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Faculty of Social, Human and Mathematical Sciences

Southampton Education School

Lecturers' Professional Development in E-learning: An Exploration of E-learning Professional Development Culture, Perceptions and Practices at Ibri College of Technology in Oman

By

Abdulsallam Maktoum Almanthari

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ABSTRACT

E-learning use in Higher Education is an emerging area of research that has been gaining increasing interest and scrutiny. This is attributed to various factors including the continuing development of technologies, E-learning potential in affecting teaching and learning and expectations from Higher Education providers to implement E-learning. Lecturers' Professional Development (PD) is widely viewed as a key component for the improvement of lecturers' E-learning practices, which could potentially affect teaching and learning. The transition from PD to classroom practices continues to be a rich area of research where there is lack of clarity in the process through which practitioners transform knowledge to classroom practices.

This thesis investigated lecturers' E-learning PD in an Omani Higher Education Institution following an ethnographic case study approach. I spent four months in Ibri College of Technology examining day-to-day formal and informal learning practices, lecturers' and managers' experiences with and perceptions of E-learning PD and lecturers' use of and perceptions of E-learning use in teaching. The study involved managers and lecturers from four academic departments: Business, Information Technology, Engineering and English, in addition to trainers from the Educational Technologies Centre and Senior Managers within the College. Multiple methods were employed in the study including interviews with managers and lecturers, focus groups, questionnaires, documentary analysis, classroom observations, observations of PD practices and a lesson planning and lesson teaching activity.

The findings revealed that several factors affected lecturers' E-learning PD practices and perceptions at Ibri College: many of them were contextual and others were individual. The contextual factors were examined using documentary analysis, questionnaires and interviews with managers. They

revealed that many government and institutional policies had a negative impact on E-learning PD such as lecturers' work contracts, lack of effective PD leave policies, lack of investment in E-learning PD, lack of academic promotions and providing general training without tailoring it to lecturers' needs. There was also lack of E-learning PD accountability and clear disparity between policies and practices. The data indicated that there was inadequate use of College resources and lack of utilization of College lecturers' expertise.

The study showed that there were many individual factors that had an impact on E-learning PD. Investigation of lecturers' perceptions and experiences showed that although most lecturers had positive attitudes toward E-learning, E-learning pedagogical anxiety and fear of application of technology in the classroom were common. Furthermore, there was a common feeling among lecturers that the management did not provide enough support and did not prioritise E-learning PD and E-learning use in the classroom. There was a common mistrust and miscommunication between lecturers and managers; and in some cases, among lecturers or managers themselves. Some lecturers felt that traditional teaching methods worked better or were safe options, and resisted the idea of E-learning use or professional development. Informal collaboration among lecturers was aided or restrained by lecturers' communities; which were created based on common factors among them such as interests, nationalities, years of experience and positions.

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DECLARATION OF AUTHORSHIP

I, Abdulsallam Maktoum Ali Almanthari declare that this thesis and the work presented in it are my own and has been generated by me as the result of my own original research.

Lecturers' Professional Development in E-learning: An Exploration of E-learning Professional Development Culture, Perceptions and Practices at Ibri College of Technology in Oman.

I confirm that:

1. This work was done wholly or mainly while in candidature for a research degree at this University;
2. Where any part of this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree or any other qualification at this University or any other institution, this has been clearly stated;
3. Where I have consulted the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed;
4. Where I have quoted from the work of others, the source is always given. With the exception of such quotations, this thesis is entirely my own work;
5. I have acknowledged all main sources of help;
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7. None of this work has been published before submission.

Signed: Abdulsallam Almanthari

Date: 12 June 2019

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Definitions and Abbreviations

CoP: Communities of Practice

CPD: Continuing Professional Development

ELC: English Language Centre

HE: Higher Education

HEIs: Higher Education Institutions

ICT: Information and Communication Technologies

INSET: In-Service Training

MOE: Ministry of Education

OAAA: Oman Academic Accreditation Authority

PD: Professional Development

PLC: Professional Learning Communities

RQs: Research Questions

SQU: Sultan Qaboos University

TAM: Technology Acceptance Model

TPACK: Technological, Pedagogical and Content Knowledge

VLE: Virtual Learning Environments

Chapter 1: **Introduction**

1.1 Overview

E-learning integration in Higher Education (HE) has become one of the top priorities in many countries for many economic, social and educational reasons (Tondeur et al., 2007). First, it seems that Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) have become an indispensable part of our society for carrying out daily tasks such as communication and our economy is becoming increasingly dependent on technology; therefore, it is crucial to prepare students for future jobs and careers (Hawkridge, 1990; Mishra & Koehler, 2006). Second, in most countries around the world, all citizens go through compulsory school education and increasing numbers pursue HE. This might be why education is viewed as a central tool for attaining national ICT strategies and objectives, such as producing graduates with ICT skills and knowledge suitable to our contemporary and future needs, and raising educational standards by integrating technology (Tondeur et al., 2007). The third reason is that E-learning is believed to have the potential of enhancing teaching and learning, and therefore raising educational standards (Hawkridge, 1990; Littlejohn, 2002; Mishra & Koehler, 2006; Tondeur et al., 2007; Van Braak, 2001). For example, E-learning may improve teaching and learning by fostering collaborative and flexible learning independent from time and place, promoting cross-cultural understanding, helping students become better informed (Hawkridge, 1990; Van Braak, 2001) and exposing learners to experiences different from reality such as virtual reality (Conole et al., 2004).

Lecturer PD is seen as one of the most effective tools in developing the quality of education, by improving lecturers' skills and knowledge and consequently improving the quality of teaching (Barth & Guest, 1990; Earley & Bubb, 2004; Guskey, 2002; Richards & Farrell, 2005; Twining et al., 2013; Wilson & Berne, 1999). Lecturer E-learning PD aims at equipping lecturers with the skills and knowledge necessary to make E-learning integration in education effective (Mishra & Koehler, 2006). However, the literature

suggests that conceptualizing how E-learning PD should be effectively delivered is a highly complicated task.

1.2 Rationale for the Study

In the last twenty years, there has been an increasingly extensive focus and research on how E-learning may enhance and transform teaching and learning (Koehler & Mishra, 2005; Littlejohn, 2002; Tondeur et al., 2016; Tondeur et al., 2007; Williams et al., 2000). With the increasing interest in E-learning, understanding the role of lecturers and lecturer E-learning PD became significant. The literature on E-learning use in HE looks into plenty of aspects such as its effectiveness as a teaching and learning tool, student and lecturer attitudes and experiences with it, technological advances and their implications and lecturer PD and use of E-learning in Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs). It might be challenging or even impractical to study all these points adequately in a single study, since each single one of them can be further sub-categorized into plenty of research topics. Therefore, studies tend to limit the scope of their focus.

Lecturer E-learning PD faces many challenges; some are linked to PD in general while others are unique to E-learning PD. For example, PD is conventionally characterised by lack of lecturer active engagement and normally top-down training approaches are followed where lecturers are expected to receive and accept information (Butler et al., 2004; Desimone et al., 2002; Flint et al., 2011; Hustler et al., 2003; Silberman & Auerbach, 2011; Steeg & Lambson, 2015; Thomson & Trigwell, 2016). However, simply following certain approaches like a ‘collaborative’ approach where lecturers are expected to be actively engaged and take control of their learning does not guarantee better PD (Desimone et al., 2002). Each lecturer is unique and ignoring lecturers’ identities and professional backgrounds may limit the effectiveness of training (Etmer, 2005; Fullan & Hargreaves, 2014). Furthermore, it may not be clear to lecturers how PD is linked to their own classrooms (Desimone, 2009). Furthermore, although informal learning and lecturers’ communities are vital to our understanding of PD, they tend to be ignored and

they are under investigated (Gerken et al., 2016; Hara, 2001; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Thomson, 2015; Thomson & Trigwell, 2016). These are some of the challenges that make conceptualising PD complicated.

In addition to the challenges related to PD above, E-learning PD faces numerous limitations. For example, studies that investigate E-learning PD tend to look at technology in isolation without a clear link to lecturers' pedagogical knowledge and experiences and/or the subjects they teach (Littlejohn, 2002; Mishra & Koehler, 2006; Tondeur et al., 2007) . Furthermore, lecturers may not understand clearly or question technology usefulness to their classrooms (Prieto et al., 2016; Watty et al., 2016; Zhao et al., 2002). Their attitudes may be affected by their perceptions of technology ease of use, its usefulness and the effort needed to use them (Davis, 1989; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Rienties et al., 2016; Venkatesh & Davis, 2000). Technology training is usually done in isolation which results in training that emphasises what technology can do (Jimoyiannis & Komis, 2007; Koehler et al., 2013; Marangunić & Granić, 2015; Mishra & Koehler, 2006; Westberry et al., 2015). Many studies tend to look at the improvement in lecturers' perceptions and confidence toward E-learning immediately after taking E-learning PD programmes; however, many studies show that these gains in perceptions do not always translate into significant increase in E-learning use in teaching (Brinkinhoff, 2006; Rienties et al., 2016; Williams et al., 2000).

Some studies indicate that the gap in E-learning use and availability among countries and institutions varies widely (e.g. Korte and Husing, 2006 study of E-learning use in Europe), which poses serious challenges for researchers when they attempt to establish connections with other studies and contexts. This is even more challenging for researchers in developing countries, since most studies are conducted in developed countries and there is dearth of research in their contexts. Even in developed countries, the reported use of E-learning, if explained clearly in published studies, is usually for low level tasks such as internet searching, word processing, emailing and PowerPoint presentations (Littlejohn, 2002; Twining et al., 2013). Furthermore, availability of

technology does not guarantee an increased use of it in teaching (Jimoyiannis & Komis, 2007).

In Oman, educational institutions have attempted to use various forms of technologies in order to improve educational standards and prepare students for the future (UNESCO, 2011). However, it seems that practitioners in Oman tend to use basic tools such as word processing and internet browsing (Al-Adi, 2009; Al-Senaidi et al., 2009). This observation in Oman was also seen by UK based researchers King and Boyatt (2015), who argued that E-learning use in HE is not common and its uptake is low. According to them, E-learning use is mainly restricted to dissemination of information and materials to students. In Oman, E-learning is seen as a vital tool that gives learners an active role in learning where they can collaborate with other students and learn better. However, lecturers with traditional teaching views may feel uncomfortable with giving students a more active role. Furthermore, even when practitioners have positive attitudes toward technology, that does not mean they use it (e.g. Al-Adi, 2009). According to Porcaro (2011b), teaching and learning in Oman is teacher-centred and this is one of the main obstacles that limit E-learning integration in teaching. Most of Omani practitioners completed their degrees before E-learning was important in education (Hall, 2005a). Some studies showed that lecturers feel they need E-learning PD to support their teaching such as learning how to manage learning, controlling the classroom and keeping the students on task. Another challenge is that educators seem to depend on their colleagues to learn how to use technologies and there is lack of satisfaction with E-learning PD if it is available (Al-Adi, 2009; Al-Rabaani, 2008). For all these reasons, this study attempted to further our understanding of E-learning PD practices in HE and lecturers' perceptions and experiences with it. It investigated the role of lecturer PD and lecturers' perceptions of its impact on E-learning use. Furthermore, the study investigated lecturers and managers' perceptions and experiences with formal and informal E-learning PD.

This research followed a case study approach where Ibri College served as the case investigated in order to answer the research questions. There were many reasons for

following a case study approach and for choosing this particular case. Case study was employed in this research since the phenomena investigated was complicated and required an intensive, lengthy and detailed examination (Bryman, 2012). The rationale for choosing this particular college was that Ibri College had many unique features that generated very valuable and interesting data. Ibri College invested financially in purchasing modern educational technologies; however, the College was criticised by the Omani Academic Accreditation Authority (OAAA) for the lack of E-learning use in teaching and learning and the lack of E-learning PD. Ibri College (2013) stated that it encouraged the use of technologies, but there was no E-learning strategy and it was not clear how lecturers were expected to use it to support teaching and learning (Oman Academic Accreditation Authority, May 2014). The reported use of E-learning was mainly to upload supplementary materials and there was no clear value of these materials to teaching and learning (Oman Academic Accreditation Authority, May 2014). Furthermore, Ibri College is located in a considerably remote area far from most HEIs and major cities; hence, focusing on it showed how HEIs with similar features cope with geographical challenges, financial challenges, policy challenges, absence of full-time professional trainers and a PD unit, and many other challenges.

This thesis aims to add to our understanding of E-learning PD in HE. It seeks to gain a deeper understanding of how E-learning PD occurs and how it is related to the teaching practice. The study focuses on lecturers' perceptions and attitudes toward E-learning PD and technology enhanced teaching and learning, day-to-day practices and processes, institutional support structures, interaction between managers and lecturers, interaction among lecturers themselves, and the formal and informal learning culture at the College. The study looks at informal learning; for example, lecturer collaboration, discussions and support and lecturers' communities. The study involved lecturers from different disciplines: Engineering, IT, Business and English, in order to investigate the role of the subject in E-learning PD. This was followed by a special focus on English language lecturers. The aim of narrowing down the subject domain was to understand how lecturers within a specific area linked E-learning and E-learning PD with pedagogy and the subjects they taught. This involved an investigation of pedagogy and the subject such as presenting information, practising, assessment, lesson planning, time-management,

creating interest and classroom management. This led to an analysis of the link between E-learning PD and teaching. This also highlighted lecturers' perceptions of E-learning and E-learning PD usefulness, applicability, and effectiveness in teaching. The study investigated formal and informal collegial support among lecturers as a community of practice. The discussions among lecturers provided valuable educational opportunities where much of the learning occurred.

1.3 Research Questions

The research questions in this study are:

1. What are lecturers' and managers' perceptions of E-learning use in teaching?

2. What are lecturers' E-learning pedagogical and technological perceptions, considerations and experiences?

3. What are lecturers' and managers' perceptions of E-learning PD at Ibri College of Technology?

3.1. How does formal learning occur at Ibri College of Technology?

3.2. How does informal learning occur at Ibri College of Technology?

1.4 Study Outline

This research followed an ethnographic case study approach with multiple methods. The study used mainly qualitative data collection and analysis methods, and a questionnaire was used to gain general statistical information and it was used as a sampling frame to select interesting cases for interviews. The study involved the use of various methods: questionnaires, documentary analysis, focus groups, interviews and observations.

The research started with a pilot study for three weeks in November 2015, followed by fieldwork for twelve weeks in February, March, April and May 2016. Both stages were initiated with a questionnaire, which was modified after the pilot stage based on lecturers' feedback and responses. One hundred and twenty six lecturers completed it. The questionnaire and documentary analysis were conducted before the other methods in order to understand the contextual features of the College and E-learning PD there, since that helped in informing the other methods following them.

Interviews were carried out with 18 lecturers, 11 managers, and 2 support staff. There was also a lesson planning and lesson teaching activity. It involved starting with focus group discussions with twelve lecturers, followed by a lesson planning session, then classroom observation of the lessons planned and finally reflections of lecturers' experiences.

1.5 Structure of the Thesis

This research starts with the context in which the study took place. The context includes an overview of Omani education system, the E-learning PD context in the Omani HE system and the specific location in which the study took place. This is followed by a literature review of E-learning PD. The theoretical and conceptual framework discusses the theoretical underpinnings of this research and the process of developing a Conceptual Framework specifically for this study. This is followed by the research methodology with analysis of the research design, data collection and data analysis methods used. The findings chapter discusses the main findings of this study. Finally, the discussion and conclusion chapter presents answers to the research questions, discussion of the main themes that emerged from this research, analysis of contribution to knowledge and implications for practice.

Chapter 2: **Context: E-learning PD in Oman**

2.1 Introduction

Oman is a developing country in the Middle East. As Figure 1 shows, it shares borders with the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, and Yemen. Oman has long shores along the Indian Ocean, Gulf of Oman and Persian Gulf. The population of Oman is 4.5 million; 2 million are foreign nationals (National Centre for Statistics and Information "National Centre for Statistics and Information," 2016). The population is growing fast, from 1.5 million in 1993, to a forecast of 8.31 million in 2050 (Khandekar & Al Raisi, 2012). Oman can be called a 'young' country, since more than 80% of the population are under 35 years old and more than 50% are under 20 (Oxford Business Group, 2012).

Figure 1: Map of Oman Source: Central Intelligence Agency (1996)

Development of the Omani HE is central to the future of the country. One of its main aims is the creation of a workforce that drives economic growth (Al-Lamki, 2002; Baporikar & Shah, 2012). The country depends profoundly (about 50% income in 2010) on its dwindling oil resources and on foreign labour (Central Intelligence Agency, 2013; Oxford Business Group, 2012). However, there are increasing efforts to diversify the economy mainly by industrialization, tourism, services, and attempting to reduce oil contribution to 9% of the economy in 2020 and providing high quality learning in order to prepare citizens for these jobs (Central Intelligence Agency, 2013; Oxford Business Group, 2012). There is dearth of research and publications related to HE in Oman, which poses challenging in understanding the E-learning PD context in the Omani HE system.

This chapter begins with an overview of general school education in Oman, which provides a background of E-learning PD status in Oman. Next, the situation of the Omani HE will be examined, focusing on its current status, future trends, training and development and E-learning. After that, the study will discuss E-learning PD in HE. Finally, the chapter will end with a description of the location in which the study took place, Ibri College of Technology.

2.2 School Education in Oman

The political changes that took place in 1970 brought stability to the country and Oman started modernizing in all aspects of life. Before this, the country suffered from civil war, poverty, illiteracy, and isolation with only two countries having presence in the country: India and the UK (International Business Publications, 2012).

In 1970, there were only three primary schools with 909 students and 30 teachers in the whole country and no post-secondary education (AlBandary, 2005; Carroll et al., 2009;

Whelan, 1984). During the early years of development, the focus was on providing education for all (Ministry of Education, 2008). The schooling system is that there are 12 grades and completing them is compulsory for all children. In 2005, the number of schools exceeded 1000 schools with more than half a million students (Ministry of Education, 2008). When compared to the number of teachers, we notice that the number of teachers kept growing faster than the number of students, which resulted in an increase of ratio of teachers per students. The student teacher ratio improved from 1:20 in 2001 to 1:10 in 2006 (Ministry of Education, 2008). The percentage of Omani teachers grew from 8% of teachers in 1980 to 86% in 2008, while Omanis in school administration grew from 26% in 1980 to almost 100% in 2008 (Ministry of Education, 2008). Figures 2 and 3 show the number of school students and teachers from 1970 to 2008.

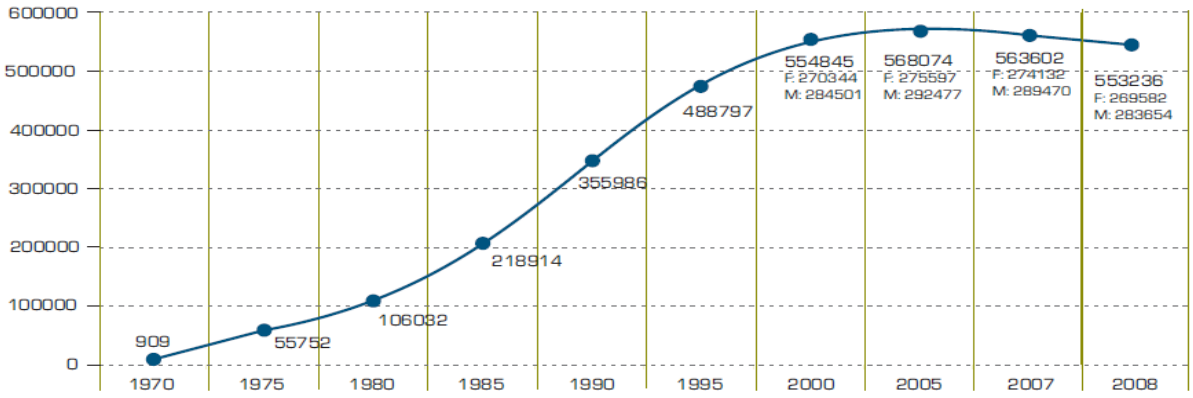


Figure 2: Number of School Students 1970-2008 (Ministry of Education, 2008)

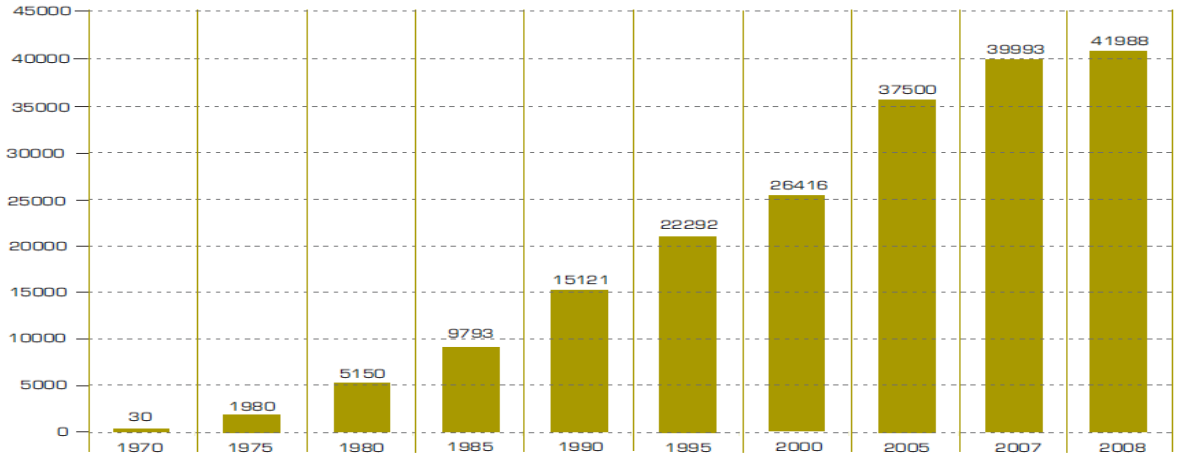


Figure 3: Number of School Teachers 1970-2008 (Ministry of Education, 2008)

Further analysis of the Omani School context is in the appendices. Appendix Q discusses the School context in Oman and Appendix R discusses E-learning PD for school teachers in Oman.

2.3 Higher Education in Oman

After developing school education in Oman, at a later stage there was a need to establish and develop HE in Oman. Higher Education in Oman is relatively new and is experiencing tremendous growth (Baporikar & Shah, 2012; Carroll et al., 2009; Oxford Business Group, 2012). It is one of the highest priorities for Oman, since it is seen as a key to foster economic, social and human resources growth (Al-Lamki, 2002; Baporikar & Shah, 2012). This section discusses mainly public HE in Oman because the College investigated is a government sponsored and regulated College. Appendix S discusses private HEIs in Oman.

Oman has experienced a remarkable growth in the number of public and private HEIs and students in HE. The first university in Oman, Sultan Qaboos University (SQU), was established in 1986. In 2012, there were over 80,000 students in 61 HEIs (Ministry of Higher Education, 2013). In that year, there were 48240 school graduates, around 60% of them (28774 students) enrolled to HEIs. 10750 students (37.3% of total enrolment) in that year enrolled to the Colleges of Technology (Ministry of Higher Education, 2013). The increasing number of population and school graduates will ensure that HEIs keep expanding and increasing (Al-Lamki, 2002; Oxford Business Group, 2010). HE is Oman is flexible and keeps changing; for example, Colleges of Education were transformed to Colleges of Applied Sciences because of the lowering demand for teachers and increasing demand for other specialisations (Oxford Business Group, 2010).

Oman provides tremendous financial resources for HE. For example, expenditure on HE in the years 2008, 2009, 2010 kept growing from 7.7%, 8.5% to 9% of the total country's expenditure respectively (Oxford Business Group, 2012). The government covers the cost

of all public HEIs, including providing free education, books and resources, constructing campuses, and giving students monthly allowances ranging from about 150 to 310 US dollars (Baporikar & Shah, 2012).

The language of instruction in HEIs is English and all of them require students to pass foundation programmes before starting their specializations. Foundation programmes in Oman are comprised of English, Information Technology, and math, in order to equip them with the skills necessary to start their studies (Baporikar & Shah, 2012). After the foundation programme, two years of study lead to diploma, three to higher diploma and four to a bachelor degree (UNESCO, 2011).

There are three levels of HEIs in Oman: Colleges, University Colleges and Universities (Baporikar & Shah, 2012). Colleges are teaching focused institutions that offer up to a Bachelor degree. There is no research or publications focus. The context of this study, Ibri College, is a College. The second level is University Colleges, which offer more programmes than colleges and offer up to a Master's degree in at least two broad fields. These are teaching and research institutions. The third level is Universities, which are teaching and research institutions that offer Bachelor, Master's and PhDs. The scope of programmes offered in universities is wide and staff usually hold PhDs with publications or appropriate professional experiences.

The Omani HE system was criticised for the lack of a common governing body, which resulted in the lack of common vision and multiplication of running costs (Al-Lamki, 2002). Omani HEIs are governed by many authorities such as the Ministries of: Higher Education, Manpower, Health, Defence, and Commerce and Industry. There is a proposal to govern all HEIs by the Ministry of Higher Education in order to enhance quality and have a consensus on how to improve HE.

The emphasis on quality and standards in Omani HE led to the establishment of the Omani Academic Accreditation Authority (OAAA) in 2006 to accredit institutions and programmes that meet the standards of the Omani National Qualification Framework (Baporikar & Shah, 2012; Carroll et al., 2009). Most HEIs at that time were not ready for accreditation, so it is implemented in steps where quality audits are carried out to give HEIs guidelines on how to maintain the standards and be accredited. All HEIs are required to conduct and publish self-assessment reports, including the college investigated in this research.

2.4 Teaching and Learning in Higher Education

Recently in HE in Oman, there has been attempts to shift from the currently dominant traditional approaches which emphasize rote learning, testing and top-down knowledge transfer from lecturers to students, to more student-centred approaches (Baporikar & Shah, 2012; Porcaro & Al Musawi, 2011). This is driven by government attempts to modernize HE. However, most HEIs use traditional approaches where students are expected to memorize information and reproduce it in exams (Baporikar & Shah, 2012). E-learning is seen as effective for giving learners a more active role in learning, collaborating with others to negotiate and construct meaning (Porcaro & Al Musawi, 2011).

Lecturers' perceptions of teaching approaches may hinder E-learning use if they prefer lecturer-centred approaches that depend on rote learning. Porcaro and Al Musawi (2011) described teaching in Oman as 'instructivist', where there is a clear focus on memorization, assessment and lecturing. Porcaro (2011b) compared teaching in Oman to 'a banking system' where instructors deposit information that can be withdrawn in exams. AlMusawi (2011) supported this observation; and argued that the 1998 educational reforms in schools were not reflected in HE, where assessment remains traditional.

Public HEIs in Oman are criticized for producing graduates who have low skills and knowledge (Baporikar & Shah, 2012). Baporikar and Shah (2012) attribute this to many factors such as: weak educational background in schools, lack of commitment because of the lack of competition in admission and employment, getting free education and the scholarship and allowance system which does not take into account student performance after enrolment to HEIs. There are many challenges that face public Omani HEIs such as overcrowding of classes, lack of resources, infrastructure, low quality and high financial cost for the government (Al-Lamki, 2002). Al-Lamki (2002) argued that the government should start getting tuition fees in order to afford improving HE.

English is the language of instruction in all public and private HEIs in Oman, and since it is a foreign language in Oman, students' language level could have a remarkable impact on their learning which is vastly conducted in the medium of English. Prakash et al. (2013) investigated the progression rate of students in a private HEI in Oman from the foundation level to Diploma, Higher Diploma and Bachelor degrees using a statistical approach. The results show that English language performance is a significant indicator of progression rate. This might imply that there is a need to improve the quality of English language courses in the foundation programme, in order to enable more students to complete their courses.

2.5 E-learning PD for Lecturers in Higher Education in Oman

In Oman, many HEIs attempt to encourage E-learning use in their educational programmes. Al Musawi and Abdelraheem (2004) argued that Omani HEIs have recognized the importance of E-learning and 'embraced' it to a large scale. However, their claim was not supported with adequate evidence except references to growth in E-learning use in SQU. According to them, in 2001 SQU began to implement E-learning with only eight E-learning courses with 981 students enrolled. In 2002 there were 40 courses with 3001 students enrolled (Al Musawi & Abdelraheem, 2004). Nevertheless, these

statistics were not supported with details of these courses or what constitutes a course in their view. For example, it was not clear whether uploading a few supplementary materials was regarded as a 'course'. In addition, the level of students' use and engagement with these courses was not clear. Furthermore, lecturers' motivation for creating these courses was not known, and whether they were self-motivated or created these courses in order to meet institutional requirements.

Although E-learning use in Omani HEIs seem to be continuously increasing, the manner and purpose for E-learning use is usually unclear. For instance, Al-Ani (2013) discussed growth of E-learning courses in SQU from eight courses in 2001 to 387 courses in 2006 and more than 3000 courses in 2012 (Al-Ani, 2013). Again, the term 'E-learning course' was not explained, since it could be an online document or an online storage of resources that could accumulate over time, without indication of use. In their study, Al-Senaidi et al. (2009) found that most lecturers in SQU used basic E-learning tools such as Microsoft Office tools and internet browsing, and rarely used more advanced tools for teaching. They found that lecturers who adopted E-learning earlier tended to have more positive attitudes than later adaptors. Furthermore, they found that E-learning skills were the most important predictor of E-learning use, followed by attitudes towards E-learning and teaching load. They found that demographic data such as age, gender, academic rank, teaching experience were not significant predictors of E-learning use. Nonetheless, these findings were not supported with other studies within the same context or in other HEIs due to the dearth of research of E-learning use in Oman.

