help to their students, and she felt she had to show compliance to the norms of the field and toe the line and that she would have to revise her strategies if she wanted to gain capital. She added, *"I said to my students, 'I'm willing to go an-extra mile to help you, but I expect you to meet me half way or at least show some willingness to meet me half way.'"* The use of the phrase *"meet me half way"* in Helen's description of the demands of the new field implied some resistance to showing full complicity. Her second realisation came when she had the orientation for marking early in the semester she joined Public High College; as she stated here:

> *The marking orientation first and foremost is not about what is expected actually in terms of academics. Because if you gave me a piece of writing and said, 'Mark this as an English teacher', I would go for the grammar; I would go for the vocabulary, and I would go for the usage of phrases, but here you kind of torn down a little bit on that because they expect at the end of the day that a larger portion of the students should move up to the next level so that largely influences whatever we are doing.*

Helen's perception of the institution's expectations of its teachers sat uncomfortably with her own identity as someone who had high ethical and academic expectations. The use of the phrase *"torn down"* in Helen's description of the demands of the new field implied disruption in her identity.

There was a doxic understanding at Public High College about the type of teaching that was legitimate and possible, and this doxic understanding was established through tests. Gemma tried to break away from this, but faced resistance from both the field and the players of the field. This was further elaborated by Gemma: *"Because of the tests, I feel the wrong thing is being taught. Students are learning to lift information and not to understand information. They must have the ability to question and analyse the information."* It seems the focus of

these tests was on inquiry-type teaching; higher-order thinking was not given any space in the tests. Teachers felt frustrated and limited, as they could not confer legitimacy to these forms of cultural capital. It seems students would only engage in assessment tasks that were acknowledged in the centralised assessments even though these tasks were not tested under standardised conditions. For teachers, centralised CSA constrained the field of possible actions that teachers might have taken in their teaching.

7.4 Teacher invigilators resisting barriers to assessment practices and processes

In the previous section, my interview data highlighted the struggle between teachers and examination coordinators over the validity and reliability of the CSA. As concluded above, teachers felt that the way the CSA was set up did not help the teaching and learning process. The interview data with teachers seems to suggest that the teachers were nevertheless responding to the way the CSA was conceptualised in Public High College, that is, accumulating marks. The institutional emphasis on marks and getting as many students as possible through the system was clearly understood and internalised by Mohsin, a teacher from Egypt: "*My teaching should be reflected positively on students' scores, on their marks. And if these marks are good enough, then I'm successful in my career and in my teaching; otherwise there is something wrong.*" This was also expressed by Gemma:

> *Teaching is evaluated by marks. You are only rated on pass or fail or whether a student is a 9 or 8 or 7, and if you give your whole class 8 and 9, then you're a brilliant teacher even if you are lying... I think it is something that is deeply rooted into the socialisation of the people. Teachers give marks deserved or not deserved.*

It seems, then, that teachers both complied and resisted the college's doxic expectations about the conduct of assessment (or testing). However, because Public High College distinguished itself from other HEIs through its high student grades, assessment became a central issue in teachers' struggle for positioning in this field.

As a response to the tension between the reliability and validity of assessment, which was captured in the opening vignette between the teachers and the examination coordinators, the teachers used a variety of strategies to claim back some authority in the testing regime in Public High College. Sometimes, this involved resistance and interference. At other times, teachers resorted to unethical practices, such as cheating, and occasionally used disciplinary

judgment to award students marks. In other instances, teachers resorted to teaching to the test to benefit from those rewards that accrued from students' CSA results. Teachers were constructed in different positions, e.g., as assessors, moderators, and invigilators, in ways that were intended to maintain the reliability of the tests. However, my interview data show that there were significant shifts in teachers' positions as they attempted to assert one position and rebut another to serve their own interests. The shift in positioning not only was perceived as a threat to the reliability of the CSA, but, also by such behaviour, teachers reproduced the assessment culture of high stakes testing and measurement. In an interview, I asked Hiba, a non-local teacher from Morocco, whether it was possible to differentiate between her duties as a home group tutor from that her duties as an invigilator while invigilating her own group, and this was her response:

> *Honestly, as I told you, I follow the rules; whether they are good or bad, I follow the rules because at the end of the day, I don't want to be in trouble with any kind of authority, but when it comes to writing, I make sure my students understand the questions. That's it. (interview data, Second semester, Hiba, non-local teacher)*

The interview data show a shift in Hiba's position from an invigilator fulfilling administrative duties to a home group tutor defending her interests, which were tied up with the CSA results. Hiba's course of action, explaining the writing question to her students during the centralised CSA, seemed reasonable to her even though her action did threaten the reliability of the CSA and her position within the wider college. Public High College did not want teachers to compromise the reliability of these processes by employing teachers whom they perceived would not respect exam rules. Thus as the Chief Examiner put it: *"An invigilator's duty is to see that a test is done without interference and without cheating… Certain things you cannot compromise."* However, Hiba was willing to take this risk. It was important for her students to answer the writing question successfully and achieve in the test. As she articulated: *"I trained my students to write a paragraph about a street… I gave them many practices on how to write paragraphs describing a street, but in the exam, they said, 'Write a paragraph describing the neighbourhood.'"* She perceived that her students' inability to understand the question and later reproduce those paragraphs that she had trained them to write would undermine her position. Thus, teachers navigated through assessment in contradictory ways, as highlighted by Hiba's course of action when observing assessment procedures. For

example, in the first instance, Hiba talked about the importance of observing exams procedures and her compliance with them, whether they were good or bad.

In the second instance, Hiba contravened test procedures to defend her position with her students and accrue institutionalised cultural capital, which was built on results and marks. The first was consistent with what Hiba believed to be a technical process of distributing exam papers, keeping time, being vigilant, and collecting the papers at the end of the exam. The second occurred when Hiba mobilised her identity as a home group tutor who felt the need to intervene with the exam procedures to influence students' achievement. She further argued that her decision to break exam regulations did not undermine the reliability of the exam. Rather, it contributed to and even constructed that validity by her quick thinking in amending a mistake; as she put it: *"I did not want 25 students to write a paragraph about something else…the word 'neighbourhood' was a new word for them."* She further added*: "I explained the question to them, but it was their handwriting, their own ideas and everything."*

Similar to Hiba's position, Mohammed, a local teacher, developed a 'practical sense' or a 'feel for the game', which oriented his teaching practices. This is no mechanical process where individual agents are conditioned or predisposed to act in a particular way since there are multiple configurations of possible social action in any field. Mohammed explained the writing question to his students. He had spent weeks teaching his students how to write paragraph describing someone's personality, but the exam question said 'character'. He also felt the question was not a fair to him or to his students. He added: *"I taught my students the word 'personality' and they had practised and written beautiful paragraphs on this topic."* Mohammed had spent time and energy so he could successfully get his students through the test. This serves to justify Mohammed's position in at least two different ways: firstly, he had built that trust in his students in his ability to get them through the test, and secondly, in this field, teachers' reputation with students is paramount. Underpinning relations between teachers and students, therefore, are stakes and investments that need to be protected. Teachers perceived such interference as legitimate and justified in their desire to defend their professional image. For example, when I asked Mohammed why he felt explaining exam questions to the students was acceptable, his answer to the question was as follows: *"Students will start talking about me as a teacher and spread rumours."* Although, at the time of this research, teacher evaluation by students was not formalised, Mohammed saw students' informal evaluations as equally powerful or even more so since they could have a damaging

effect. As he added: "New groups will have an idea about you as a teacher and they say, 'Oh if you are taking grammar and writing with that teacher, you will fail.'" College teachers valued students' feedback even though it was informal, and perceived their feedback a valid judgment on their capability as competent teachers.

Equally, teachers used assessment practices and structures to build trust with students, a trust which was constantly threatened by exam results, as further expressed here by Mohammed: *"Students are here so we could help them to pass their tests; otherwise, they will not trust you."* In other words, it seems that tests underpinned the relationship between students and teachers. Teachers respected the exam rules and recognised that their role in assessment was purely administrative. However, teachers used the exam procedures which were meant to protect the CSA reliability in conflicting and at times in an unethical way to position themselves within the assessment system.

Teachers also used speaking tests as another opportunity to assert their position within the testing regime. Since speaking was tested separately and between classes, it was not conducted in the same ways as the tests in listening, reading, and writing, which were centralised. Speaking tests did not go through the moderation processes that, at the time of the research, were in place for the listening, reading, and writing skills. Teachers were given the freedom to select materials for the speaking test and to choose the type and difficulty of questions, as explained by Hiba*: "You can make the questions easy or difficult or just consider the gist in students' answers without considering whether the grammar is bad or good."* It seems from Hiba's answer that the focus was on giving students marks. It appears teachers' practices were shaped by the high stakes testing regime embedded within the CSA. This was reflected in the way teachers ignored the grading criteria for speaking 'I don't care whether students' grammar was good or bad' and were concerned only with awarding high marks. Other teachers' drew on disciplinary judgments to award students marks on their speaking ability, as further explained by Helen in a rather irritated voice: *"Some teachers give marks on how nice the student was in class. Well this is speaking test; I don't understand."* It seems teachers were feeding into the culture of testing. Similar to Helen, Gemma was equally irritated by how teachers resorted to disciplinary judgments in awarding marks. Thus, she put it, *"Oh he is such a nice student really, let's score them 22 out of 25… No! What about the pronunciation, fluency and grammar and the lexical resources? You can't just give students a mark."* It seems teachers were less concerned about the validity of

their tests and were more concerned about awarding those marks through unethical practices and cheating their way into testing.

Equally, my interviews with teachers suggest that the high stakes testing dominated teachers' practices, so that many were caught up in teaching to the test. For example, Infitah, a non-local teacher from Sudan, in her class, focused on teaching to the test. As she explained: *"Sometimes, I write with the students. I encourage them to give me sentences, and I write them on the board. So at the end of the day, the whole group will come up with one essay or paragraph."* It seems preparing students for testing and getting them through successfully was an important influence on Infitah's teaching habitus. Habitus serves to "generate practices, perceptions and attitudes which are regular without being consciously co-ordinated or governed by any rule" Thompson (1991, p.12). Even though there was a tension between reliability and validity, they actually oddly reinforced each other and helped cement Public High College's position.

7.5 Exam processes: undermining teachers' authority

In this section, yet another, somewhat contradictory issue can be identified in relation to teachers' assessment practices. Public High College students were required to attend a certain percentage of classes before they could sit the end of semester exam or the LEE. Taking student attendance, keeping records, and sending out warning letters to students was taken very seriously. For each group, there was the home group tutor and the co-teacher, both of whom were required to record attendance, although as shown below, how this was done varied. However, these administration processes took up a lot of a teacher's time and, at times, put strain on teacher-student relationships, as illustrated in Ruby's comments:

> *You issue 'debarred' letters, which scares them for one day, and the next day, the authority allows them in. When they come back, it is kind of a slap in our face. Like, all the hours we spend counting the hours students have missed and entering with so much care - what does it matter? We cannot think like this, but if the rules are made, then rules are there. Systems are made, but it depends how you use it.* (Ruby, non-local teacher, interview data, first semester)

Teachers felt their position within the student attendance monitoring and assessment processes were constantly being compromised. In the first interview excerpt, Ruby is

expressing frustrations over the assessment administration processes that seem to work against the teachers and further alienates their relationship with students. Ruby uses the phrase 'slap in the face' to illustrate how the college administration implicitly sanctioned such processes, e.g., by their non-intervention. Helen, like Ruby, felt frustrated by the assessment administration processes although her frustration was in how they were then followed up. As she put it: *"I see at meetings how strict the college administration is about recording student attendance, and you have to follow policies, but still, many debarred students took the exam; so what is the use?"* Equally, teachers used monitoring student attendance to rally students to their cause within the assessments and to undermine each other's position. This was partly done through the variety in the way absences were recorded. Some teachers recorded students absent if they were ten minutes late whilst others considered three 'late arrivals' as one absence, and yet other teachers marked students absent for interrupting the lesson. As Hiba put it: *"If students are 5 or 10 minutes late, for me, they are absent, but then students would say, 'So what about X and Y they can be 30 minute late but still they are not marked absent.'"* Teachers recorded attendance with varying degrees of consistency, and different teachers capitalised on this to develop good relations with students. This created contentions between teachers and between teachers and students; as the Head of Section for Curriculum and Teaching Methods put it:

> *There are a lot of people complaining about their partner teachers not recording the absences, and that causes a clash because the students see one teacher is letting them off while one teacher is going by the rules, and they seem to be the bad guy.*

For some teachers, it was important to get students on their side and stay popular with the student body, as my data demonstrated in section 7.4. Teachers in Public High College cared about their reputation with the students, and it seems it was important that students would make a special request to be taught by certain teachers. In addition, some teachers interpreted students missing classes as a reflection on their own teaching abilities. Thus, as Hiba put it:

> *If you notice my attendance online, this semester I gave only one warning. It doesn't mean I'm flexible with attendance, but they like to come back to my class… It is like a business… There are students who do not go to their classes because they did not like their teacher. I don't want to be that teacher. (Hiba, non-local teacher, interview data, summer semester)*

It seems attendance was seen as reflection of teachers' ability to keep an inviting environment for students to continue coming to class. For some teachers, it was important that no students on their class list were debarred because of their poor attendance. Of course, the lower the number of students who were debarred from a group, the lower the number of failed students who appeared on the list. Attendance was monitored by two teachers, and sometimes one of them would resort to practices that were considered unethical and unprofessional in order to project a good image with students. For example, as reported by the Head of Section for Curriculum and Teaching Methods:

> *The home group tutor not only did not record student absences; she took them to the beach and then later showed the class that their co-teacher was the one who reported them absent and got them in trouble with the head of the centre. (HoS, interview data, summer semester)*

She further added:

> *This home group tutor then later got from the server the spread sheet and put it on the screen in front all of the students to show that she had not marked them absent. It was the other teacher who had marked them absent, and that, to me, is the height of unprofessionalism; that's disgusting.*

For example, some teachers marked all the students present all the time even though they were not physically in the classroom. Others cancelled students' classes for the day and took them to the beach without informing the other core teacher, who would then arrive for a class with no students to teach. The teacher who then marked the class absent was reported to the ministry by the students. The students did not want this teacher to teach them and demanded that the non-local teacher from the western context be replaced. Thus, teachers used rules against each other to undermine each other's authority.

7.6 Standardisation process: struggle for positioning

A further point where struggle for positioning between Public High College and the six regional colleges took place was through the standardisation process of assessment practices and processes. The struggle over assessments was related to the emergent new Omani HE field. Public High College was audited in 2010 (www.oaaa.gov.om) and was criticised for failing to demonstrate how the quality of its student assessment system was assured and

benchmarked: "The Panel was unable to find evidence of how the assessment standards are quality assured or benchmarked externally" (OAC, 2010, p.20). OAC recommended that "Public High College develop and implement a system for benchmarking assessment standards along with a consistent approach to external moderation" (OAC, 2010, p.9). The reputation of Public High College assessment and QA was therefore a sensitive issue, in which perceptions of institutionalised cultural capital of different qualifications, local and non-local, were also implicated. Students in PHC are streamed into diploma and higher degree level, such as B.Tech (Bachelor degree in technical education) through TOEFL or IELTS even though they passed their LEE.