Students' and lecturers' attitudes toward educational technologies may change after experiencing them. For example, Ahmad and Al-Khanjari (2011) examined 510 students taking a blended learning course in the foundation programme at SQU. In this course, students and lecturers were connected through classroom discussions and online. The online communication was through Moodle discussions and Moodle chat sessions for 10-15 minutes to share ideas and thoughts. The results showed that although students at the beginning did not have a good idea about Moodle, there was a considerable shift in their

ideas at the end of the course. There was a considerable shift in students' confidence with Moodle, acknowledging its importance in their learning. Before the course, most of them preferred learning depending on the lecturer only. However, at the end of the course their preference changed to learning depending on both the lecturer and Moodle.

A study by Porcaro and Al Musawi (2011) examined a module they taught in SQU for pre-service teachers about educational technologies. The module was for 3 semesters, where the lecturer and students met twice a week: one day for the theoretical part and the other for practical applications. Multiple methods were used in their study based on this module: surveys, interviews, observations and collecting online information and assignments. In the first semester, students worked in small groups to develop educational media such as videos, presentations and posters. In the second semester, they built educational media suitable to a unit from a school textbook. Moodle and a course wiki were used for communication. 27 students took the course in autumn 2009, 22 students in spring 2010 and 41 students in autumn 2010. 84%, 79% and 92% of the students in the 3 semesters respectively were satisfied with the course. The practical part was more enjoyable for them than the theoretical part. At the end of the course, students reported enhanced knowledge and confidence in E-learning use. Students also reported enhanced collaboration, presentation and leadership skills. Students reported satisfaction with the ability to share ideas freely with students regardless of gender. This was similar to Khan's (2006) observation in his study, where Omani females preferred online discussions as they felt it gave them more freedom to express their opinions. However, it would be interesting to see if these views hold true to Omani female students today, since mixed gender education was new and introduced at that time. Many things made implementing that course difficult. SQU, as most HEIs in Oman, has a traditional preference for exams rather than projects or other forms of student-centred learning. It is questionable whether the course can be successfully taught by other lecturers, since the success of their course might be dependent on them and their expertise as researchers and instructors in educational technologies. Furthermore, preparation of the course took considerable time, despite the fact that they were specialists in E-learning use. According to Porcaro (2011a), it might be hard to continue or replicate their course, unless there are ready-made templates, designs and clear guidelines for lecturers to use in their

classrooms. Consequently, most lecturers may not have time or experience to design similar courses, or have freedom with the curriculum.

Omani HEIs may have the necessary foundations needed to make E-learning integration effective, such as availability of technologies and students' and lecturers' knowledge of technologies. However, most of Omani HE lecturers completed their university degrees before E-learning was essential in education (Hall, 2005b). As a result, they may know how to use technologies for personal use, but not for teaching since they were not trained for that. Hall (2005b) argued the computers available in Omani HEIs could cope with most E-learning functions, without a need to update computers or buy expensive software and hardware. Although basic E-learning tools may not require expensive computers, use of advanced E-learning tools could require considerable financial investment in PCs or other technologies. For instance, the use of Smartboard, tablets (e.g. iPads) and computer labs could be expensive. Furthermore, some studies showed that students could get anxious with IT limitations such as computer errors or slow internet speeds. For example, Al-Ani (2013) looked at using Moodle in SQU, and students' perceptions of its advantages and obstacles that hinder its use. A randomly selected sample of 283 students from all disciplines completed a survey about Moodle satisfaction. The results of the study revealed that students think that the most important advantages of Moodle are increasing students' achievement, collaboration and communication. Students highly ranked the importance of Moodle for flexibility in doing homework, developing skills and making them autonomous leaners. The highest rated obstacle facing students was the frequent disturbance in computers, followed by disturbances in university network and anxiety with online quizzes. The majority of students owned a personal computer and had good confidence and skills in using computers and Moodle.

2.6 Ibri College of Technology

Ibri College of Technology is one of seven Colleges of Technology in Oman, established between 1984 and 2007. These Colleges are governed by the Ministry of Manpower and

offer Diplomas, Advanced Diplomas and Bachelor degrees mainly in Business, Engineering and Information Technology (Ibri College of Technology, 2011; Oman Academic Accreditation Authority, May 2014). Ibri College was established in 2007 and therefore it is the newest College of Technology in Oman (Ibri College of Technology, 2011). The number of students and infrastructures in Ibri College kept growing rapidly. The number of students grew from 673 in the first semester in 2007 to 2300 in 2009 (Ibri College of Technology, 2011). Currently, there are over 3500 students in the college. The Engineering building was the latest project and it opened in 2013. Construction of the ELC compound was initiated at the end of 2014 and it is due to be completed in 2018. According to Ibri College (2011, p109), the College main purpose is:

> *'To provide high quality technological education and training to students, so that when they graduate they are immediately able to make a meaningful contribution to the further development of the sultanate's economy'.*

That is done, according to the college, by attempting to achieve excellence in teaching and learning, that is equal to international standards (Ibri College of Technology, March 2013). Understanding the nature of E-learning PD in the Colleges of Technology is a challenging task, since no studies have yet been written about E-learning PD at Colleges of Technology in Oman, and a handful of studies were written about E-learning PD in Oman.

The medium of instruction in the Colleges of Technology is English and students must pass the foundation programme of English language, math, and IT before starting their specializations. Lecturers in the ELC help students improve their English in the foundation and post-foundation programmes. That is done to enable them to successfully complete their programmes in Business, Information Technology, or Engineering, which are taught in the medium of English (Ibri College, 2013). Students should take a Placement English language Test, which determines the level of their entry: pre-elementary, elementary, intermediate or advanced (Ibri College, 2013). Although all these levels are non-credit courses, passing them is a prerequisite to joining the Post-Foundation programmes. Students who get more than 86% in the Placement Test qualify to take the Advanced Level Exit Exam. Passing it qualifies them to go directly to the Post-Foundation

programmes. In addition to English, students have to pass an ICT module and a mathematics module (Ibri College, 2013). After the advanced level, students should pass the TOEFL or IELTS exam, and based on their results can continue to Diploma or Higher Diploma. This determines whether they can progress to higher diploma (TOEFL 450) or bachelor degrees (TOEFL 500) (Ibri College, 2013). Students can exit the system after completing any of the three levels of qualifications: Diploma, Higher Diploma or Bachelor degrees.

Admission of students to Ibri College is based on their results in high school. Admission is done online through the Higher Education Admission Centre website. All school graduates use this electronic system to choose a minimum of 12 choices in the order of their preferences, and the electronic system places them automatically in different HEIs according to their results (Haque, 2014).

A greater emphasis on E-learning use in education was shown in Ibri College report (2013) and the feedback from the Omani Academic Accreditation Authority (2014). Ibri College believes that information technology skills are 'paramount' for students in order to improve the quality of teaching and learning, update students' knowledge, promote a lifelong learning culture and equip graduates with the technological knowledge needed for employment (Ibri College, 2011; Ibri College, 2013). Ibri College has many forms of technologies such as high-speed broadband Internet, computer labs, laptops, smartboards, PCs for all staff, projectors, Moodle (VLE), audio and videos technologies, intranet, shared folders, College webmail and a College website. Lecturers receive training and there is a considerable number of support staff. Ibri College is committed to maintaining the ratio of PCs to students, and upgrading technology constantly (Ibri College, 2013). For example, Ibri College increased the number of smart boards in classrooms and laboratories (OAAA, 2014). The College attempts to offer international certification programmes in ICT, such as ICDL (Ibri College, 2011). Furthermore, in each academic programme Ibri College will attempt to implement one international certification programme (Ibri College, 2011). Ibri College indicated that it attempts to

ensure that 80% of its technologies and teaching aids 'are latest' (Ibri College, 2011). However, this is a vague statement since it does not specify what and how technologies are considered 'latest'. This is similar to another vague statement that states the Colleges plans to 'equip labs with 70% of latest technologies' (Ibri College, 2011, p93).

Ibri College (2013) indicated that 90% of its lecturers used E-learning. However, it is not clear here what is meant by E-learning and how lecturers used it, since it can indicate using Smart boards or simply searching for supplementary teaching materials using the Internet. Furthermore, lecturers may have considered using their college emails E-learning. Therefore, these general statements do not clarify what the College meant by E-learning, which in result lead to understanding it differently by different lecturers. A questionnaire carried out by Ibri College (2013) revealed that students' satisfaction with learning resources was low (3.1 out of 5). Again, learning resources is a generic term that includes many things, without probing deeply into the components of learning resources and the various interpretations of it. Moodle is used as a learning platform where lecturers can create courses and a space for discussions using the discussions forum function (Ibri College, 2013). Ibri College states that it is committed to excellence in teaching and learning, and views PD as crucial to enhancing quality of education (Ibri College, 2011; Ibri College 2013).

Most lecturers at Ibri College are foreign. The requirements for lecturers in the Colleges of Technology are high and that creates a need for foreign lecturers. For example, in the IT department there were only two Omani lecturers out of 37, while it was the highest in the ELC where 17 out of 60 lecturers were Omani (Ibri College, 2013). Most of the lecturers in Ibri College (55%) held a Master degree while a few (10%) were PhD holders (OAAA, 2014).

The teaching and learning strategy at Ibri College stated that students need cognitive skills, interpersonal skills and IT skills (Ibri College, 2013). Assessment was not supposed to be based on textbooks, but on a list of expected learning outcomes. Ibri College (2011)

stated that there was a shift from exams-only assessment to continuous assessment that involved midterms, final exams, quizzes, presentations, group and individual projects, participation and homework. However, the OAAA (2014) reported that there were cases where examinations were based on memorizing facts from textbooks, which did not meet what was written in Ibri College Quality Assurance Manual (2013).

Ibri College identified a number of challenges that may hinder E-learning use. First, as the number of students kept increasing significantly, this was not accompanied with adequate increase in computers (Ibri College, 2013). There was no reported use of smartboards, and the college was planning for training to increase their use (Ibri College, 2013). The surveys used by the college were in many cases vague, too generic, and failed to explain terms (OAAA, 2014). The OAAA (2014) criticised the surveys distributed by Ibri College, since they were based on general satisfaction, the response rate was low, and the method of measurement needed to be reviewed. The respondents were left to guess what was meant by some terms, such as E-learning and learning resources. Students' satisfaction about the Internet was 2.0 out of five while for lecturers it was 3.5 (Ibri College, 2013). It is not clear why students' satisfaction is lower than staff here. Another example, lecturers' satisfaction with educational technology resources was 3.97 while it was only 1.5 for students (OAAA, 2014). When lecturers and students were interviewed later, there was no clear reason for this disparity (OAAA, 2014). This adds to the limitations of the survey used. The OAAA (2014) recommends improving the quality of data gathering, by designing better surveys, ensuring representativeness or respondents, and supporting surveys with interviews. In the ICDL exam in 2009/10, only 37 students out of 611 (6%) managed to pass it (Ibri College, 2013). It was not reported why the majority of students failed in this IT skills exam.

Despite all the financial investment made in technology, it seems that integration of technology in teaching and learning is limited (OAAA, 2014). The OAAA (2014) recommends that Ibri College needs to have an E-learning strategy, which specifies how educational technologies should be applied for teaching and learning. This E-learning

strategy should be part of a comprehensive teaching and learning strategy (OAAA, 2014). Furthermore, Ibri College does not have a plan for future learning technologies based on students' needs (OAAA, 2014).

The OAAA (2014) found that Moodle use consisted of only uploading notes, without adding value to teaching and learning. Ibri College did not define E-learning, in the context of their teaching and learning plan. According to OAAA, it is not enough to plan for a 100% use of Moodle, as indicated by the College portfolio, but there is a need to consider how it can add value to teaching and learning (OAAA, 2014). OAAA (2014) suggests that this can be done by providing training and creating an E-learning strategy.

Chapter 3: **Literature Review**

3.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the literature on E-Learning Professional Development (PD) for lecturers in Higher Education (HE). The chapter constitutes of three main sections: PD, E-Learning and E-learning PD.

The chapter begins with PD in HE. This includes discussions on formal and informal learning, importance of lecturers' PD, factors that affect lecturers' PD, and then the challenges that face PD.

This is followed by a section on E-learning in HE, which comprises analyses of the various definitions and interpretations of E-learning, its importance and factors that enable or hinder E-learning use in HE. This section includes analysis of empirical studies that investigate E-learning use in HE.

The last section will bring together PD and E-learning in HE. This section begins by defining E-learning PD. This is followed by a focus on pedagogy and E-learning, by defining pedagogy and the role of E-learning in enhancing teaching and learning. The role of the management is investigated after that. Finally, the literature review highlights educators' beliefs, which includes many aspects such as individual and cultural beliefs, resistance to change and so on.

Throughout the literature review, empirical studies that report on the use E-learning in HE will be analysed. More focus is paid to technologies that are related to the context of the study, such as the use of smartboard, Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs), productivity

tools, data presentation tools and the Internet. Finally, although this study focuses on HE, the literature review includes analysis of key studies that looked into E-learning PD in schools. The relevance of these studies is investigated, taking into account the similarities and differences between HE and school education. HE lecturers may engage in academic activities related to research projects and publications. However, this literature review focuses on the pedagogical side of lecturers' practice, due to the focus of the study, and the context in which the study took place. The study focuses mainly on the pedagogical implications of E-learning PD; consequently, the literature review concentrated on E-learning PD with a special focus on pedagogy.

I found that HEI instructors were referred to as teachers, lecturers, tutors, academics, practitioners, instructors and educators. To avoid confusion, in the literature review and throughout this study, the term 'teacher' refers to school teachers while 'lecturer' and 'academic' refers to HE instructors. 'Educators' in this study refer to instructors in schools and HEIs. The settings in which learning takes place in HEIs and schools may vary in the number of students, size and arrangement of the learning environment. Furthermore, although teaching is an important aspect of HE academics work, it is only one part of it (Teräs, 2016). In this study, 'classrooms' will be used to describe the setting where educators teach their students in HEIs and schools.

3.2 Professional Development in Higher Education

3.2.1 Defining Professional Development

Professional Development (PD) cannot be easily defined since there are multiple ways of conceptualizing it, which may be affected by various factors such as people's perspectives, their professional backgrounds and purpose of defining it (Wood, 2008). Furthermore, views toward PD may be affected by expectations of HE lecturers, managers and society. These expectations may change as a result of changes in the HE sector, widening participation and accessibility to HE, and developments in ICT (Baume &

Popovic, 2016). As a result, lecturers are expected to develop emerging skills, such as using educational technologies for different purposes (Baume & Popovic, 2016). This section illustrates how PD has been understood and defined, then states the definition adapted for this study.

Some definitions of lecturer PD seem to assume that the term 'development' is self-explanatory and define PD by demonstrating what it includes. For example, Baume and Popovic (2016, p52) defined lecturer PD as:

> *'Development that encompasses all aspects of academic and educational work associated with the lecturer role'.*

These roles vary and include teaching their subjects, managerial and research related work (Baume & Popovic, 2016). This definition encompasses core areas that HE educators normally engage with, but it is vital to understand what is meant by 'development' since it is open to numerous interpretations.

Other definitions of lecturer PD seem to place a higher emphasis on formal top-down PD. For example, the Higher Education Academy (2005, Cited in Wood; 2008, p15) defined lecturer PD as:

> *'Any process or activity, planned or otherwise, that contributes to an increase in or the maintenance of knowledge, skills and personal qualities related to learning and teaching and broader academic practice. This includes appropriate research and scholarly activity and the leadership, management and administration of academic provision and support'.*

In addition to emphasising formal top-down PD, this definition assumes that PD always 'contributes' and increases knowledge and skills. This is a desired outcome of PD, yet undertaking PD activities may not always result in positive changes, or any changes.

Desimone (2009) defined PD as any kind of activity that aims at developing the skills, knowledge and performance of educators in their various educational roles. Guskey (2002, p381) defined PD more specifically, stating that PD refers to:

> *'Systematic efforts to bring about change in the classroom practices of teachers, in their attitudes and beliefs, and in the learning outcomes of students'.*

This definition refers to school instructors, but it can be adapted for HE lecturers since teaching and learning are key areas in lecturers' practice. This definition states that PD constitutes of 'systematic efforts'. However, PD may not always be 'systematic' and it does not always aim at or result in 'change' in classroom practices. PD can be unsystematic and 'incidental', which are key characteristics of informal learning. Furthermore, PD may address aspects not related to classroom practices, such as training related to administrative and academic roles outside the classroom.

Day (2002, p4) gave a more comprehensive definition of PD, which covers many aspects of PD. According to him, PD is:

> *'The process by which, alone and with others, teachers review, renew and extend their commitment as change agents to the moral purposes of teaching: and by which they acquire and develop critically the knowledge, skills and emotional intelligence essential to good professional thinking, planning and practice … through each phase of their teaching lives'.*

In this definition, Day (2002) pointed out that PD is a combination of In-Service Training (INSET) and self-initiated PD, and development alone or with others. In addition to the previous definitions, Day stated here that in addition to skills and knowledge, PD improves practitioners' 'emotional intelligence'. Emotional intelligence might be part of skills and knowledge, but Day may have stated it separately to emphasise its importance to educators, since recognising their own and students' emotions can be a crucial skill in their practice. Day (2002) pointed out that PD means that practitioners develop

'critically'. It might be overstating to claim that all PD involves critical thinking since many PD practices can be imposed, not interactive and only dictate what educators are supposed to do or how they should think; rather than giving them freedom to critically think about and question PD content and their teaching practice. This definition may have several important features for our understanding of lecturers' PD. However, lecturers are expected to engage with academic responsibilities and deal with different age groups, which requires additional and unique skills.

Professional development is frequently referred to as 'Continuing Professional Development' (CPD). The two terminologies may refer to the same thing, but adding 'continuing' emphasizes the importance of continuous development since change is a process that may take place over a long period. Effective PD is an ongoing process that starts with induction, includes development opportunities throughout lecturers' careers, and ends with retirement (Earley & Bubb, 2004). Throughout this document, Professional Development will be used instead of continuing professional development, since many forms of PD are not necessarily continuous.

Based on the arguments made above about educators' PD, this is the definition of lecturers' PD in this study:

Lecturer Professional Development is the process where lecturers, alone or with others, engage in planned or unplanned activities consciously or unconsciously, typically for the aim of developing or maintaining their skills, knowledge and performance in the various professional roles they engage with, which ideally results in the enhancement of their teaching, academic, thinking, planning, administrative and/or managerial capabilities.

In this definition, there are many points that were highlighted. PD is not necessarily a collective activity such as a formal training event, but it can be an individual process such as self-reflection, reading and conducting research. It can be planned, such as formal training, or unplanned such as a conversation with a colleague. Lectures may learn consciously or learn without realising that they are engaged in an activity that is

improving them professionally. PD 'typically' aims at developing and maintaining lecturers' skills, knowledge and performance. In some cases, lecturers may engage in activities that do not necessarily have developmental aims, such as sharing an experience or a story, but the outcome is developmental. The last part of the definition states that 'ideally', but not necessarily, the outcome of engagement with PD activities is developmental, but outcome can be non-change or even negative change.

3.2.2 Forms of Professional Development

Professional development activities vary in their form, aim and content. PD incorporates all formal and informal activities that aim at improving educators' practice (Earley & Bubb, 2004). PD can be formal like a seminar, a meeting, a workshop or it can be informal like discussions with colleagues and getting feedback from students. PD can take place within institutions such as meetings, seminars, discussions with colleagues, watching others, sharing stories, and peer collaboration or outside institutions such as conferences and institutional visits.

PD can be either directed by lecturers themselves when they share experiences with other lecturers, or directed by 'experts'; who might be considered specialists or more knowledgeable about certain pedagogical, administrative, technical or academic issues than lecturers (Fullan, 1997). PD can vary from 'one-shot' activities such as a presentation about a topic to more continuous forms such as mentoring or a series of related talks. Furthermore, PD can happen individually such as self-reflection or collaboratively with others such as classroom visits.

PD practices may differ in their purposes and characteristics and none of them should be underestimated based on general assumptions (Desimone et al., 2002). In other words, the decision on what form of PD to follow should not be made on superficial judgments of what activity is superior to another (Desimone et al., 2002). Following some forms of PD

such as collaborative learning, which might be considered by some people superior to others, such as conventional top-down training, does not guarantee better PD (Desimone et al., 2002).

Self-initiated PD happens when educators take charge of their own learning by voluntarily undertaking or organizing activities that aim at developing their practice (Fullan & Hargreaves, 2014; Lohman & Woolf, 2001). For example, peer-observation, special interest groups, seminars and informal discussions.

Recently published studies tend to use the term Professional Development instead of In-Service Training, which may indicate a shift of perspective of responsibility from the institution to the individual (Sandra, 2005). However, this does not mean that institutions should ignore PD and leave it up to lecturers. It may signify an increasing focus on the active involvement of educators in PD practices.

3.2.3 Formal and Informal Professional Development

A. Introduction

Traditionally, research on PD focused mainly on formal In-Service Training (INEST), resulting in lack of research and understanding of informal PD (Gerken et al., 2016; Kyndt et al., 2016; Thomson, 2015; Thomson & Trigwell, 2016; Westberry et al., 2015). This might be attributed to several factors. PD has been conventionally seen as improving performance through formal learning (Gerken et al., 2016; Hara, 2001; Kyndt et al., 2016; Thomson & Trigwell, 2016). Furthermore, top-down formal PD tends to have characteristics that make it easier to investigate, such as having a structure, time, place and goals (Gerken et al., 2016; Kyndt et al., 2016). Another reason could be that from an organisational point of view, formal PD is easier to manage, observe, and control. On the other hand, informal PD tends to have features that make investigating it challenging, such as being implicit, unpredictable, unstructured, without an agenda, without control of

learning, without external facilitation and being spontaneous (Gerken et al., 2016; Kyndt et al., 2016; Marsick & Watkins, 2001; Thomson, 2015).

This section examines studies that investigated formal and informal PD. It starts with an analysis of how formal and informal learning have been defined. This is followed by presenting the definitions adopted in this study and the rationale for their choice. After that, there will be a focus on the forms and features of formal and informal PD. This section includes evidence and outcomes of several key studies that investigated formal and informal learning.

B. Defining Formal Professional Development

Although most studies that investigated PD focused on formal learning, there are disagreements on some the key features that define it. For example, Kyndt et al. (2016, p1113) defined formal PD as:

> *'Learning activities that are structured in terms of time, space, goals and support. It is undertaken intentionally to develop knowledge and competencies.'*

The authors argue here that a key feature of formal PD is being 'structured'. There is an argument here that PD is undertaken 'intentionally'. In some cases, however, attending some forms of formal PD activities might be an institutional requirement, where educators do not intentionally or willingly take part in them. Consequently, this definition is not comprehensive since it does not cover compulsory training imposed by HEIs.

Gerken et al. (2016, p138) defined formal PD for lecturers in HE as:

> *'Intentionally planned educational activities that usually take place outside the classroom …. Learning in this setting happens in a structured*

environment in which experts disseminate information that can be applied in the workplace'.

Similar to the previous definition, the author states that formal PD constitutes of 'intentionally planned educational activities' in 'a structured environment'. Being structured, organised, and planned are given prominence in many definitions of formal PD. A key statement here is that formal PD activities 'usually take place outside the classroom', which poses questions regarding the extent to which it has an impact on educators' performance inside the classroom. Gerken et al. (2016) argues that 'experts' disseminate information that can be 'applied' in the workplace. These two arguments can be problematic, since some forms of PD are delivered by educators' peers or support staff, and PD may not aim or result in applicable information in the workplace.

In this research, the following definition of formal lecturers' PD has been adapted:

Formal professional development of lecturers is intentionally planned and structured learning activities in terms of time, place, aims, audience and support, where experts, lecturers, managers or support staff disseminate information that aims at developing the knowledge, skills, and performance of lecturers at the workplace. The majority of these learning activities take place outside the classroom, while some forms occur inside classrooms such as lesson observations, getting feedback from students and classroom-based action research.

In this definition, the key words used to define PD is being 'intentionally planned and structured'. This is compatible with most definitions of formal PD. The people delivering training here can be expert professional trainers, academics, managers or even support staff. For example, librarians can provide training in using resources, and technicians may provide training in using some forms of educational technologies. This definition highlights that formal PD 'aims' at developing practices. Choosing the word 'aim' rather than 'result' indicates that although improvement is the ultimate goal, it may or may not be achieved. The last sentence aims at highlighting the setting in which formal PD takes

place, since investigating the impact of PD on teaching and learning is a key area in this study.

C. Limitations of Formal Professional Development

Formal PD has many unique characteristics that may explain the research intensity on it more than informal learning. As formal PD has been defined earlier, it is structured, planned and announced, which makes it easier to observe, manage and investigate.

Formal PD has been criticised for having features that limit its effectiveness. Formal learning activities tend to be one-off with inadequate follow up and support (Gerken et al., 2016; Hara, 2001). Formal PD has been criticised for failing to address that development is an evolving process that takes time, requires context and much of the learning takes place informally in lecturers' day-to-day work practice (Gerken et al., 2016; Hara, 2001). Gerken et al. (2016, p138) argues that

> *'Formal learning cannot keep up and it becomes nearly impossible to follow the need for learning and development activities'.*

Being structured and pre-planned may result in a lack of flexibility, adaptability to lecturers' individual needs and evolvement of emergent reforms or needs. Formal training has other limitations such the decontextualized nature of most PD practices (Gerken et al., 2016; Hara, 2001) which may result in lecturers questioning the links between training and their own practice.

D. Defining Informal PD

The typical focus on formal PD over informal PD has resulted in a lack of understanding of the circumstances in which informal learning occurs, its impact and approaches to promote it within HEIs (Kyndt et al., 2016; Thomson, 2015; Thomson & Trigwell, 2016; Westberry et al., 2015). For example, lecturers' conversations and their role in academic

and pedagogical development are emerging areas of research in HE, where there is increasing interest and research about them (Thomson, 2015; Thomson & Trigwell, 2016).

Researching informal learning can be challenging for various reasons. It is invisible, deeply contextual, workplace specific, implicit and unpredictable (Kyndt et al., 2016; Thomson, 2015; Thomson & Trigwell, 2016). Furthermore, having access to informal conversations can be challenging, and lecturers may regard many of their conversations private (Thomson, 2015). As a result, researchers may not have access to these 'private' conversations. Informal conversations that academics have may change based on the personality, approach and rapport established by the researcher. In order to have access to these informal conversations, researchers may have to 'immerse' themselves in the field and spend a prolonged period there, in order to gain confidence, access, and an adequate picture of how informal learning occurs. For ethical reasons when conducting research about informal learning, lecturers have to be aware that a research is being carried out about their informal learning practices, which may affect their behaviours.

Due to the complexity of informal learning, defining it seems to be challenging (Thomson, 2015). Thomson (2015, p138) stated that:

> *'Informal learning is defined as which occurs within and around formal learning'.*

This definition of informal learning seems to assume that formal learning is central to our understanding of informal learning. Gerken et al. (2016, p136) defined informal PD as:

> *'Learning that is unstructured and happens spontaneously in the workplace without systematic support to foster learning'.*

In contrast to formal PD where being structured and planned are key features, informal learning has the opposite features, being unstructured, spontaneous and opportunistic. Thomson (2015, p138) added that informal learning:

> *'Happens everywhere in corridors, cafes face to face or online, office, without pre-determined agenda'.*

This flexibility in time, medium, duration, topics and locations are important features of informal day-to-day learning.

There are disagreements over the level of 'planning', 'awareness' and 'intentionality' involved in informal learning. The majority of studies indicate that informal learning is unplanned; however, others argue that informal learning can happen intentionally. For example, Eraut (2004, p250) defined informal learning as:

> *'Implicit, unintended, opportunistic and unstructured learning and the absence of a teacher'.*

Absence of a trainer may not necessarily be a characteristic of informal learning, since chatting with a trainer in a corridor or over coffee can be considered informal learning. Kyndt et al. (2016) thinks that informal learning tends to have a low level of planning in terms of context, support, goals, and time. Marsick and Watkins (2015) disagree with Eraut's (2004) view that informal learning is necessarily 'unintended'. Marsick and Watkins (2015) distinguish between informal learning and incidental learning, where incidental learning, according to them, is part of informal learning but usually happens without planning for it. In other words, they think that informal learning can occur where educators intentionally plan to learn. Kyndt et al. (2016) think that informal learning normally occurs spontaneously and unconsciously, where learning is not the primary goal of informal interactions among educators.

In my view, formal and informal learning are not a dichotomy where each has exactly the opposite features. It is a continuum, where level of formality and informality varies. For example, informal learning that occurs during conference breaks has different features from an unintended and incidental informal learning in a corridor. While the first may include conversations linked to formal learning and might be more linked and structured around the conference themes within the period of a break, the latter might be more implicit, disordered and incidental. In other words, informal learning tends to be

unplanned, opportunistic, and implicit. However, it can be planned and intentional, when educators engage in informal conversations for the aim of developing their practice.

Based on the arguments made above, I have adapted this definition of informal PD in this study:

Informal professional development involves learning opportunities that are usually unplanned, unstructured, opportunistic and spontaneous; which take place everywhere in a physical or a virtual environment, generally without a pre-determined learning agenda or a trainer, although learning prospects and structure may be affected by the time, place, and circumstances in which learning occurs and the various backgrounds and expertise of people involved. It can happen with the participants incidentally or intentionally taking part in the learning process, and they may learn consciously or unconsciously, with or without being aware that they are learning.

E. Studies in Formal and Informal PD

This section will analyse some empirical studies that investigated formal and informal PD. Some of these studies focused on either formal or informal learning, while others investigated both of them.

There is growing evidence that academics learn a lot from informal interactions and discussions with their colleagues outside the classroom (Gerken et al., 2016; Hara, 2001; Kyndt et al., 2016; Thomson, 2015; Thomson & Trigwell, 2016). Marsick and Watkins (2015) think that informal learning is at the centre of adult education because it replicates what happens in real life.