The head of Public High College was keen for the LEE to be recognised as equivalent to TOEFL/IELTS; he stated:

> *I wrote a proposal to the Undersecretary to have the TOEFL removed. We have an excellent programme (EPP) that ends with the LEE that streams students well… It is a matter of common agreement that all regional colleges would go for the implementation of the common exit exam.*

Therefore, Public High College's proposed a new assessment regime is as follows:
1. Removal of informal continuous summative assessment results from student certification across the language centres in Public High College and in the six regional colleges as a way to improve the integrity of student grades.
2. Standardisation of learning outcomes and delivery plans for all the levels (pre-elementary, elementary, intermediate and advanced.
3. Introduction of a centralised LEE at the end of the English Proficiency Programme for all students across the seven colleges under the same higher education provider. (data recorded from meetings with HoCs from PHC and regional colleges)

At the time of the research, the proposed centralised LEE was at the stage of deliberation. My analysis in this section is based on both observation data which were collected from the English Language Committee meetings with the heads of the English language centres of Public High College and the regional colleges as well interviews with all the heads and, at times, with section heads. As discussed in Chapter Six (see section 5.5), formal and informal CSAs were in use and were aggregated to give final marks. Summative and formal

continuous summative tests were prepared, administered, and graded under a tight framework while informal continuous summative tests were prepared and administered by teachers with no supervision from college management over the process. Although each college used different mechanisms to standardise and monitor its summative and formal CSA, it seems from the discussion at the meetings that not all colleges had in place similar mechanisms to monitor the grades awarded to students through informal CSA. The centralisation process started on the premise that it was in the interest of Public High College and the six regional colleges to address the new requirements of the OAC in assuring the quality of their assessment system. Thus as the head of Public High College put it:

> *Also, we have the OAC and the foundation programme standards…. Deans have also recommended that we had better have something common since we (Public High College and regional colleges) work under the same system and have one common Level Exit Exam, and it is good to see the result of that.*

The aim of centralising the LEE was to replace the internationally benchmarked test TOEFL. The meetings for the centralisation process were planned, chaired, and hosted by Public High College. This itself marked the authority and prestige of Public High College. The discussion at the meetings for moving forward with a centralised LEE was repeatedly framed in terms of transparency (e.g. in student college transfers) and QA discourses, such as the quality and effectiveness of the assessment system. Therefore, the head of Public High College stated: *"Also, when it comes moving students from one college to another, they would like to see the level of the student… It is good to have a standard system that is reliable."* In the research context, students were allowed to move colleges if, during the initial student allocation, the location of students' family residence and difficulty of commuting to and from college could not be taken into consideration. In Oman, students prefer to stay with their families rather than rent accommodation. From the interview, the head of Public High College had reservations about students moving from regional colleges to his college because of their elementary level of skills, and he saw a centralised LEE as important to filter the students. However, the centralisation process was fraught with tensions, contradictions, and power struggles over institutionalised cultural capital within different forms of assessments. Different colleges wanted to privilege certain processes that were associated with assessments and wanted their outcomes to be included.

7.6.1 Standardisation and struggles to defend institutionalized cultural capital

Public High College was interested in gaining trust in its assessment system from the policy makers within the ministry and obtaining national recognition from the OAAA. Therefore, it proposed a new assessment regime, and in particular wanted to end the ways that informal CAs were being used to inflate grades. On the other hand, the regional colleges saw such practices as legitimate and important, so were resistant to the proposed changes. For example, regional college A felt that removing informal CA would jeopardise its position in achieving external accreditation. According to Kim, the HoC of regional college A, PTs and LEE did not take into account all the learning outcomes explicated by the OAAA in GFPs (OAAA, 2008). Kim gave an illustration of such learning outcomes which were not covered by standardised summative and formal summative CAs, such as writing a summary. She asked the head of Public High College, *"How I'm going to show the OAAA that my students were tested on summary writing?"* Kim saw this as a valid concern and felt that Public High College was jeopardising her college's position with the external audit body. The HoC of regional college A was concerned that not testing these learning outcomes would weaken its assessment system, and thus would weaken its college's position regarding passing the audit process. This again was brushed off by the head of Public High College, who, she said, replied by saying, *"'OAAA is not the holy Quran.'"* Diana, the section head of regional college E agreed that informal CA was problematic and that some of the marks were inflated. However, she saw that students were benefiting from constantly writing in-home and class assignments, as this gave students some much-needed language practice. She further explained: *"For example, if they were having homework and classwork and presentations, they were feeling these teachers were giving inflated marks…Well in my opinion, this is a small reason to throw away the whole assessment."* Diana was concerned that removing the marks gathered from informal CA would discourage students from practising in the classroom. In the local context, if grades of assignments did not contribute to the certification, students usually did not take part in these assignments. Diana perceived the proposed changes would put her students, who were considered the weakest amongst regional colleges, at a disadvantage.

Diana was equally concerned that the proposed centralised LEE would be too challenging for her students who are perceived to be the weakest amongst the seven colleges. The regional colleges saw the proposals by Public High College as a threat to their interests, which were currently protected by their relative autonomy in being able to implement different

assessment practices and processes. Equally, they perceived centralisation of the LEE would further have a negative impact on their student achievement. They were concerned tests produced by Public High College would be too difficult for their students; as Diana added, *"Public High College students are completely different than our students….I used to be in regional college D and their students are about two to three levels higher than the students in regional college E and linguistically different too."* For example, regional college E was locally perceived as one of the weakest college in terms of quality of students; thus, the HoS of this college felt that removing informal continuous summative tests would harm their results.

However, other regional colleges were compliant with the standardisation process. These colleges perceived such processes as a form of external validation. In the local research context, colleges were ranked based on student results and self-assessment reports (see Chapter Two, section 2.6). From my own professional involvement at the managerial level, regional colleges B, and D, and F were considered weak in terms of the quality of the teachers, and in producing quality materials, tests, and graduates. However, such judgment was built on anecdotal evidence, and how the educational issues were understood and implemented was problematic. Participants in regional college B perceived raising the standards of student achievement as a way to minimise the risk of being seen as weak management and wanted to secure the quality of their practices by modelling Public High College. This was echoed by the head of section of regional college B, who said, *"We need to cover the entire infrastructure for our students and need to train them."* When I asked the section head what he meant by that, he said that the college of choice for the students was Public High College, and private companies preferred Public High College graduates as prospective employees. He then added: *"Like Public High College, we want to become the college of choice"*.

Similar to regional college B, the section head of regional college D perceived standardisation of assessments as an important way to strengthen their position with the MoMP. For example, David, the section head of regional college D, perceived centralisation of the LEE as a way to make up for what he perceived to be a shortage of qualified teachers and to gain access to expertise knowledge in writing exams and resources. For example, he said:

> *I love it, because there are more resources here (referring to Public High College). I have been told the staff have been properly trained to create exams; so they are qualified exam writers. I think in our college, we don't have proper teachers, and we ask these teachers to write exams.* (David, section head, regional college D, interview data)

Although there were no surveys or comparative studies on which David could base such strong judgments of the legitimacy of the Public High College exam coordinators and give less legitimacy to his own teachers, the certainty with which he made such assertions was fascinating. He saw that adoption of the assessment practices of Public High College would give assessment more face validity with their students; as he commented: *"The fact that it is centralised and students know it is the same exam we give to all students will diffuse the situation, and the exam had been devised methodically."* Again, this was a reflection of the kind of legitimacy Public High College claimed in official spaces at the same time as it questioned the legitimacy and ability of the regional colleges to produce quality assessment material. For example, in one of these meetings with the colleges, the head of Public High College, in his position as the chair of the committee, addressed the regional colleges by saying, *"I came to know that teachers from your colleges ask for our in-house material through our teachers; please pass your requests through official channels."* This was the indirect way Public High College's senior officials claimed a position of superior knowledge and capacity in these domains. In other words, he was saying that Public High College produced better quality material. He then asked for this to be documented in the minutes, thus according an official status to this remark and its associated judgement. The head of Public High College perceived it was important to accord such statements an official status since copies of the minutes were kept in the MoMP.

Participants from regional college C also perceived that centralisation would give their assessment system and, by extension, their college, the credibility they felt they lacked. In the interview, then, I directly asked the HoC of regional college C about her views in relation to the proposed centralised LEE. She replied, *"Maybe Public High College knew what they were doing and it was best we took what they suggested."* She then continued by saying, *"For example, some of the regional colleges did not do their job; they (referring to Public High College) say, 'Your students know nothing.'"*

Thus, it was the case that at least some regional colleges found it acceptable to be evaluated by Public High College in this fashion. Nonetheless, there were some colleges who were resisting this evaluation. Furthermore, what counted as 'standardisation' was also problematic; however, as shown by the following quotation from my interview with the head of Public High College. There were different understandings of student movement and equity, and these were framed within discourses of discipline and norms of conduct and compliance with Public High College's dress code. When I asked the head of Public High College what he meant by standardisation, he gave me an example in which he quoted an incident that took place between him and one of the students who had been transferred to his college from one of the regional colleges. He explained that during the incident with the student, the following conversation took place:

> *A student came from a regional college, and I saw him at the corridor with long hair. I stopped him and said, 'Well this is not allowed (referring to his long hair).' He said, 'Why?' and I told him, 'This is the system.' He said, 'But in that regional college they allowed us.' I said, 'Well you were in regional college, but now you are in Public High College.' Believe me, after two weeks he went back to his regional college. This is just one example, so if all the systems (referring to regional collage) follow the same criteria, students will not get surprised and formulate a different view.*

Students were judged based on criteria that would be considered unacceptable within equality and diversity legislation in Europe. Students from regional colleges were only allowed to stay at Public High College if they obeyed Public High College's dress code. For example, whereas students in regional college E were allowed to have long hair, Public High College perceived that such students would damage its image and represent a threat to discipline. Public High College did not want students with long hair to become part of the college. As explained earlier, the ministry under which colleges operated facilitated student transfer from regional colleges to Public High College. Public High College perceived such a decision as a threat to its acclaimed reputation as an elite college. Public High College, through the standardisation process, wanted to defend its interests/institutionalised cultural capital by allowing certain students to become part of this college.

In a further instance, teacher recruitment processes functioned as an objective measure in creating differential power relations between the colleges, a measure which was masked by

discourses that claimed transparency. These processes gave Public High College control over regional colleges' practices in relation to hiring teachers. For example, regional colleges could no longer hire teachers unless their CVs had been approved by Public High College. Prior to the standardisation process, the process of hiring teachers was the responsibility of each college. The MoMP gave the colleges the authority to contact private hiring agencies approved by the ministry to fill teaching positions. However, in 2011 and as a form of standardisation, Public High College demanded that all CVs be sent to them for review. After CVs had been reviewed then they were sent to the regional colleges. This process took a lot of time, and regional colleges could not fill teaching positions on time; as Diana, the section head of regional college E explained:

> *Anyways, they said all the CVs have to come through PHC. There are several problems with that; first of all, we were not leading any international standards in terms of time frames. We were contacting teachers for interviews two, three months after they had submitted their CVS. That's not appropriate. (Diana, HoC, Interview data, second semester)*

She further added that the senior manager of Public High College, who was not familiar with the American education system, did not know how to assess these CVs; she commented: *"They were not familiar with American colleges. So they were approving CVs from people who had their diploma from what we call diploma mills. You just buy your qualification."* Diana felt that because Public High College had no experience with the American system, they were not in a position to assess CVs properly. Therefore, Diana, in her position as section head, was frustrated with the process and with the shortage of teachers as a result of such control. She raised these concerns with the local dean and suggested recruiting teachers locally. The dean, who was well connected with the ministry policy makers, managed to get approval for this. However, when they sent a list of local teachers they wanted to hire, Public High College insisted on re-interviewing them for the teaching position; as Diana further commented:

> *The dean was told that the applicant needs to go to PHC to do a teaching demonstration. So he (applicant for teaching position) is going down there and will be assessed by someone who is not Omani, and he is not a native speaker. (Diana, HoC, Interview data, second semester)*

Diana here is questioning the legitimacy of the head of Public High College in exercising control over their hiring practices. She was extremely frustrated with how much power Public High College was accorded and how this allowed her college little authority and legitimacy. Thus, she commented:

> *So for Public High College, it is off by itself and reports directly to the ministry; and there seems to be, at least in my opinion, that the regional colleges don't know what's in their influence or at least are afraid to make the decisions. (Diana, HoC, Interview data, second semester)*

So Diana was aware of the hierarchical positioning of the colleges. All these factors have contributed to a lack of critical engagement and debate about any theoretical underpinnings that might be implicated in assessment, learning, and teaching practices. The logic of the structures was a bureaucratic and procedural one, which seemed to replace the application of thought and debate regarding the development of assessment standards with the need to conform to official requirements, as if these could transparently speak for themselves. The struggle was over who had access to the field of assessment and whose outcomes would be included when each college was trying to defend their institutionalised cultural capital. The head of Public High College was concerned to defend the concentration of symbolic capital attached to his college. Those regional colleges who felt that they did not have such institutionalised cultural capital were sometimes happy to comply with Public High College, while others were more resistant. Although there were detailed discussions about the technical aspects of a centralised LEE, theoretical considerations were absent from such discussions. The merit of the assessments in the local context was understood in terms of mechanical ease of application and standardised administration. Similarly absent from these deliberations was any discussion of the different theories that underpinned teaching and assessment in the local context. Part of the problem and confusion could be attributed to the superficial similarity in practices and procedures that were involved in assessments that were derived from both behaviourist and constructivist perspectives. Standardisation in this context, therefore, functioned as an apparently neutral mechanism that masked the contradictory practices, power relations, and networking that functioned in the interests of the accumulation and expansion of Public High College's institutionalised cultural capital.

7.7 Teacher evaluation: transparent procedures and opaque processes

This section begins with a short vignette from my interview data with two local teachers who were discussing teacher evaluation processes. I draw upon this vignette to illustrate the tensions between the non-official system of teacher evaluation, which was premised on a network of relationships and understanding of the tacit norms of practices of this particular institution, and the official system, which was constructed using discourses of accountability, accreditation, transparency, and performance.