The kinds of conversations that academics have and the institutional culture might be fundamental determinants in understanding informal PD. Roxå and Mårtensson (2015) investigated the conversations that academics have about teaching. They found that most

academics have a small number of 'significant others' with whom they share mutual trust. Academics in this study regularly engaged in private conversations with those 'significant others' about teaching and learning. The researchers found that these conversations are different from the public conversations academics had with colleagues outside these networks. The researchers argued that having a supportive culture that encourages quality teaching may affect these networks and allow practitioners to extend their networks.

Although informal learning can have many developmental potentials, it may have disadvantages too. For example, Kyndt et al. (2016, p1113) argue that:

> *'What is implicitly learned through informal learning might not always be desirable; therefore, solely relying on informal learning does not seem adequate'.*

Nonetheless, it can be challenging to identify what is 'adequate' in informal learning and what is inadequate. For example, lecturers who complain or have negative attitudes toward PD may discourage others; nonetheless, speaking about negative attitudes might be seen as a 'venting' opportunities, where academics release their tensions and frustrations (Thomson & Trigwell, 2016). Thomson and Trigwell (2016) examined the role of informal conversations in an Australian university using interviews, and found that academics had informal conversations with their colleagues to 'whinge' about teaching issues. After complaining to their colleagues, academics felt less negative because their colleagues listened to them. This is one example where academics complaints might be seen as negative by some researchers, whereas others, like Thomson and Trigwell (2016), see them as a positive outcome of informal conversations. Another challenge is that although informal learning presents valuable learning opportunities, it might be difficult to manage, its outcome are unpredictable and it is not sufficient on its own (Kyndt et al., 2016). Teräs (2016) argues that newly qualified academics may mimic how their senior colleagues work, who in turn may have learned things from other senior lecturers when they were new. These can be good practices, but others can be negative, outdated or not suitable to the current needs of the academic profession.

Informal learning can occur in many forms, mediums and circumstances. Kyndt et al. (2016) carried out a systematic literature review of 74 studies examining informal learning in higher education. The study showed that the most common forms of informal learning are: collaboration, reflecting on personal teaching approaches, sharing ideas with colleagues, getting feedback from students, knowledge sharing, classroom observations, observing what other do and reading. Thomson (2015) found similar outcomes in his study. Also, he found that when lecturers interact, they may share solutions to problems or seek validation and reassurances of ideas.

Informal conversations may serve many purposes. Thomson and Trigwell (2016) examined academics' informal conversations in an Australian university and found that they served five purposes. They arranged them according to their frequency: managing teaching, improving teaching and learning, reassuring themselves about teaching, venting about teaching issues and transforming teaching. However, the authors argued that if academics kept seeking 'reassurances' from similar colleagues, this might result in lost opportunities to change thinking and teaching. This may indicate that there should be a balance in developmental and 'venting' purposes of informal conversations.

It seems that academics engage in different kinds of informal conversations based on their professional experiences. Thomson (2015) investigated how mid-career and novice academics learn informally in a HEI by carrying out interviews with 30 academics. The study found that early career academics engaged more frequently in conversations about curriculum and reflected more about content of formal PD programmes. More experienced academics engaged in informal conversations most frequently about managing their own teaching, where half of the informal learning incidents identified were about teaching, evaluation, delivery, and getting things done. Kyndt et al. (2016) found that novice educators learned more from observing colleagues, while more experienced educators learned more from supporting and giving advice to others. The study also found that there was fear of being perceived as incompetent, which limited the level of engagement among faculty.

F. Bringing Formal and Informal Professional Development Together

Although informal and formal learning are commonly seen as contrasting, looking at how they complement each other can help develop existing practices and improve existing research. Kyndt et al. (2016) argue that formal and informal PD should be seen as equally important.

Formal and informal PD may complement each other in HEIs. Thomson (2015) found that lecturers in his study engaged in informal conversations during and around formal PD programmes. He found that these conversations provided positive learning roles in which academics were able to develop their teaching skills. He argued that organisers of formal PD programmes should consider how to promote informal conversations among academics. Thomson and Trigwell (2016) and Kyndt et al. (2016) argued that HEIs should provide an appropriate environment for informal learning, such as having a suitable common space for academics to socialise, arranging for joint non-teaching hours and arranging for physical proximity among staff. Thomson (2015) found that academics engaged in informal conversations during formal PD breaks, and argued that providing time, space and refreshments can enhance informal learning opportunities.

HEIs may encourage formal and informal learning by supporting the communities of practice within institutions (Hara, 2001; Wenger et al., 2002). Hara (2001) argues that informal learning is related to the concept of Communities of Practice (Lave and Wenger (1991) (see Conceptual Framework: Communities of Practice), which are defined as:

> 'Informal networks that support professional practitioners to develop a shared meaning and engage in knowledge building among the members' (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p1).

These informal communities can support formal PD by providing feedback and sharing expertise, which can be used in conjunction with formal PD practices within HEIs.

G. Conclusion

This section analysed some of the most prominent discussions surrounding lecturers' PD in HEIs. It started with an overview of the manner in which PD has been defined. That showed the various interpretations of PD, and the different views of the main concepts that constitute PD. At the end, a new definition has been proposed which will be used throughout this study. PD has been traditionally viewed as formal training. This was problematized in this study, since formal learning has many limitations and there is growing evidence that lecturers learn a lot informally. The previous section talked about formal and informal learning. It started with an overview of how they have been defined, then proposing new definitions to be used in this study. Limitations of both formal and informal PD were discussed and there was analysis of some studies that investigated formal and informal learning. At the end, instead of looking at them separately, manners in which formal and informal PD can complement each other has been proposed.

3.2.4 Importance of Lecturers' Professional Development

The main motive for PD is the belief that it improves the quality of professional practice, and therefore, in the case of lecturers, improving teaching, learning, research and the different responsibilities related to their practice. There is an assumption that PD, which aims at the improvement of educators' practice, translates into improvement of student learning (Day, 2002; Desimone, 2009). As a result of improving teaching, learning and research, PD is believed to be capable of improving educational standards (Barth & Guest, 1990; Earley & Bubb, 2004; Wilson & Berne, 1999). However, to understand these assumptions we need to understand the complex relationships between educators' learning, educators' performance and students' learning (Fullan, 1997; Fullan & Hargreaves, 2014).

The role of PD in enhancing educational standards and quality in HE is a complicated matter. 'Standards' and 'quality' can have multiple interpretations, and cannot be easily

observed or measured. From an institutional point of view, it can be in the form of a list of Key Performance Indicators that are seen as crucial to the profession of academics in that institution. In this view, academics' performance might be based on measurable indicators, such as student satisfaction and feedback, managers' feedback, research publications, involvement in research projects, students' assessment scores, and so on. These individual areas of teaching and learning are complicated areas of research, let alone all of them. For example, Biggs (2003) argued that in some cases aims of teaching might not be aligned with assessment methods. Consequently, it is common in HE that assessment scores may not reflect students' skills and knowledge in their subject areas (Biggs, 2003). Hénard and Roseveare (2012, p7) defined quality teaching as:

> *'The use of pedagogical techniques to produce learning outcomes for students'.*

They argued that quality teaching is not only affected by PD, but by other factors, such as assessment, lecturers' communities and learning environments. Attributing changes in 'standards' and 'quality' can be problematic, since any changes can be affected by other factors such as the elements suggested by Hénard and Roseveare (2012).

Research in the schools sector shows that although improvement in buildings, technologies, or teaching materials may have a positive impact on teaching and learning, it is argued that the best way to improve education is to invest in the PD of educators (Barth & Guest, 1990; Earley & Bubb, 2004). There is lack of research in HE to support the claims made above, since most studies tend to focus on schools. Barth and Guest (1990, p9) stated that:

> *'Probably nothing within a school has more impact on student in terms of skills development, self-confidence, or classroom behaviour than the personal and professional development of their teachers'.*

This claim needs to be supported with research on effectiveness of training and impact of training on student learning. Furthermore, effective teaching approaches may be shaped as a consequence of other factors than PD. Guskey (2002) thinks that becoming a better

educator means improving students' learning. Richards and Farrell (2005, p381) argue that:

> *'High-quality professional development is a central component in nearly every modern proposal for improving education'.*

However, it is difficult to understand what 'high quality PD' means. This might be a subjective description, since PD is a highly debated topic and, in many cases, needs to be tailored to the needs of lecturers and institutions. The need for PD might also be attributed to other factors. For example, PD might be a result of educational reforms (Desimone, 2009), increasing public awareness of student learning (Wilson & Berne, 1999) and rising expectations of the quality of education (Moon et al., 2000).

Changes in HE are regarded as a crucial motivation for PD (Teräs, 2016). These changes include putting more emphasis on student engagement, using educational technologies, and increasing access to HE (Teräs, 2016). Teräs (2016) argues that recently more focus is paid to the quality of teaching in HE.

Change and development have been regarded as essential to educators (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). Change here refers to desirable changes and improvement, not just change for the sake of change (Earley & Bubb, 2004). Positive changes such as growth in abilities, skills, motivation and knowledge certainly qualify as development, whereas changes that we do not wish to happen, such as decline in enthusiasm or performance do not qualify (Hargreaves & Fullan, 1992). Day (2002, p2) argues that it is important for educators to:

> 'Keep pace with change and review and renew their own knowledge, skills and visions for good teaching'.

Fullan (1997) asserts that creating a change culture within educational institutions is one of the ultimate aims of PD activities. In order to make this happen, we need to understand how change happens and how to manage it.

One of the main characteristics of good educators is the capacity to develop knowledge, understanding and skills (Smith & Varma, 1996). That means they are eager to learn new things, share and listen to the ideas of others and act as life-long learners. Educators may not be able to work effectively if their skills stopped developing after their Initial Training (Day, 2002; Harmer, 2007). The availability of proficient lectures who keep sharpening their skills is essential to HEIs.

3.2.5 Factors that Affect Professional Development

Lecturers' motivation and collaboration are crucial to the success of any PD initiative. In each institution, lectures are likely to come from different backgrounds, experiences and skills. Therefore, not listening to their voices might result in training which is boring, repetitive, and not tailored to their needs. If educators are not interested, do not see the value, or do not voluntarily take part in PD practices; it is difficult to convince them to change (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). Because each educator is unique in many ways, it might be impossible to create a single PD programme that satisfies all their needs (Fullan & Hargreaves, 2014; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). However, the positive side here is that this diversity in experiences and skills can create a rich learning environment if educators are given an active role in PD practices (Richards & Farrell, 2005). In other words, diversity in lecturers' needs is a challenge since not all forms of PD can be equally effective for them, but at the same time this diversity can be an advantage if lecturers shared their unique experiences with others.

Educators' active involvement and collaboration have been recognized as key factors in PD programmes (Butler et al., 2004; Silberman & Auerbach, 2011; Steeg & Lambson, 2015). Hustler et al. (2003) argues that giving educators a passive role in PD programmes where they act as listeners is a common practice. This argument was supported more recently by Flint et al. (2011) who simplified this approach to a 'banking model' where 'experts' deposit information to 'novice' practitioners in this form of top-down training. PD here takes the form of spoon-feeding information from an expert to a person or

people with less knowledge or experience. Educators' individual needs, experiences and interests tend to be ignored, and usually they do not have any control over the focus and content of training (Flint et al., 2011). This might limit the effectiveness of PD and make lecturers feel 'less empowered', since it ignores their professional identities (Flint et al., 2011). Silberman and Auerbach (2011) argue that no matter how good the trainer's presentation is, simply listening to a speech places educators in a passive role. This does not enable them to think critically about E-learning integration (Hennessy et al., 2005), and reflect on their teaching expertise and knowledge (Smyth, 1995). Furthermore, in many PD activities educators do not have a chance to collaborate with others (Butler et al., 2004). Educators' collaboration enables them to take an active role in PD and be involved in the learning process (Silberman & Auerbach, 2011). Flint et al. (2011) argue that collaborative PD helps make learning meaningful and directly related to educators' practice. Furthermore, it might enable educators to utilize and share their own experiences and knowledge, and consequently learn from each other (Flint et al., 2011; Silberman & Auerbach, 2011; Walker et al., 2011).

Lecturers spend a considerable time teaching in their classrooms, so it is important to consider what kind of PD practices might happen there (Desimone, 2009; Richards & Farrell, 2005). Richards and Farrell (2005, p2) argue that:

> *'Classrooms are not only places where students learn – they are also places where teachers learn'.*

Classrooms might provide an effective way to develop educators, because they are context based and directly related to what they do (Desimone, 2009). Furthermore, lecturers may find it difficult to find time to attend external PD practices. Forms of classroom-based PD include: peer-observation, eliciting feedback from students and video recording lessons for analysis.

The role of management has been identified as a crucial factor affecting lecturers' E-learning PD (Forte & Flores, 2014; Porter et al., 2014). This includes having an institutional strategy (King & Boyatt, 2015; Porter et al., 2016; Porter et al., 2014), organising PD

activities (King & Boyatt, 2015; Porter et al., 2014), giving opportunities for lecturers to interact and share (Forte & Flores, 2014; King & Boyatt, 2015; Kyndt et al., 2016; Thomson & Trigwell, 2016) and providing technical, pedagogical and moral support (Lankveld et al., 2016; Porter et al., 2014). Management may encourage collaboration by providing a physical location and physical proximity where lectures can easily meet (Forte & Flores, 2014; King & Boyatt, 2015; Kyndt et al., 2016; Thomson & Trigwell, 2016). Furthermore, management may support staff by providing free time, or a common free time, where lecturers can meet and interact (Forte & Flores, 2014; Kyndt et al., 2016; Watty et al., 2016). Watty et al. (2016) investigated reasons for lecturers' lack of uptake of E-learning by interviewing 13 academics from 10 Australian HEIs. They found that time was the most important factor inhibiting lecturers from taking part in E-learning PD. Another motivational factor is having policies where lecturers are required to engage with PD in order to get promotion opportunities (Lankveld et al., 2016). Furthermore, management should consider improving E-learning PD as a priority and give time, space and support for it (King & Boyatt, 2015).

HEIs need to define E-learning according to their contexts and provide clear examples of the manner in which lecturers can attain the set goals, and provide top-down support in addition to giving space for bottom-up initiatives (King & Boyatt, 2015). Kirkwood and Price (2014) reviewed 47 articles related to E-learning use in HE and found that HE managers may see many benefits to E-learning such as increasing efficiency by saving time and resources, increasing student numbers and meeting students' expectations. Furthermore, E-learning was viewed by managers as capable of enhancing practices, improving flexibility, accessibility and teaching and learning. They found that a common feature in the studies examined was that interventions to improve E-learning were technology-led (e.g. how to use PowerPoint) instead of pedagogically led.

3.2.6 Challenges and Resistance to Professional Development

PD might carry negative undertones that lecturers associate with it. For example, they might think that it implies that they have weaknesses or deficits that need to be fixed (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012), or imply a mistrust of the quality of education they received at university. Fullan and Hargreaves (2014) argue that educators are not interested in things that make them feel humiliated and they may fear being exposed as incompetent and in need of help.

It is widely believed that PD is essential for lecturers regardless of the quality of initial HE training they received. PD should not be seen as a sign of a lack of trust or a sign of dissatisfaction with the quality of training received at universities (Richards & Farrell, 2005). It should not also be seen as a sign of lack of trust in their abilities. It is simply a 'fact' that not everything that educators need can be provided at initial training (Richards & Farrell, 2005). Richards and Farrell (2005) argue that initial training tends to be generally theoretical with limited chances for trainees to practise what they have learned in real classrooms. Another challenge is that in general the availability of training to HE lecturers is limited and its quality need improvement (Teräs, 2016).

Educational research is characterised by continuous debates and the absence of clear-cut answers. Educational research has witnessed many shifts in the 20th and 21st centuries. For example, there is a trend in modern pedagogical research to favour student-centred approaches, student communication and active engagement. Another example from a specific discipline is the move in language teaching from the grammar translation method, to the audio-lingual method then the communicative language teaching method. Therefore, lecturers may teach differently based on their educational backgrounds, the time and place where they received their education and their level of engagement with educational debates. Stefani and Elton (2002) think that university training can be problematic if educators accept what they learn as undebatable facts or rules that should be applied anytime and anywhere. Moreover, lecturers might teach the way they have

been instructed to teach, and may not be familiar with current educational debates and findings.

Educators who ignore changes and development in teaching might find themselves left behind and unable to teach effectively (Hargreaves & Fullan, 1992; Harmer, 2007; Robbins, 2012). Therefore, initial training at university (pre-service) is inadequate and lecturers need to continuously develop their skills and knowledge. Harmer (2007, p14) argues that:

> *'Nothing could be more deadening for a teacher than 20 years of repetition, especially in the interactive and dynamic world of the classroom'.*

There are educators with 20 years of experience, and educators with 1 year of experience repeated 20 times (Harmer, 2007; Robbins, 2012). Furthermore, having more years of experience does not necessarily have a positive impact on teaching. Educators' experience might grow with years, but their motivation and performance might decline if they do not make an effort to develop professionally (Hargreaves & Fullan, 1992). However, even newly qualified lecturers need to develop professionally, although their needs may vary.

Many lecturers work in isolated environments with limited opportunity to know what is happening beyond their classrooms. In general, lecturers regard their classrooms as their private workspace where outsiders, even other fellow colleagues, are unwelcome or not allowed to know what is happening inside. As a result, this limits lecturers' ability to gain from the experiences of their colleagues. Fostering educator-led collaborative forms of PD within HEIs can help them break out of this isolation and learn from the experiences of others.

3.3 E-learning in Higher Education

3.3.1 Defining E-learning

There is no commonly agreed definition of E-learning and researchers have defined it variously (Arkorful & Abaidoo, 2015; Sangra et al., 2012). For example, Arkorful and Abaidoo (2015, p30) reviewed the literature on E-learning in HE and defined E-learning as:

'The use of information and communication technologies to enable the access of online learning/teaching resources'.

One of the key words in this definition is 'access' to online resources. This indicates that merely getting access to ICT is considered E-learning. Similarly, Holmes and Gardner (2006, p14), defined E-learning as:

'Online access to learning resources, anywhere and anytime'.

The definition adopted in this study is the one by Sangra et al. (2012, p152), where they defined E-learning as:

'E-learning is an approach to teaching and learning, representing all or part of the educational model applied, that is based on the use of electronic media and devices as tools for improving access to training, communication and interaction and that facilitates the adoption of new ways of understanding and developing learning'.

This definition does not view E-learning as only the use of ICT. Rather, it indicates that ICT use has pedagogical and communicative implications for teaching and learning. It also emphasizes pedagogy, whereas the other definitions emphasized technology.

3.3.2 Forms of E-learning

There are many forms of E-learning such as the use of Virtual Learning Environments (e.g. Blackboard and Moodle), classroom tools (e.g. smartboards, tablet computers, computer

labs and projectors), productivity tools (e.g. Microsoft Word, PowerPoint and Excel) and online tools (e.g. search engines, professional communities and social networks). Some of these tools are designed for general purposes while others were designed specifically for educational purposes, such as Virtual Learning Environments. Some E-learning tools enable same time communication (synchronous communication) such as Video-conferencing while others enable delayed communication (asynchronous) such as emails (Arkorful & Abaidoo, 2015). The Context Chapter provided many examples of E-learning use in the Omani HE sector in general, and specific examples of E-learning use in Ibri College.

Technologies can be standardized and commonplace for academics such as word processing, emailing, projectors and other technologies that have been available for a long period and have become part of academics' daily practice. It can also mean modern technologies such as computer software, Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs) and tablets which are considered newer and their rapid improvements may pose challenges for educators (Mishra & Koehler, 2006). ICT is a broad concept that means many different things.

In this study, ICT refers to digital technologies, including hardware, software and communication technologies. In other words, it refers to digital tools such as computers, laptops, iPads, smartphones, software programmes, email, interactive boards, VLEs and so on.

Educational technologies tend to include plenty of tools that enable lecturers to use them flexibly. For example, VLEs can be used for basic purposes like uploading a paper for students, or for other purposes such as creating discussions and quizzes. Low level technology uses are normally associated with lecturer centred practices; while high level uses are generally associated with student centred and constructivists practices (Becker, 2000; Etmer, 2005). Littlejohn (2002) believes that there is confusion between 'online

resources' and 'online courses'. Some practitioners might just upload 'online resources' such as lecture PowerPoint slides or additional reading materials on Moodle/Blackboard and call them courses. E-learning PD should keep into consideration the required skills needed from lecturers and the reasons for E-learning use, in addition to the activities that could be taught (Littlejohn, 2002).

3.3.3 Teaching and Learning Using E-learning

Studies that investigated E-learning use in HE existed since the 1990s, and they became increasingly popular from the 2000s to date as a consequence of the increasing development in technologies, their widening spread, their affordability and increasing technology literacy. Conole and Dyke (2004, p115) discussed some of the common views regarding E-learning, which interestingly seem to exist until now:

> *'Developments [in educational technologies] have been met by a spectrum of views, ranging from wholesale acceptance and calls for pedagogical re-engineering and revolutionizing educational systems, to significant dissent and cynicism about the use and value of these new tools'.*

Mayes (1997) classification of 'courseware' (course software) according to its communication level (primary, secondary and tertiary) provides a useful tool to understand educational technologies and how lecturers use them. Figure 4 shows Mayes classification of communication level in course software. This classification is a clear and useful tool to reflect on the level of communication and engagement when lecturers use E-learning. According to Mayes, Primary courseware means transmitting information to students such as online lecture notes and reading lists. This is the most basic use of E-learning and the less communicative, since ICT is used as a medium of information delivery from lectures to students.

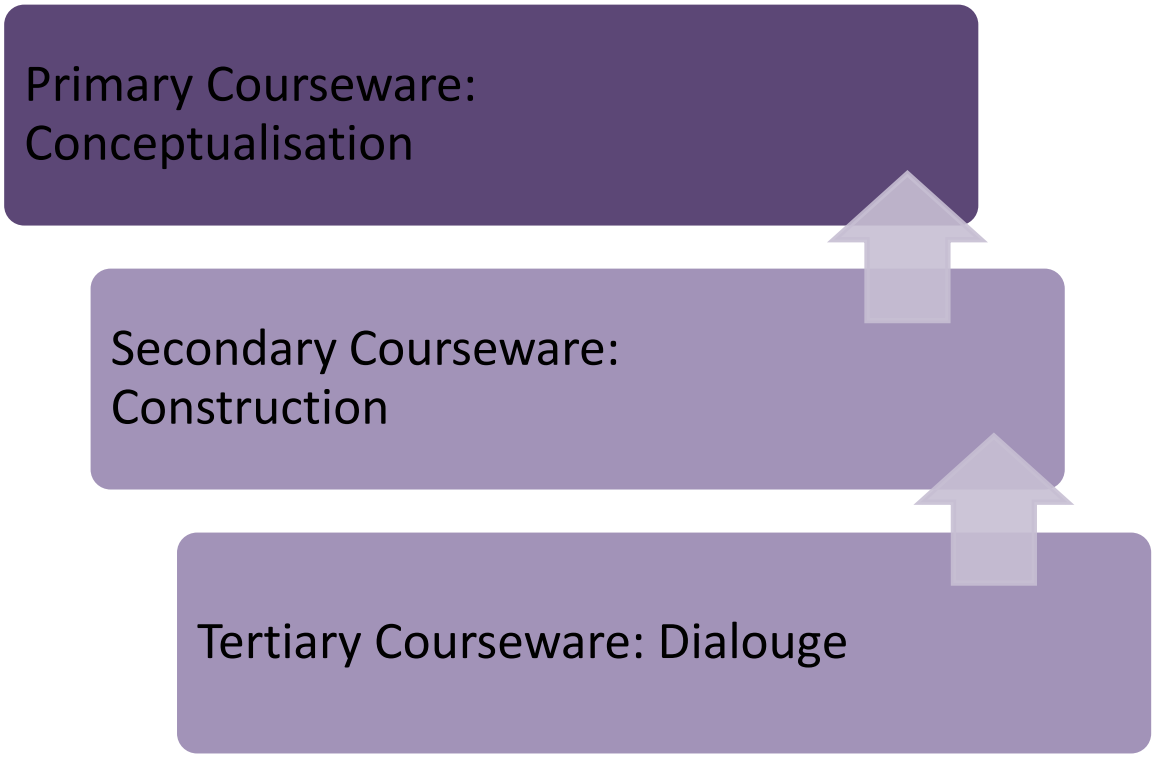


Figure 4: Communication Level with Course Software (Mayes, 1997)

Secondary courseware is concerned with knowledge 'construction', rather than 'conceptualisation' at the primary level. Secondary courseware aims to help students to question and reflect on their learning. For example, online tests and quizzes can be used to help students reflect on their learning. It can contain some tools such as spontaneous feedback and links to relevant information. Furthermore, it provides a useful tool to inform lecturers of students' needs and level. Communication here is two ways starting with lecturers uploading content, then students completing tasks online. Tertiary courseware is concerned with dialogue such as online discussions. Lecturers' use of technology can be complicated and reflect many of the levels in Mayes classification. For example, a lecturer could open an online discussion forum for students (tertiary courseware) based on a learning material uploaded there earlier (primary courseware) and followed by an online quiz (secondary courseware).

One of the limitations of Mayes classification is that modern technologies tend to have multiple functions depending on lecturers use of them. In other words, it is common for modern educational technologies to have all these levels of communication and the level

of student engagement varies considerably based on lecturers' use of E-learning. Hence, classification of dialogue level rather than software could be more appropriate. Classifying communication level could provide a useful tool to understand lecturers' use of E-learning. For instance, using similar terminology and elements from Mayes model, the primary level could reflect one-way communication from lecturers to students. Secondary level communication could be concerned with self-reflection and/or sending results or performance of students to lecturers. Third level communication could be related to open discussions and collaborative learning.

It might be difficult to generalize findings of studies across countries, since there can be a considerable gap in E-learning use, availability of technology and emphasis on E-learning use in education. For example, Korte and Hüsing (2006) conducted a survey of E-learning use of more than 10,000 head teachers and 20,000 classroom teachers in 27 European countries. This survey was compared to an earlier large-scale study, the eEurope 2002. The study showed that there was a remarkable growth of E-learning use in schools between 2002 and 2006. However, the survey showed a huge gap between European countries. For example, in Latvia and Greece about 35% reported using computers in the classrooms, whereas it was 95% and 96% and the UK and Denmark respectively. Almost all schools surveyed (96%) had Internet access and 90% had high-speed broadband Internet. However, the ratio of students to computers varied considerably between countries. It ranged from four or five pupils per computer in Denmark and the Netherlands to 17 pupils per computer in Latvia, Greece and Portugal. The number of computers in classrooms rose dramatically in all the countries, making computers increasingly available in classrooms instead of only computer labs. Almost three quarters of practitioners reported that they used computers in classrooms.

3.4 E-learning PD in Higher Education

E-learning PD comprises of the formal and informal activities that contribute to the understanding and practice of using technologies to enhance student learning (Daly et al.,

2009). This section will discuss factors that affect E-learning PD, levels of E-learning PD responsibility and influence and barriers that negatively affect E-learning PD.

It appears that the traditional emphasis in PD on IT skills and ignoring curriculum and pedagogical issues may lead to unsatisfactory results (King & Boyatt, 2015; Littlejohn, 2002; Tondeur et al., 2007). In other words, the mere focus on technological training may not always result in significant changes in E-learning classroom use (Mishra & Koehler, 2006). For example, lecturers may not understand how to develop specific pedagogical skills or deliver their course content using E-learning. E-learning PD tends to focus on lecturers' learning of IT skills rather than learning how to practically implement E-learning to enhance teaching (Englund et al., 2016). Lecturers may need support to understand how E-learning PD affects some aspects such as classroom management, lesson planning, teaching techniques and meeting expected learning outcomes set by the institution. Lecturers need to understand how E-learning should relate to classroom interactions and course content (Mishra & Koehler, 2006). Furthermore, lecturers might not have a clear view of how technology is linked to pedagogical enhancement (Herring et al., 2016; Scrimshaw, 2004).

Other research found that although many lecturers realize the importance of technology, they might come across obstacles in integrating it in their teaching. These include personal factors (e.g. negative attitudes) (Etmer, 2005), lack of support for or provision of technologies, methods of assessment and absence of a vision or active role of the administration (Daly et al., 2009; Loveless, 2003; Twining et al., 2013). Hustler et al. (2003) claims that PD in E-learning is characterized by 'one shot', 'one-size fits all' programmes where educators are listeners and do not have a chance to experiment with technologies. This implies that the design of PD may sometimes leave lecturers passive and unengaged. Islam et al. (2015) argue that research on E-learning PD tends to ignore lecturers' perceptions of the limitations of E-learning and enhancement of teaching and learning. As a result, E-learning is not adequately questioned.

Studies examining E-learning use tend to neglect, or find it difficult to understand how educators introduce technologies to their familiar environments (Zhao et al., 2002). It might be difficult for lecturers to understand how E-learning may make teaching specific subjects, courses or skills more effective. Furthermore, academics might ask themselves: does E-learning use automatically make teaching more effective? E-learning use may not be a magic spell that can always enhance teaching and learning. As a result, academics may find themselves left puzzled about how the E-learning skills they learnt could be implemented effectively in their contexts. Studies have shown that there is a high level of dissatisfaction with one-off courses delivered by external 'experts' who provide training about what technology can do, without clearly linking it to teaching practice (Daly et al., 2009).

Preparing lecturers to integrate E-learning in their practice is made more difficult by the fact that technologies are rapidly developing (Twining et al., 2013). Therefore, only focusing on technologies will mean that soon the skills learned in E-learning PD would be outdated (Mishra & Koehler, 2006). Furthermore, there are many factors that can affect lecturers' integration of E-learning in their teaching. For example, E-learning PD is affected by national policies, as well as institutional and individual factors, such as availability and quality of resources, support, training, curriculum, staff collegiality and their beliefs (Mumtaz, 2000).