> Maryam: *I learnt later the examination coordinatorship for listening skills went to another teacher; actually, my junior by two years. This is after I had asked the head of the centre about vacancies in the examination coordinationship positions to which his answer to me was, 'No, we are still filling teaching positions". Oh, I was furious. I wanted to kill somebody.*
>
> *We (Maryam and Rahma) went to his office (the Head of the Centre) and asked him 'Why? Tell us what were your criteria? Why did you choose her for the position? If we are not doing our job satisfactorily tell us. We will meet your criteria and we will improve ourselves.' He gave no reason and added that she (the junior teacher) was prepared for the coordinatorship for the listening skills.*
>
> Maryam: *I don't know how she was prepared for it. If he was talking about filing. I can do filing. I don't know. Maybe it is me; it is my personality. Maybe I need to change my personality.*
>
> Rahma: *We don't know the criteria they use to select people for these positions.*
>
> (Maryam and Rahma, local Omani teachers, interview data).

Maryam and Rahma's interview extract gives a clear depiction about the two teacher evaluation systems in operation at Public High College. One operates within the arena of performance management, where positions are announced and selection procedures are formalised and standardised. The first part of the interview extract gives a clear hint of the formal procedures in place and how they lead to career advancement; as Maryam explained, *"I asked the head of the centre if there were vacancies."* However, the comment in the second part of this vignette, where Maryam came to know that another colleague had been appointed without any apparent process having taken place, is suggestive of a covert system being in operation at the same time. How did these two conflicting regimes of teacher evaluation come to be in operation, and what held them together? I will explore this through my empirical data. By 'regime' in this context, I mean a formal system of codified practices and other practices that remain informal. Before I describe the official teacher evaluation

system at Public High College (one that involved assembling a paper trail reflecting on good teaching practices), I will briefly describe academic tenure and employment conditions at Public High College.

7.7.1 Academic tenure and employment practices: local interpretations

With the establishment of the OAAA and the development ROSQA (OAAA, 2004), HEIs were required to formalise their teacher evaluation system. However, as discussed in Chapter Four, GFP (OAAA, 2008) did not explain how teacher evaluation was to be understood and taken forward by HEIs. Also, there is no alignment in GFP (OAAA, 2008) between teacher evaluation and career progress. As a result of such a lack of explication, both formal and informal teacher evaluation processes were being applied, contributing to the emergence of tension embedded within the two forms of teacher evaluation. Progress in any career ladder was not directly linked with teacher appraisal; as interview data with teachers and management show, teachers were only formally evaluated once, that is, at the point of their recruitment.

At Public High College, there were no tenure track positions in place, as they are understood in the western contexts. Omani local teachers were appointed directly by the MoMP. They were hired on a permanent basis, whereas non-local teachers were hired on a renewable contract basis (based also on their qualifications). However, non-local teachers' contracts were renewed automatically irrespective of whether they were hired directly by the MoMP or through an independent hiring agency. Some non-local teachers had held their teaching position at Public High College for more than twenty years. In addition, there was an employment grade system in place for the local teachers only. However, there was no system in place where teachers could apply for promotion within a grade system whereupon the application was assessed. All local teachers, irrespective of their levels of responsibilities were promoted every four years. The evaluation was based on local teachers' qualifications (masters or doctorate) and the number of years since they had obtained their last qualification. Therefore, career advancement in the research context was perceived as involving moving from teaching to holding administrative positions. Holding administrative positions was not linked with the grade system in place nor with the type of qualifications and/or years of experience. These positions came with no extra monetary rewards although there was occupational prestige attached to them. They also facilitated access for local teachers to

policy-makers and overseas study scholarships. In the ministry bylaws, the following positions were recognised as administrative positions in the English Language Centre of Public High College and regional colleges in the periphery:

- Head of the English Language Centre

- Head of Curriculum and Teaching Methods Section

- Head of the English Language Programmes Section (see Appendix H)

These positions were filled either internally by the individual college or by the MoMP. In the ministry bylaws, there is no reference to any formal written application process for these positions, nor any explication of the kind of monetary rewards for them. In contrast, the positions below were not specified in the ministry bylaws, and were not linked to any formal distinction in professional grade; nevertheless, within Public High College structure, they were well-acknowledged and held currency for the local teachers:

- Quality Assurance Officer

- Assistant Quality Assurance Officer

- English Language Centre Registrar

- Timetabling Coordinator

- Social Committee Coordinator

- Event Management Coordinator

- Newsletter Coordinator

- Chief Examiner

- Examination Coordinators for different skills (see Appendix G)

7.7.2 Teacher evaluation: formal and informal processes

Teachers, upon their appointment, go through a formal teacher appraisal process to evaluate their teaching competency. However this was not used for promotion purposes. This process was in place to evaluate teacher suitability in teaching. This section describes what this process involves, drawing on my interview data, since no college document describes the teacher appraisal process. The description highlights the official teacher evaluation processes which were in place at Public High College; and which included both local and non-local teachers upon their first appointment. These official teacher evaluation processes are considered in ROSQA (OAAA, 2004) as part of 'Good Practices.' Thus, it states, "All staff are appraised annually. The supervisor discusses the implementation of the performance

appraisal scheme with each staff member before he or she is evaluated, clearly specifying the performance criteria" (p.87, section 8.2.7). However, the document is silent about any link between recognition of good practice in teaching and tenure track, and nor is there any mention of connections between teacher appraisal and employment grade system. Thus, the document states, "Outstanding academic or administrative performance is recognised and rewarded" (p.87, section 8.3.3).

Through the interview below, I explore the official teacher appraisal processes at Public High College. These included evaluation of classroom teaching as well as other processes that demonstrated Public High College teachers' compliance with ROSQA (OAAA, 2004), such as pre and post classroom observation meetings, which led to formal documentation of the observation. At the time of the research, Emily, a non-local teacher from a western context, had been teaching at Public High College for over a year. Like all newly appointed teachers, Emily started her teaching post with a probationary period of three months, during which time, her suitability for the teaching position was monitored and assessed. During the three month- probationary period, Emily was expected to understand the practices and procedures, and the internal and external policies of this particular college. As described in her interview, Emily went through two processes; one was less formal, which involved her going through an induction/orientation week, and the second process, which was more formal, involved a lesson observation. In the orientation week, Emily was expected to have a folder signed to show she had received adequate induction about college practices. The orientation week was organised by Public High College and delivered by teachers in the administrative positions mentioned in section 7.7.1. During the orientation week, teachers were given information about the assessment system, monitoring of student attendance, QA, where to collect text books, their timetable, and their group timetable, as well as other information about the type of physical resources available for teachers. Thus, as Emily put it, *"The discussions were about what is expected and what their situation was, and they just signed off."*

At the end of Emily's orientation week, her folder went back to Public High College administration as part of a paper trail that indicated that the teacher had completed the orientation programme. This folder was known as the 'QA file' and included procedures about monitoring student attendance, assessment requirements, procedures about issuing warning letters to students for missing classes, and teacher and student dress code. The

different administrators who conducted the orientation week also acted as gatekeepers to administrative positions, as I demonstrate later.

Teachers were also expected to keep the following documents in their file; class lists, completed student weekly attendance sheets, teacher timetable, home-group timetable, copies of warning letters, classroom materials, completed academic advice (for weak students), team meeting records (evidence that home-group teacher and co-teacher had met to discuss students' academic and behaviour problems), and completed and signed teacher appraisal forms. Emily further elaborated on the purpose of each visit, as she described here:

> *For quality assurance, I know we are supposed to know the rules of the college so we can tell our students about the academic and the attendance policies, and I know we are supposed to have the file on the desk.*

Teachers, then, keep this file with them and keep updating it on a semester basis as they are assigned different levels, new students, new timetables, and worksheets. The QA file has a dual function. Firstly, it helps new local and non-local teachers to be more efficient in their job, become better organisers, and stay on top of their day to day duties. Thus, as Emily put it: *"I agree the file is great; it is a good way for disorganised teachers to be forced to be organised."* It is perceived as a necessity and as an effective tool to keep disorganised teachers in shape and to keep them on track. Thus, the process becomes one of establishing, by a much less direct means, whether teachers are good organisers, efficient managers, and social relations facilitators, in a particular conceptualisation of what it is to be a professional teacher. Secondly, the QA file is perceived by teachers as protection against students who might wrongly accuse them of not fulfilling certain aspects of their responsibilities, such as information about attendance requirements, academic support, and assessment requirements, as well as giving advice on what might be perceived problematic aspects of students' behaviour. As Emily's comment illustrates:

> *If my students misunderstand something then that comes back on me. Why didn't you explain it like you were supposed to? That would be the assurance… I get them to sign their names, so I get to cover myself if at the end of the semester they have failed, and they say, 'She never talked to me and never advised me.' 'Yes I did; I have your signature.' (Emily, non-local teacher, interview data, second semester)*

It seems the QA file served as evidence that the teachers had been attending to their responsibilities as indicated in their contract and/or in teacher's handbook. However, the QA file was not used in a consistent way. There was no evidence that the file was used to support promotion to administrative positions. To sum up, the purpose of the QA file was not to document teaching, but to document processes that were associated with teaching, particularly for newer teachers. It seems the emphasis was more on attending to processes that suggest teaching has been done. However, any evaluation of how teaching was understood and conducted was absent from the college's documentation and given little space as part of teacher evaluation. These assumptions are also reflected in the Head of Section for Curriculum and Teaching Method's statement:

> *We don't actually assess them every year. How many teachers do we chuck out? Very few… It is usually disciplinary things that get people fired. We know we have got teachers who don't teach well. But once you have been here for a year or so, we are not going to kick you out unless there has been some big incident, or big problem. We don't just want to get rid of people once they are in the system, and work in the system reasonably well and follow the guidelines, you know, turn up regularly and not have too many sick days and do a reasonable job, which is better than somebody who comes in new.* (Louise, Section Head, Interview data, first semester)

It seems from Louise's interview that teaching was not evaluated on a year-to-year basis; nor was it linked with a grade system or a tenure track. Although these processes were in place, it seems the way they were implemented or positioned were complex and were not aligned with teaching. This could explain the development of informal processes and networking, which further contributed to the hierarchical positioning of teachers. Teaching was formally assessed once during the probationary period, usually in the second month after the teacher had started teaching and had had the opportunity to familiarise themselves with the system. They were then visited by the head of the centre and one or both section heads to evaluate their teaching. As Emily explained: *"These visits were not announced; you know the week they visit, but not the day or what class."* The process involved classroom observation, lesson observation, and post lesson observation discussion. Teachers were given feedback on different aspects of the observed lesson, and during the feedback, the teacher was expected to bring their QA file.

The teacher appraisal form emphasised aspects of teaching techniques that are associated with CELTA (Certificate in Teaching English to Speakers of other languages) or student-centred teaching approaches. These include presenting the material to the students, clarity of giving instructions, concept checking, organising the class into pairs or small groups, giving timed tasks, and walking around and observing students as they work on the task. If this suggests some emphasis on teaching techniques, they were not considered very important, as Louise explained:

> *There are some people whom we have kept after their three months' probation and whom we knew were not particularly brilliant; but they are ok. They are reliable and get on with the work. They do what they need to do, and they do the admin and they are not awkward with the other colleagues. So they function ok in the system. They may not have the best teaching techniques, but they are doing enough, and it is good enough to get the students through.* (Louise, Section Head, Interview data, second semester)

It seems that providing teachers did the administrative side of teaching, such as doing the attendance, giving warning letters to students on time, not missing classes, and getting on well with co-teachers and management, they would be able to stay at Public High College. As Louise further elaborated, *"We know we have got teachers who don't teach well, but work in the system reasonably well and follow the guidelines… They turn up regularly and don't have too many sick days."* Therefore, no stringent QA of teaching seemed to be in place. The dominant concerns were for ensuring administration processes were completed, although even these practices were variable and were not applied to all teaching staff.

7.7.3 Informal teacher evaluation processes

This section focuses on informal teacher evaluation processes. Chapter Five showed how local teachers were given access to the EPP and its networks. As discussed earlier, to play the game in a particular field, one needs to believe in the value of the game and its rules, a concept Bourdieu calls 'illusio' (2004, p.4). However, the habitus of different teachers were not always well aligned with the largely implicit rules that governed the field, for example, Maryam's disappointment in not being given the post as listening skills coordinator (see section 7.7). The outcome of this was the position went to another local junior teacher who established good relations with the management of PHC, as stated by one of the local teachers: *"This new teacher established a friendship with the western section head."* Such networking at Public High College was carried out in ways that were relatively invisible but

that had opened up new professional opportunities, including working with the listening coordinator, as Maryam stated: *"During the summer semester Khadija (the new Omani teacher) was not given any teaching and was asked to help Salah, the listening coordinator."* In the past, Maryam had shown interest and had been given an opportunity to assist the Quality Assurance Officer. That was Maryam's opportunity to impress the management and help build her CV to support her in taking up a promising position in the administration.

Maryam was passionate, enthusiastic, and willing to invest in the wider teaching community. However, she did not see *"doing tally sheets and questionnaires"* as helping her in either learning new skills or taking her closer to her dream job of coordinating exams. She felt spending extra hours doing small tasks was not worth investing in. Thus, she quit; as she explained, *"I did not benefit from this position, and I said to the head of the centre, 'If I'm going to do the same thing, I would rather not continue"*. When Maryam later showed an interest in coordinating the listening skills, the HoC's answer was that there were *"no openings for testing coordinators positions.... My priority is to fill teaching positions."* This willingness to engage in unrewarded additional tasks appeared to be used as a tool to evaluate teachers covertly, a tool that cost Maryam what local teachers considered as an important position.

Reflecting on Maryam's story, it seems there was a conflict in the expectations between what she considered learning certain skills and low level tasks. For the HoC and the Quality Assurance Officer, doing small tasks was perceived as an important part of building a character and preparing teachers for positions in the administration, as expressed here by the head of the centre:

> *Some people really aim at reaching a certain stage, which is good and which is fair, but they have to prove they are entitled to and that they have the potential and they are ready, and they should not, as we say jump the ladder. They should make sure they go step by step. (HoC, interview data, summer semester)*

These processes where teachers were involved in the wider teaching community were valued at Public High College, as expressed here by the Quality Assurance Officer: *"I asked teachers to take upon themselves additional tasks; shouldn't this be part of teacher appraisal?"* She further added, *"So many (teachers) refuse, and they have the right to refuse because it is not part of their job description."* The Quality Assurance Officer, a local senior

administrator who had, in the past, held the position as HoC at Public High College, was referring to a local understanding of what teachers' responsibilities should entail. Taking extra responsibilities and doing extra tasks are loosely defined in the local context. There are tasks that are clearly defined in the teachers' handbook and in their contract. At the time of data collection, teaching responsibilities were well defined, and teachers reserved the right to decline taking up additional tasks as expressed here by the Quality Assurance Officer: *"Of course, I can't argue and say, 'Why you can't do it?' Fair enough; it is your right."* She was here referring to the recent changes where teaching and learning activities were being contracted and defined within a legal and financial framework. However, there were other tasks that were not included in the official documents. These ranged from dealing with a local water supplier to get bottled water delivered to the teachers, to organising a raffle, or to mentoring new Omani local teachers. These tasks were not defined and were not obligatory. The extent to which teachers were willing to take on tasks outside their classroom boundaries and contribute to the wider college community was up to the teachers.

Many non-local teachers from a western background would refuse to do additional activities outside their contract unless there was a financial reward attached. For example, as discussed in section (5.4.1) on one occasion, the western HoS approached a western teacher to work as an examination coordinator, but the teacher declined; as he explained: *"I wouldn't mind doing something else if it was actually a promotion with a pay increase because I can put that on my CV, but I don't want to sit in an office all day writing exams and no teaching."* Although teachers had the right to refuse taking on tasks defined outside their contract or in the college teachers' handbook, as has been seen, a willingness to take on additional unpaid tasks was used in the research context as a covert criterion to promote local teachers for positions in administration albeit tacitly and implicitly.

The Quality Assurance Officer further added: *"Imagine how much respect I would have for teachers who don't say no and are willing to give their time, and how would I look at teachers who come to me and give me a hundred excuses."* Again, the distinction between teachers who were willing to give additional time and teachers who *"made a hundred excuses"* was constantly stressed and was considered an important criterion to distinguish between active and non-active teachers. The Quality Assurance Officer further added: *"Other teachers do it because they think it is an important thing, and they think they are important because we*

chose them.'' Revisiting Maryam's story, it seems that within the local framework and local understanding of doing things, Maryam's refusal to give assistance to the Quality Assurance Officer did not lead to termination of her contract, but it created a barrier regarding future advancement. Instead, her decision to stop working in the QA office was perceived negatively by the HoC, and so the position for listening coordinator went to another local teacher who was two years junior to Maryam. Maryam was positioned as a rebellious teacher and was excluded from and denied future opportunities, as she stated here: *"I was not given another chance; I was blacklisted."* It seems from Maryam's reflection that when teachers enter a more mature field, whose scripts and norms are likely to be well established and taken for granted, and teachers have relatively limited power to challenge them, noncompliance with these norms became the basis for exclusion from positions.

Similarly, Mohammed lacked knowledge of the practices and norms of Public High College, which created an obstacle to his career advancement in the administration. Mohammed challenged these norms when he demanded to work on the timetabling committee, but it seemed that it was not acceptable for new teachers to demand positions. In my first interview, he was eager to tell me about the numerous times he had asked for certain positions in the administration by making suggestions and giving proposals, as he expressed in this interview extract:

> *When I first joined, I asked my boss if I could be put on the timetabling committee. He said, 'No, you are ne.' ....I said, 'what if those non-local teachers leave the country, what will we do? (Mohammed, local teacher, interview data, second semester)*

By demanding to be positioned in the administration, and suggesting a hundred percent replacement by the local teachers as normal (*"What if those non-local teachers leave the country?"*), Mohammed was perceived within the local norms as aggressive and arrogant and as claiming a legitimate right to positions. He was challenging the status quo and the internal arrangements and norms of promoting teachers, as well as proposing reforms. As he said, *"I have given him (the head of the centre) so many proposals for improving teaching and learning practices and suggestions and things I would be interested in, but he says no."* Mohammed perceived his enthusiasm to take over from non-local teachers as a normal and rational action. Although Mohammed was not always compliant with the established norms, he kept participating in other activities within the wider teaching community. He was later

given a position as club coordinator, which by local standards was not an important position, as Mohammed commented in a rather disappointed manner: *"At the end, the head of the centre said to me, 'We did a personality analysis and according to this analysis we put you as club coordinator.'"*

The reference to the first person plural 'we' gives a direct hint about the hidden process and assessors who were not part of the official management structure, but were consulted when selecting local teachers for administrative positions. My informal discussions with the HoC showed it was a tradition to consult the heads of section, Quality Assurance Officer, College Registrar, coordinators, and senior colleagues when selecting teachers for positions in the administration. It seems, therefore, that the HoC took into account Mohammed's personality, attitude, and behaviour when evaluating him, although these processes were not transparent. None of the formal evaluation processes involved a consideration of personality, approach, and attitude, and nor were these part of a teacher's formal appraisal form. Furthermore, Mohammed's legitimacy to hold an administrative position was compromised when his co-teacher, a non-local from a western context, questioned his knowledge of English grammar. As Mohammed reported:

> *I was helping this teacher… I said to the students, 'You can use the simple past instead of 'used to' for this exam." The students told the teacher, and the teacher went to the head of the centre. He believed the teacher and asked to see me…He said, 'Grammar is not improvising; it is one, two, three; you follow it.* (Mohammed, *local teacher, interview data, second semester*)

It was important for local teachers who were pursuing promotion to administrative positions to possess at least the minimum amount of knowledge and expertise, including both teaching and linguistic skills. Teachers who were seen as having poor teaching skills were equally excluded from certain positions in the administration and teaching higher levels of English, as Mohammed also stated here: *"After that, I was never put on the teaching schedule for the intermediate level, but I like my pre-elementary students."* Mohammed was further demoted when, the following semester, he was placed to teach pre-elementary students. Again, this was done without conducting a formal evaluation process or any open dialogue. Such hidden evaluation processes were further explained by Khalil, a junior local teacher, who at the time of the research was promoted to Assistant Quality Assurance Officer and had recently been

promoted to an official position in the management. According to Khalil, these positions were open to all local teachers; as he explained: *"So everyone has been given a responsibility and a chance to join one thing."* Both Khalil and Mohammed joined Public High College at the same time. Unlike Mohammed, Khalil was privileged to occupy a position as the Quality Assurance Assistant Officer representing the language centre at college level. Unlike Maryam and Mohammed, Khalil had a better understanding of the unwritten norms and the institutional practices of Public High College. Khalil immediately pursued these positions through the coordinators not the head of the centre.

Khalil started by helping the HoC's registrar with recording student marks, lists, and statistics. Thus, he was getting external validation from the coordinators by doing small tasks. In contrast to Maryam and Mohammed, Khalil asserted his identity as a teacher, focussing on his cultural capital and concentrating, in particular, on his embodied and institutional capital. Giving this kind of help was highly regarded; as the Quality Assurance Officer commented earlier, *"Imagine how much respect I will have for teachers who give their time and don't say no."* These norms were embedded within the local wider culture and tradition and extended to the teaching community. Khalil's strategy was consistent with the dominant narratives of how a new teacher should act and what they should look like and demonstrated that their practices correspond to shared conceptions of proper organisational functioning. 'Giving a lot of help to the administration during student break', 'helping with student data base and grouping', and 'reading out student marks;' were among investments that Khalil made. Subsequently, Khalil converted small tasks into a positive identity.

In this regard, it appeared that Khalil was aware of the institutional practices of Public High College. He complied with these norms and showed respect to these understandings and this way of doing things. Khalil had no problem working with coordinators from other nationalities, which was important to the HoC. Thus, as the HoC put it, *"If you are given the position of HoC or HoS and you don't know how to communicate with people, there is a problem."* In addition, it was important to the HoC that teachers pursuing positions should prove their teaching abilities and go through training for administrative positions. Thus, the HoC put it: *"So if they get enough training, and they have the good experience, and, at the same time, they focus on their main career, which is teaching because this is communication."* Khalil was willing to take up unpaid additional work, of a routine and unchallenging nature, as it seemed an important way of ensuring the appreciation of more senior colleagues. Thus,

he was aware of the importance of establishing networks and of the informal processes that were in play.

7.8 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have used my observation and interview data to examine the capitals, stakes, and interests embedded in different assessment practices and processes and which become sites of struggle, tension, and conflict between teachers and examination coordinators and across different colleges. I have also examined the practices of teachers and examination coordinators in relation to assessment practices and processes and explored what was at stake in these practices and processes for these different groups. The analysis in this chapter has also examined the disjuncture between the official discourses/procedures in relation to teacher evaluation and the informal practices. The data discussed in section 7.3 have shown how both the teachers and examination coordinators became involved in a power struggle to favour the reliability versus the validity of the standardised CSA. For example, the examination coordinators perceived the reliability of the CSA as being more important than the validity, and thus there was a lot of focus on the actual administration of the CSA and on skills that could be easily tested. Teachers, on the other hand, wanted the CSA include assessment tasks that tested students' analytical skills and questions that were more challenging. Nonetheless, it seems the Public High College administration was more concerned with accumulating marks that could be comparable and credible whilst teachers seemed to be concerned with the actual learning process. However, in section 7.4 the data showed how the doxa of the institutionalised cultural capital of Public High College, which was associated with accumulating marks and student certification, was instilled in teachers habitus and became embedded in their everyday dispositions. Teachers, for example, interfered with the CSA administration at times and occasionally resorted to unethical practices so their students could accumulate those marks and rewards that were embedded within assessments.

In section 7.5, the data showed yet another contradictory issue. Teachers recorded attendance with varying degrees of consistency, and different teachers capitalised on this to develop good relations with students. This created in the research context conflict between teachers and between teachers and students. In section 7.6, the data showed how Public High College and regional colleges used assessments as a way to position themselves and establish their

authority and power. Although standardisation was linked to meeting the requirements of the OAAA, issues such as student movement between HEIs, equity of assessments, and teacher equality, which are privileged discourses within international HE, were absent from these structures. Instead, there were problematic understandings regarding how these discourses were understood and implemented. I conclude from the data that Public High College used the standardisation process negatively to build its own institutionalised cultural capital and to exercise its power and authority over the regional colleges. In section 7.8, the data focused on two teacher evaluation processes that were in play in the research context. A formal position, where the norm would be for authority to be respected, was continually undermined by networking and social capital. The local teachers competed in this field, and those who were aware of the importance of networking and the norms of practice were successful in progressing in their career. However, not all teachers entered the field of teacher evaluation; the non-local teachers played the game differently, taking the view that their role involved doing their job well, but no more.

Chapter Eight: concluding chapter

8.1 Introduction

This ethnographic case study has provided insight into and theoretical analysis of the complexities of ESL teacher identity construction at a higher education college in Oman (Public High College). The study of ESL teacher identity that has been presented in this thesis was conducted from mid-December 2011 to mid-July 2012. Drawing on Bourdieu's theoretical framework, this research has attended to tensions, nuances, power relations and struggles for positioning and legitimacy that were embedded in key sub educational fields, such as quality assurance, assessments and teacher evaluation practices and processes and implications of these for the construction of ESL teacher identities and their practices. The study also attended to the significance of space and the ways in which it intersected with other hierarchies in producing hierarchical, spatial and at times male-female positionings of teachers. What can be drawn from this ethnographic case study is that the hierarchies in the Omani higher education system are not structured in the same way as in other contexts or as depicted in literature, although are subject to and influenced by global policy discourses. In this final chapter, I begin by summarising my findings and outlining the contributions to knowledge my research makes, taking into account substantive, theoretical and methodological aspects. Finally, I conclude the chapter with implications for policy and practice and trajectories for future research.

8.2 Constructing the research questions

As I stated in the introductory section of this chapter, the thesis explores ESL teacher identity construction in a public college within the context of higher education colleges in Oman. Since the outset of the research study, I have tried to understand identity in relation to the particular spatial location of the teachers and the differential values of these locations as well as the way social capital, local networking and the institutional practices of this particular institution intersected with capitals associated with teachers' nationality and linguistic capitals in producing complex hierarchies. Teachers in this research study positioned themselves and were positioned in complex and contradictory ways. Struggles for power and positioning took place in sub-fields of assessments, teacher evaluation and quality assurance and the interests, institutionalised cultural capital that were embedded in these processes were

significant for the construction of teacher identity. On my return from fieldwork, I revisited my research questions. The revised research questions informed the way I analysed my data.

My overarching research question is:

1. How are ESL teachers' identities constructed and produced in higher education in Oman?

Within the above overarching question, I asked:

   1.a How is space implicated in the construction of institutional and teacher hierarchies?

   1.b How are ESL teachers' identities constructed and produced in Oman and can that construction be understood at a macro as well as a micro level?

I will now address each of these questions in turn.

8.3 Exposition of my key findings

In this section I present my key findings following the order of the analysis chapters.

8.3.1 The implications of the Omani National Education Frameworks and potential tensions for teacher hierarchical positioning

In Chapter Five, I drew on documentary analysis of key texts, the Omani National Education standards for the General Foundation Programme (GFP; OAAA, 2006)) and the Requirements of Oman's System of Quality Assurance (ROSQA; OAAA, 2004). The central aim of this chapter was to answer my first research question: How are ESL teachers' identities constructed and produced in Oman and can that construction be understood at a macro level? To answer this question the chapter provided a background and rationale for the new developments in the Omani higher education system but importantly, also, pointed to the tensions inherent in their texts. Through these documents the Omani higher education signalled its engagement with this major international field of regulating and promoting quality education. For example, the text makes direct reference to international benchmarking in developing the standards, requirements and guidelines for the General Foundation Programmes.

A documentary analysis of these official documents revealed that there were tensions and contradictions between the way educational practices are understood in international contexts and the way these practices are explicated within the Omani higher education policy context. These documents were silent about how different assessment practices should be conducted

and combined. For example, my analysis has shown that the GFPs text does not explicate how summative and formative assessments were to be understood and realised as part of on-going teaching and learning. Also, despite the lack of agreement in the literature, it does not does not provide any working definition for these assessment methods nor introduces any guidelines as part of these new interventions. The GFPs text adds further confusion by its espousal of different theories of learning. For example, the GFPs text positions the learning standards within Bloom's taxonomy (1956) which is associated with behaviourism. At the same time the text positions teaching to align constructivist view of learning and suggests a shift in the role of the teacher from one of transmitter of knowledge to one of facilitator.

The documentary analysis examined the way different social actors are included in these policy text and the types of authority accorded to them affect both the positioning of teachers and their practices. For example, the GPF texts make very little reference to teachers in relation to curriculum development and delivery, as well as teaching, learning and assessment, although discuss the role of HEPs extensively. In relation to assessment, teachers' contributions are largely reduced to marking of prepared tests. Although the texts make an implicit expectation of teachers' compliance within their HEIs, teachers' contributions in developing teaching, assessments and learning are misrecognised in these texts. This indicates the ways QA is developed can contribute to a de-professionalisation of teachers' work. Equally, the text makes a brief reference to teacher evaluation and these are not linked to career track and tenure. This kind of positioning of teaching, learning and assessments in the OAAA texts is problematic and as I show in my interview and observation data, contributed to tensions, power relations and struggle for positioning between different groups as well leading to the development of informal teacher evaluation processes with further implications for differential hierarchical teacher positioning.

Also, my textual analysis focused on Public High College sample placement test, sample summative and continuous summative exams. My analysis revealed differential values were attached to entry and exit exams. Embedded within these different assessment processes are different rewards, different qualifications, different interests and different institutionalised cultural capital.