Brinkinhoff (2006) categorized the barriers that lead to lack of E-learning integration into four parts: resources, support (institutional and administrative), training and experience, and personal factors. Brinkinhoff investigated the barriers to E-learning integration in a two-year PD programme. Schools teachers attended training for 8 hours a day, for 20 days in the first year and 20 days in the second. The ultimate aim was the integration of E-learning in their teaching. The study revealed considerable gains in the participants' technology 'self-efficacy'. Self-efficacy means people's 'judgment' of their capabilities to attain a certain task (Bandura, 1986). However, this gain in attitudes was accompanied with insignificant changes in E-learning integration. Furthermore, since lecturers in this

study volunteered to take part in this programme, they might be more motivated to use E-learning than others who did not participate in the study. Brinkinhoff thinks that change is slow and the duration of the course was not sufficient. In this study, lecturers were given a considerable time off for the course (about 320 hours), and in practice applying similar intensive courses is challenging due to practical and time limitations.

Having a consensus among lecturers and managers on best E-learning use E-learning PD practices can be hard to reach. Twining et al. (2013) argued that having 'shared visions' among educators, management and policymakers are one of the top conditions for the success of integrating technology to enhance learning. However, it might not be possible to have one view among people from one level, let alone all the levels mentioned by the authors. One of the recommended methods for having a clear strategy towards E-learning is to follow international, national or institutional standards. Many educational authorities around the world have developed concrete lists of E-learning competencies and expected outcomes for educational institutions (Tondeur et al., 2007). For example, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) have set up competency standards that educators and students should be equipped with. Although individual and institutional needs may vary from these general standards, they could provide general guidelines for standards that may help policymakers and practitioners have a shared vision of the desirable outcomes.

3.4.1 Lecturers' Beliefs toward E-learning

This section will talk about the importance of understanding lecturers' beliefs toward E-learning and the impact it may have on technology use in teaching. It has been argued that attitudes, beliefs, and confidence towards E-learning play a crucial role in educators' integration of it in teaching (Etmer, 2005; Mumtaz, 2000; Schifter, 2008; Twining et al., 2013). Therefore, it is important to understand how these beliefs affect lecturers' relationship with E-learning.

Becker (2000) believes that technology serves as a valuable tool in schools in which educators: have access to technology, are prepared (PD), have some freedom in the curriculum and hold personal beliefs compatible with technology use. Although all the first three factors (access to technology, PD and flexibility) may have become increasingly widely available nowadays, many studies show that the majority of educators do not integrate E-learning into their practices even when resources and training are available (Etmer, 2005; Prestridge, 2012; Scrimshaw, 2004) or tend to use low level E-learning tasks such as word processing and online searching. The first three points in Becker's (2000) model (access to technology, PD, curriculum freedom) do not require educators to change their own fundamental beliefs. However, the last one (beliefs) requires them to have a new perspective of doing and seeing things (Etmer, 2005). However, the availability of PD, technology and curriculum flexibility does not mean that these are effectively provided. In other words, the poor quality of PD or resources could be a cause of the negative attitudes held by practitioners.

Lack of E-learning use despite having adequate technology infrastructures may be caused by other barriers, especially related to lecturers' beliefs, which are much less understood and therefore less resolved (Etmer, 2005). As a result, it is vital to understand these pedagogical beliefs, because the decision whether to use technology or not and how to use it may depend largely on lecturers (Etmer, 2005; Marcinkiewicz & Regstad, 1996). Nevertheless, a counter argument could be establishing national and institutional policies that impose or regulate E-learning use. In many HEIs around the world, some forms of E-learning use are imposed, such as the use of VLEs. However, although top-down approaches may have some merits, E-learning use is more effective when educators believe in its use (Etmer, 2005). Furthermore, it is very difficult for policies to be involved in everything that educators do, such as lesson planning and teaching methods.

Understanding the difference between knowledge and belief can be essential to understand and improve E-learning PD practices. After learning something (e.g. creating discussion threads in Blackboard), lecturers may conceptualize its effectiveness or

practicality for their practice differently (Etmer, 2005; Prestridge, 2012). Prestridge (2012) argues that beliefs are far more influential than knowledge in affecting educators' behaviours. Tondeur et al. (2007) argue that reform in E-learning is unlikely to succeed unless educators' educational beliefs are understood. These claims need to be supported with more research, since there is dearth of research in the correlation between educators' pedagogical beliefs and their adoption of E-learning (Etmer, 2005). Studying how lecturers' pedagogical beliefs interact with their technological beliefs might enable us to better understand their roles in E-learning PD activities, and whether technology should be dealt with in isolation or integrated with lecturers' perceptions of what constitutes good teaching and learning. However, it is difficult to measure beliefs accurately because beliefs are implicit and a person may hold contradicting beliefs (Etmer, 2005; Pajares, 1992). Furthermore, lecturers may have idealistic or wishful E-learning beliefs that do not inform practice.

Although many studies, mainly conducted in Europe and the USA, have indicated increasing access and use of E-learning, in most cases this is only for low level tasks such as word processing, presentations and internet searching (Littlejohn, 2002; Twining et al., 2013). In other words, technology may be used simply to facilitate traditional lecturer-centred pedagogical approaches (Etmer, 2005). Therefore, ensuring that lecturers get access, training, and curriculum guidelines is not enough if barriers related to lecturers' pedagogical beliefs remain the same (Etmer, 2005).

Many studies indicate that gains in educators' confidence and perceptions towards E-learning following PD programmes, are not always accompanied by significant changes in E-learning classroom use (Brinkinhoff, 2006; Williams et al., 2000). Therefore, E-learning PD measures that tend to simply look at lecturers' technological confidence and self-efficacy may not accurately represent actual gains in their ability to use E-learning to facilitate teaching and learning. This may be attributed to following a simplistic approach, where the focus is on developing general technological skills, perceptions and self-efficacy, without clear links to pedagogical practice (Mishra & Koehler, 2008).

Having a supportive environment where lecturers feel comfortable to learn from each other can help them, especially when there is lack of formal E-learning PD or when it is not effective. For example, Williams et al. (2000) investigated teachers' E-learning use and their attitudes in primary and secondary schools in Scotland. Teachers were categorised according to their E-learning use into low, medium and high E-learning users, and according to their attitudes into low, medium and high attitude. Results suggested that there was a substantial correlation between attitudes and E-learning use. The results showed that the majority of teachers (80%) depended on their colleagues (high users) to keep up-to-date with technology. These are alarming figures since they showed a limited institutional role in developing E-learning knowledge and skills. The study concluded that formal training alone was not effective and teachers need continuous help and a supportive environment to overcome the anxiety and lack of confidence in E-learning.

Jimoyiannis and Komis (2007) examined the beliefs and attitudes of 1165 school teachers in Greece towards E-learning immediately after completing a training programme. The results show that:

> *'The availability of ICT tools does not seem to be a factor favouring or promoting by itself the teachers' use of ICT for educational purposes' (p158).*

A low percentage of teachers in the study used technology for instruction (one out of ten teachers) and they tended to use basic E-learning tools. There was clear variation in E-learning usage among teachers of different subject areas, gender, teaching experience and ownership of a computer at home. Teachers were sceptical about how they could apply the skills they learned in their own classrooms, which may suggest that there should be a clear link between E-learning PD and teachers' practice. This study did not discuss the reason for the variation between subject areas. The researchers argue that top-down approaches are unproductive, and there should be a culture of teacher self-development, where teachers develop their skills individually or in collaboration with other teachers. Collaborative online learning is one important affordance of E-learning where practitioners can benefit from the experiences of others by forming online

communities with other practitioners, and consequently they take charge of their own learning (Conole et al., 2004). E-learning policies should see technology not as a trend, but as an effective teaching and learning tool (Jimoyiannis & Komis, 2007). This means that we need to understand how E-learning can make teaching and learning better.

Loveless (2003, p321) argues although E-learning research and use in the United Kingdom started long time ago, it was seen as something new:

> *'[Teachers] described the application of E-learning in the primary school as 'new' and 'rapidly changing'.*

This argument is supported by many studies that revealed educators' anxiety in using E-learning. However, Loveless' observation happened more than a decade ago when E-learning availability, proficiency and use were limited. Figure 5 shows a number of factors that might affect educators' perceptions of E-learning, as a subject and in society. These factors are the Identity of practitioners and their confidence with E-learning, the community and culture, subject knowledge and pedagogical knowledge of E-learning. These factors are dynamic, interacting with each other and their perceptions are not static but progressing over time. This might suggest that conceptualizations of E-learning in society and education are continuously evolving and there is no 'ideal' view that can dictate how to implement E-learning.

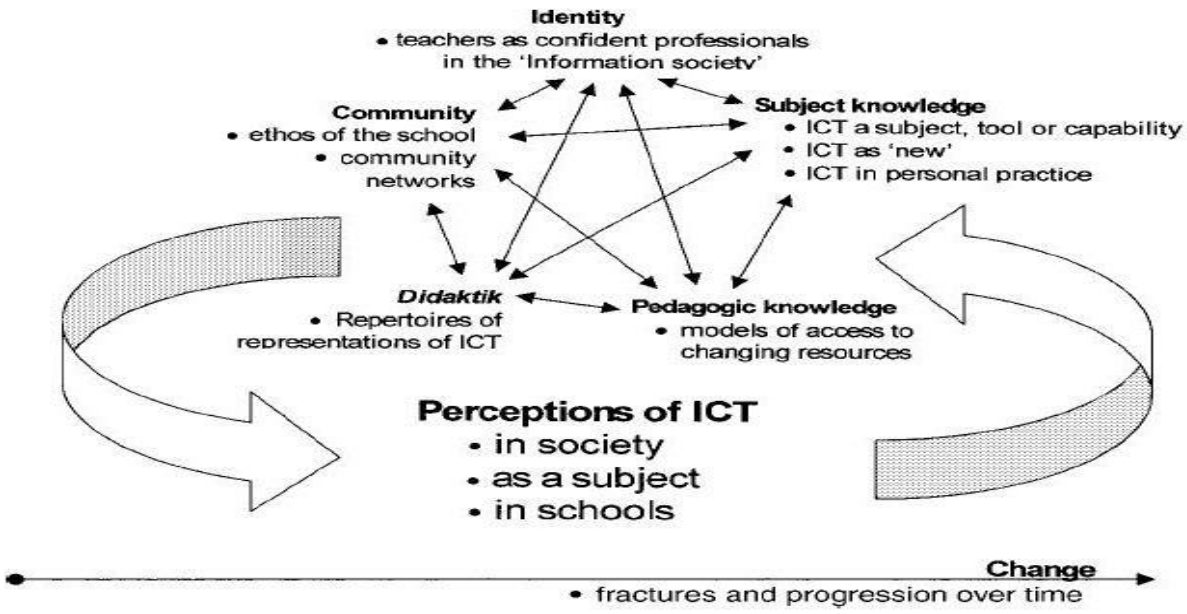


Figure 5: The Interaction between Perceptions of E-learning and PD (Loveless, 2003, p317)

3.5 Conclusion

Most of the literature on E-learning in education seems to come from Europe or the USA, where technology might be more prevalent in people's daily lives and education. Daly et al. (2009, p12) believe that:

> *'An important factor to consider when seeking to understand E-learning CPD, is that CPD in general for teachers is to some degree still in its infancy'.*

Most of the literature concerning E-learning PD has been published after 2006 (Daly et al., 2009). Most of these studies seem to focus on schools rather than HE. In addition, in some developing countries like Oman, there is a dearth of research in lecturers' E-learning PD.

The rapid development in educational technologies and their pedagogical implications mean that research has to be updated constantly. However, the literature is increasingly indicating that there should be a shift from technology training only, to more holistic approaches to help lecturers make sense of E-learning integration.

The literature review here indicates that there is a profound gap in our understanding of what makes E-learning PD result in real changes in lecturers' practices and perceptions. Simply looking at lecturers' attitudes, availability of technology or technological skills have not given satisfactory answers. Many issues related to pedagogy, lecturers' identities and specific subject contents are ignored in studies that investigate E-learning PD. For example, studies examining E-learning use tend to neglect how educators introduce technologies to their familiar environments (Zhao et al., 2002), if they collaborate (Schlager & Fusco, 2003), take an active role (Hustler et al., 2003), teach specific subjects (e.g. math), and employ critical thinking skills in PD activities (Graham et al., 2009; Hennessy et al., 2005). Additionally, there is a lack of understanding whether there is transfer from E-learning PD to teaching; and if so, how it happens. There is also a lack of understanding of the pedagogical decisions made when lecturers use E-learning, such as content representation, aim of technology use, time management, creating interest and assessment. Additionally, the mental processes involved in planning for technology enhanced lessons and the adjustment of subject content from paper mode to E-learning. All these issues are central to understanding whether E-learning PD have an impact on lecturers' practices. Furthermore, much of the learning happening in HEIs is informal, and thus it should not be ignored. All these issues pose serious challenges for this study, but at the same time provide a valuable opportunity to contribute to the understanding of E-learning PD in HE.

Chapter 4: **Theoretical and Conceptual Framework**

4.1 Introduction

The literature review chapter highlighted the most prominent discussions and issues related to E-learning PD. It showed that there are many limitations to our understanding of E-learning PD, since it is an evolving and a complicated area of research experiencing continuous changes and debates.

This chapter focuses on the theoretical and conceptual framework of the study. It provides the theoretical foundations in which I approached the key areas in this research. The theoretical framework facilitated in shaping the research methodology, which will be discussed in Chapter 5, and will help in analysing, describing and interpreting data in the Findings Chapter and Discussion and Conclusion Chapter (Ravitch & Riggan, 2016) .

A conceptual framework is defined as a *narrative and/or a graphical explanation of:*

> **'The main things to be studied – the key factors, variables or constructs – and the presumed relationships among them' (Miles et al., 2013, p20).**

This definition will be adopted in this study, since it provides a simple and clear explanation of the conceptual framework. In this study, the key factors and constructs are explained in a narrative and a visual form. This chapter illustrates the links between the key concepts in the research questions and the concepts in the adapted theories, which consequently led to the development of a conceptual framework for this research.

A conceptual framework guides research by representing and examining the underlying assumptions made about the research focus, including assumptions by other researchers

and the researcher's positionality and assumptions (Maxwell, 2012). It allows researchers to make informed decisions and apply careful reasoning throughout the research process (Ravitch & Riggan, 2016). The Conceptual Framework of this study examines the underlying assumptions of E-learning PD, in order to aid in answering the research questions, and explain to readers the researcher's interpretations of the key concepts in the research.

This chapter will illustrate the *theoretical foundations* of the study and the theories and models used to conceptualise E-learning PD, which led to the development of the Conceptual Framework. Habib et al. (2014, p54) defined the *theoretical framework* as:

> **'A structure developed by the previous researcher(s) that would be used as an initial idea to develop a new concept/model'.**

The Conceptual Framework was developed based on theories analysed in this chapter (Habib et al., 2014). Learning theories provide frameworks that can help researchers conceptualize the complex processes of learning and teaching (Schunk, 2012). Since E-learning PD is linked to various theories, the rationale for choosing specific theories and their appropriateness for this study will be discussed in this chapter.

Many frameworks have been proposed to help in understanding E-learning PD in education. The conceptual framework of this research is predominantly based on four conceptual models:

1. Three Nested Levels of PD by Twining et al. (2013)
2. The Technological Pedagogical and Content Knowledge (TPACK) by Mishra and Koehler (2006)
3. Communities of Practice (CoP) by Lave and Wenger (1991)
4. The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) by Davis (1986a).

A mapping process was used to show the key constructs in these theories, the research questions and the issues selected for the conceptual framework for this study.

This chapter will start with an analysis of the Conceptual Framework of this research, which is based on the learning models: The Three Nested Levels of PD, CoP, TPACK and TAM. After that, each of these theories will be discussed separately. The manner in which their characteristics form the Conceptual Framework will be investigated. This includes the rationale for their choice and the manner in which they are operationalised to answer the research questions for the specific context in which the study was conducted. After that, there will be a discussion of the key constructs in the Conceptual Framework and their interpretations in this study. This chapter will also include a discussion of the tools that were developed to measure TPACK and TAM, which were adapted mainly in the questionnaire designed for this study, and guided the other data collection methods and data analysis as well. Throughout this Chapter and in the subsequent chapters, the term *'the Conceptual Framework'* will refer to the Conceptual Framework specifically designed for this research.

4.2 The Conceptual Framework

This section will discuss the Conceptual Framework of this study. It will start with identifying the key issues raised by the research questions. These issues will be analysed according to the different areas they focus on. After that, these key issues will be linked to theories that form the basis of the Conceptual Framework. Then the Conceptual Framework will be presented and analysed throughout this Chapter.

This study seeks to understand lecturers' and managers' perceptions and experiences with formal and informal E-learning PD. Furthermore, it investigates the relationship between E-learning PD and lecturers' practices. The research focus encompasses a wide range of issues that fall within many theories.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

The key issues posed by the research questions were used as a basis for selecting certain theories that formed the theoretical foundation/framework; which led to the development of a Conceptual Framework. In other words, in order to understand how the Conceptual Framework was formed, it is important to disentangle the research questions to find the key issues raised by them, and then consider how they are presented and interpreted in the adapted theories.

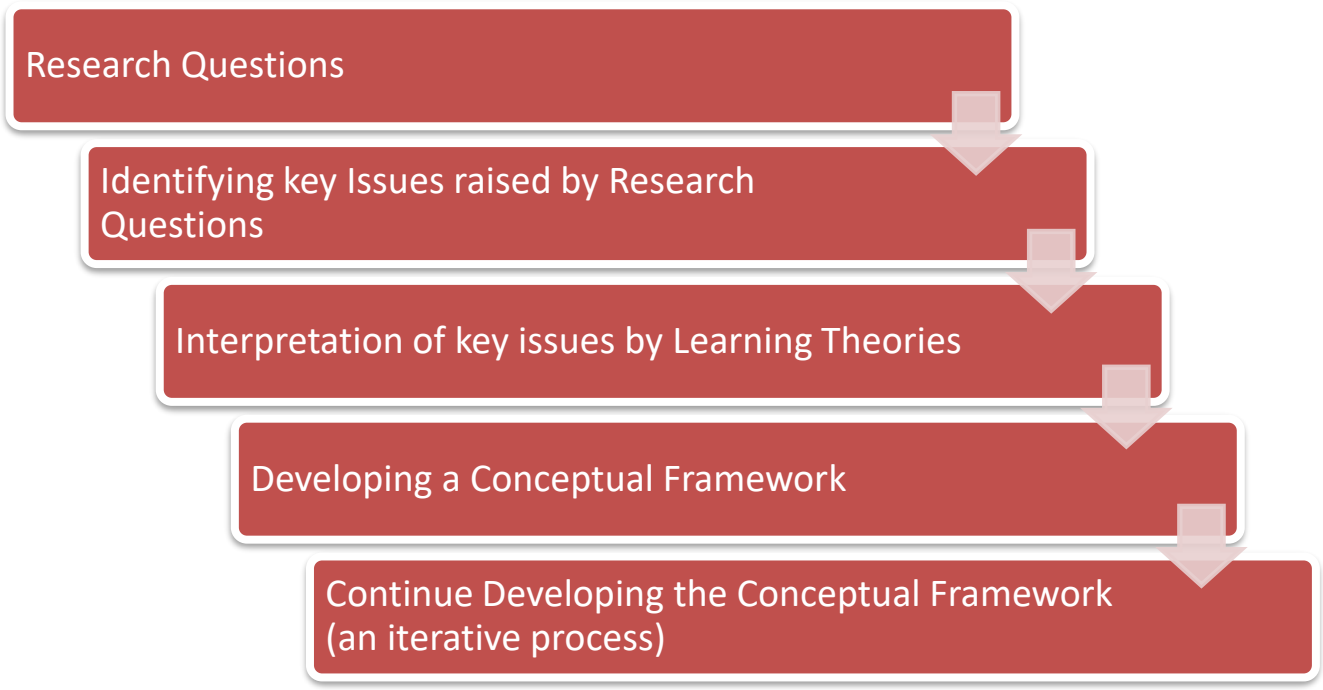


Figure 6: The Process of Developing the Conceptual Framework

Figure 6 shows the process of developing the Conceptual Framework. It is crucial to note that developing a Conceptual Framework was an iterative process throughout the research, and it kept developing based on new findings, studies, data and interpretations. The key issues raised by the Research Questions are presented in Figure 7.

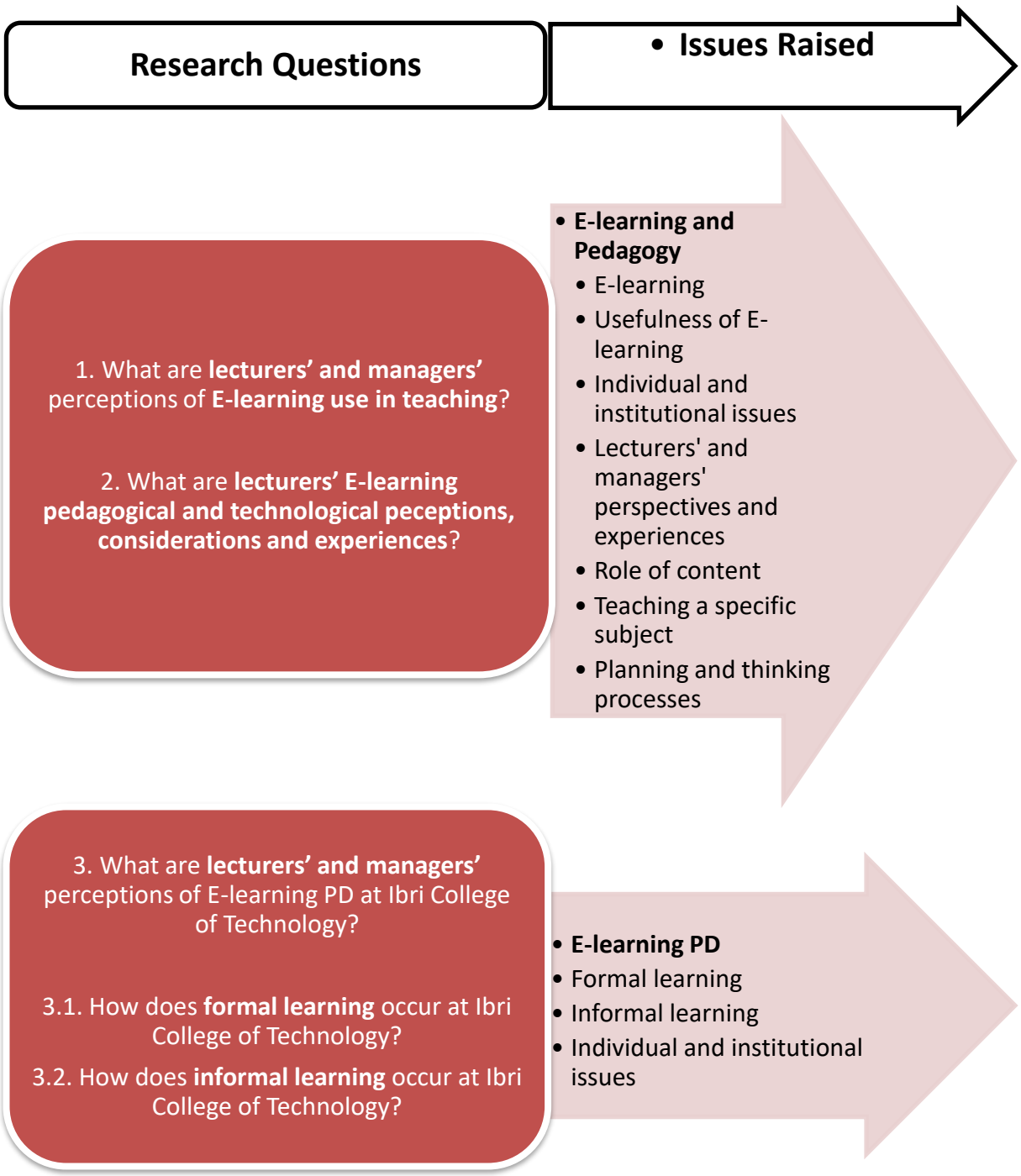


Figure 7: The Research Questions and Main Concepts in this Study

The research questions encompass many concepts from academic and managerial perspectives. The first and second research questions are mainly linked to E-learning and pedagogy. The third set of research questions investigate formal and informal E-learning PD.

The main issues raised by the research questions are organised in Figure 8 according to different categories:

People	Areas of inquiry	Forms of PD	E-learning and Pedagogy
Lecturers Managers	Perspectives Experiences Individual and institutional issues	E-learning PD Formal Learning Informal Learning	E-learning Pedagogy Content

Figure 8: Key Concepts in this Study

The literature review showed that the above issues are multifaceted, intersected and comprise of various other sub-concepts. Although the main research questions are followed by more focused sub-questions, these sub-questions incorporate a wide range of concepts. For example, the literature review showed that formal learning encompasses many issues such as trainers, trainees, timing, focus, forms, methods and impact. Informal learning is linked to various issues such as the work culture, trust and lecturers' identities and backgrounds. However, the argument made earlier in the literature review is that formal and informal learning are intersected and affect each other. Furthermore, in many cases the boundaries between formal and informal learning are fuzzy. Another issue shown in Figure 8 is that the study involves lecturers and managers. From a managerial perspective, there are issues related to policies, funding, structure, vision, curriculum and so on. These may differ from the perspectives held by lecturers. This shows that the issues in Figure 8 are broad and include a wide-variety of sub-issues. The literature review analysed the issues related to the key concepts raised by the research questions. This chapter complements the literature review by analysing the main theories, concepts and factors which form the Conceptual Framework for this study.

The Conceptual Framework of this research is based on four theories that were adapted because of their relation to the key constructs in this research. These theories will be explained in detail later. Their value for this study and the manner in which they can support the answering of the research questions will be discussed. Figure 9 shows the

main issues in these theories, and their relations to the key concepts in the study. The figure shows that the Three Nested Levels of PD is at a higher level than other theories, since it has a wider scope by covering individual, institutional and government issues. Including wider issues in the Conceptual Framework, such as government and laws, was based on the literature and data that suggested E-learning PD at Ibri College is affected by the government.

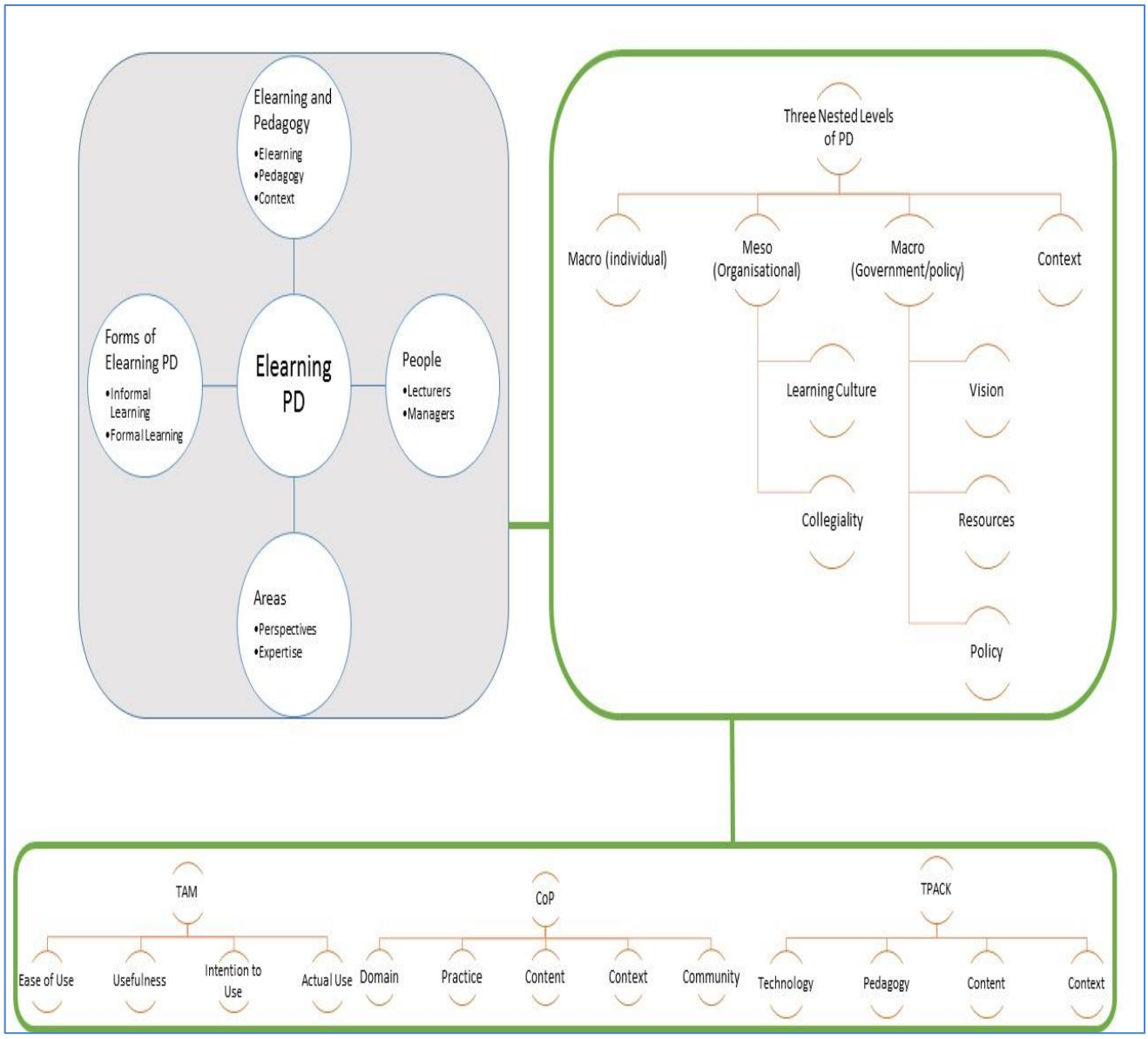


Figure 9: Learning Theories and the Key Concepts in this Study

Figure 9 shows that the Three Nested Levels of PD was used in the overall design of the Conceptual Framework because of its ability to accommodate individual, institutional and government issues. The other theories cover issues that can be placed within these three

levels, within one level or many levels. The concepts in the learning theories are complexly intersected and relate to various constructs in the key concepts in this study. After examining the relationships among the theories and key concepts in this study, the Conceptual Framework was formed. Figure 10 shows the Conceptual Framework of this study.