8.3.2 Space and the production of institutional hierarchies

Chapter Six answers my research question 1a: How is space implicated in the construction of institutional and teacher hierarchies? To answer this question it was important to map out the different fields where struggle for positioning took place and then explain the different positions of locals and non-locals teachers and between non-local from inner circle and non-local teachers from outer circle in relation to their capitals. The chapter made use of the vignettes to illustrate the felt hierarchies and capture the complex and contradictory ways of positioning teachers across time and space. Teachers were constructed and positioned through mechanisms of capitals and access to networking opportunities which were embedded in timetabling procedures, programmes and course allocations to convert and trade up the capitals they possessed into symbolic capital and career enhancement. My analysis highlights two particular entry points where struggling for positioning took place; the English Proficiency Programme (EPP) and the Academic Credit Programme (ACP).

As elaborated below, at times the distinction between local and non-local teachers was salient; at others, the distinction between non-local teachers from inner circle contexts versus non-local teachers from outer circle contexts came into play. Each group of teachers was from a habitus which brought particular dispositions, and which framed expectations and practices in different sub-fields. However, there was no consistency in the way teachers' cultural capital and habitus from different contexts was evaluated across different sub-fields; this was contingent and relational. This was further complicated by the institutional practices of the Public High College as well as the way social capital and local networking that cohered around those considered locals and non-locals and at other times cut across these hierarchies to produce further hierarchies between teachers. The process of constructing a teacher identity was different for different teachers in the two programmes. For example, for teachers in the EPP constructing an identity involved accessing material benefits as well as positions of authority within teacher networks. Capital associated with the nationality of the local teachers had a strong currency which immediately placed them in the EPP and gave them access to all the material benefits that came with this programme. Also, their capitals placed them in tenure track positions and with protection from dismissal. However, this kind of job security and protection from dismissal was not extended to non-local teachers. This difference in contract status, largely based on nationality, contributed in structuring hierarchies between local and non-local teachers. Equally, non-local teachers from inner circle contexts enjoyed certain privileges that were associated with being native speakers of

and experts in English language. This expanded the professional spaces which they could access as well as movement between programmes.

This kind of navigation in professional spaces and across time was not available to teachers from outer circle contexts. The issues of space were also illuminated in Samira's struggle to accrue and convert capitals to establish a positive identity. Although she struggled to be treated equally and as a respectable and dignified teacher, her habitus and cultural capital had no value in a programme dominated by male teachers. Samira a non-local teacher from Pakistan tried to assert a positive identity in her capacity as the course coordinator for a course. However, her habitus and cultural capital were further undermined by the low institutionalised cultural capital associated with the subject knowledge of the female local teacher. Unlike Samira who was not able to capitalise on her administrative position, male teachers were able to capitalise on the networking resources that came with their administrative positions. In other settings, local networking, and social capital cohered around the sub groups of non-local teachers from outer circles and which cut across the groups of locals and non-locals to produce further hierarchies. Struggle for positioning in these settings included being allocated a good time table, teaching within the comforts of an air-conditioned building as well as teaching from 8:00 to 13:00. The gatekeepers who influenced the way teachers accessed these privileges were mainly male non-local teachers from outer circle contexts. The cultural capital of the local teachers had no recognition in this context. They were outside the key networks. For example, the nationality of Khalil and Fawzia had no currency and instead the networking of the timetabling coordinator cut across those established hierarchies. For example, local teachers were given classrooms outside the comforts of the main building.

It seems then the cultural capital and habitus of teachers from different contexts were differently evaluated within the institutional practices of the Public High College and were integral to teachers being differentially positioned across time and space, notably across two different programmes, one of which was prestigious and the other not.

8.3.3 Assessment and teacher evaluation practices: fields of struggle

Chapter Seven answers my research question 1.b through micro level analysis: How are ESL teachers' identities constructed and produced in Oman and can that construction be understood at a micro level? My ethnographic data pointed me to the importance of

examining teachers' and examination coordinators' assessment practices and what was at stake in these practices for these different groups. Because the Public High College distinguished itself from other HEIs through its high student grades, assessment became a central issue in teachers' struggle for positioning in this field. Teachers positioned themselves in contradictory and complex ways within assessment practices. There were occasions were teachers were compliant with the doxic expectations about the conduct of assessment or testing. In other occasions there was disjuncture between teachers' habitus and prevailing doxic understandings of the Public High College. For example, Gemma, Diana and Helen tried to break away from an understanding of teaching that was associated with accumulating marks through teacher identity stances reflecting resistance and difference. However, they faced resistance from both the students, and the management. Although the Public High College teachers expressed frustrations about the conduct of assessment, they developed a 'practical sense' or a 'feel for the game' which oriented their teaching practices. It seems teachers wanted to benefit from those rewards accrued from student CSA. Bourdieu suggested that agents' practices are aimed at accumulating the forms of capital that are at play in society. Teachers were responding to the way CSA was conceptualised in the Public High College; that is around the importance of accumulating marks and certification. The institutional emphasis on marks and getting as many students as possible through the system was clearly understood and internalised by the teachers as expressed by Hiba, Mohammed, Mohsin and Infitah.

Another sub key field which my data have highlighted where struggling for positioning took place was through practices associated with the teacher evaluation framework. Formal processes here were undermined all the time by networking and social capital. The Omani local teachers competed in this field and those who were aware of the importance of networking and the norms of practice were successful in getting ahead in their career. Not all teachers entered the field of teacher evaluation, the non-local teachers played the game differently; do my job; do it well and that's enough. Because in this field local and non-local teachers were evaluated differently, this allowed formal and informal teacher evaluation processes to emerge. My data also highlighted a third entry point where a struggle for positioning took place, this being at the meso level, between colleges. Public High College and regional colleges entered into struggle in defending their interests which were embedded in different forms of assessments, and was taken forward through the standardisation process of assessment. However, the standardisation process was fraught with tensions,

contradictions, and power struggles. The Public High College used the standardisation process negatively to build its own institutionalised cultural capital and to exercise its power and authority over the regional colleges. Some regional colleges were more complacent whilst others showed resistance and went into struggle to defend their positioning within assessment procedures.

8.4 Limitations of the thesis

One of the limitations of the thesis was not including students in the study. Because my data did not include students, I could not address societal issues that are integral to student access and equality of opportunity in higher education. Also, my decision not to observe classrooms limited the extent to which I could comment on the teaching and learning processes in the Public High College. Theoretically, while gender emerged as being important in the construction of male-female hierarchies between teachers in one location in the Public High College, gender was not addressed systematically across the study, and was not explored in ways that go beyond a male/female binary.

8.5 Contribution of this thesis to knowledge:

My research study has opened up a space which has until now been a lacuna for researchers and policy makers to reflect on the various tensions, problematic practices, hierarchical and at times male/female positioning of different groups by positioning the research in Bourdieusian analysis. Analysing teacher identity construction from Bourdieu's framework gave attention to the structures and normative practices which were salient in the way teachers positioned themselves and were positioned in relation to one another in different educational practices. Theoretically, interrogating teacher identity from a Bourdieusian framework seems to provide a richer understanding of the concept, as further discussed below. The relationship between teacher identity and capital has not been researched in Oman. Previous studies have investigated teacher identity in relation to classroom practices as well as investigating teacher identity from native and non-native lenses. However, in addition to attending to teacher beliefs, teaching experience, and educational and cultural background, Bourdieu's concept of field is also important. In other words, their engagement, the type of engagement, and the extent to which they were allowed to engage in the different fields were determined by the structuring practices of the field.

My study has attended to the structuring of the field by attending to the macro level policy discourses which were framing teachers' identity constructions. It has also attended in an in-depth way to the micro and meso level struggles which were constantly in play in the performance of their identities. This allowed me to show how the macro level discourses of quality assurance/recognition of Omani HE and its assessment systems and the pressures they create then penetrate into meso level (relations between colleges) and the micro level relations (relations between teachers and their managers). My study showed that power relations, problematic practices, networking, inequitable access were embedded in these processes and the complexity of ESL teacher identity construction in the Omani higher education system.

In terms of methodological and theoretical implications, deploying Bourdieu's framework is an epistemological departure from understanding teacher identities which is associated with Phillipson's linguistic imperialism and which is shaped by the discourse on colonisation and postcolonial orientations. Conducting my research study using Bourdieu's concepts of field, habitus and capital helped to account for the intersection between teachers' spatial positioning, their cultural capital (nationality and varieties of English language) and the institutional practices of this particular institution. His perspective helped me to shift my focus to the assessments, teacher evaluation and quality assurance and the tensions, contradictions and power relations embedded within these practices which are integral and constitutive of teacher identity construction. In Bourdieu's (1977; 1998) framework, constructing an identity is concerned with ongoing symbolic struggles to prove and gain acceptance for capital. It is also an attempt to be recognised as having worth. His perspective also helped to explore identity not as a process through which teachers insert one identity and butt out another one, rather it shifts the focus to the wider context that frame these practices and processes. There is no question that the Omani higher education system is changing and has been influenced by international higher education systems and this has led to the emergence of new educational procedures and quality assurance. The emergence of these new procedures has implications for who has access to the field and who is out of the field and the types of capital that have value.

As I stated in Chapter Four, ethnographic methodologies allow engagement in fieldwork and provide rich, longitudinal and in-depth analysis and is an approach that has hitherto been largely neglected in this context. Ethnography is a time- consuming enterprise but it largely

reveals the complex and contradictory ways teachers positioned themselves and were positioned in which assessment practices, teacher evaluation and quality assurance were entangled with their identities. Ethnographic methodology alerted me to consider space the way it was implicated in differential spatial positionings. It also allowed me to gain insights into the key practices and sites of struggle through which teacher identities were constructed, namely those of assessment and teacher evaluation. Overall, an ethnographic approach provided additional understanding and insights into the complexity of teachers' identity construction observed in this higher education institution.

8.6 Possible implications for policy and avenues for future research

The present investigation has explored the construction of teacher identities from a theoretical lens and methodological position that has not been given much attention previously in Oman. It is not enough to claim similar practices to other international higher education institutions; the epistemological assumptions underlying new change in the higher education in Oman need to be brought to the surface and examined in relation to different theories that guide assessment, teaching and learning practices in the local context. Thus, this research opens up a space for theory in investigating the Omani HE. Based on this ethnographic research, a number of possible future projects might become important. These include projects at both macro and micro levels:

1. Professional development activities that bring out the implications of theories for teaching, learning and assessment.
2. Development of teacher action research focusing on improvement of teaching, learning and assessment.
3. Review of equality and diversity policies and practices, in relation to both students and staff.

As stated earlier, because the present investigation has explored teacher identities from a theoretical lens and methodological position that did not seem to have attracted much attention in Oman before, it opens up a space for theory development in investigating Omani higher education. Formative assessment could be tackled through Action Research where certain assessment procedures can be developed, applied and evaluated as part of a teaching and learning process, I look forward to taking some of these avenues forward in my future career within Omani Higher Education.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Ref: Permission to conduct research in Public High College

Dierctor General of Technological Education

I'm writing to you to get written official permission to start my research in the Muscat Public High College startnig 24th December. My permission includes interviewing and observing teachers and mangement staff in their social interactions inside the metting rooms and other social venues. My research focus builds directly upon my previous professional experience as both an EFL teacher and as the head of an English Language Centre. I'm particularly interested in researching ways in which teachers, department heads, sectin heads and coordinators interpret, and react to teaching practices in contemporary HE in Oman and their understandings of their own teaching context. I would like to think that the findings of this research project will be of interest to colleges of technology and useful for teacher professional practice in the future. I will make the findings of the research available to Public High College. In addition to observing the University of Sussex ethical research guidelines, I would ensure that I am fully compliant with Ministry of Manpower guidelines.

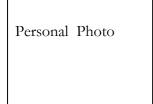Thank you for taking time to read and consider this.

Yours sincerely,

Nihad Al-Zadjali

Invitation to take part in a research study

Title of the research

Negotiation of EFL teacher identities in Omani Higher Education

Personal Photo

Nihad Al-Zadjali
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An invitation
With the permission of the University of Sussex Social Sciences Cluster Research Ethics Committee (C-REC) and the Ministry of Manpower I am conducting my doctoral research at your college. The research is entitled 'Negotiation of EFL teacher identities in Omani Higher Education'. Therefore, I would like to invite teachers to volunteer to take part in this study! I will be particularly interested in your views on any aspects of the curriculum, policies, and standards within the college.

Who I am?
I am an experienced Omani ESL teacher in higher education and currently a full-time PhD student at the University of Sussex, UK.

Qualifications: Masters in Applied Linguistics, Masters in Social Sciences, and Doctorate in Education (in-progress)

What is the puropose of this study? To explore professional development of ESL teacher identities, understandings and practices in contemporary higher education in Oman.

Is participation voluntary?
Yes**, y**our participation is voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.
How will the research be conducted? I will take up the role of observer while in the meeting room, but outside this I will engage with you on a one-on-one basis or as part of a group to explore your understandings of your teaching context. I will also conduct interviews with some of you. When your time allows I would like to spend more time as part of a group or on a one-on-one basis, in order to listen and chat more informally.

Will my participation in this study be kept confidential?
 Yes, I shall maintain confidentiality by not discussing with any other participants anything that is said to me in a way that is attributable. I will take every care to protect your identity and data will be protected and will be used for the purposes of this study only. Written field notes, digital recorder, and any recorded material will be locked away. Transcripts, and field notes, and diary will be stored on my personal laptop using password protected. Personal information such as age, or income will not be requested.

Can I choose not to be interviewed?
Yes. For those of you who do not choose to be interviewed, you will see me about the college, in social spaces such as meeting rooms and within the teacher lounge. I will take notes about decision making processes concerning the curriculum (for example, what to teach; what not to teach; how to teach; how to test; how to develop school rules; etc.)

What are the possible benefits of taking part?
I hope the research will provide valuable opportunities to reflect: on teaching practices and teacher development. I would like to think, too, that the findings of this research project will be of interest to you and useful for your professional practice in the future.

What if I want further information about the study?
If you have questions, or queries about my presence, or my research, or about what I do as a researcher, I would to encourage you to feel that you can approach me in person for a chat or via my email address.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet, and considering taking part.

Appendix C : letter to teachers to pilot the information sheet

Dear teachers,

Thank you for agreeing to pilot the invitation letter for me. I know this is very busy time for you all, and I appreciate very much your feedback on this. I'm about to start my research in one of the colleges in Muscat, and like you, my research participants are ESL teachers in higher education in Oman. One of the ethical concerns prior to embarking on this kind of research is that teachers understand clearly the <u>nature of the research and the level of participation required by them.</u> Teacher invitation letter should exclude any highly academic terminology. Based on the above, please assess the attached invitation letter. Ms. Kristina Bayburtsyan, your Head of Centre, has kindly agreed to distribute, collect feedback and send it back to me. The invitation letter is one page only. I'm kindly requesting you to pilot this for me as no teachers from this will be asked to take part in this research.

Thank you for your time!

Best wishes,

Nihad Al-Zadjali

Appendix D

OMAN ACADEMIC STANDARDS

FOR

GENERAL FOUNDATION PROGRAMS

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Ministerial Decision

Following the decision of the Higher Education Council No.13/2008, HE the Minister for Higher Education issued Ministerial Decision No.72/2008 stating that the General Foundation Programs should be adopted by all public and private higher education institutions operating in the Sultanate of Oman. The deadline for the adoption of these standards is the academic year 2009-2010.

1.2 Overview

The majority of students entering into higher and post-secondary education in Oman first undertake some form of foundation program designed to help prepare them for their further studies. These standards seek to help ensure that those program are of an appropriate quality. In essence, they require that all General Foundation Programs (GFPs) are effective in helping students attain the prescribed student learning outcomes in at least four areas: English, mathematics, computing and general study skills. GFPs which meet these standards will be recognised through formal accreditation by the Oman Accreditation Council (OAC). The standards also recognise that the higher education providers (HEIs) have the primary responsibility for providing high quality teaching and assessment of students. As such, these standards provide flexibility for the HEIs to meet them in the manner they deem best.

1.3 Purpose of Standards

Oman's Academic Standards set the minimum requirements that programs of study are expected to attain. Their primary focus is on student learning outcomes, placing the students and their potential contribution to society at the heart of higher education. These outcomes are not achieved by chance, but are the result of carefully planned and executed formal programs of study. Therefore, the standards also address the minimum structural and resourcing requirements.

Standards are not curricula. It is the responsibility of each HEI to develop the curriculum, teach and assess students, and review and improve its GFP curriculum in line with the requirements of these standards.

These standards may be used for the following purposes:

a) To guide HEIs in the development of their GFPs.

b) To provide information to the public about the learning outcomes of GFPs.

c) To provide the benchmark against which OAC Accreditation Panels will assess GFPs for the purpose of program accreditation.

1.4 GFP Exit Standards vs. Higher Education Entrance Standards

a) The GFP is a compulsory entrance qualification for Omani degree programs, although some of these programs may also require that additional standards are met (see 2.5 g).

b) For other Oman postsecondary qualifications and for degrees in Oman awarded by a foreign HEI, the GFP is not a compulsory entrance qualification for postsecondary and higher education. Rather, it is designed and used to provide additional academic support to those students who require it.

c) Thus, the GFP exit standards and higher education entrance standards are not synonymous and will not necessarily be the same. Oman's system of higher education

includes locally and internationally sourced diploma and degree programs. In the case of the international programs, the entrance standards are determined by the foreign provider. As such, HEIs may require students to achieve higher standards than those specified for the GFP. For example, whereas these GFP standards require students to achieve English language competency at a level equivalent to IELTS 5.0, a foreign provider may require an IELTS score of 6.0 for entry into their degree program. It will be the responsibility of each HEI to make this information clearly available to prospective students.

1.5   Standards Development, Approval and Review Processes

a) These standards were developed by pan-sectoral working groups comprising leading national and international academicians. The members are listed in Appendix A.

b) The process involved national and international benchmarking, a review of past and current national experience, and extensive public consultations including a major symposium held at Sultan Qaboos University (January 2007).

c) In order to ensure their androgogic effectiveness, the standards were crafted taking into account a learning taxonomy derived from work started by Bloom et al.[1]

d) All Oman Academic Standards are formally approved by a Decision from H.E. The Minister of Higher Education on the recommendation of the Oman Accreditation Council.

e) These standards will undergo a minor review by the OAC after each accreditation exercise, taking into account lessons learned through the accreditation process.

f) These standards will undergo a major review, similar to the process used to develop the initial draft, by no later than the year 2012.

1.6   Accreditation of General Foundation Programs

a) The Oman Accreditation Council accredits GFPs. Each accreditation exercise will involve a single Review Panel considering several GFPs at the same time.

b) Accreditation will involve assessment of the GFP against these standards. In cases where a HEI has chosen to include areas of learning in its GFP additional to the four student learning outcome areas in these standards (see section 2.2), they will also be considered by the accreditation panel, taken into account appropriate benchmark standards provided by the applicant HEI.

c) The first accreditation exercise will take place in late 2009. All HEIs will be invited to submit their GFPs for accreditation. Participation will be optional.

d) The second exercise will take place in late 2011. All HEIs whose GFPs are not already accredited will be invited to submit their GFPs for accreditation. Thereafter, it is expected that accreditation exercises will take place every two years (but note (g) below).

e) In time, the OAC will issue a Decision as to when participation will be mandatory. It is anticipated that this may be by 2010.

f) GFPs which meet the required standards AND which are being subject to successful continuous quality improvement efforts by its HEI will be accredited.

g) Accreditation of a GFP lasts for six years. At the end of that time, the accreditation will lapse. It is expected that HEIs will reapply for GFP accreditation at least 10 months before their existing accreditation (where applicable) lapses.

h) HEIs will be entitled to promote the accredited status of their GFP.

i) Further rules and information about accreditation will be available from the OAC (www.oac.gov.om).

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[1] Bloom, B. (Ed.) (1956) *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives: The Classification of Educational Goals*, Susan Fauer Company, Inc.

2   PROGRAM DETAILS

2.1   *General Foundation Programs*

There are many types of programs of study that use the term 'foundation'. For the purpose of these national standards, a GFP has the following characteristics:

a) It is a formal, structured program of study licensed[2] in the Sultanate of Oman and provided by a licensed HEI.

b) It is designed to prepare students for their postsecondary and higher education studies.

c) It precedes the first formal year of higher education study (except where, on a case by case basis, the HEI has determined that it can be undertaken, in part, concurrently with first year study).

d) It is only required for students who do not otherwise meet all the entrance criteria for the first year of their postsecondary and higher education (which, for Omani degree programs, include these student learning outcomes – see section 1.3).

e) It does not result in the awarding of formal academic credit to the student. And more specifically, a HEI may not award credit for any higher education course which only meets these standards or less.

f) It is general in disciplinary scope, thereby preparing students for a wide variety of subsequent postsecondary and higher education program options (although see clause 2.2(3) below).

g) It is not precisely 'higher education', but nonetheless falls within the ambit of the OAC.

2.2   *Four Areas of Learning*

a) In order to obtain accreditation, a GFP must be effective in helping students meet the specified learning outcomes in the following four areas of learning:

- English Language
- Mathematics
- Computing
- General Study Skills

b) These four areas have been selected based on the advice of academic staff in Oman, international literature and international benchmarks. They provide a comprehensive intellectual base that is relevant to all further study, and to the development of broad thinking and life skills in general. This strategy is consistent with the development of generic graduate attributes for Oman.

c) A HEI may, at its discretion, choose to supplement these areas of learning with any others that it believes are appropriate, having regard for the higher education programs it provides.

d) HEIs that teach only in Arabic will not need to comply with the English language standards. It is intended that the issue of developing standards for Arabic language, as an alternative to the standards for English language, will be considered during the first review of these GFP standards.

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[2] GFPs not already licensed but which, by March 2007, have been operating for more than one semester may apply directly for accreditation without first obtaining a license. The awarding of accreditation will be concomitant with granting the license.

2.3   Structure

a) These standards are designed to ensure HEIs have the necessary level of flexibility in managing their GFPs.

b) The student learning outcome standards in the four areas of learning are not prescriptions for courses/modules. They may be addressed through any variety of courses/modules. For example, there does not need to be a "General Study Skills" module, provided that the HEI can demonstrate that the General Study Skills learning outcomes are satisfactorily attended to in its other GFP modules.

c) For administrative convenience, GFPs are expected to be structured according to the credit hours or credit points system set out in ROSQA (although completion of each course does not earn the student credit).

d) These standards do not impose a time limit on a GFP (unlike pending OAC standards for diploma and degree programs, which will utilize standardised durations of study as well as student learning outcome standards). It is expected that GFPs will be tailored for each student in accordance with their learning needs. A student does not complete the GFP until s/he has met all the learning outcomes. Therefore, a GFP may range in length from none, to one or more semesters (the term 'foundation year' is unhelpful as it assumes a fixed duration irrespective of the students' varied learning needs). It is anticipated that many GFP students may require three or more semesters, until the benefits of changes to the secondary school curriculum become manifest over the next few years.

e) A student undertaking a GFP must not be enrolled in more than 100% of a full time load. In other words, they may not undertake a GFP on top of a full time first year study load. This is in recognition of the fact that students undertaking GFPs require additional support, and are not yet ready to manage more than a full time higher education load.

f) Where the learning outcomes of the GFP are manifestly pre-requisites to further study, then the GFP must be completed prior to a student's enrolment in further study.

g) Non-mandatory guidelines for structuring GFPs in relation to each of the four areas of learning are provided below under their respective sections.

h) A HEI may contract with a second HEI to provide courses to the first HEI's students that will meet these standards.

2.4   Assessment of Student Learning

a) Assessment for GFPs is unique because the assessment for the entry and exit are essentially the same, i.e. designed to determine whether or not the student meets the learning outcome standards.

b) A GFP entrance assessment is required to determine whether a student already has met the required GFP learning outcomes.

c) A student shall not be required to undertake a component of a GFP if s/he has already met the required learning outcomes for that area of learning. If a student satisfies the standards for English, Mathematics and Computing during entry testing then s/he will be awarded the certificate of attainment for the entire GFP (see sections 2.5 and 6.1).

d) The Study Skills standards are not subject to pre-entry testing. This is for pragmatic reasons, because effective assessment of study skills involves methods other than a test or examination. Therefore, the Study Skills component of a GFP will only be required if a student is undertaking any of the English, Mathematics or Computing areas – see section 6.1).

e) An exit assessment is required to determine whether a student has met the required GFP learning outcomes. A student shall not pass the GFP until all the learning outcomes are met.

f) At this time, there will be no standardised national tests. Each HEI will have the responsibility for developing its own methods of assessment against the student learning outcomes in these standards. The HEI must demonstrate that the chosen assessment method is effective in determining whether the student has attained the required learning outcomes.

g) The final assessment result should be either a pass, indicating that the student learning outcomes have been achieved by the student, or a fail. There will be no final grading shown on the official testamur or transcript.

h) All assessment shall be criteria based (i.e. based on the learning outcome standards) and not normative references. Arbitrary scaling of results (for example, ensuring a certain percentage of students pass by moving the pass/fail point down the scale of student results) shall not be permitted.

i) HEIs must have appropriate internal quality controls for its assessment processes. These must include, at least, internal moderation by faculty of examination papers and of marked work prior to the issuance of results, and a transparent appeals process for students.

j) It is expected that HEIs shall also utilize an appropriate and broad range of assessment mechanisms during the program, in order to provide students with feedback on their progress which will assist their learning.

k) The process for accrediting GFPs will include, at least, independent checking of student's marked work and overall assessment results. If the OAC Review Panel determines that students have been passed without meeting the learning outcome standards, then the GFP will not be accredited.

l) If a student fails part of the GFP s/he does not fail the entire GFP and would only need to re-sit the part that s/he failed. However, the student must pass all four learning outcome areas in order to pass the GFP.

m) A student who has not completed their GFP may enroll in some first year degree courses provided that:

- The outstanding GFP component is not evidently a pre-requisite for the first year/level courses being taken (e.g., a student could enroll in a 1st year history course before achieving the Applied Mathematics GFP standards);

- The student's total enrolment (of first year and GFP courses) does not exceed 100% of a full time student load; and

- The student may not undertake any second year/level degree courses until the GFP is completed.

n) In order to ensure that the GFP is sufficiently flexible to allow students to take the time necessary to reach the learning outcomes, the assessment schedule should provide for students to successfully exit at the end of any semester. This may require making all GFP courses available every semester. For example, if a student passes Course 1 (in semester/term1) in an area of learning but then fails Course 2 (in semester 2), s/he ought to be able to repeat Course 2 in the next semester/term, rather than having to wait two semesters.

o) For instances where a cohort of GFP students at a particular HEI will be progressing to subsequent studies taught and assessed in the Arabic language, it will be acceptable for the teaching and assessment of these GFP to be undertaken in Arabic.

2.5 Certificates of Attainment

a) HEIs shall present non-credit 'certificates of attainment' to students who successfully pass the requirements of an accredited GFP, whether they do so during GFP entry or exit testing. The certificate may bear the insignia of the testing HEI and an insignia from the OAC provided to the HEI for this purpose.

b) The 'certificate of attainment' is not intended to be a formal exit qualification and does not represent any commitment to employers about the preparedness of the student for work.

c) The certificate will be issued to students achieving the required standards for all four student learning outcome areas, even if some of those areas were passed by the student via assessment/recognition of prior learning (including adequate secondary school exit marks) (see 2.4).

d) HEIs may present non-credit 'certificates of attainment' to students who successfully pass the requirements of a non-accredited GFP. The certificate may bear the insignia of the testing HEI. However, they shall not bear an insignia of the OAC.

e) The HEI shall, within one week of presenting the certificates to students, submit a complete list of all students who have received such a certificate to the MoHE, who shall keep it on file for such purposes as providing independent confirmation to enquirers. This list shall clearly demarcate certificates for accredited verses non-accredited GFPs.

f) This list may be audited by the MoHE at any time, and will be included in the scope of accreditation assessments by the OAC. Any breach of the standards in this section shall result in disciplinary action by the MoHE and shall, in the case of accredited GFPs, result in immediate forfeiture of the GFP's accreditation.

g) For the purposes of enrolment into the first year of postsecondary or higher education programs of study, all HEIs in Oman will be obliged to recognise a student's certificate for successfully completing an accredited GFP, although HEIs will also have the right to set additional enrolment criteria for certain programs.

h) This period of recognition shall last for two years from the date the certificate is issued. After that, a HEI may choose to re-test a student seeking to enroll for the first year of a postsecondary or higher education program.

3   ENGLISH LANGUAGE

3.1   *Aim of the Area*

To extend the English language skills of the student to enable active participation in their postsecondary or higher education studies.

3.2   *Learning Outcome Standards*

Having successfully completed GFP English language a student will be able to satisfactorily:

a) Actively participate in a discussion on a topic relevant to their studies by asking questions, agreeing/disagreeing, asking for clarification, sharing information, expressing and asking for opinions.

b) Paraphrase information (orally or in writing) from a written or spoken text or from graphically presented data.

c) Prepare and deliver a talk of at least 5 minutes. Use library resources in preparing the talk, speak clearly and confidently, make eye contact and use body language to support the delivery of ideas. Respond confidently to questions.

d) Write texts of a minimum of 250 words, showing control of layout, organisation, punctuation, spelling, sentence structure, grammar and vocabulary.

e) Produce a written report of a minimum of 500 words showing evidence of research, note-taking, review and revision of work, paraphrasing, summarising, use of quotations and use of references.

f) Take notes and respond to questions about the topic, main ideas, details and opinions or arguments from an extended listening text (e.g. lecture, news broadcast).

g) Follow spoken instructions in order to carry out a task with a number of stages.

h) Listen to a conversation between two or more speakers and be able to answer questions in relation to context, relationship between speakers, register (e.g. formal or informal).

i) Read a one to two page text and identify the main idea(s) and extract specific information in a given period of time.

j) Read an extensive text broadly relevant to the student's area of study (minimum three pages) and respond to questions that require analytical skills, e.g. prediction, deduction, inference.