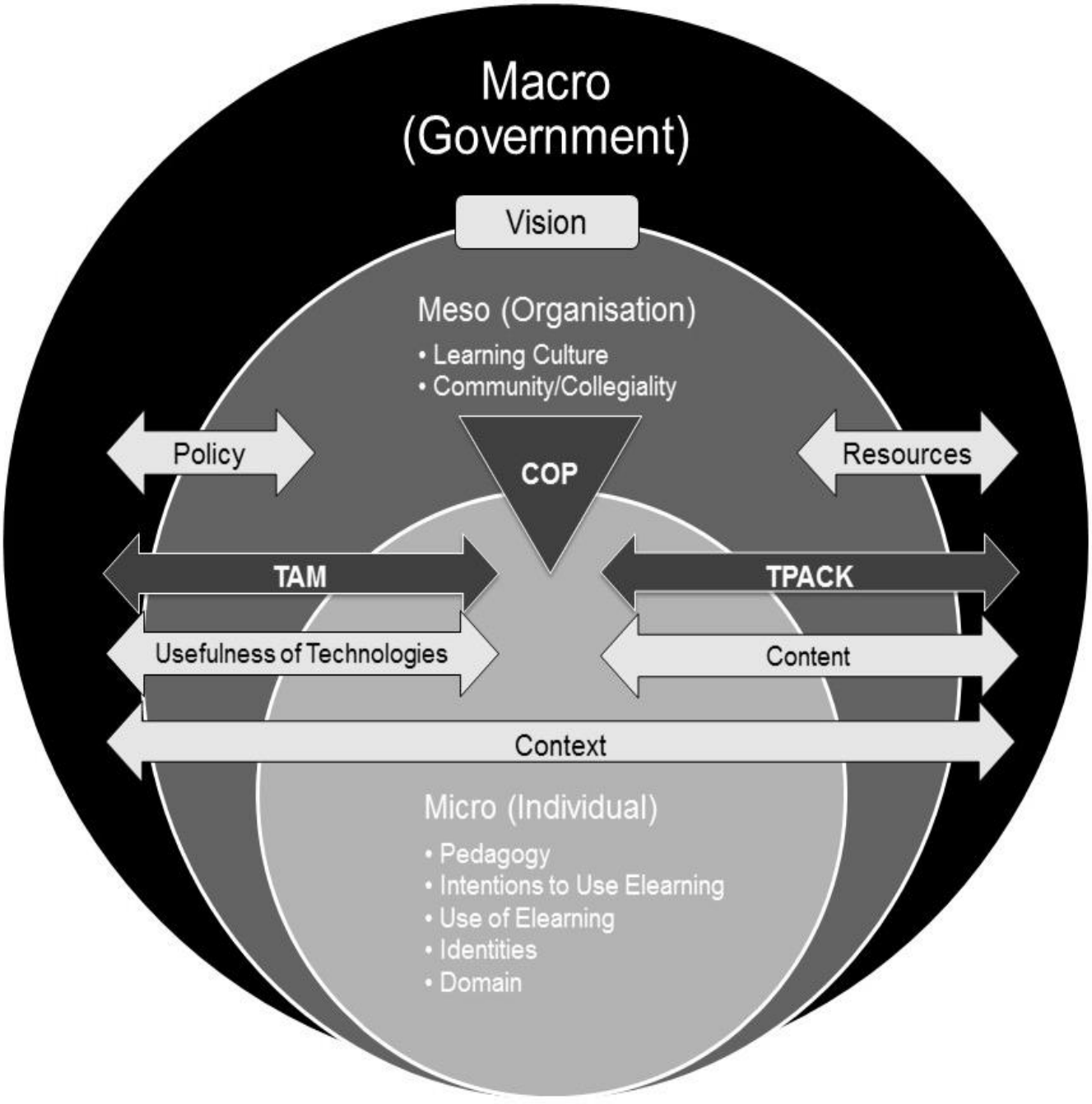


Figure 10: My Conceptual Framework

The Conceptual Framework (CF) in Figure 10 shows the key concepts, theories and factors in this study and the relationships between them. This Conceptual Framework will be interpreted according to these three classifications:

1. **The Three Circles:** these nested circles represent levels of responsibility and influence toward E-learning PD. This is mainly adapted from Twinning et al.'s (2013) Three Nested Levels of PD and altered according to the needs of this study. The inner circle here represents individual (micro) factors such as academics, managers, teaching intentions and actual use of E-learning, lecturers' identities and the subjects they teach. The middle circle represents institutional level issues such as learning culture, academics' collegiality, and the management. The outer circle refers to government; in this case, the College sponsor which is the Ministry of Manpower, and regulatory bodies such as the Ministry of Civil Service.
2. **The shadowed figures**: these represent the learning theories that affect the study: TAM, TPACK, and CoP. Although TAM and TPACK affect all the three level circles, TAM is more linked to individual issues while TPACK links more closely to individual and institutional levels. CoP is placed within both the individual and organisational levels. Although CoP can go beyond HEIs, for the purpose of this study CoP within the College were investigated. All of theories will be discussed one at a time.
3. **The white figures:** these figures represent some key factors affecting E-learning PD: Resources, vision, policies, content, context and usefulness of technologies. Contrary to Twining et al.'s (2013) model, vision, resources and policy are not merely located within the government level of influence, but are also influenced by HEIs.

Although this Conceptual Framework will be explained according these three classifications, they intersect and affect each other. After explaining each of them independently, the manner in which they interplay and answer the research questions will be analysed.

The following section will analyse the three Circles in the Conceptual Framework, which are adapted from the Three Nested Levels of PD by Twining et al. (2013).

4.2.1 The Three Circles of Influence

This part will examine the three circles in the Conceptual Framework: The Micro (individual), Meso (organisational) and macro (government) circles. This is adapted from Twining et al.'s (2013) Three Nested Levels of PD. This section includes an analysis of Twining's model, its relevance and importance for this study and the manner in which it was adapted and operationalised.

According to Twining et al. (2013), E-learning PD responsibility is distributed and influenced by factors at the national, institutional and individual levels. Figure 11 suggests that there are three levels of responsibility and influence towards E-learning PD: government, organization and individual.

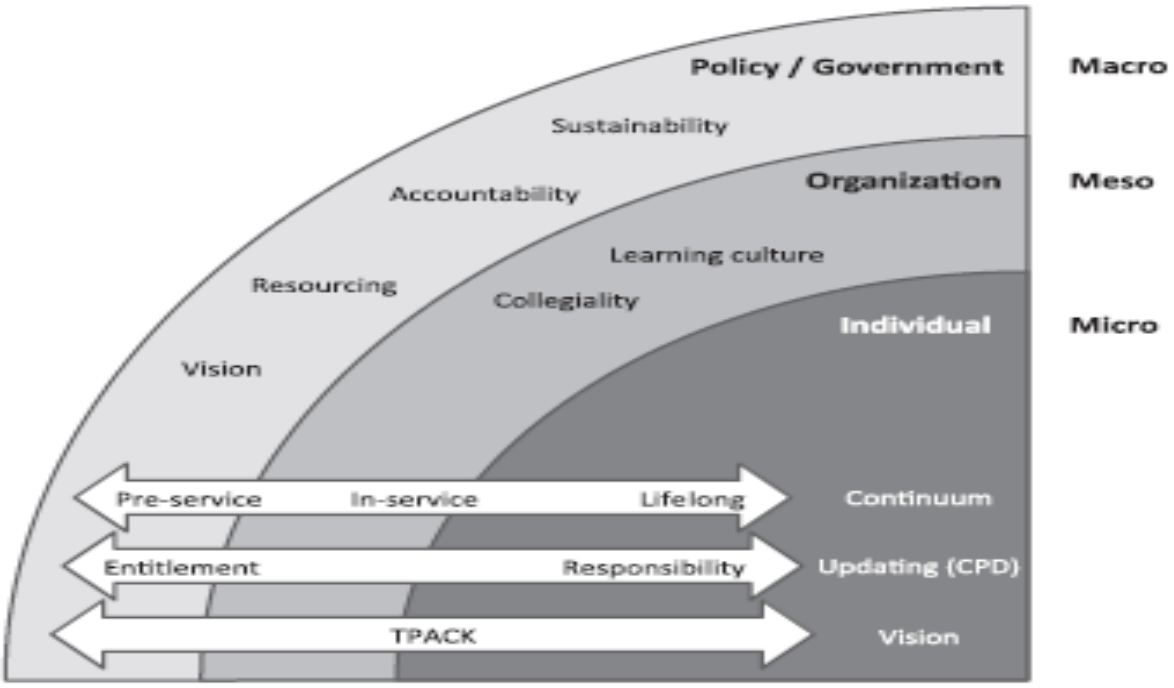


Figure 11: Three Nested Levels of Professional Development (Twining et al., 2013)

Although Twining's model was useful for informing the overall design of the three circles in which E-learning PD occurs, it was adapted with caution in many aspects. It does not specify the role of context, learning environments or level of autonomy of educational institutions. For example, level of autonomy of HEIs may affect policies, resourcing, visions and decision-making. Policies and visions may be created by governments, individual HEIs, or a combination of both. HEIs that are financially independent or semi-independent are likely to have more freedom than public HEIs. Furthermore, even within a single HEIs, different faculties may operate differently and may have to be represented using different models. Ibri College is a government sponsored HEI and decision-making occurs both within and outside the College. These issues are crucial for understanding E-learning PD at the research context, so they were added to the Conceptual Framework.

It seems that Twining's model has other limitations inherent in it in addition to other limitations related to its suitability for this study. This study is within the HE context, which has many unique characterictis that distinguish it from schooling education. However, Twining's model was originally designed for schools not HEIs. This may have affected the issues raised by the model and the boundaries between the three cirlces. The following analysis of the three circles will demonstrate the manner in which the model was adapted for this study.

A. The Macro (Government) Level

The first level, according to Twining's model, is the macro (national) level, where government is expected to be responsible for having a vision and providing resources. According to this model, the vision may include a system of approaching E-learning PD, desired learning outcomes and guidelines for educational institutions.

Many aspects within the Macro level in Twining's model may not suit HEIs. In the model, resources and vision are placed within the government responsibility and influence circle. This may be applicable to public schools sponsored and regulated by governments, more than public and private HEIs. The applicability of this model to HE may be more

challenging. This model would be more relevant in an era when HEIs were commonly government sponsored and regulated; however, HE nowadays is characterised by being increasingly independent (Teixeira et al., 2017). E-learning PD vision and resources in HEIs may not be restricted to the government level and HEIs may develop their distinctive visions and be economically independent or semi-independent. Furthermore, Omani HEIs typically have more flexibility and freedom than schools in terms of visions, resources, curriculums and assessment methods. In addition, it is common for HE to provide education for fees, with limited or no financial support from governments. In other words, this model states that resources are provided by government whereas HEIs may be financially independent, or receive government subsidies or funding in addition to generating their own resources. Furthermore, providing resources from government does not mean that HEIs do not have freedom or flexibility in spending these resources, which is crucial, but not included in Twining's model.

Many alterations were applied to the Macro level in this model when it was adapted for the Conceptual Framework. Vision and resources in the Conceptual Framework were placed in both the macro and meso levels. Sustainability and accountability were not included in the Conceptual Framework, since they are not central aspects in the research focus. 'Pre-service' training in the figure is located within the government/policy level, but it might be provided by private HEIs where government may have no or limited influence on the educator training provided. Since pre-service training is not a central aspect in this study, it was not included in the Conceptual Framework.

The Macro level was included in the study because Ibri College is a government sponsored HEI. In the Conceptual Framework, vision and resources are placed within both the Macro and Meso levels, since they may be within the government and the institution levels at Ibri College. In Twining's model 'Policy/Government' were at the same level. However, in Ibri College, like many other HEIs, there are government policies and laws, and institutional policies and by-laws. For this reason, policies were located in both the government and institutional level.

In this study, data related to government level was collected and analysed. It was collected using published documents and studies, in addition to interviews and focus groups with the college management and lecturers. The participants talked about E-learning PD and the Government's role in it. For example, a senior staff at the college talked about laws and policies dedicated by the Ministry of Civil Service and funding issues at the Ministry of Manpower.

B. The Meso (Organisational) Level

The second circle in Twining's model shows institutional E-learning PD level (Meso level). According to this model, E-learning PD is affected by many factors such as staff collegiality and learning culture. It may include other factors such as institutional support structures, the leadership, training, technical support and availablity of technology.

Twining's view of the Meso level was adapted in the Conceptual Framework. In addition to collegiality and the learning culture, many factors were added. For example, vision and policies were placed in both the government and institutional circles, because Ibri College has its own bylaws and visions besides government policies and regulations. Resources are provided by government, but the College spends available resources according to the College needs and priorities. Furthermore, Ibri College sends funding requests to government for extra financial requirements, and seeks private sector support for additional resources.

The learning culture and collegiality may be affected by wider issues such as the country's culture and by individual issues such as identities and behaviour of lecturers and managers taking part in it (Coleman, 2010). In this Conceptual Framework, the learning culture and collegiality were kept within the institutional level, because the study does not intend to investigate the relationships between national culture on institutional culture. Although this is an interesting area of research, it is outside the scope of this

study. The Communities of Practice (CoP) model was placed in both individual and institutional levels. The CoP, learning culture and collegiality will be discussed in detail later.

The Meso level in the conceptual framework guided the design, data collection and data analysis processes in the study. Understanding staff collegiality and the learning culture are crucial in this study. I immersed myself in the College daily for about four months observing, interviewing, and analysing formal and informal learning. The factors included in the Conceptual Framework guided research, such as institutional policies, bylaws, and E-learning PD support strategies and methods.

C. The Micro (Individual) Level

The micro level refers to personal factors, such as lecturers' and managers' identities, personal experiences and pedagogical strategies. According to Twining's model, having a lifelong learning responsibility falls within the individual level zone, supported with institutional in-service training. As figure 11 shows, this model does not specify any key issues within the micro level, whereas the meso and macro levels included more detail. Twining's model distinguishes between lifelong learning, an individual responsibility and in-service training, an institutional responsibility. However, I emphasised in the literature review that even in-service training can be an individual responsibility. The term 'in-service training' was avoided altogether since it is associated with formal learning. This study used the term PD and argued that formal and informal training should not been seen as contrasting or separable entities.

In this study's Conceptual Framework, the micro level encompasses a wide range of issues that fall within the individual spectrum. Many key concepts were added to the Conceptual Framework in order emphasise their importance: pedagogy, intention to use E-learning, use of E-learning, identities and domains. This was informed by the literature

review, the adapted learning theories and focus of the study. These will be discussed one at a time in detail.

Individual lecturers' perceptions and experiences with E-learning and E-learning PD were investigated using interviews, observations, surveys and focus group discussions. Individual managers' backgrounds, experiences, identities, and attitudes provided valuable information for understanding their stances toward E-learning PD at the College and using E-learning in teaching.

D. The Three Levels of Responsibility and Influence in Practice

The InterActive project, which was carried out by the Economic and Social Research Council, UK, is an example that shows levels of E-learning PD responsibilities and influence as described in Twining's model. The InterActive project reflects how the three circles can be applied. The InterActive project was analysed by Sutherland et al. (2004) and Trigg and John (2004). The project spanned 2 years and involved 59 teachers from different subjects, 6 teacher educators, 7 university researchers and 3 research students. The participants came from one HEI and nine schools. The aim was to investigate how people from different professional backgrounds and experiences such as teachers, university researchers and teacher educators worked together to professionally develop teachers' E-learning skills related to the subjects they teach, and how learning is negotiated among them.

As the InterActive project progressed, Trigg and John (2004) investigated the interrelationships and work dynamics that developed. Each teacher worked with a researcher (Micro level), and then became involved in bigger groups of teachers and researchers (Meso level) and university researchers worked on the overall design of the programme. The activities they worked with were using the InterActive smartboard, using PowerPoint for storytelling (English language teachers) and using a dynamic geometry software (Math teachers). The approach was exploratory, where teachers and

researchers worked together in meetings to set goals and teaching styles. Video evidence was used to analyse data in addition to notes by teachers.

The findings showed that boundaries between the three groups became increasingly smaller. For example, all of them shared their beliefs of learning and teaching and negotiated the PD process. Teachers acted as researchers observing lessons, discussing and analysing data. They attempted to incorporate E-learning in ways they felt could make teaching more effective. Teachers redefined their roles from asking researchers 'what do you want me to do?' to more active and critical involvement. Furthermore, researchers' roles shifted from consultants to classroom teachers and co-teachers. At the end, some teachers presented the findings within their institution and with other institutions (Meso level) in conferences and seminars. The teachers in this project highlighted the importance of the video evidence of their teaching, which enabled them to review, analyse and reflect upon their own teaching. The researchers argue that this model helps empower teachers and involve them in decision-making and creating E-learning PD. Although this experiment proved valuable in bridging the gap between teachers and academics, the authors admitted that it is hard to replicate the study widely because of the length of the course, and the time and money put into the project. This study is crucial because it gives a model where PD is determined by various levels of the educational structure.

E. Summary of the Three Circles

The three circles in the Conceptual Framework represent the levels of responsibility toward E-learning PD and the key constructs associated with them. At the macro (Government) level, there are responsibilities associated with policies, laws, resources and E-learning PD vision. These responsibilities intersect with the Meso (organization) level. In addition to that, there are many constructs at the organisational level that affect E-learning PD, such as the learning culture and lecturers' collegiality. These constructs are associated with the Communities of Practice (CoP) model, which will be discussed in

detail later. Within the individual (Micro) level, there are many key elements related to E-learning PD, such as pedagogy, domain, lecturers' identities, intentions to use E-learning and actual use of E-learning.

Twining's model was found to be significant to understanding the different levels of E-learning PD responsibility and influence in this study and it was altered to suit this study needs. The research focus, literature review, and the research findings suggest that E-learning PD encompasses a wide range of issues within the individual, institutional, and government premises. For instance, the arguments made by many lecturers in the study referred to institutional issues, while managers talked about ministry policies, funding and support. The impact of context on individuals and institutions is not visible in this model, although it may affect how E-learning PD occurs. The model seems to assume many things such as having national E-learning PD visions, institutional reliance on national E-learning resources and support, and following 'TPACK' as a framework for E-learning PD. TPACK is a model used to understand how technology, pedagogy and content interact, and will be discussed later.

The three circles of influence and responsibility was considered for its ability to provide a conceptual and an analytical tool for the study. However, many changes were made to Twining's model. First, policies, resources and vision were originally within the Macro (government) spectrum, but were placed in both the institutional and government circles here. This was done to acknowledge that this institution developed some of its own visions, bylaws and resources. Some factors in Twining's model were not included because they are not central to the focus of this study, such as pre-service/in-service/lifelong learning, accountability, sustainability and entitlement to PD. Other factors such as context, content and learning theories were added due to their importance for this study.

4.3 Communities of Practice

Lave and Wenger (1991) proposed a social learning theory which views learning as a situated sociocultural phenomenon that does not occur separately from the real world (Kirshner & Whitson, 1997). Communities of Practice has its roots in anthropology and social theory (Vygotsky, 1978b). Situated Learning suggests that learning occurs when people learn from their daily activities and experiences rather than traditional learning in which individuals 'acquire' and receive information from decontextualized knowledge (Kirshner & Whitson, 1997; Stein, 1998). Situated learning indicates that 'meaningful learning' is embedded within the environment, situation, time, community and place (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Stein, 1998).

Communities of Practice may have features that make it effective for adult workplace learning. For example, adult learners are full of stories, experiences, and knowledge that can offer meaningful and valuable learning opportunities directly related to their environments (Stein, 1998). Stein (1998) argues that adult learning is more effective when practitioners' prior knowledge and expertise are taken into account and if the concepts of situated learning are considered and applied. The four main elements of situated learning are content, context, Community of Practice and participation.

Figure 12: Elements of Situated Learning

Content in situated learning refers to facts, processes and information. Lave and Wenger (1991) argue that knowing, thinking and interpreting any content does not occur by individually internalizing knowledge, but through sustained processes as individuals become members of a community of practice, and multiple communities of practice. The content is co-constructed through interactions between instructor and learners, where they mutually engage in reflective thinking, negotiation, and discussions to make meaning of content and to make content applicable to them, rather than memorable (Choi & Hannafin, 1995; Smith & Varma, 1996; Stein, 1998). Situated learning criticises separating 'knowing and doing' and treating knowledge as 'an integral, self-sufficient, theoretically independent' from the situations where it is applied (Vincini, 2003, p1).

Context in situated learning refers to the environmental circumstances in which participants normally engage with in their practices (Stein, 1998). Situated learning takes place in the normal context in which it is practiced (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Lave and

Wenger (1991) argue the role of context is important since learning should not be in a decontextualized, abstract, artificial, or in a rigid environment, but should be authentic, co-constructed and negotiable among participants.

Participation is a fundamental component of CoP since it is the basis through which CoP members learn (Handley et al., 2006). Participation refers to the active involvement in interactions, reflections, exchange of ideas and negotiations of meaning among the community participants (Stein, 1998). Participation can happen face-to-face or virtually, and it has been identified as crucial to the development of practitioners. For example, Prestridge (2009) investigated how eight Australian school teachers participated in a collaborative design E-Learning PD for more than 12 months. Teachers used online discussions and face-to-face meetings. The participants indicated that face-to-face discussions were perceived to be effective and better for developing collegiality, getting background information about others and setting a community. Online discussions were seen as vital for critical discussions about practices and beliefs, and for transforming beliefs. The online forums were seen as a more formal environment where more critique was expected from teachers.

Conole and Dyke (2004) shared a similar observation, where they argued that asynchronous technologies encourage reflection and critique since it provides practitioners with time to reflect before taking part in educational discussions. Although E-learning has the potential of encouraging reflection, that should not be taken for granted as it depends on how technology is used (Conole et al., 2004). Teachers in Prestridge's study (2009) felt that online forums were less effective for establishing collegiality. Prestridge (2009) argued that as we get more experienced with virtual environments, relationships and common understanding can occur virtually. Twining et al. (2013) argued that collaborative PD approaches such as collaborative revision of recorded lessons and immersion in technology-rich classrooms resulted in increased practitioners' use of E-learning. Schifter (2008) believed that there is increasing evidence that the environment plays a very important role in practitioners' development.

CoP provide a mechanism for understanding authentic and natural lecturer learning in the workplace and how knowledge and skills evolve through interactions and experiences with other lecturers. Smyth (1995) criticized training which is frequently carried out as a top-down one-way interaction between trainers and trainees. In other words, lecturers are frequently given a passive role in many PD activities, such as listening to speeches given by 'experts' without a chance of questioning, contributing or reflecting on their practice. In order to improve current practices, it is important to actively involve lecturers and make dialogue and feedback central to PD (Littlejohn, 2002). It is important for lecturers to get support and training in how to integrate E-learning in their practices (Daly et al., 2009).

Communities of Practice (CoP) is defined as:

'Groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly' (Wenger, 2015, p1).

There are three components of CoP: the domain or shared concern, the practice which is based on trying to learn how to do things better, and the community which is based on regular interaction between the members (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Lave and Wenger (1991) specified that a community cannot be called a CoP unless it has all these three features. These informal entities are considered as effective and efficient for knowledge generation and sharing within institutions (Ardichvili et al., 2003).

Their concept of 'legitimate peripheral participation' describes how newcomers to CoP gradually become experienced old-timers, and their roles progressively become more central to the group. Identity plays a crucial role in CoP, because membership in a community is influenced by practitioners' identities, which consistently develops as a result of involvement with a community over time (Handley et al., 2006).

Figure 13: Communities of Practice

Communities of Practice places practitioners at the centre of the learning process, in contrast to conventional PD where they are placed beneath training educators to indicate the flow of information and authority of training (Lave & Wenger, 1991). This view emphasises interaction and collaboration between practitioners, researchers and educators. In this model, lecturers do not simply receive training but are involved in collaboratively constructing meaning of what they are doing (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

Learning can be intentional where CoP members consciously interact for the purpose of learning, or incidental where the community participants learn when they interact (Lave & Wenger, 1991). CoP can be a valuable tool to understand informal learning; however, it does not specify clearly how it can be used for formal learning and how organisations can use them as a PD tool (Roberts, 2006).

CoP may be called other names like learning networks, thematic clubs, tech clubs, reading clubs, and so on (Wenger, 2009). Furthermore, it shares many features of Professional Learning Communities. Communities of Practice and Professional Learning Communities have many similarities and the main difference between them is that Professional Learning Communities emphasise the role of the leader who is usually an external to the community, while CoPs favour leadership emerging within the community members themselves (Blankenship & Ruona, 2007). In this study, CoP was used since it explains how incidental and informal learning occur better than Professional Learning Communities.

Communities of Practice have ambiguities associated with it, since its focus, terminologies and interpretations seem to have changed over time, and applications and interpretations of CoP differ among researchers (Cox, 2005; Duguid, 2005; Li et al., 2009). Li et al. (2009, p11) argue that:

> *'The lack of consistency in the interpretation of the CoP concept makes it difficult to describe, develop and measure the effectiveness of a CoP'.*

Lave and Wenger (1991) early publications focused on the concept of legitimate peripheral participation where newcomers become professional old timers. Later, Wenger (2009) abandoned the concepts of legitimate peripheral participation, boundary crossing and multiple identities; while more focus was paid to individual growth and participation in groups (Li et al., 2009). The three components of practice in a community were introduced in 1998 as 'joint enterprise, mutual engagement and shared repertoire'. Each of these included sub-components and explained at length. Later more focus was paid on the use of CoP as a managerial tool for improving PD and organisational standards (Cox, 2005; Li et al., 2009; Wenger et al., 2002). Cox (2005) described Wenger's (2002) interpretation of CoP as a 'manual' for managers and practitioners in forming and cultivating CoP. In each of the publications, it seems that there is lack of clarity and specificity, where concepts can be easily interpreted variously. Li et al. (2009, p11) argues that:

'The different interpretations of CoP make it challenging to apply the concept or to take full advantage of the benefits that CoP groups may offer'.

In this study, the terminologies and concepts in the conceptual framework were mainly adapted from Lave and Wenger (1991) early interpretations of CoP. That is due to the relevance and suitability of concepts to this study. Additionally, that is attributed to the clarity of the terminologies and interpretations of concepts to this study. Duguid (2005) argues that there are ambiguities associated with CoP, such as lack of clarity in specifying what constitutes a CoP, a community, practice and 'tacit knowledge'.

This study agrees that the concepts in CoP can be easily interpreted differently. In addition, the term 'community' can be loosely labelled to groups of people (Cox, 2005). For example, Cox (2005) criticises that some ambiguity in labelling of 'community' in virtual CoPs. According to him, the level of engagement needed to call an online group a CoP. In other words, to what extent individuals in an online group have to be engaged to be called a CoP, instead of an online group. The same argument could be applicable to face-to-face CoP.

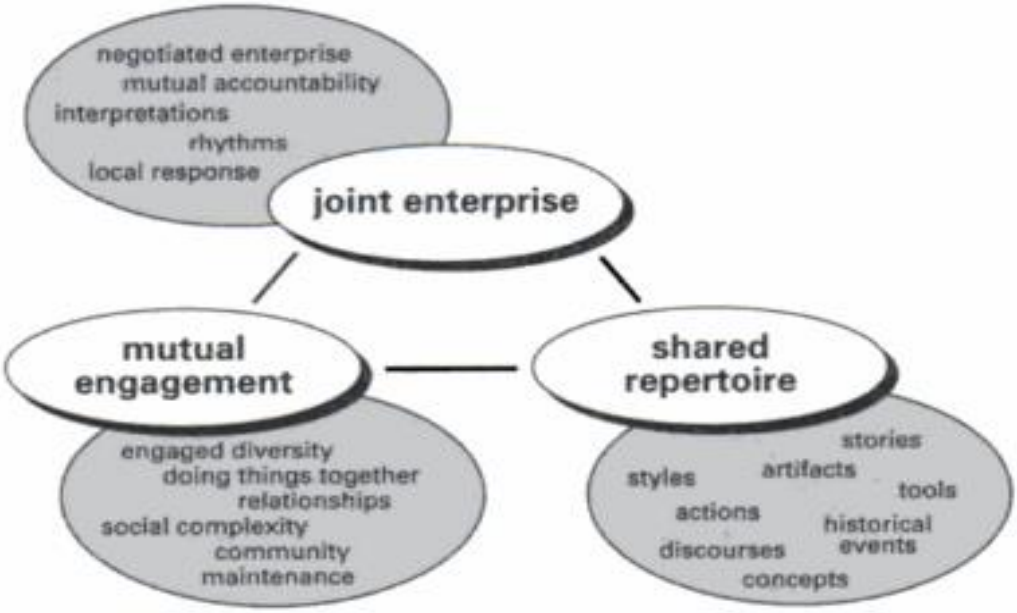


Figure 14: Dimensions of Practice as a Property of a Community Source: Wenger (1998, p73)

Wenger's (1998) interpretation of components of 'practice' provided useful additional information, which informed the practice component of the CoP. For example, lecturers' as a community within a HEI have 'shared repertoire' in the forms of stories, historical events, actions and discourses. Mutual engagement describes the issues that bind a community together. The 'joint enterprise' component seem to have similar features with the 'domain' component. However, the level of similarities and differences between the two terminologies is not clear since the domain falls directly under CoP, while joint enterprise falls under the practice aspect of the CoP. This interpretation and other contributions to CoP informed this study, but were not included in the Conceptual Framework based on the researcher's judgement of centrality and relevance of issues in relation to the research focus. Another reason is that CoP is an extensive area of enquiry and descriptions of CoP can be exhaustive if all factors by studies were included, which may limit research instead of guiding it.