3.3   *Resource Requirements*

3.3.1   Staffing Resources

a) The person with overall academic responsibility for the program must have at a minimum a Master's Degree in English or related fields, a qualification in English Language Teaching (ELT) (e.g. CELTA, DELTA, Trinity TEFL certificate) and at least three years' English language teaching experience at postsecondary level.

b) The minimum requirement for GFP English language teaching staff is either a Bachelor's degree (in a relevant subject and taught and assessed in English) and a qualification in English Language Teaching (ELT) (e.g. CELTA, Trinity TEFL certificate), or a Master's degree (in a relevant subject and taught and assessed in English). Most faculty should have at least two years' English language teaching experience at postsecondary level.

c) It is also desirable that institutions provide evidence of regular staff professional development opportunities in order to maintain and upgrade staff teaching skills (e.g. workshops, provision for conference attendance, peer observation).

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3.3.2 Teaching Resources

In order to support students' studies and develop independent learning skills, institutions should provide an environment where students can have regular access to e-learning and computer facilities (e.g. such as an IT or Learning Resource Centre equipped with audio visual aids and computers with software/programs to help students enhance and develop language skills like vocabulary, reading and grammar and listening) and support materials (e.g. a library section dedicated to English language teaching materials or a learning resource centre). Training should be given to staff to facilitate the incorporation of new technology and resources into the teaching program. Where possible, use of these facilities and electronic materials should be incorporated into the teaching programs.

3.4 *Advice from the GFP Academic Committee*

The contents of this section are not mandatory requirements for licensing or accreditation. They are offered as advice from the GFP Academic Committee and its English Working Group.

3.4.1 Course Structure

a) English courses ought to be semesterised and all courses ought to be available each semester.

b) The ideal maximum class size is about 20.

c) If, upon entry-testing (see below), a student is found to require substantially more English tuition than that for which the GFP provides, then it is recommended that the HEI provide that student with access to appropriate additional support, either directly or by referral.

3.4.2 Assessment

Students entering the GFP should be given some form of needs analysis (e.g. a written test, interview or self-evaluation questionnaire) in order to ascertain their current level of English language proficiency and evaluate which skills areas need to be developed. This will enable the institution to decide on the study program for individual students.

Program assessment methods could include both continuous assessment and end of semester exams. However, in order to ensure that the learning outcomes have been achieved and to avoid institutions focusing solely on exam results, a variety of formative and summative assessment methods[3] could be considered:

- standardized tests/quizzes
- comprehensive exams (teacher-made or institution-made)
- observations
- portfolios
- research projects (group or individual)
- oral presentations, and/or
- evaluated performances
- evaluation of post-program success

Instruments of assessment could be put on a matrix to show which English language learning outcome(s) were being assessed, as shown in Table 1.

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[3] Adapted from '*CEA Standards for English Language Programs and Institutions*' (2005) Commission on English Language Program Accreditation, USA

Table 1. Indicative Assessment Schedule for English Language learning outcomes

Learning outcome	Teacher observation	Project	Presentation	Class Test
Actively participate in a discussion on a topic relevant to their studies by asking questions, agreeing/disagreeing, asking for clarification, sharing information, expressing and asking for opinions.	✓		✓	
Paraphrase information (orally or in writing) from a written or spoken text or from graphically presented data.		✓	✓	✓
Prepare and deliver a talk of at least 5 minutes. Use library resources, speak clearly and confidently, make eye contact and use body language to support the delivery of ideas. Respond confidently to questions.			✓	
Write texts of a minimum of 250 words, showing control of layout, organisation, punctuation, spelling, sentence structure, grammar and vocabulary.		✓		✓

Examples of good assessment practice include benchmarking and double marking of assignments; a number of institutions invite external assessors to moderate exam papers and written scripts before and after the examination.

Institutions would need to consider incorporating transparent and consistent mechanisms for providing feedback to students on their progress. This could be done through counseling or advising sessions or written feedback (as opposed to % marks). Evidence of a recorded support system for underperforming students is desirable.

3.4.3   Alternative Assessment

An IELTS score of at least 5.0 (with none of the four areas of writing, speaking, listening and reading below 4.5) or a TOEFL score of at least 500 will be deemed equivalent to passing these standards.

Serial No. 000659

Ministry of Manpower

Directorate General of Technological Education

Higher College of Technology & Colleges of Technology

Placement Test
(Version A)

Instructions to Candidates

Do not make any marks or notes on this question paper. Use *only* the answer sheet to answer your questions.

Multiple Choice Section

Circle the letter of the word or group of words that best completes the sentence.

1. The teacher asked them to return _____ books on Tuesday.

   a) their   b) them   c) hers   d) him

2. _____ you don't hurry, you will miss the train.

   a) Since   b) If   c) Because   d) When

3. Nobody knows _____ will happen tomorrow.

   a) how   b) what   c) where   d) who

4. We postponed our trip _____ the weather was bad.

   a) when   b) as   c) because of   d) after

5. After his expensive vacation, _____ working very hard to make more money.

   a) he   b) he began   c) now   d) so

6. The speed of light is _____ the speed of sound.

   a) much faster than   b) the fastest   c) fast as   d) faster

7. We invited _____ people to the party.

   a) several   b) plenty   c) every   d) all

8. There is not _____ water in the tank.

   a) many   b) a lot   c) much   d) few

9. The _____ who got the award was an old man.

   a) art   b) artist   c) arty   d) artistic

10. Diane can't come to the phone because she _____ her hair at the moment.

    a) washes   b) is washing   c) wash   d) has been washing

11. My teacher wasn't _____ with my report.

    a) pleasant   b) pleasing   c) pleased   d) please

12. Once _____ your work, you can go home.

    a) you have completed   b) complete   c) completed   d) will complete

13. I can't pay my bills _____ my paycheck comes.

    a) if   b) until   c) but   d) and

14. I don't know who she was, _____ what she wanted.
    a) but   b) or   c) neither   d) also

15. My friends sometimes write to me, and I sometimes write to _____.
    a) they   b) their   c) him   d) them

16. I'm _____ those pictures. I don't know why I can't find them. I was sure I had put them in this drawer.
    a) looking at   b) looking on   c) looking in   d) looking for

17. If you _____ now, you won't be able to meet him.
    a) leaving   b) are leaving   c) will leave   d) leave

18. The fish in the Red Sea are more colorful than _____ the fish in the Gulf of Oman.
    a) are   b) was   c) they are   d) are many

19. The party was _____. It kept us awake.
    a) very loudly   b) loudly   c) noise   d) noisy

20. The passengers were _____ because the plane was delayed.
    a) annoy   b) annoyed   c) annoying   d) be annoyed

21. I will take you _____ you want to go.
    a) why   b) how   c) whereas   d) wherever

22. The children had _____ all the chocolate by the time I got home.
    a) been eaten   b) ate   c) eaten   d) eating

23. _____ he entered the room, the clock struck.
    a) Soon   b) As   c) Then   d) Since

24. Mushrooms, _____ low in calories, are included in most diets.
    a) are   b) which are   c) they are   d) which

25. _____ were put up on the notice board.
    a) Last week   b) This morning   c) The results   d) There

26. _____ I am poor, I am quite happy.
    a) So   b) Whereas   c) Though   d) In case

27. The bigger your house is, _____ your electricity bill will be.

   a) higher
   b) the highest
   c) highest
   d) the higher

28. You should pack _____ pair of shoes in case that pair gets soaked.

   a) other
   b) another
   c) any
   d) one

29. The trip to Salalah will be a success because _____ very carefully.

   a) will plan
   b) has been planned
   c) it has been planned
   d) has planned

30. The teacher asked the student why _____.

   a) was he late
   b) he was late
   c) he late
   d) late

31. _____ he said was true.

   a) When
   b) What
   c) How
   d) Why

32. The _____ man told the police everything.

   a) afraid
   b) frightened
   c) scaring
   d) terrorist

33. The article that I _____ in the magazine was interesting.

   a) read
   b) reading
   c) was read
   d) am reading

34. He took the bus to work because he _____ his car in an accident.

   a) has damaged
   b) had damaged
   c) damaged
   d) damages

35. He _____ his writing assignments if he organized his binder better.

   a) will easily find
   c) would have easily found
   b) would easily find
   d) easily finds

36. She was very happy with the present _____ by them.

   a) was given
   b) given
   c) gave
   d) was giving

37. He's always very careful when _____ a car.

   a) buying
   b) is buying
   c) buys
   d) has bought

Circle the letter of the underlined word or group of words that is _not_ correct.

38. Most of <u>my</u> cousins <u>goes</u> for a picnic <u>on</u> the beach every <u>Friday</u>.
         a   b   c   d

39. He said <u>that</u> he <u>has seen</u> him three <u>days</u> <u>ago</u>.
         a   b   c d

40. I <u>know</u> that <u>my</u> brother <u>takes</u> a loan <u>from</u> the bank last month.
     a   b   c   d

41. It is <u>easier</u> to talk <u>about</u> a problem <u>than</u> to resolve <u>them</u>.
         a   b   c   d

42. He appeared <u>happily</u> when I <u>invited</u> him, but he <u>did not</u> <u>attend</u> the party.
           a   b   c   d

43. She won't <u>get</u> good <u>marks</u> if <u>she</u> keeps on <u>doing</u> these mistakes.
           a   b c   d

44. Computers can <u>storing</u> <u>a lot of</u> information in <u>their</u> <u>memories</u>.
                 a   b   c   d

45. <u>In</u> his free time Adel plays football, <u>or</u> he <u>is going</u> <u>fishing</u> with his brother.
     a   b   c   d

46. The villa <u>with</u> <u>the</u> blue <u>windows</u> <u>were</u> built last year.
             a b   c   d

47. <u>According</u> to him, to <u>travel</u> there by train would <u>be</u> easier than <u>traveling</u> there by plane.
      a   b   c   d

48. <u>Nobody</u> <u>know</u> where the garage key <u>is</u> <u>hidden</u>.
       a   b   c d

49. He <u>has not</u> been <u>attending</u> <u>regularly</u> his <u>classes</u>.
         a   b   c   d

50. <u>His</u> wedding ring <u>made of</u> <u>white</u> and yellow <u>gold</u>.
     a   b   c   d

51. He continued <u>running</u> <u>even</u> though his feet <u>was</u> bleeding very <u>badly</u>.
             a   b   c   d

52. <u>The life</u> is full <u>of</u> challenges, but <u>you</u> should meet <u>them</u> with courage.
      a   b   c   d

Reading & Vocabulary Section

In the following passages, write ONE word in each blank space. Use the information in the text to help you find the right word to complete the meaning. Bad spelling will not lose you any marks provided we can tell the word you mean. Try to spell correctly.

Passage 1

> 63, Newton Drive
> London SW 8
> England
>
> 21 May

Dear Ali,

I am writing to you because I want to become your pen friend. My (1) _____ is Salim

and I am 18. I will finish secondary (2) _____ in June. I am a good (3) _____,

and spend a lot of time reading and studying. Mathematics is my favorite (4) _____,

but I also like English. I am planning to go to college in September and I think I will have no

trouble getting into a good (5) _____.

I usually spend the evenings at home, (6) _____ sometimes I go out with my friends. At

weekends, I go (7) _____. I am not very good (8) _____ swimming, but I am

trying to do my best.

In the summer, I am planning to work at a gas station. I can't wait to start my new

(9) _____. I will save the (10) _____ I make to help pay for my college

education. My parents are not rich and going to college is (11) _____.

I have to stop now. I will write again (12) _____ week. I look forward to hearing from

you.

Regards,

Salim

Passage 2

Australia is one of the seven continents of the world. Seventeen million people live

(1) _____. They speak English because many of their families came from England two

hundred years (2) _____.

The (3) _____ in Australia is usually hot and dry and the centre of the country,

the "outback", is a desert. Ayers rock is a famous rock in the middle (4) _____ the

outback. It (5) _____ color under the sun – sometimes it is blue, and sometimes

it is red or brown.

Australian farmers have very big (6) _____ where they keep many sheep. There

are crocodile farms, (7) _____.

There are many other interesting animals in Australia. Dingos, for (8) _____, are dogs

which live in the outback. They do not live in people's houses (9) _____ they are wild.

Kangaroos and koalas (10) _____ live in the outback. They (11) _____ their babies

in a special pocket, or pouch.

Australia is an interesting country. Perhaps you will (12) _____ it one day. Would

you like that?

Passage 3

For centuries, people have been playing kicking games with a ball. The modern game
of soccer developed from some of these early games. Some people believe that the
name "soccer" came from "assoc.," an abbreviation for the word (1) _____.
Others believe that the name came from the high socks that the (2)_____ wear.
In European countries, soccer is called football or association football.

The basic (3) _____ of the game are quite simple. In soccer, two teams of
eleven players try to kick or head the ball into their (4) _____ goal. The
goalie, who tries to keep the ball (5)_____ of the goal, is the only player on the
field who is allowed to (6) _____ the ball with his or her hands. The other
players must use their feet, heads, and bodies to control the ball.

Every four years, soccer teams from around the world (7) _____ for the
World Cup. The World Cup competition started in 1930.

Brazil is the home of many great soccer players, including the most (8) _____
player of all, Pelé. With his fast footwork, dazzling speed, and great scoring ability,
Pelé played for many years in Brazil and (9) _____ later in New York. During
his 22 years in soccer, he (10) _____ 1,281 goals and held every major
record for the sport.

People in more than 140 (11) _____ around the world play soccer. It is the
national sport of most European and Latin American countries. Soccer is (12) _____
the world's most popular sport!

Passage 4

Twenty years ago, most people had never even heard of the Internet. Now, you can't find a (1) _____ person who hasn't at least heard of it. In fact, many of us use it on a regular basis, and most of us even have (2) _____ to it from our homes! The 'net' in Internet really stands for network. A (3) _____ is two or more computers connected together so that information can be received and (4) _____ from one computer to another. People enjoy using the (5) _____ to do research, for downloading their favorite songs, or for communicating with other people through email and chat programs.

The Internet is a vast (6) _____ of all types of information. Information is got from web pages that companies, organizations and individuals create and post. It's kind of like a giant bulletin board that the whole world uses! But, since anyone can put anything on the Internet, you have to be (7) _____ and use your judgment and common sense. Just because you read something on a website, it doesn't mean that it is correct information. So you have to be (8) _____ that whoever posted the information on the website knows what they are talking about – especially if you are doing (9) _____!

What if you are just using the email or chat programs? You still have to be very careful. If you've never met the person that you are (10) _____ with online, you could be on dangerous ground. You should never give out (11) _____ information to someone you don't know, not even your name! And just like you can't rely on the information on every website out there, you can't (12) _____ on what strangers you 'meet' on the Internet tell you either.

Level Exit Exam
Level 4 (Advanced)

December 2011
Writing
Duration: One hour

Name	

Student Number	
Group	

Question 1 (10 marks)	
Question 2 (15 marks)	
Total (25 marks)	

Question 1 (10 marks)

Using the following information, write a classification essay in about 150 words on the different types of chocolate. Your essay should have an introduction with a thesis statement, supporting paragraphs, and a conclusion.

Unsweetened chocolate	Dark chocolate	Milk chocolate
- known as baking or pure chocolate - contains only cocoa - has deep, rich chocolate flavour - used for baking	- known as plain or black chocolate - contains 70-80% cocoa - available in bittersweet, semisweet varieties - the healthiest variety	- one of the most popular flavours in the world - contains milk and 25% cocoa - used for baking - can be eaten as it is

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Question 2 (15 marks)

In about 250 words, write an essay on the positive effects of joining one of the English clubs at the English Language Centre of the Higher College of Technology. Your essay should have an introduction with a thesis statement, body paragraphs, and a conclusion.

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3

Ministry of Manpower

Directorate General of Technological Education

Higher College of Technology

Level Exit Exam
Level 4 (Advanced)

December 2011
Reading
Duration: One hour

Name	
Student Number	
Group	

Question 1 (10 marks)	
Question 2 (15 marks)	
Total (25 marks)	

SECTION 1

(10 marks)

You have been given a scan sheet called <u>Lonely Planet Top Cities 2012</u>.
You have 20 minutes to answer the questions.

1. When was the Skansen Open -Air museum established in Stockholm?

   _____

2. How many tourists visit London each year?

   _____

3. Which people founded Cadiz?

   _____

4. Where in Muscat is the old souk?

   _____

5. How big is Bangalore's Lalbagh Botanical Garden?

   _____

6. Where is the London Eye situated?

   _____

7. What do actors in Stockholm demonstrate?

   _____

8. How old is the Christmas tree in Lalbagh Botanical Garden?

   _____

9. What attraction is newly opened in Muscat?

   _____

10. Which procession attracts thousands of visitors from all over Spain each year?

   _____

/10

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SECTION 2   **(15 marks)**

PART A: Circle T if the statement is true or F if it is false.   **(1/2 mark each)**

1) More than 8 million people lived in London in 2010.   T   F

2) London has hosted the Summer Olympic Games 3 times.   T   F

3) The London Eye is located close to the river Thames.   T   F

4) The Romans made London their capital city.   T   F

/2

(subtotal)

PART B: Circle the best answer: **(1/2 mark each)**

5) What is the main idea of **paragraph 4**?

a) London has a history of problems but is impressive today.

b) London has been an impressive city for a lot of its history, with a hospitable atmosphere.

c) During the 1740s, each citizen of London drank on average 10 litres of gin annually.

d) Gin drinking only declined when the government introduced taxes on gin to control consumption.

6) What is the main idea of **paragraph 5**?

a) Beginning in the 16th century, the British had started to build a huge empire.

b) London became rich because of the British Empire.

c) The British Empire was larger than any that the world had seen before.

d) London was the capital of the British Empire.

/1

(subtotal)

PART C: Answer the questions. (1 mark each)

7) What will happen to the population of London after 2021?

_____

8) Which other big modern centre of finance is mentioned in the passage?

_____

9) When will the Olympic emblem be fixed to the London Eye?

_____

10) What did the Saxons use London for?

_____

11) Why was London reconstructed after World War II?

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(subtotal)

/8

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PART D: Complete the table about the history of London (½ mark each)

Event	Date
London was founded by the Romans.	Around AD 43
12)_____	Around AD 443
William the Conqueror built the Tower of London.	13)_____

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(subtotal)

PART E: What do the underlined words refer to?   (1/2 mark each)

14) it   (line 6)   _____

15) it   (line 19)   _____

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(subtotal)

PART F: Find words in the passage which mean the _same_ as: (1/2 mark each)

16) composed of people from   (lines 1-6)   _____
     many parts of the world

17) predict   (lines 2-7)   _____

18) head offices of companies   (lines 7-12)   _____

19) colonists   (lines 18-23)   _____

20) friendly and welcoming   (lines 26-31)   _____

/2.5
(subtotal)

PART G: Find words in the passage which mean the _opposite_ of: (1/2 mark each)

21) grow bigger   (lines 1-6)   _____

22) not many   (lines 7-12)   _____

23) not worth looking at   (lines 15-20)   _____

24) became weak   (lines 20-25)   _____

25) similarly   (lines 38-43)   _____

/2.5
(subtotal)

/7

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244

Higher College of Technology
English Language Program
Writing Progress Test 1

| Level 4 (Advanced) | Time Allowed: 25 minutes | Marks: 10 |

Name: _____ ID: _____ Group: ____ Date: 19/10/11

The recent change in the lifestyle of Omanis has led to serious health problems. <u>Using the following notes, write an essay in about 150 words giving solutions to this problem.</u> Your essay should have an introduction, supporting paragraphs, and a conclusion.

- eating healthy food (avoiding junk food, sodas, too much coffee and tea, etc.)
- having an active lifestyle (exercising, playing games, not watching TV and using internet for many hours)
- getting enough sleep

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Higher College of Technology
English Language Program
Reading Progress Test 2

Level: 4   **Time allowed: 30 min.**   **Marks: 10**   **Date: November 23rd, 2011**

Name: _____ ID no._____ Group: _____

SECTION 1: Scanning   (1 mark each)   10 minutes
   You have been given a scan sheet about <u>Products and Slogans</u>.
   You have 10 minutes to answer the questions below.

1. In which year did British Airways stop using "The World's Favourite Airline"?
   _____

2. How much money did the Egg Marketing Board spend on advertising?
   _____

3. In addition to Lay's, how many other Frito-Lay products are mentioned?
   _____

4. Which author helped to create the "Go to work on an egg" campaign?
   _____

5. What products does Nike Inc. supply?
   _____

/5

SECTION 2: Reading passage (5 marks)   20 minutes

PART A: Circle the best answer: (1-mark)

   6. What is the main idea of <u>**paragraph 5**</u>?

   a) The Democratic Party chose Roosevelt to run for president in 1932.

   b) Roosevelt's New Deal was an important part of his success.

   c) About 13 million people were unemployed in the United States.

   d) In 1935 Roosevelt asked Congress to pass the Social Security Act.

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PART B: Answer the questions.   (1 mark each)

7. What did doctors forecast that Roosevelt would not to be able to do?

_____

8. Which 3 groups of people were helped by the Social Security Act of 1935?

_____

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PART C: What does the underlined word refer to?   (1/2 mark)

9. <u>It</u>   (line 31)   _____   /1/2

PART D: Find the word in the passage which means the same as: (1/2 mark each)

10. persistence; not giving up   (lines 15-20) _____

11. opponent; competitor   (lines 20-25) _____

/1

PART E: Find the word that is the opposite of: (1/2 mark)

12. defeat   (lines 9 –14) _____

/1/2

/ 4

2

| Level: 4 | Time Allowed: ...35...minutes . . .   Marks: 10 | . . . . | . . .... |

Name: _____ ID: _____ Group: _____ Date_____

Using the following information, write a classification essay in about 150 words on the different types of friends

Your essay should have an introduction with a thesis statement, supporting paragraphs and a conclusion. Each paragraph should have a topic sentence, supporting sentences, a concluding sentence, and appropriate signal words. You may use the following points, and add your own ideas.

Buddies	Good friends	Best friends
• Friends you hang out with in free time • Talk sometimes • Meet in college • Not very close • Lots of them	• Friends you hang out with always • Both of you have lots in common • Helpful • Meet in college and outside • Few friends	• Maybe one or two • Trustworthy • Share your secrets • Know everything about each other • Long time friends

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Higher College of Technology
English Language Program
Writing Assignment 4

Level: Intermediate	Time Allowed: 25 minutes	Marks: 10

Name: _____ ID: _____ Group: 37 Date:_____

Using the following information, write an essay of about 150 words classifying the activities you had for your fundraiser for AEI. Your essay should have an introduction with a thesis statement, supporting paragraphs, and a conclusion.

Indoor Activities	Outdoor Activities
Theatre Performance (drama, DJ, Music band)	Football matches (18 student teams) played at different venues
Sale of accessories (key chains, wallets, CDs) and food (Spaghetti, cup cakes, brownies, mandazi, etc)	Final match-Teachers versus Students BBQ

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Higher College of Technology
English Language Program
Reading (vocabulary) Assignment 1

| | | | | 10 |

Level: **Time allowed: 10 min.**   **Marks: 10**   **Date:**

Name: _____ **ID no.** _____ **Group:** _____

Choose one word from the grid to complete each sentence below. There are ten sentences but 15 words to choose from.

diet	low- frequency	campaign	interpret	maintain
dominate	slurping	odors	sponsors	habitat
sociable	materialism	looking forward to	blunder	communication

1. Elephants can live in nearly any _____ that has adequate quantities of food and water.

2. Everybody in this class is _____ pass this level with good marks.

3. Stop _____ the soup! It is bad manners.

4. Advertising is a form of _____ used to encourage people to buy products.

5. Elephants are _____ and form small family groups.

6. The government is having a _____ on road safety.

7. Elephants can eat an extremely varied vegetarian _____ including grass, leaves, fruits etc.

8. People from different cultures _____ symbols very differently.

9. Elephants make _____ calls, many of which , though loud, are too low for humans to hear.

10. Advertising messages are usually paid for by _____.

Higher College of Technology
English Language Program
Writing   Assignment – 1   C.W
Problem and Solution

Level 4 (Advanced)	Time Allowed: 35 minutes	Marks: 10

Name: _____ ID: _____ Group: ___ Date: _____

Students are not happy with the canteen facility in HCT. What suggestions/ ways can you think to deal with this problem? Write some solutions. Your essay should have an introduction with a thesis statement, supporting paragraphs and a conclusion. You may use the following notes.

- Provide more choices for food and drinks
- Provide fresh food
- Reduce food prices

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Higher College of Technology
English Language Program
LEVEL-4 -Reading (vocabulary) Practice Assignment (chapters 3 and 4)

14

Time allowed: 20 min   Date:

Name: _____ID no._____ Group: _____

- First read the words and put them into the respective columns.
- Then fill in the blanks with appropriate words from the table.

barrier	campaign	exaggerate	puzzled	persuade	blunder	interpret	temptation
thriving	materialistic	advertising	estimate	excessive	shrink	habitat	slang

NOUNS	ADJECTIVES	VERBS

1 Social organizations are organizing a (n)_____ to (v)_____ youngsters to stop taking drugs

2. People from different cultures (v) _____ symbols very differently.

3. Ahmed has become too (a) _____.He judges people with what they have and not what they are.

4. People found it difficult to (v)_____ the loss after the cyclone.

5. The business at Al Maya is (v)_____. This new supermarket is (v)_____ all its products through (a)_____ campaigns. Hence, people cannot resist the (n)_____ to shop there.

6. While some materials expand after wash, some others (v)_____.

7. I made a terrible (n)_____ when I went out without informing my parents. I am sure they will forgive me for that mistake.

8. Some people love to (v)_____ even simple incidents. Can you call such people liars?

9. Distance is no longer a (n)_____ for people to keep in touch, as the internet makes the world seem so small.

10. You cannot use (a)_____ expressions while conducting a seminar.

Rdgvocabchp3/4-vm

Higher College of Technology

English Language Centre
Writing- CA-3

| Level 4 | Time Allowed:45 mins | Marks :10 |

Name:_____ID:_____Group:_____Date:_____

The joint family system is an important aspect of the traditional Omani society . **Write an essay (about 250 words) arguing <u>for or against</u> the joint or the extended family system.** Your essay should have an introduction, three body paragraphs, and a conclusion.

Appendix F

These interview questions are result of many chats with teachers, testing coordinators and section heads.

No.	Interview question	Participant
1	Teachers differ in whether and to what extent they believe that students should learn independently or students should be given direct instruction on how to use specific strategies and offer sufficient opportunities to practice newly acquired strategies with reinforced feedback? We want our learners to be autonomous; is it possible with the current set up and structured programme we follow in Omani higher education? Do you feel your students are completely dependent on you?	Teachers
	Does your moral obligation influence your practices at HCT or teachers are more influenced by the level of control exercised by the center?	Teachers
	What does it mean for the center when your home group' final score sheet shows Ds and Fs? How does the center perceive that and how do you perceive that?	Teachers
	What is your understanding of code of conduct? One of the issues discussed at the assistant lecturer training session is for teachers to be consistent when it comes to student behavior. Is this possible to achieve that with the current set up of team teaching and with diverse teachers?	Teachers Head of section/ timetabling committee
	Do male teachers behave and teach differently than female teachers?	Teachers
	How TESOL program has prepared you for language teaching?	Teachers
	Are you aware of any differences between boys and girls in the way they learn or the topic they prefer? Does that affect you lesson preparation?	Teachers
	Do you feel teaching should be controlled to ensure quality?	Teachers, exam coordinators and section heads
	Do you feel you are always running against time to keep up with the delivery plan? Do you feel the delivery plan restricts you? Do you feel the textbooks limit you as a teacher?	Teachers
	How do you identify with your students?	Teachers

	Prior to teaching, did your training require you to observe more experienced teachers classes?	Omani teachers
	How do you know what are good teaching practices?	Teachers
	How do you measure the quality of your exams?	Teachers & exam coordinators
	How do you translate the learning outcomes? There seems to be an endless review of the learning outcomes, why? How do you translate the learning outcomes into test items? Where do you think the learning outcomes come from? How did you translate a QA standard where it says write a text of 250 words into a five paragraph essay? What teachers focus-on in their teaching; fluency or accuracy?	Teachers, section heads and testing coordinators
	As a higher education institute, how do you establish your authority? Do you feel some of the constraints come from the bylaws (Section heads) How much does the ministry interfere with your practices and what kind of interference is usually exercised?	Head of center
	You commented at the meeting and I quote "It is not normal to have this kind of detailed conversation; I've never been part of this kind of conversation." Could you please comment on that? (Deborah)	
	How do you deal with off-topic questions? Is there a cap for highest mark in writing?	exam coordinators & teachers
	How do you evaluate your own teaching? How do you feel about students correcting teachers?	Teachers
	Are you comfortable with the current practice where coordinators write and set these exams? Do you think teachers should write these tests?	Teachers
	Do you feel the tests and delivery plan restrict and limit your teaching style?	Teachers
	During level exit exam is it easy to differentiate between your duties as an invigilator and your duties as a teacher? How do you react to the center's internal policy of adopting the role of invigilator during LEE and not explain exam	Teachers & exam coordinators