In this study, the third set of research questions focus on lecturers' and managers' perceptions and experiences with formal and informal E-learning PD. Since informal learning is usually unstructured, harder to observe and complex, this model provides a conceptual tool for understanding how informal learning occurs and lecturers' roles in it, in addition to managerial support for it by creating conditions or a suitable environment for informal learning. CoP can provide a guiding compass for answering the research question concerned with lecturers' perceptions and experiences with E-learning. CoP can be used as a lens to see how some lecturers work together to develop their E-learning skills and knowledge as they interact. Furthermore, it highlights how informal learning occurs by investigating lecturers' communities, interests, identities and collaboration. This study investigated how E-learning PD occurs within lecturers' CoP. This included examining the domain by looking at the common grounds and shared interests that lecturers have within CoPs. The manner, frequency and motivation for lecturers' participation within the community were examined. Then the kinds of practices and issues that CoPs try to develop and the context in which learning takes place were investigated.

Communities of practice, although useful, may have some limitations. CoPs do not describe individualist learning approaches (Duguid, 2005). For example, lecturers may learn from self-reflection or reading. It is not clear how the concepts of CoP can be applied in controlled environments, such as professional training events (Stein, 1998). This could be due to the fact that it advocates learning through 'real world' challenges and issues. However, it may not feasible to replicate real world issues, since by trying to initiate an intervention by management that it may become an artificial experience. Nonetheless, it is vital to understand how workplace learning occurs, the circumstances that encourage or discourage it, and the conditions and environment that promote it.

Ardichvili et al. (2003) investigated online CoPs in a multinational cooperation, by qualitatively analysing three online communities and interviewing 30 members. They found that trust in reliability of information and intentions of others are crucial factors in an online CoP, and participants preferred joining discussions in groups where they are familiar with some people. Li et al. (2009) investigated the use of CoPs in studies carried out in the health sector and found that CoP definitions varied vastly from voluntary groups to formally formed and supported groups. Furthermore, there was disparity in the characteristics of CoPs investigated, roles of members, and power dynamics (Li et al., 2009). Although CoP seem to be loosely defined and used, I believe that its concepts are crucial for understanding how informal workplace learning works. However, researchers may need to clarify their position to the different components and concepts it conveys. CoP may have become a trend where researchers, managers and practitioners use it and label it differently. However, the ambiguities surrounding CoP could be one reason for the wide usage of it, since it can adapted differently for different purposes, contexts and professions (Cox, 2005).

Brown et al. (1989, p32) criticise educational systems where 'knowing what' is separated from 'knowing why'. According to them, knowledge is situated in the activity, culture and context in which it is located. They stated that:

> *'Many methods of didactic education assume a separation between knowing and doing, treating knowledge as an integral, self-sufficient substance, theoretically independent of the situations in which it is learned and used'.*

Furthermore, the kind of knowledge needed in the workplace requires continuously generating novel solutions to novel problems (Brown & Duguid, 2000). Conventional formal PD may not be able to keep up with constantly shifting needs of lecturers.

Cox (2005) carried out a comparative study of four published reports of using CoP. He argues that descriptions of CoP varied among the studies. He argues that the CoP keeps shifting by researchers and even by the authors themselves. Cox (2005) argues that many CoPs fail when supported by management, because of lack of clarity whether they are genuinely for staff improvement or another form of control.

4.4 Technological Pedagogical and Content Knowledge

Research on educational technology has been criticized for the lack of a solid theoretical framework (Mishra & Koehler, 2006). Conole et al. (2004) argued that practitioners' use of E-learning was based on common sense rather theoretically informed by pedagogical theories. Mishra and Koehler (2006) believed that one of the main problems of E-learning PD, is the tendency to look at technology in isolation, by emphasising what it can do and how it is used. This results in training focused on technical skills without a clear link to lecturers' pedagogical practice, the subjects they teach, or their contexts. Williams et al. (2000) indicate that several studies show that despite educators' consideration of themselves as competent in technology, they do not necessarily use their skills effectively for pedagogical purposes.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

Shulman (1986) argued that training related to teaching should involve two interacting components of knowledge: knowledge of teaching (Pedagogical Knowledge: PK) and knowledge of subject matter (Content Knowledge: CK). Mishra and Koehler (2006) built on this model by introducing Technology Knowledge (TK). Similar to Shulman's model, Technological Knowledge (TK) should not be treated in isolation, but interacting with Content Knowledge (TCK), Pedagogical Knowledge (TPK) and both of them: Technological Pedagogical and Content Knowledge (TPACK). The result, as the graph below shows, are seven knowledge domains: TK, CK, PK, TCK, PCK, PTK and TPACK.

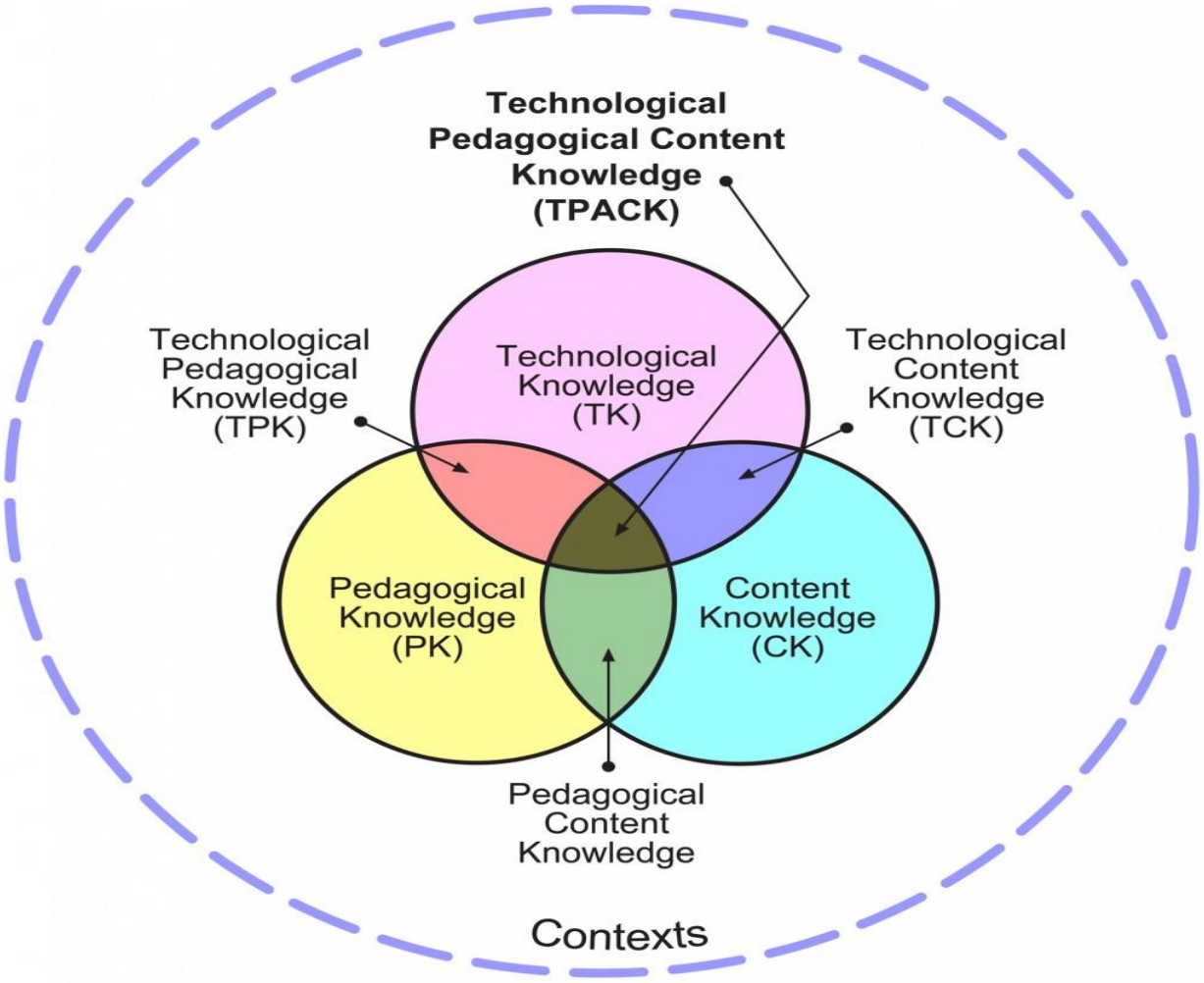


Figure 15: The TPACK Framework Source: www.tpack.org

Using the Technological Pedagogical and Content Knowledge (TPACK) framework for understanding lecturer knowledge is one way of understanding the knowledge that

lecturer needs, based on different E-learning PD knowledge that can be developed (Mishra & Koehler, 2006). Although pedagogy and content seem to become increasingly intersecting, technology training is treated as something independent of pedagogy and content (Mishra & Koehler, 2006). PD programmes which focus entirely on technology skills is an illustration of this conceptual perspective.

Mishra and Koehler (2006) criticize the available literature and studies in E-learning, claiming that much of it represents 'ideal cases' of E-learning integration or using new technology tools. This simplistic approach, by only trying to understand technology, does not honour the complexity of the teaching practice (Mishra & Koehler, 2006). In many cases, lecturers receive training in technology use and they are expected to implement these skills in their practices. Simply introducing technology is unlikely to be sufficient and we need to consider what and how lecturers can use it. Furthermore, adding technology to existing practices may not lead to better practices (Mishra & Koehler, 2006). TPACK may help in moving beyond technology training to taking a holistic approach where connections between technology, content and pedagogy should be understood (Jimoyiannis & Komis, 2007; Koehler et al., 2013). Since the advent of the TPACK framework, it has become a vibrant area of research especially in the field of E-learning PD (Koehler et al., 2012; Shin et al., 2009). This model has been applied in many in-service and pre-service lecturers' E-learning PD programmes.

Koehler and Mishra (2005) introduced the TPACK framework after implementing a 2-year design-based course for Master's students. Their survey, which was pre- and post-tested, comprised 35 items: 33 Likert scale items and 2 short answer items. Their sample was 4 faculty members and 13 students at Michigan State University. Koehler and Mishra (2005, p149) found that:

> *'The participants developed through the experience a deeper understanding of the complex web of relationships between content, pedagogy and technology and the contexts in which they function'.*

However, the TPACK theory and the scale used have been criticized for being specifically and narrowly designed for long-term school teachers' training programmes, where they are required to design content.

There was a need for a theory and a scale that could be administered efficiently to a wider variety of contexts. Appendix T presents an analysis of various scales used to measure TPACK. The scales analysed were developed by various researchers such as Schmidt, Baran, Thompson, Mishra, et al. (2009), Koh et al. (2010), Zelkowski et al. (2013), Shin et al. (2009), Koh et al. (2010), Archambault and Crippen (2009), Jimoyiannis and Komis (2007), Zelkowski et al. (2013) and Harris et al. (2010). The aim of this analysis was to understand how TPACK has been conceptualised and how it could be measured.

Although this framework provides valuable insights into the kinds of knowledge that lecturers need, development of a TPACK measurement tool has been challenging. After development of this conceptual framework, many TPACK measurement tools were devised so that effectiveness of E-learning PD can be understood (Albion et al., 2010; Koehler et al., 2012; Shin et al., 2009). The ideal instrument should be valid, reliable, conveniently administered and relevant to a wide variety of contexts, and conveniently analysed (Albion et al., 2010; Shin et al., 2009).

After considering all the major TPACK measurement tools, this study initially adapted many items from Schmidt, Baran, Thompson, Koehler, et al. (2009) survey. It was initially viewed as the most suitable scale for this study because of the relevance of its items, its simplicity and clarity. In the Questionnaire section in the Methodology Chapter, I specified which items were considered and why TPACK questionnaire items were eliminated later, while TPACK as a theory was conceptually crucial.

TPACK is theoretically important for this study since it explains the relationships between technology, pedagogy and content in PD programmes. It enabled me to conceptualise and consider the links between PD and the different kinds of knowledge explained earlier: TK, CK, PK, TCK, PCK, PTK and TPACK. This is linked with all the research questions. For instance, the second research question investigates lecturers' perceptions of and experiences with E-leaning in teaching specific disciplines and modules and the pedagogical implications of E-learning use.

4.5 Technology Acceptance Model

The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) states that a person's willingness to use a system is determined by two factors: perceived usefulness, and perceived ease of use (Davis, 1986a). Perceived usefulness refers to the individual's judgement of the importance of a system in enhancing his or her job performance, while ease of use refers to the perception of the amount of effort needed in order to learn and use a system (Venkatesh & Davis, 2000).

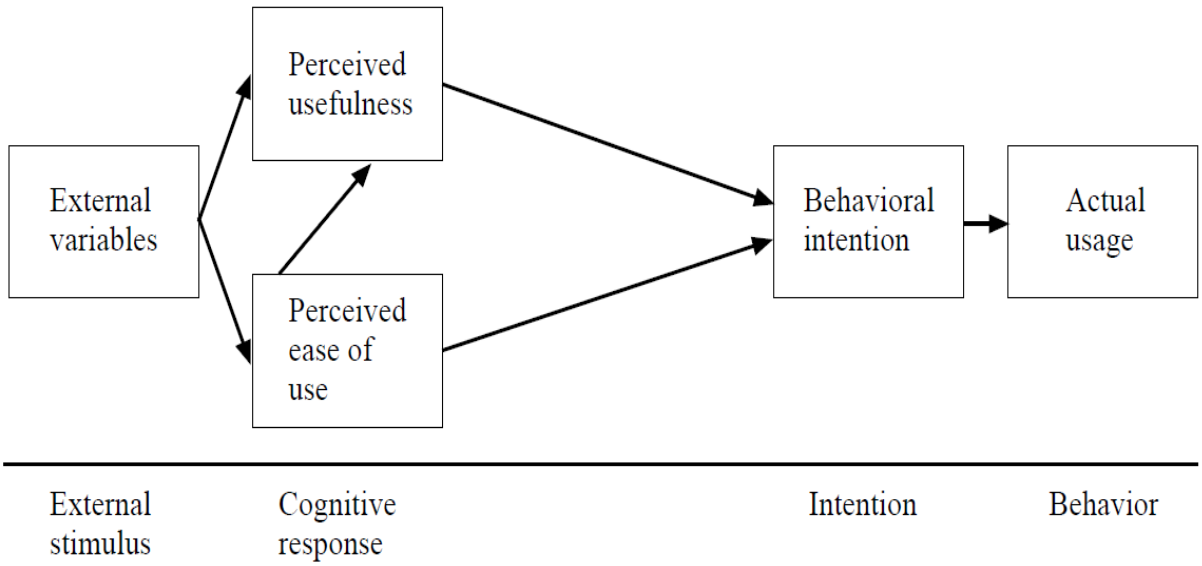


Figure 16: Technology Acceptance Model Source: Davis and Venkatesh (1996)

TAM proposes that a person's actual use of a system is determined by behavioural intentions to use that system. This intention is affected by a person's perceived usefulness of the system and perceived ease of use. Usefulness is based on judgement of

the value a system adds to improving performance, ease of use is linked to the effort needed to use it (Davis, 1989; Davis & Venkatesh, 1996). External variables affect an individual's perceived usefulness and ease of use. The external variables can be the system design features such as interface and audio/visual content. Although TAM might be a useful tool at the level of individuals, it does not describe the sociocultural aspect of technology use where individuals are affected by people, organisations and society (Bagozzi, 2007).

Technology Acceptance Model is based on the Theory of Reasoned Action, which was developed by Ajzen and Fishbein (1977) in order to explained the relationship between attitudes and behaviour. TAM provides a tool that enables researchers to understand the role of lecturers' perceptions of usefulness and its impact on E-learning use, in addition to lecturers' perceptions of the user-friendliness of technology and the effort needed to learn to use technologies.

Many elements of the TAM model were used in this study. For example, some interview questions and interviews were based on TAM and TAM surveys. TAM informed the design of the Conceptual Framework. The main TAM measurement tools adapted for the questionnaire of study were designed by Davis (1989) and Davis (1993). The perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, E-learning design features, intention to use and whether lecturers use certain E-learning forms were investigated in this study.

4.6 Conclusion

This chapter looked at the theoretical foundations that formed the conceptual framework of this study. The discussion included the rationale for adapting the Three Nested levels of PD, the CoP, TPACK and TAM in this study, their distinctive features, and the manner in which they complement each other to answer the research questions.

The CoP was employed in this study because of its ability to identify, capture and explain lecturers' and managers' experiences and perceptions toward informal E-learning PD. The manner in which CoP explained its concepts of domain, practice, interaction, content and context were crucial to answering the research questions.

The TPACK framework was a useful tool particularly for understanding formal E-learning PD, lecturers' perceptions toward E-learning, and the relationships made between technology, pedagogy and the subjects taught at the college. The seven knowledge domains explained by TPACK enabled me to examine the relationships between these knowledge domains and lecturers' and managers' E-learning PD perceptions and experiences.

The TAM was adapted here since it was important for understanding lecturers' and managers' perceptions, experiences and motivations to use E-learning. It was particularly essential for conceptualizing individual's cognition of usefulness of technology to their practice and ease of use. This was used to investigate lecturers' intention to use technology and their actual use.

These models were adapted and they complemented each other and enabled me to answer the research questions. Twining's model (2013) was crucial to understand the different roles and responsibilities toward E-learning PD at the individual, college and wider levels. It also enabled me to accommodate the other theories within it. These learning theories complemented each other by capturing a holistic picture of individual perceptions, institutional context and social factors affecting E-learning PD. These learning theories were adapted and formed the Conceptual Framework of the study.

The following chapter, the research methodology, examines the research objectives, research outline, researcher positionality and the data collection methods used in this study.

Chapter 5: **Methodology**

5.1 Introduction

This chapter describes the research methodology followed in this study. It starts with the research objectives and research questions. This is followed by the research positionality. The research design and data collection methods illustrate the methods used to collect data, the strategy followed in implementing them and the rationale for their choice. This is followed by analysing the piloting process of the research instruments. This chapter ends with a discussion of the steps taken to ensure that this research was undertaken in an ethical manner.

5.2 Research Objectives and Questions

The study set out to improve our understanding of E-learning PD in Higher Education (HE). More specifically, it focused on lecturers' and managers' experiences and perceptions toward E-learning PD and technology use in teaching and learning. It investigated how E-learning PD, formal and informal, was taking place on a day-to-day basis at the College.

The study investigated the formal organisation of E-learning PD at Ibri College by observing PD activities, analysing documents and investigating the perceptions of trainers, trainees and the college management using interviews and focus groups. The study also examined informal learning, how it occurred on a daily basis at the College and the processes involved in it. For example, lecturers' collaboration, discussions, support and the different lecturers' communities at the College. The literature review in chapter 3 and the Conceptual Framework discussed in chapter 4 informed the research design of this study.

The research questions in this study are:

1. What are lecturers' and managers' perceptions of E-learning use in teaching?

2. What are lecturers' E-learning pedagogical and technological perceptions, considerations and experiences?

3. What are lecturers' and managers' perceptions of E-learning PD at Ibri College of Technology?

3.1. How does formal learning occur at Ibri College of Technology?

3.2. How does informal learning occur at Ibri College of Technology?

The research methods complemented each other in answering these research questions. Within the discussion of each method, I will illustrate how they aided in answering the research questions.

5.3 Research Positionality

Positionality refers to researchers' worldviews (ontological, epistemological and methodological assumptions) and their position to the research topic, research participants and research context (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013; Sikes, 2004). This section starts with discussion of the importance of positionality and 'reflexivity'; followed by positionality to the research topic, participants and context; then discussion of positionality toward the insider/outsider dichotomy; and finally, research paradigms positionality (ontological, epistemological and methodological assumptions).

5.3.1 Importance of Positionality

Researcher positionality is important because fundamental assumptions, identity and personal experiences may influence all stages of research, starting from choice of the

research subject to interpretation of findings (Holmes, 2014; Sikes, 2004). Furthermore, positionality is crucial since it enables researchers to reflect and consider their positions in relation to recognised frameworks, methodologies and belief systems. Etherington (2004) criticised the 'illusory gap' between researchers and researched, where researchers are viewed as objective and independent from the researched. Berger (2015, p220) argues that:

> *'Researchers need to increasingly focus on self-knowledge and sensitivity; better understand the role of the self in the creation of knowledge; carefully self-monitor the impact of their biases, beliefs, and personal experiences on their research; and maintain the balance between the personal and the universal'.*

According to Berger (2015) positionality affects research in three main ways: respondents may be willing to share with some researchers more than others, it can affect the researcher/researched relationship, and affect researchers' conceptualizations, decisions and interpretations. However, it seems that it is hard to draw a line between Berger's distinction of researcher/researched relationship and participants' willingness to share information, since they may affect each other. Furthermore, positionality is not only crucial to researchers, but also to people who read and use research, in order to make informed judgements about research validity, relevance to their contexts and researchers' influence. To sum up, positionality is important for researchers and consumers of research in order to make informed judgements and have an adequate understanding of researchers' judgements, thinking, and interpretations throughout the research process, since the researcher is viewed as an indispensable part of data in research.

5.3.2 Positionality and Reflexivity

The notion of positionality is fundamentally based on research 'reflexivity', where researcher positionality is continuously scrutinized through a process of research reflection and a self-reflection. Darawsheh (2014, p561) defined reflexivity as:

> *'The continuous process of self-reflection that researchers engage in to generate awareness about their actions, feelings and perceptions'.*

Hence, researcher positionality is scrutinised and revealed through 'reflexivity', where researchers acknowledge that the researcher and the researched are not independent entities (Berger, 2015; Willig, 2013). Berger (2015, p220) defined reflexivity as:

> *'The process of a continual internal dialogue and critical self-evaluation of researcher's positionality as well as active acknowledgement and explicit recognition that this positionality may affect the research process and outcome'.*

Nonetheless, reflexivity does not have to be an 'internal dialogue', since researchers may share these reflections with their participants to 'validate' them or to get their opinions and additional information (Etherington, 2004).

5.3.3 Positionality to Research Topic and Context

I had some knowledge of and experience at the research context, Ibri College. I worked as a lecturer in the English Language Centre (ELC) at Ibri College for three years from 2010 to 2013; in addition, I was the head of the College Media Committee (responsible for college website and magazine), a member of College Portfolio Writing Committee and founder of English Society. For these reasons, I had good connections with lecturers from all academic departments and the College management, especially with ELC lecturers. Furthermore, this gave me a wider perspective of the College context, since I did not restrain myself to the duties within the ELC. Being part in writing the College Portfolio for the OAAA enabled me to work with lecturers and managers to review and report the overall mechanisms at the College level and within each department. This helped in gaining a general understanding of the College context, since the portfolio itself is rich in data and the writing/reviewing process itself was a valuable learning experience about the work mechanisms within the college. The media committee kept me up-to-date with

all the major activities at the College, since they were reported on the College website and magazine.

Part of the context is the wider context at the town where the College is located (Ibri), the national context (Oman) and the sponsor (Ministry of Manpower). I am an Omani national and Ibri is my permanent residence from birth until now. I moved temporarily to different cities or countries for study (Bachelor, Master's degrees and other degrees) and short work duties. I was involved with the College sponsor mainly as part of the role in writing the College Portfolio, in addition to being an employee sent for a Master's degree by the Ministry itself. This gave me knowledge about the Ministry roles in addition to having first-hand experience with working with the Quality Office at the Ministry of Manpower. Currently, the Ministry of Higher Education sponsors my PhD, but I am still considered a lecturer for the Colleges of Technology as per the Omani law.

Regarding the research topic, E-learning and PD, I feel that I did not have enough prior experience and knowledge of the College context because of the limited E-learning PD organised when I was a lecturer there. Furthermore, I did not have any experience outside the College with E-learning PD or adequate prior knowledge of the topic itself. When I joined the College, I expected to learn from different forms of PD programmes there. However, there was lack of opportunities. Because of my motivation, I was willing to drive to Muscat 3 hours to get there and 3 hours back to attend PD, but later felt it was exhausting and stopped. This may have been one of the motivations for the decision to investigate PD at the College. Regarding E-learning, I depended a lot on technology to develop my skills when I was a student, and admired lecturers who used them for discussions, explanation or projects. This may have been a motivation for researching this area.

5.3.4 Positionality toward Participants: Insider/Outsider Dichotomy

A researcher might be viewed as an insider or outsider to the culture being studied, where insiders are 'members' of a group and outsiders are non-members (Hammersley, 1993; Merton, 1972). Membership to a group is not a straightforward notion, and it can be affected by a wide range of factors. For example, researcher proximity to any group investigated may be determined by researchers' and participants' interests, personalities, educational backgrounds, gender and research topic and methodology (Berger, 2015). The notions 'emic' and 'etic' describe whether researchers are positioned as insiders or outsiders to the group investigated. An insider is described as someone whose biography and experience makes him/her familiar with the group being investigated while an outsider is someone who does not have sufficient prior knowledge, experience and biographical likeliness to the group studied (Chereni, 2014; Griffith, 1998). These are examples of a wide set of complicated factors, where membership may be better viewed as relative than being either insiders or outsiders. Therefore, there are no absolute insiders or outsiders to research. Considering the position of the researcher to the group may provide valuable information to enrich the reflexivity process in research (Chereni, 2014).

As a researcher, I feel that my position is somewhere in between an insider and an outsider. First, there are features that qualify me to be an insider, since my experience at the College gives me intimate knowledge of the group that an outsider researcher may not have by simply studying the group. I also have features that may make me partly an outsider. Spending many years away from the College has an impact since with time people and the context may have experienced many changes. This includes changes in some staff members and managers. Even as a researcher my identity may have changed over time and I may view the topic, participants and the context differently today (Holmes, 2014; Kerstetter, 2012). Furthermore, it is not only about how I view and position myself, but how the participants view me. Being away for many years and visiting the College for research purposes may have affected their view towards me.

The advantages of having this insider knowledge and experience was getting research access, getting access to the culture and individuals' experiences, using prior knowledge to interpret things which outsiders might find difficult to interpret (Holmes, 2014; Kusow, 2003). The disadvantages are that I may have inherited bias, previous misconceptions and may find it difficult to detach myself from them (Holmes, 2014). Furthermore, in many cases during the study participants assumed that I already knew things; consequently, I had to spend an extra effort asking them to clarify things. For example, in interview 1, the lecturer was asked why she stated that PD is not effective at the College, and she replied 'You know it does not work'. I indicated that I also consider myself as a combination or something between an insider/outsider, by asking for a clarification for her statement.

I feel that being away from the College may have some advantages. For example, getting some distance enabled me to see the bigger picture which may not be possible if I was too attached to the context and absorbed in the day-to-day activities. Furthermore, the participants may not have taken the research seriously since they may have expected that I already know everything. However, being away from the College may make me assume that things remained as they were before I left. Therefore, it was important to be conscious about not making quick judgements and assumptions. Hammersley (1993, p433) argues that:

> *'[There are] no overwhelming advantages to being an insider or outsider'.*

According to Hammersley (1993), advantages of being an insider or outsider can balance themselves. Furthermore, their impact may depend on the research subject.

As an insider, I was a lecturer within the ELC at the College and had different responsibilities that required working with all the College departments and the management. The fact that my main role was teaching in the ELC was crucial to this study, since it determined the choice of participants of the lesson planning and lesson teaching activity, may have affected my interpretations, and positioned me to lecturers as insider/outsider to various extents. I attempted to spread the interviews equally among

all academic departments at the College. However, the lesson planning and lesson teaching activity was only with ELC lecturers because I felt that I would be more capable in understanding how English language lecturers link E-learning and E-learning PD with teaching their students, because I am a qualified language lecturer. Furthermore, the lesson planning and lesson teaching activity was time demanding and it was not possible to replicate that with the other departments. Access to data within the ELC was easier, while I had to pay extra care and effort to engaging with lecturers and managers within the other departments. Being involved with committees was an important factor, since many of the people I used to work with volunteered and became 'key informants' and tended to be more willing to participate than others.

5.3.5 Research Paradigms Positionality

In social science research, it is important to consider research paradigms (sometimes called worldviews), since they impact all stages of research (Creswell, 2013). Willis (2007, p8) defined a paradigm as:

> *'A comprehensive belief system, world view, a framework that guides research and practice in the field'.*

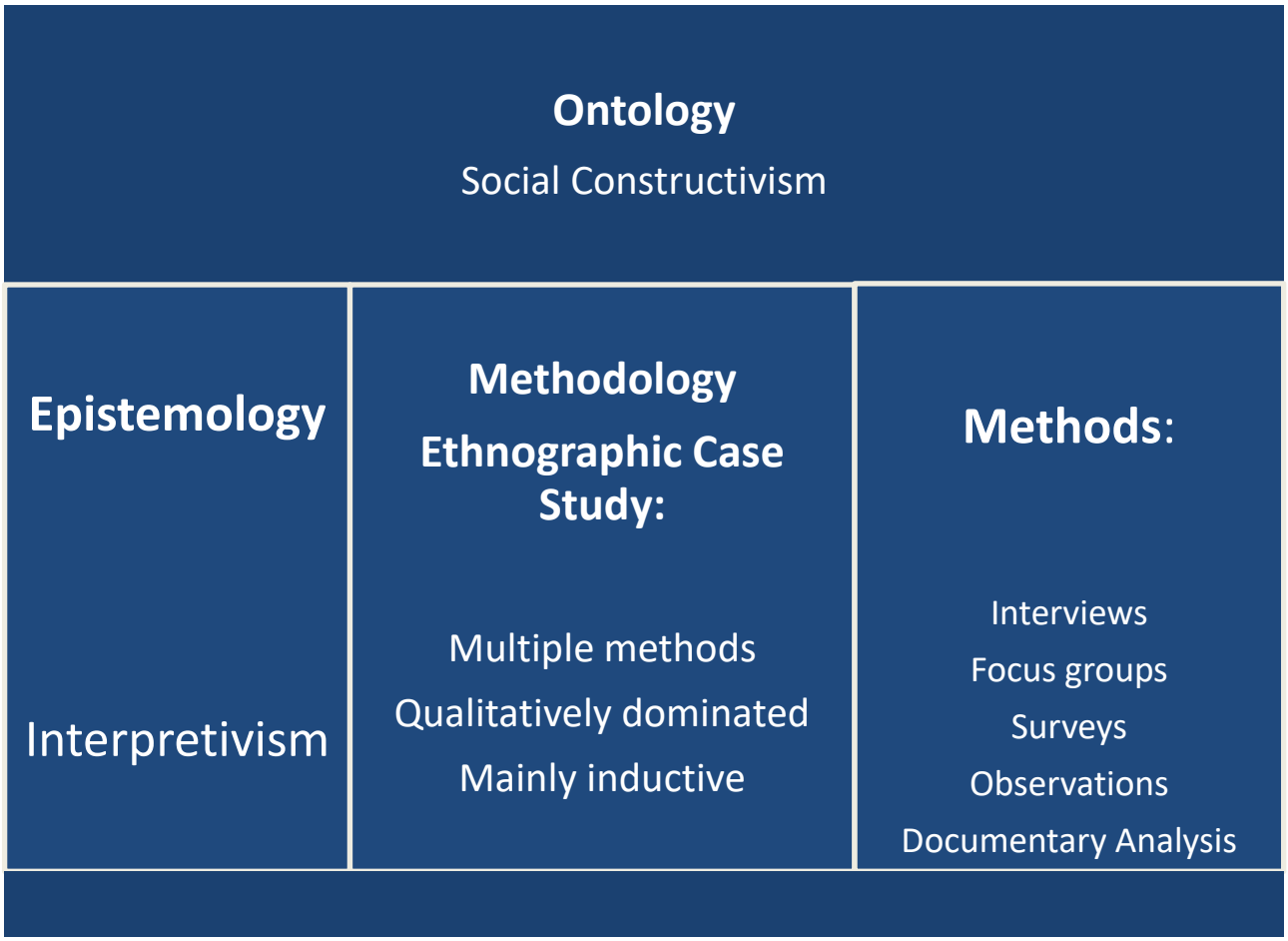
Paradigms can be divided into ontology (nature of reality), epistemology (the relationship between researcher and research) and methodology (the overarching research design to enable questions to be answered), and methods (tools for data collection and analysis) (Creswell, 2013). I revealed my own position on paradigms since they could affect all stages in this study.

For a very long time, there was an assumption that some paradigms are superior to others (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Taylor & Medina, 2013). This has been referred to as 'paradigm wars', where proponents of each paradigm defended their position (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Taylor & Medina, 2013). Historically, there has been overemphasis on positivism, which emphasizes quantification (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Positivism was

criticized for its unsuitability for social sciences because of its superficiality, reductionism, context stripping, and the weak assumptions of 'objectivity' and causality (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Nowadays, there is agreement that different paradigms serve different purposes and there is no one superior to another (Taylor & Medina, 2013; Teddlie, 2005), so the metaphor of 'paradigm war' may be deemed obsolete (Creswell, 2013; Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Researchers have reached many agreements such as the unavoidable role of the researcher in research, and the distinguishability of social sciences research from natural sciences research (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004).

The research paradigm of this study was based on my view of what suits best the research questions, purpose and focus. However, different researchers are likely to lean toward different paradigms for the same study, so that is why revealing them is important. Table 1 shows my ontological, epistemological and methodological beliefs for this study. These will be discussed later one at a time in relation to this research.

Table 1: My Philosophical Worldview (Research Paradigms)



This research was based on a social constructivist ontological view. Social constructivism is based on a relativist (interpretivist) epistemology, which views reality as complex and subjectively constructed by individuals rather than 'found' through objective observation; therefore, research should employ qualitative approaches that emphasize interactions, dialogue and rich contextual descriptions (Creswell, 2013; Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Social constructivist reality is shaped by people's backgrounds, personal experiences and cultures (Creswell, 2013). Therefore, in this research I took an active role where subjectivity could not be avoided, but intentionally embraced and highlighted (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Social constructivism was essential for this study since its focus was on lecturers' and managers' perceptions and the manner in which they conceptualised and experienced E-learning PD. To understand their perceptions, it was essential to investigate dialogues, interactions and the context.

Furthermore, I believe that I could not be objective since interpretations and interactions were key factors in this study.

There are two main strands of constructivism: social constructivism and cognitive (individual) constructivism (Amineh & Asl, 2015; Dagar & Yadav, 2016; Kanselaar, 2002; Palincsar, 1998; Phillips, 2000). Cognitive constructivism and social constructivism share many similarities and differences (Jones & Brader-Araje, 2002). These similarities and differences will be discussed here, in addition to the reasons for following a social constructivist ontological view.

Cognitive constructivism emphasises the role of individuals in constructing meaning; hence, reality could be constructed differently by different individuals (Amineh & Asl, 2015; Dagar & Yadav, 2016; Merriam & Caffarella, 1999; Piaget, 1972). Kanselaaar (2002, p1) argues that:

> *'Constructivism's central idea is that human knowledge is constructed, that learners build new knowledge upon the foundation of previous knowledge'.*

Although cognitive constructivism is important for understanding the individual processes that are involved in constructing meaning, it has been criticised for overlooking social and cultural constructions of reality and focusing only on individualistic constructions of reality (Amineh & Asl, 2015; Kanselaar, 2002). Bakhtin and Emerson (2013, p110) argue that this view is problematic because various forms of reality could exist at the same time; hence, they stated the following:

> *'truth is not born nor is it to be found inside the head of an individual person, it is born between people collectively searching for truth, in the process of their dialogic interaction.'*

By contrast, social constructivism emphasises the importance of a shared construction of reality among individuals and the role of socio-cultural context, in addition to the

individual construction of reality (Doolittle & Camp, 1999; Jones & Brader-Araje, 2002; Packer & Goicoechea, 2000; Vygotsky, 1978b). In other words, knowledge is the result of social interactions and shared constructions of meaning, rather than an individual construction of reality (Doolittle & Camp, 1999). This occurs through social interactions, dialogue and negotiation of meaning (Powell & Kalina, 2009; Vygotsky, 1980).

Both strands of constructivism share the view that learning occurs when individuals actively construct meaning (Jones & Brader-Araje, 2002; Piaget, 1964; Powell & Kalina, 2009; Vygotsky, 1978a). This occurs by making sense of new situations and constructing meaning based on existing knowledge (Jones & Brader-Araje, 2002; Piaget, 1964; Vygotsky, 1978b). Instead of looking at both strands as unitary theoretical positions, they could be better described as continuums, where individuals hold views that vary in their extremity towards their underlying positions (Cobb, 1994; Doolittle & Camp, 1999; Packer & Goicoechea, 2000). In this study, understanding the sociocultural processes that were involved in E-learning PD and the roles of lecturers' communities and collaboration between lecturers and managers were key areas of inquiry.

My methodological positionality was mainly based on my ontological and epistemological views, which described my views toward reality and how reality could be understood and investigated. I believe that an ethnographic case study (See Section 5.6) with multiple methods used was the most appropriate methodological approach to my study. The methods employed were qualitatively dominated (Section 5.8) because I believe that people's personal constructions and understanding of E-learning PD were central to this study. The quantitative method (Survey: Section 5.7) used statistical procedures to obtain an overview of attitudes and relationships between variables.

5.4 Research Design

The design of this study is an ethnographic case study with multiple methods. This means that the study prioritized qualitative data collection and analysis using focus groups, interviews, observations and document analysis. The aims of quantitative data using a survey was to explore the topic, identify any issues and patters, give a quantitative overview of some of the issues in this study and complement the information gathered from the other methods (Creswell, 2013).

This study adopted an ethnographic case study approach where Ibri College served as case study site where the discussions surrounding E-learning PD were investigated from different perspectives. Section 5.6 discusses the use of case study here. The study included a pilot study for three weeks from the 3rd of November 2015 to the 19th of November 2015. This was followed by fieldwork for 12 weeks from the 3rd of February 2016 to the 2nd of May 2016.

Multiple methods were used in my ethnographic case study to gather data in this study: focus groups, interviews, questionnaires, documentary analysis and observation. Methods can be defined as the range of approaches used to gather, analyse and interpret data (Bryman, 2012; Cohen et al., 2013). Methods can be qualitative such as interviews, observation and focus groups, or quantitative such as questionnaires. Generally, qualitative approaches collect and analyse data in the form of words, while quantitative approaches in the form of numerically derived data (Bryman, 2003; Kneale & Santy, 1999). This study was qualitatively dominated, since the vast majority of data was collected and analysed in the form of words. This was supported with quantitative data in the form of numbers and statistics based on the questionnaire used.

The decision of method choice for this study was based on the research question, topic, focus (Cohen et al., 2013; Denscombe, 1998; Flick, 2014; Mason, 2002; Silverman, 2005) and my positionality. This is based on my opinion that there is no method superior to another and choice of methods was influenced by several factors including the research questions and context (Denscombe, 1998; Punch, 2005; Silverman, 2005). Previous

discussion of my research positionality, including my worldviews (paradigms), showed how they could affect all stages of research, including research design and methodology.

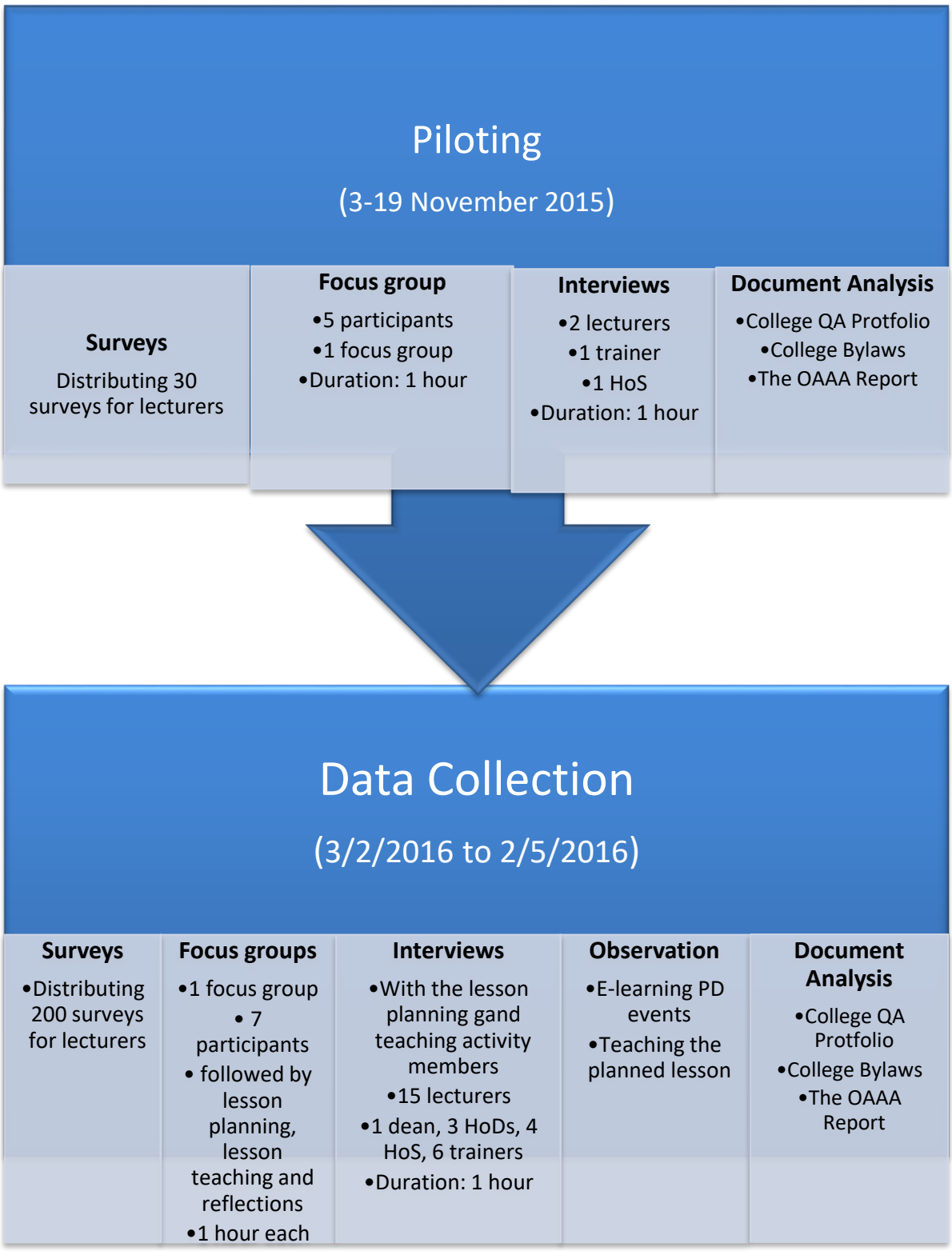


Figure 17: The Research Design of this Study

Figure 17 shows the research design of this study. Multiple methods were used in the pilot stage and the fieldwork stage. In the analysis, data is analysed without referring to

piloting or fieldwork stage, since minor changes were made to the data collection methods. Each method will be discussed later in the corresponding section related to it.

The following sections will discuss the data collection methods in the study, the rationale for their choice, and how they were carried out. Section 5.7 talks about quantitative methods and Section 5.8 discusses qualitative methods. The next section will discuss the rationale for employing multiple methods in the study, instead of using a single method.

5.5 Use of Multiple Methods

Use of multiple methods in this study aimed to gain a deeper understanding, a fuller picture, and a greater confidence of the phenomena being studied (Bazeley, 2006; Johnson et al., 2007). Due to the complexity of the phenomena investigated in this study and the importance of understanding the E-learning PD context and participants' practices and perceptions, it was not possible to conduct the study using a single method without losing important information necessary to answer the research questions. Furthermore, each method employed had different inherited strengths and limitations and dependence on a single method would have resulted in a poorer understanding of the investigated phenomena (Hunter & Brewer, 2003). The rationale for each method was considered thoroughly regarding how the multiple methods that were used could complement one another and how findings from different sources could be analysed, interpreted and represented.

A crucial reason for choosing multiple methods was that this was a case study research and gaining a comprehensive understanding of the E-learning PD context and the lecturers' and managers' E-learning and E-learning PD practices and perceptions was necessary to answer the research questions. Case study research, which seeks to gain a deep understanding of a specific context, typically employs multiple methods (Mills et al.,

2010; Swanson & Holton, 2005; Yin, 2014). Hence, Mills et al. (2010, p580) argue the following:

> 'The case study method is itself multimethod in nature. In fact, a feature of case study research is the use of multiple and complex data sources that may include qualitative … and quantitative … records. It can be argued that the aim of case study research is to achieve a wide, in-depth assessment of a context and its participants.'

An important feature of this study is that it sought to gain both a deep and a comprehensive understanding of E-learning PD at the Higher Education Institution (HEI) that was investigated. This was pursued by investigating the various levels that influenced E-learning PD, such as at the micro (individual), meso (institutional) and macro (governmental) levels. The in-depth investigation required the employment of multiple methods, such as interviews, focus groups and observations in order to investigate complex phenomena such as the lecturers' use of E-learning in their classrooms.

It seems that there are inconsistencies in defining 'multimethod', where it is common to label multimethod design as 'mixed methods' design (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010). However, use of multiple methods does not necessarily mean that there is 'mixing' of them at the study. Morse (2003, p190) defined multimethod design as:

> 'The conduct of two or more research methods, each conducted rigorously and complete in itself, in one project. The results are then triangulated to form a comprehensive whole'.

Creswell and Clark (2007, p83) argued that:

> 'A study that includes both quantitative and qualitative methods without explicitly mixing the date derived from each is simply a collection of multiple methods'.

The mixing according to this statement should be at the 'data derived', or analysed. In this study, multiple methods were used but there was limited extent of mixing between them;

since each method was conducted by itself; therefore, this study followed a multimethod design (Hunter & Brewer, 2003).

This study used multiple qualitative and quantitative research methods. The methods used were predominantly qualitative, with quantitative data playing a supplementary role to enhance understanding of the research topic and the participants. The use of multiple methods enabled initiating the research with a questionnaire and documentary analysis; then followed by the interviews, focus groups and observations to enhance understanding, clarify findings and complement data (Greene et al., 1989; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Questionnaires were used to gain an overview of the different perspectives and practices at the college and also as a sampling frame for selecting lecturers for interviews. Documentary analysis was used to gather data about the E-learning PD policy, strategies, institutional support structures, responsibilities and practices. These data were important for understanding the E-learning PD context at the college and for selecting interviewees based on their roles and responsibilities.

The different methods that were used in the study informed as well as complemented one another. For example, the documentary analysis and questionnaires were conducted before interviews, focus groups and observations, to gain a general understanding of the E-learning PD context at the college, which allowed the tailoring of the other methods and assisted with selecting interview participants. Documentary analysis provided valuable information that guided certain interview questions, mainly to managers. For instance, managers were asked about discrepancies between policy and practice. Without understanding the roles of managers based on documentary analysis, it would not have been possible to tailor questions based on managers' positions and their E-learning PD responsibilities. After collecting data from the questionnaires and documents, the initial interview and focus group questions were modified based on the findings. For instance, the questionnaire revealed that many lecturers relied on colleagues and on self-learning for professional development. Consequently, informal learning and self-learning were investigated in the interviews and focus groups.

The multiple methods used enabled me to gain a deep understanding of the E-learning PD and a fuller picture of the case investigated, and consequently, enabled me to answer the research questions and have a greater confidence in the findings. Use of multiple methods in this research was important since the research questions required the application of more than a single method (Newman et al., 2003). Using a single method would not have been enough to answer the research question adequately, or would have provided a partial understanding based on the method used (Creswell, 2013). Using multiple methods meant that method selection was more likely to be based on the research questions, rather than preconceived biases towards a specific research paradigm, or having better knowledge and skills in some methods more than others (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Multimethod research enabled me to get a better and a more complete picture of lecturers' and managers' attitudes and behaviour, since different methods have different strengths and are better in analysing different aspects of human behaviour than others (Morse, 2003; Poteete et al., 2010; Stange et al., 1994; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2003).

This study benefited from the different strengths of the methods used and compensated for the limitations and weaknesses that were inherent to each method (Creswell, 2013; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). For example, focus groups were ideal for revealing group dynamics, gaining different perspectives and replicating social interactions. During the interviews, although there was some flexibility in the questions asked, interactions were mainly in question and answer form. Questions that were posed during the focus groups allowed participants more freedom to discuss issues among them, and they regularly strayed from the questions to talk about issues they regarded as important. However, sometimes the lecturers diverted from the study's focus; and I had to raise questions to bring them back to the research topic. In addition, the focus groups may have discouraged lecturers from giving in-depth opinions and offering personal experiences if they preferred to keep such information confidential, especially amongst colleagues. The focus group discussions were influenced by group interactions, power relations and the lecturers' openness to sharing personal experiences and attitudes. Some lecturers in the focus groups were more outspoken than others; hence, I occasionally had to intervene to

ensure that all participants had an opportunity to share their opinions. Furthermore, the lecturers with less popular views may not have had a chance to express their views. Some of the less vocal focus group participants were more willing to express sceptical views of E-learning and E-learning PD and to share personal experiences during later interviews. In addition, while interviews were more appropriate for gaining in-depth insights into lecturers' perceptions, they may not have had accurately shown what happened in classrooms or in day-to-day lecturers' practices. Therefore, the lesson planning and teaching activity and classroom observations added valuable information to this study. Using a large-scale survey helped in getting a bigger picture of lecturers' attitudes, experiences with E-learning at Ibri College, and gathering information to support the other methods, but it did not provide a platform for interacting with lecturers and probing further into interesting answers. These are a few examples of the manner in which the methods complemented each other and enabled me to answer the research questions of this study.

Although using multiple methods was essential for this study, it is important to address certain challenges that were associated with their use. In addition to the extra time and effort that were required for the design, data collection and data analysis, another challenge was inconsistencies in the data that emerged from different methods (deMarrais & Lapan, 2003; Meetoo & Temple, 2003; Morse, 2003). This occurred when those who participated in more than a single method showed inconsistent perspectives. Regarding such challenges, Meetoo and Temple (2003, p3) argue the following:

> *'Adopting an interpretative epistemology makes it problematic to add findings together without considering the possibilities for contradiction and difference that arise from centrality of context and the process of data production'.*

The contradictions that emerged, which were limited, were caused by several factors, such as learning new information, going through new experiences, the nature of the method used and/or a misunderstanding of concepts (Brewer & Hunter, 2006; Meetoo & Temple, 2003). These contradictions were investigated to understand their causes, to

allow participants to clarify their perceptions and to build greater confidence in the findings.

Participants who provided contradictory information were asked for clarification about the cause of any inconstancies. For example, one participant showed a negative attitude towards conferences in the questionnaire yet expressed a positive attitude towards them when interviewed later. When asked about this contradiction, she stated that she was a new staff member, and attending a recent conference that had been organised by the college persuaded her that it was an effective form of PD. This experience, which occurred after completing the questionnaire and before the interview was the cause of the inconsistency. In another instance, a lecturer initially referred to E-learning as ineffective but showed a more positive attitude after engaging in the lesson planning and the lesson teaching activity. Although the contradictions required extra effort in data collection and analysis, using multiple methods was valuable because it highlighted the complexity of E-learning PD and lecturers' uncertainty about its usefulness and applicability to their contexts and classrooms. In support of this, Meetoo and Temple (2003, p4) argue the following:

> *'contradiction and tension between findings generated by different methods are to be valued and explored and not used to judge whether one set of findings produced under specific conditions are validated by findings produced under different conditions'.*

However, using a single method does not guarantee data consistency because inconsistency can be caused by other factors, such as participants' uncertainty towards a topic. Brewer and Hunter (2006) argue that social life is complicated; therefore, inconsistent findings can result from this complexity. It was important to investigate the causes of inconsistencies to instil greater confidence in the study and its findings.

One of the key reasons for using multiple methods in this study was its suitability for the research approach. An ethnographic case study approach was used to investigate the E-

learning PD culture, practices and perceptions at a HEI. The next section discusses the use of an ethnographic case study approach in this study.

5.6 Ethnographic Case Study

This study adopted an ethnographic case study approach where Ibri College served as the case investigated. This section starts with analysis of ethnographic research. This is followed by discussion of ethnographic case study, its features, suitability for this study and its strengths and limitations. This section also discusses the rationale for choosing this specific case and concludes with the importance of getting an 'emic' perspective.

Ethnography is the study of culture, usually through multiple methods, in the natural occurring place of phenomena and where investigations are typically detailed and unstructured (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). Ethnographic case study can be defined as a study:

> *'Wherein the culture of a particular social group is studied in depth'*
> *(Merriam, 2009, p42).*

It is a subjective experience by the researcher where he/she immerses personally in the ongoing activities in a place or a culture (Pole & Morrison, 2003; Wolcott, 2005). Ethnography has become widely accepted in social sciences (Hammersley, 2013). This could be linked to the arguments made earlier in research positionality, that positivism and having a 'scientific' approach were the norm in social science research, then gradually constructivism and interpretivism became more accepted (Hammersley, 2013). Consequently, ethnography gradually received more recognition, since it attempts to investigate phenomena in its 'natural occurring place', rather than in artificial or controlled environment (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007).

Many criticisms of ethnographic research are related to the arguments of researcher/researched relationship and subjectivism/objectivism in research. Earlier in research positionality, I acknowledged that the study was affected by my positionality from the choice of topic to the interpretation of findings. In my view, ethnographic research was fundamental for understanding the culture of E-learning PD at Ibri College. One of the limitations of following an ethnographic approach is that it is common to find studies labelled as 'ethnographic', without involving an intensive period of engagement, or being based only on interviews (Atkinson, 2014). This might be due to the lack of clarity of 'intensity' required in ethnography and methodological processes required (Atkinson, 2014). In this study, spending a considerable amount of time in the field was crucial, in addition to immersing myself in the daily activities at the College every workday for four months. Without such intensive immersion in the field, I would not have been able to gain adequate access and understanding of the E-learning PD culture at the College.

Case study can be defined as:

> *'a study of a singularity conducted in depth in natural settings' (Bassey, 1999, p47).*

Or it can be defined as a study that focuses on:

> 'the particularity and complexity of a single case' *(Stake, 1995, xi).*

Singularity here means a single unit such as a person, an institution or a community (Cohen et al., 2013). In this study, a single HEI was the case. Normal or 'natural settings' indicate that a researcher investigates phenomena 'in action' in their natural life cycle during the period of the study (Cohen et al., 2013; MacDonald & Walker, 1975). The researcher is interested in the 'life' of the case and its subjects, by getting in-depth observations for a period of time and observing how the participants, the culture and the environment may change over time (Yin, 2014). Yin (2014, p2) argues that:

> *'A case study investigates a contemporary phenomenon ("the case") in its real-world context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident'.*

Case study has become increasingly popular and recognised in social science research (Gagnon, 2010; Hyett et al., 2014; Yin, 2014).

Ethnographic case study as a research method was viewed with scepticisms for many reasons. Since case study is interested in the 'life' and 'natural settings' of phenomena, it is not possible to undertake case study with rigid and fixed research design (Gagnon, 2010). Consequently, it has been viewed as poorly designed, unsystematic and unstructured (Gagnon, 2010; Yin, 2014). However, Yin (2014) argues that case study is suitable for studies where researchers have little or no control over behaviours, and where the research questions are open, as 'why' and 'how' phenomena occurs. Furthermore, as interpretivists approaches became widely acceptable in social science research, the view of being 'unscientific' has become superseded (Gagnon, 2010). Gagnon (2010, px) argues that:

> *'Not only has the case method become 'scientifically correct' but there also seems to be a bias in favour of it within the academic community'.*

Another critique of case study research is the issue of 'generalizability', since it emphasises the role of context and the researcher subjectivity (Yin, 2014). Hyett et al. (2014) argues that descriptions of case study research vary widely. This might be due to the complexity of issues case studies incorporate, where flexibility of paradigms, designs and methods lead to different descriptions and interpretations of case studies (Hyett et al., 2014). Although case study emphasises the study of a singular unit, which poses challenges toward generalizability, providing rich descriptions can guide readers to the relevance of the case investigated (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). One limitation that may at the same time be viewed as a strength of case study, is the requirement to spend an extensive time at the field to provide rich descriptions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). This may result in financial and time challenges, but also result in better understanding of learning cultures and life within the case (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

Although case study typically employs multiple sources of evidence, such as observations, interviews and focus groups, the researcher is interested in the 'wholeness' or integrity of the phenomena being studied, not in gathering a loose collection of information (Yin, 2014). This informed the research design of this study and the analysis, since multiple methods were used and the analysis attempted to capture the patterns and themes that emerged from the field.

In short, case study is a research that focuses on single phenomena such as a person, an organisation or a culture, using multiple sources of inquiry and evidence in order to reach in-depth understanding of the case as a whole, by collecting data from multiple sources of evidence. The key features of case study are:

- In depth investigation
- In natural settings
- Investigates wholeness of a singular case
- Multiple sources of evidence are used

Ibri College was selected because of its intrinsic features in addition to instrumental reasons (Stake, 1995). The College has many unique intrinsic characteristics that encouraged me to investigate it (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). It is a newly established College (established 2007) growing rapidly in the number of students, lecturers and size of campus. The College indicated that it is attempting to develop its E-learning PD practices. It is seeking accreditation from the Omani Academic Accreditation Authority (OAAA), and was advised to develop its E-learning and E-learning PD practices as a way forward in order to get formal accreditation and improve its practices. The College is located in a considerably remote location, which resulted in lack of E-learning PD and college dependence on its lecturers to deliver PD. The College was also chosen for instrumental reasons, such as the ability to get access and my inability to examine more HEIs because of time and resources limitations. I indicated earlier that my positionality had played a major role and affected all stages of the case studied, and that is why it was revealed.

Case study was a suitable method for this research since the study focus and research questions required this form of research, because the phenomena investigated was embedded within complex social units (Yin, 2014). This case study was ethnographic, where I spent considerable time at the college (almost 4 months) studying the sociocultural aspects of the phenomena, by describing the culture, observing the participants' daily lives, and seeking understanding from the point of view of the research subjects.

Getting an 'emic perspective' was important since this study attempted to understand phenomena from the point of view of participants (Morris et al., 1999). In this study, observation and interviews were general at the beginning and then became progressively focused, as some issues emerged as important, while other issues reached some level of saturation as participants provided similar and repeated perspectives. I did not approach the case with a predetermined list of people and issues to investigate, but it was an exploratory journey. I tried to immerse myself in the field by talking with people, trying to understand their perceptions and trying to understand issues from their perspectives.

5.7 Quantitative Research Methods

5.7.1 Questionnaires

Quantitative research is research that emphasizes quantification in the processes of data collection and analysis (Bryman, 2012). The questionnaire is a quantitative method that typically involves collecting data from a representative sample of the population at a specific point of time, and usually results in data in the form of numbers (Bell, 2005; Cohen et al., 2013; Denscombe, 1998). It is a popular method of data collection in social science research because it enables researchers to generalize their findings and they can be quickly administered and analysed (Cohen et al., 2013; Dooley, 2001).

However, there are many limitations to surveys. Information in the real world does not come naturally in numeric form, so researchers need to come up with methods to turn information into numbers. Different researchers might use different methods to elicit information in the form of numbers. Blaxter et al. (2006, p60) argue that:

> *'[Quantitative data is] falsely…. presented or perceived as being about gathering of 'facts''.*

Questionnaires usually get trends but fail to get in-depth data. The researcher has no control over the accuracy of the answers provided by the respondents. Furthermore, many respondents may not take it seriously or attempt to finish it quickly. Human behaviour is unpredictable and involves so many factors, so researchers cannot control or choose the variables in a situation similar to laboratory experiments (Cohen et al., 2013).

In this study, a questionnaire was distributed to more than 200 lecturers at Ibri College for many purposes. First, the questionnaire was distributed to capture significant statistical information about lecturers' perceptions and experiences with E-learning PD. This includes getting demographic data which aimed at investigating how different factors such as gender, age, subject area, teaching experience and qualifications affect lecturers' perceptions and experiences. Furthermore, the questionnaire gathered information related to lecturers' attitudes toward E-learning PD, engagement and satisfaction with E-learning PD at the College, and use of E-learning in teaching. This information enabled me to get a general understanding of E-learning PD at the College.

The survey complemented and informed the other methods. For example, the survey is anonymous and participants did not have to leave any personal information, unless they volunteered to take part in interviews and left their contact details. At the end of the questionnaire, lecturers were asked to leave their details only if they would like to take part in interviews. As a result, I was able to use the survey as a sampling frame where interesting cases were selected for interviews. Furthermore, an initial analysis of the survey findings helped in tailoring the interview questions based on individual responses.

The survey was initially based on the TPACK and TAM surveys (Davis, 1989, 1993; Schmidt, Baran, Thompson, Mishra, et al., 2009) in addition to new items that I constructed based on the focus of the research, the conceptual framework and the literature review. Schmidt's TPACK survey items were removed later since I believe that it was not appropriate or important to 'measure' lecturers' technological, pedagogical and content knowledge. I believe keeping these items may have discouraged lecturers from taking part in a study that 'tests' them, alienated lecturers from the study and reduced volunteers for interviews. Furthermore, this study did not intend to measure lectures' knowledge. Schmidt's survey was designed for pre-service school teachers, and it asks questions which I believe are not appropriate for HE academics. For example, it asks 'I know how to assess student performance in the classroom' and 'I have sufficient knowledge about science'. Some of the items related to demographic data in Schmidt's survey were adapted for this study. Davis's TAM surveys (1993 & 1989) included many items that informed the questionnaire used in this study. Table 2 shows how the questionnaire items were constructed and the items that were adopted from other questionnaires. The questionnaire is in Appendix A.

Table 2: The Questionnaire Items

Questionnaire Item no.	Source	Adaptation/Use
Demographic Data items 1, 4, 5, and 6	New items: Gender, Teaching experience, Teaching experience at Ibri College, and Qualification	These were included to investigate how these factors may affect lecturers' E-learning PD perceptions and experiences
Demographic Data items 3 and 4	Schmidt Survey	The concept of age range was adapted. Age range was modified since Schmidt's survey was for students and the age range was lower. Departments were modified based on the departments at Ibri College
Items 1 to 11	New items: PD Perceptions and experiences	I constructed these items based on the literature review, research questions and conceptual framework.

Items 12 to 15	New Items	I constructed these in order to know the frequency of engagement with different PD forms
Items 16 to 19	New Items	I constructed these in order to understand lecturers' perceptions of the PD they get engaged with
Items 20 to 26	New Items	These items elicit lectures' perceptions of the factors that affect PD
Items 27 to 29	New Items	These items elicit lectures' perceptions of the impact of PD
Items 30 to 39	New Items	These items elicit lecturers' use of different forms of E-learning tools
Items 40	Based on Davis (1993) Survey item: 'Overall, I find the electronic mail system useful for my job'	Modified to: Using E-learning in education is important
Item 41	Based on Davis (1993) Survey item: 'Using electronic mail improves my job performance' And Davis (1989): 'The electronic mail improves my job performance'	Modified to: E-learning can improve my teaching performance
Items 42 to 48	New Items	E-learning and pedagogy – E-learning and institutional support
Item 49	Based on Davis (1989) Survey item: 'My job would be difficult to perform without electronic mail'	Modified to: 'My job would be difficult without E-learning'
Item 50	Based on Davis (1989) survey item: 'Overall, I find the electronic mail system easy to use'	Modified to 'I know about a lot of technologies and learn them easily'
At the end of the survey	I added: 'Please provide contact details if you are willing to take part in an interview to discuss your opinions about professional development of lecturers in E-learning.'	

The questionnaire started with demographic information items, and then moved to 50 Likert-scale items. Demographic items gathered information about lecturers' age, gender, qualifications, teaching experiences and departments. The Likert scale items were divided into 7 sub-scales, measuring agreement, perceptions and frequency. These subscales were categorized into two main areas: Professional Development and E-learning. The survey was constructed based on the general information I believed was important to capture, the strengths and limitations of the nature of surveys, and the data required to complement the other methods. Based on the Conceptual Framework, the survey attempted to capture lecturers' experiences and perceptions of individual and

institutional levels of influence and responsibility toward E-learning PD. The government level was not included since the survey was distributed to lecturers not managers, and lecturers may not have a good understand of financing, budgeting and policy issues. The Macro level issues were elicited in interviews with managers.

Within the individual level, the survey asked questions about lecturers' pedagogical practices, intentions to use technology, actual use of technology and perception and involvement with E-learning and PD. At the institutional level, the survey contained items related to lecturers' communities, collegial support, technical and training support, and the learning culture at the College. The lecturers were also asked about their perceptions of factors that affect E-learning PD such as time, workload, training location, frequency of training and college policies.

Piloting the questionnaire helped in improving the survey by reducing the questionnaire items to 50 instead of 56 items. This is discussed at the Piloting section (5.9) in this Chapter.

5.8 Qualitative Research Methods

This section describes qualitative research and the rationale for its use in this study. It starts with defining it and describing its features, then discussing its importance and what distinguishes it from quantitative research. This is followed by descriptions of each single qualitative method used in this study.

Van Maanen (1979, p520) defined qualitative research as:

> *'an umbrella term covering an array of interpretive techniques which seek to describe, decode, translate, and otherwise come to terms with*

the meaning, not the frequency, of certain more or less naturally occurring phenomena in the social world'.

Qualitative research does not claim objectivity and value-freedom, nor does it seek that. It attempts to gather data in its natural form in its embedded context rather than labortory like experiments. Denzin and Lincoln (1998) defined qualitative research as an interpretivist research, studying social phenomena in their natural settings in order to make sense and interpret the phenomena under investigation.

Qualitative research has many features that make it a powerful tool in social science studies. It recognizes the richness of social phenomena and the extensive amount of factors embedded within social enquiry (Kneale & Santy, 1999). This richness means that it is impossible to understand social reality, such as everyday behaviours and how people experience, conceptualize or interpret issues, by investigating a reduced set of quantified factors listed in a questionnaire without losing important factors (Flick, 2014; Kneale & Santy, 1999). Denzin and Lincoln (2011, p3) argue that:

'Qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them'.

Mason (2002) argues that choosing qualitative research should be done if the research question requires following this approach. Due to the complexity of the issues investigated in this research and the deeply contextualized nature of inquiry, following a qualitative approach was necessary for the purposes of this study.

From the perspective of qualitative research, I could not be neutral in the process of understating, collecting data and interpreting the social world (Mason, 2002). Mason (2002, p52) believes that:

'I think it is more accurate to speak of generating data than collecting data'.

That is because information does not come naturally in a ready form to be collected, so researchers are seen as active constructors of knowledge (Mason, 2002). Therefore, 'reflexivity' is important, where researchers make rich descriptions of their studies including their impressions and subjectivities, so that readers can judge research credibility and the extent it is applicable and vital to their contexts (Flick, 2014; Gomm, 2004; Kneale & Santy, 1999). In this study, I continuously documented details of the data collection process in a diary, to capture details that may enrich the study and to reflect on my experience and impressions while collecting data. Reflexivity was discussed earlier in this Chapter.

The issues of validity, reliability and generalizability are important in research. Validity tells us whether we are investigating and answering what we are supposed to investigate and answer (Bell, 2005; Mason, 2002; Silverman, 2005). Validity in qualitative research should be shown by providing sufficient details for the reader to make judgements about the robustness of data collection and interpretations made in order to answer the research questions (Kneale & Santy, 1999). Reliability is:

> *'the extent to which a test or procedure produces similar results under constant conditions on all occasions' (Bell & Waters, 2014, p111).*

In general, qualitative research does not emphasize research replicability and generalizability, since it sacrifices that for depth and also recognizes the role of context, researcher subjectivity and possibility of various data interpretations (Bryman, 2012; Gillham, 2000; Gomm, 2004).

Due to various factors such as time, money and accessibility limitations, it is not possible to collect data from the whole population, so it is collected from a smaller group called the sample (Dooley, 2001; Mason, 2002). The population here means the larger group from which the sample is taken, and is related to the study (Cohen et al., 2013). In qualitative research, sample size is usually small and selection is purposive for the specific features that make them relevant to the study (Kneale & Santy, 1999; Mason, 2002;

Silverman, 2005). In general, researchers are ready to sacrifice scope for depth, details and individual experiences (Kneale & Santy, 1999; Silverman, 2005).

The following parts discuss the qualitative methods used in this study: focus groups, interviews, observation and document analysis. Focus groups and observations were used for the lesson planning and lesson teaching activity. In this activity, lecturers discussed issues in focus group discussions, planned for a lesson and taught this lesson which was observed. This was followed by reflections on these lessons in interviews.

5.8.1 Focus Groups and Lesson Planning and Teaching Activity

This section discusses the use of focus groups in this study, which constituted the first part of the lesson planning and teaching activity. After focus group discussions, this section discusses the use of lesson planning and lesson teaching activities in order to understand how lecturers use E-learning in practice and the considerations they make when they attempt to use it for teaching. In the observations section (Section 5.8.3), use of observations will be discussed in more detail.

A focus group is a qualitative research method where a group of people are involved in 'a collective activity' of talking about a specific issue, and where their interactions are used as vital information (Kitzinger, 1994). Patton (2002, p385) defined focus group as:

'An interview with a small group on a specific topic'.

However, focus groups are different from interviews and they have many unique characteristics. For example, focus groups are different from group interviews by their:

'explicit use of the group interaction as research data' (Kitzinger, 1994, p103).

Typically, group size is approximately from 8 to 12 (Gomm, 2004). However, other researchers have indicated that it is also common for the number to be less.

In this study, the first focus group involved five lecturers and the second involved seven, which brings the total number of focus group participants to twelve lecturers. Both groups were involved in a similar focus group session, but it was not possible to involve all of them at the same time due to their engagement with teaching activities. The decision for accepting all volunteers was based on my expectations that not all lecturers would be able to take part in the lesson planning and teaching activities. This was true since only five lecturers taught their lessons and were observed.

Focus groups can help in reducing time, effort and money costs, by collecting data from a group of people each time (Flick, 2014; Gomm, 2004). Interactions provide valuable information related to the participants' attitudes, the social processes involved, and it is more contextual than interviews (Kitzinger, 1994). Furthermore, it might reflect what people might say in real-life situations better than interviews (Gomm, 2004). Focus groups do not only grasp perceptions, but also lecturers' interactions with each other and with the environment.

However, there were many limitations associated with focus groups. We must acknowledge that what lecturers say may not accurately reflect what they think for various reasons. For instance, focus groups put participants at pressure toward agreement, or they may look for social desirability and the approval of others by saying what they expect them to say in order to admire them (Gomm, 2004). Furthermore, some participants might have had confidential information that they did not want to reveal in front of a group. Confidentiality can be given in individual interviews, but when a group of people talk it is not possible to promise confidentiality (Gomm, 2004). Another disadvantage is that what lecturers said might have been determined by the others in the group, and could have been affected by power relations (Gomm, 2004). Focus groups required higher skills in group management, managing interactions, and transcribing interactions later (Flick, 2014). Although focus groups were valuable for this study, they

were less suitable than the interviews were for obtaining an in-depth understanding of individual lecturers' perspectives and experiences. This was caused by the several factors, including the presence of several lecturers and the continuous flow of discussions from one lecturer to another and from one topic to another. Furthermore, some participants dominated discussions more than others did, which made examining important issues rather difficult (Flick, 2014). Another limitation was that due to lecturers' busy schedules, it was challenging to find a suitable time to meet with all those who expressed interest in taking part in the focus groups. Consequently, many interested lecturers were unable to participate in the focus groups.

In order to tackle and minimize the limitations of focus groups mentioned above, they were followed with individual reflection interviews with the lecturers who completed all the lesson planning and teaching activity, so that they could comment, reflect, add their opinions and discuss more deeply some points raised in the focus groups. The interviews gave focus group participants a chance to add information which they may have preferred to speak about individually.

Being aware of the strengths and limitations of focus groups helped in managing focus group discussions better. For example, focus groups were affected by power relations of the participants and some lecturers were more vocal than others, so I had to stop lecturers who kept talking about a topic at length and asked for the opinion of others. It was important to explain the purpose of the study again vocally, in order to remind participants and make sure that there are no ambiguities related to the purpose or process of the study. During discussions, I had to intervene in many cases when lecturers diverted from the focus of discussions and to re-direct conversations back to the issues investigated.

Use of focus group in this study aimed at investigating lecturers' perceptions by discussing different issues related to E-learning and E-learning PD. To be more specific, focus groups gave answers to all research questions to various degrees of depth. Although they

complemented and shared features with some of the other methods used, the strength of focus group in this study was in answering the first and second research questions, which are concerned with lecturers' experiences and perceptions towards E-learning in teaching. Focus groups moved gradually from general discussions about E-learning to specific questions about E-learning PD. The activity that followed the first focus group session, which was planning for a lesson, was done to encourage lecturers to reflect and make decisions on pedagogy, technology and the subject they teach, which was directly linked to the first and second research questions.

These focus groups were complemented with observations of five lecturers teaching their lessons and individual follow up interviews with the lecturers who taught the lessons. The aim of the follow up interviews was to gain a deeper understanding of their thoughts and behaviour while planning for and teaching this lesson, and allowing them to comment on their overall experience with E-learning and the issues discussed in the focus group session. These interviews were different from the general interviews with Ibri College lecturers and managers, since these were focused on E-learning use in teaching their classes.

The Conceptual Framework and the theories within it were important to understand lecturers' attitudes and actual use of technology. The three levels of influence were crucial for understanding the levels of E-learning PD responsibility and influence. TAM helped in understanding individual intentions and motivations to use technology, issues that affect intentions to use technology and actual use. The structural factors within the individual, college and government levels were important in determining lecturers' decisions to use technology. Lecturers' pedagogical, technological and content knowledge (TPACK) were involved in lectures' perceptions and use of E-learning. Social factors, such as collegial support, the learning culture, managerial and lecturers' perceptions of 'good teaching' and lecturers' CoP were also vital for understanding lecturers' decisions to use technology.

In order to facilitate focus group discussions, lecturers were given prompts in order to ensure that discussions would not divert from research focus. The focus group sessions moved gradually from pure discussions in the beginning to talking about specific examples from their practice. Focus groups discussions were followed by an activity of writing a lesson plan and preparing E-learning materials for it. Many of the lecturers dropped out at each stage due to different reasons, mainly because of the difficulty in finding appropriate time, and eventually five lessons were observed.

Table 3 shows the lesson planning and lesson teaching activity which was conducted in four sessions. In these four sessions, there was focus group session, one lesson planning session and one classroom observation. The first session started with a discussion about E-learning and teaching, followed by discussions about formal and informal E-learning PD. The discussions moved gradually towards E-learning and their teaching. The lesson planning session and classroom observation following it aimed at making links between E-learning and their classrooms by teaching the lesson planned.

Table 3: The Lesson Planning and Teaching Activity

Activity	Details	Duration
Focus Group Session	E-learning and the teaching practice Formal and informal E-learning PD	1 hour
Activity	Lesson planning session	1 hour
Observation	Teaching the planned lesson	1 hour
Interviews	Reflections about the lesson planned and taught	1 hour

The second session was a practical lesson planning session and it required lecturers to work individually or together to produce lesson plans that involved the use of E-learning for a module they normally teach. Planning for a lesson required bringing together a variety of ideas such as choice of technology, purpose of use, content taught and student

engagement. These issues were key to getting a deep understanding of what happens when lecturers link technology to their teaching. However, this was a demanding task since some lecturers expressed that they have limited or no experience in planning for a lesson that involved E-learning use. In order to enable lecturers to think about lesson planning, they were reminded of the lesson planning activity after the focus group session verbally and by email. The aim of reminding them was to enable them to come mentally prepared and think how they would teach their normal lessons with the aid of E-learning. During the lesson planning activity, lecturers were asked to work together or individually to produce one lesson plan for each one. After writing their lesson plans, lecturers used them to teach their student. I observed the lessons taught by lecturers. Observation is explained in section 5.8.3.

In the reflections, lecturers shared their experiences in teaching the lesson. Furthermore, they reflected on the pedagogical choices made for planning and teaching the lesson and the choices they made in order to integrate E-learning. Examples of expected pedagogical considerations were about the skills taught, presentation of content, student engagement, classroom management and time management.

The lesson planning and lesson teaching activity guide is in Appendix E and the Information Sheet is in Appendix G.

5.8.2 Qualitative Interviewing

The interview is a qualitative research method that aims at getting a deep understanding of phenomena using speech, and it is argued to be the most commonly used method in qualitative research (Flick, 2014; Mason, 2002). The interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee is regarded as an advantage for creating trust, a friendly atmosphere and rapport, but also creates subjectivity and is dependent on the skill of the interviewer

(Cohen et al., 2013; Dooley, 2001). Interviewing, although may limit the scope of the research, can give us rich descriptions and rigorous information (Silverman, 2005).

The study adopted semi-structured interviewing since it was the most suitable approach for this study. It meant that I prepared a list of questions that served as a guide for the interview, but allowed flexibility depending on the flow of the interview (Flick, 2014; Mason, 2002). It was important for me to be a good listener and flexible in asking questions based on the participants responses and their professional backgrounds and identities (Fontana & Frey, 2000). Interview questions were chosen based on the research questions, Conceptual Framework and focus of the study. The interview questions for lecturers are in Appendix B. Appendix C shows the questions for managers. The consent form for interviews is in Appendix I.

The interviewees were eighteen lecturers, eleven managers and two support staff, in addition to interviews with the participants in the lesson planning and teaching activity discussed earlier. The managers were a college dean, two assistant deans, three head of departments and five head of sections. Two support staff who worked for the educational technologies centre and sometimes gave Moodle and Smartboard training and support were interviewed. The eighteen lecturers worked in different departments and some of them had experience in delivering training to their colleagues. Each interview was up to 1 hour long. The interviews are linked mainly to the third set of research questions, but also answer the first and second research questions well.

The interviewees were asked questions based on their job positions. For example, the College Dean and Head of Departments were asked questions about their attitudes toward the management process of E-learning PD, while trainers were asked about the processes involved when they planned for a PD activity.

Interviews, observations, focus groups, questionnaires and document analysis complemented each other. Focus group members who taught their lessons were individually interviewed to get a deeper understanding of their experiences and attitudes, and to enable them to reflect on their experience with the focus group sessions. Information from the questionnaire distributed at the beginning and documentary analysis was used to inform me of the suitability of the questions, and some questions were asked based on questionnaire data. The questionnaire was also used as a sampling method where some lecturers were selected for interviews. Document analysis helped in guiding some of the questions asked, especially to managers. It was important not to look at issues in isolation, but to link the emerging data from the different methods.

Interviews with College managers was a key aspect for understanding E-learning PD practices, policies and support. Table 4 shows that interviews involved the College Dean, two Assistant Deans, three Heads of Departments and five Heads of Sections. For the sake of protecting the identities of managers in this study, I decided to categorise College managers into three levels based on their positions: top management, middle management and lower management. The total number of managers at the College is twenty-five. The College top management is constituted of the Dean and three Assistant Deans, followed by middle management of four Heads of Academic Departments (Business, Engineering, ELC and IT) and heads of administrative and support departments such as the Human Resources Department and the Educational Technologies Centre (Ibri College of Technology, 2016). Lower management of Heads of Sections within each academic department follows this. Table 4 shows the interviewees that took part in the study and the codes used in order not to show their identities. The College managers interviewed had a work experience varying from 13 to 25 years. Six of them were Omani and five were expatriates.

Table 4: Interviews with Managers

Total number of managers at the College: 25 managers **The Research Participants: 11 managers (Out of 18 Managers relevant to the Study)**	
Positions of Interviewees	**Code Used**
The College Dean	(Senior Manager)
Two Assistant Deans	(Senior Manager)
Head of the Human Resources Department	(Head of Department)
Head of Quality Assurance	(Head of Department)
Head of an Academic Department	(Head of Department)
Five Head of Sections	(Head of Section)

A deductive and inductive approach was used to analyse lecturers' interviews where the Conceptual Framework and the Research Questions were used to identify themes, then an inductive approach by identifying emerging issues within transcripts. Those themes were initially descriptive and later analytical themes were generated and used in the following sections of this Chapter.

In addition to investigating College managers' perceptions, I found overwhelming evidence from documentary analysis that Government policies, regulations and rules undermine lecturers' E-learning PD. These policies, regulations and rules are analysed in the Findings chapter at the Context of E-learning PD level, then their impact on lecturers is discussed at the Micro level. These policies were about lecturers' contracts, PD leave policies, investment in E-learning PD and academic promotions. Government policies, regulations and laws were significant influencers on lecturers' E-learning PD. This is attributed to the fact that Ibri College is a government sponsored and regulated HEI. Ibri College is financed and regulated by the Ministry of Manpower; and consequently, the College spending, bylaws and regulations have to be within the general boundaries set by the Ministry of Manpower.

5.8.3 Observation

This study involved immersing myself in the field for an extensive period (almost four months), observing the social, cultural and professional activities of lecturers, managers, and support staff at Ibri College. This section starts with analysing the meaning and features of participant observation. Then looks at the rationale for using it in this study, its strength and weaknesses and describe how it was operationalised. After that, classroom observations, which were part of the lesson planning and lesson teaching activity discussed earlier, is discussed here.

Participant observation is a research method that emphasises understanding social and cultural activities related to the phenomena investigated by encouraging the researcher to take an active part in the daily practices and processes of people observed (Bernard, 2011; Cohen et al., 2013; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Yin, 2014). DeWalt and DeWalt (2011, p1) defined participant observation as:

> *'A method in which a researcher takes part in the daily activities, rituals, interactions, and events of a group of people as one of the means of learning the explicit and tacit aspects of their life routines and their culture'.*

They added that (p2):

> *'The method of participant observation is a way to collect data in naturalistic settings by ethnographers who observe and/or take part in the common and uncommon activities of the people being studied'.*

Bogdan (1972, p3 cited in Crabtree & Miller, 1999, p48) defined participant observation as:

> *'Research characterised by a prolonged period of intense social interaction between the researcher and the subjects … during which*

time data, in the form of field notes, are unobtrusively and systematically collected'.

These definitions show that participant observation has many features that distinguish it from other methods. Participant observation highlights the importance of being immersed in the field for an extended period, taking part in the daily activities undertaken by the participants in relation to the research topic, and getting involved in 'intensive' social interactions (Bernard, 2011; Crabtree & Miller, 1999; Yin, 2014). The researcher tries to get a deep understanding of the complex social and cultural aspects within the study in their natural settings and understand issues from the perspectives of participants (Bernard, 2011; DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011). This indicates that the researcher role is significant, where his/her skill and approach may have a prominent role and effect on the study process and outcomes (Bernard, 2011; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Consequently, researcher reflexivity is crucial, where the researcher is encouraged to reflect on the issues observed in the field and self-reflect (Bernard, 2011). Generally, most of the data in participant observation is qualitative in the form of field notes (Bernard, 2011; DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011).

The rationale for including participant observation in this study was that the study required an immersion in the field in order to understand the E-learning PD culture, practices and perceptions of lecturers and managers. Spending time in the field was crucial for getting a deep understanding of the phenomena being investigated, and understanding the sociocultural aspects related to the E-learning PD at the College such as lecturers' communities of practice. Furthermore, the fact that observation was unstructured, detailed and immersive was vital to investigate the topic as it naturally occurs, and attempting to understand issues from the participants' view. I attempted to gain an insider (emic) perspective of the issues participants were engaged with (Yin, 2014). Without participant observation, it would not have been possible to gain a deep understanding of formal and informal E-learning PD practices at the College.

There were many challenges and limitations of using participant observation in this study. One of the biggest challenges I faced was gaining access to the social and professional

activities of lecturers and managers at the study (Bryman, 2012; Yin, 2014). Institutional access was easy to get since the College administration was supportive and sent a memo and an information sheet I prepared to all College departments encouraging staff to support me in this research. I worked as a lecturer at the English Language Centre at Ibri College for three years and I felt that it was easier to get access to the lecturers at the ELC more than other departments. Another challenge in participant observation is that I may have developed an emotional attachment to the participants over the period of research, which may have created bias (Yin, 2014) (See Research Positionality). Another challenge is that the college is physically dispersed in two main buildings. Consequently, I may have missed important details because I could not be at the right place at the right time (Yin, 2014). Additionally, participant observation was exploratory where most of the time I did not know where to be, who to talk to and what to take note of (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). This was not an issue with formal learning since it was normally announced by email and college website. Another challenge was depending on memory to write field notes, since in most cases it was not possible to interrupt conversations and observations to write notes (Yin, 2014). I wrote field notes and reflections as soon as possible, in order not to forget any important details.

There were challenges that were hard to address, since they were linked to the nature of participant observations. Flick (2014, p316) argues that:

> *'Biographical processes are difficult to observe. This also applies to comprehensive knowledge processes. Events or practices that seldom occur – although they are crucial to the research question – can be captured only with luck or if at all by a very careful selection of situations of observation'.*

In order to understand mental and emotional processes, it was important to use other methods such as interviews, where lecturers were asked to reflect on the issues observed (Flick, 2014). For example, I noticed that lecturers were very enthusiastic and engaged in a PD activity more than others in a conference. In the interviews, I asked some lecturers about that event and they reflected on their experiences. Similarity, in some PD activities

lecturers interacted with each other and with the trainer more than other sessions. Talking to them after events provided vital information about their perceptions of what made some PD events more interactive than others.

This study involved observing day-to-day practices related to formal and informal E-learning PD at Ibri College. This included observing all formal E-learning PD activities that took place there during the data collection process. Formal PD events were observed by following all formal PD announcements and attending them. The observations were open without constraining observations to an observation sheet, and I kept note of processes involved before, during, and after formal PD activities, such as investigating the processes of topic choice, planning, focus, delivery, interactions and structure of E-learning PD.

I observed informal E-learning PD at Ibri College by spending a considerable time at Ibri College observing lecturer collaboration, managerial support, the work environment and the learning culture. I went every workday to the College for about four months and I paid attention to the manner in which informal learning occurs, by observing lecturers' collegial support. Furthermore, I investigated informal learning by investigating lecturers' communities of practice within the College, where lecturers with similar interests networked to share experiences and ideas. For example, there were different communities with different interests such as E-learning, educational research, professional development, extra-curricular activities and student support. My strategy to gain insight into informal learning practices was to use the 'key informants' I had at the College as a starting point. Through them, I was able to network with other lecturers, managers and support staff. I paid attention to informal learning that occurs around formal learning events, by observing how lecturers talk and share ideas. After a period, I felt that lecturers and managers were more interested in the study and talked about issues related to it and personal experiences and perceptions whenever we met at corridors, café, offices or events. I tried to build rapport with as many people as I could, by getting participants' interest and trust. However, rapport was easier to build with some participants more than others; and I attempted to be as unobtrusive as possible (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Taylor et al., 2015).

During the study, I attempted to make informed decisions of what to look at, how to observe, what to record, and when and where to look (Delamont, 2002). I continuously took field notes and reflections of formal and informal learning observations. I attempted to record these field notes in as much detail as possible, in many forms such as descriptions, quotations and reflections (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The Conceptual Framework was a vital guiding tool for observing informal learning. Some of the observations were validated by talking about my observations with the people observed, then getting some feedback whether the notes accurately represent what actually happened to them or not. For instance, in the interviews I asked some lecturers why they kept discussing a training event they attended after it finished and what happened during these discussions. This supported the observation I had and showed lecturers' perspectives of what I observed.

I also observed how lecturers taught the lessons they planned following the focus group session, which is explained in the Lesson Planning and Lesson Teaching Activity discussed earlier (Section 5.8.1). The aim was to understand the processes involved in planning for a lesson that involved E-learning use and the manner in which these lessons were taught. I investigated how lecturers linked their E-learning perceptions with the actual teaching practice. I took notes of what happened in the classroom such as classroom dynamics, interactions, delivery of content and the manner in which E-learning was used. Before and after the lesson, lectures reflected on their experiences and shared ideas and opinions with other lecturers. I allowed lecturers to reflect on their lessons in order to compare my observations with lecturers' perspectives.

5.8.4 Document Analysis

This study involved investigating publicly available documents that were useful to the study. The document analysis was part of the literature review prior to conducting the

research and continued during the data collection process where comparisons were made between policy and practice. As part of the literature review process, I searched and analysed the publicly available documents. These documents were available in printed and online forms, and I downloaded them from different government sources and from the College website. These documents were the OAAA report (2014) and the College documents (Ibri College, 2008, 2011, 2013 & 2016). These College reports were mostly similar with updates made to each report. Hence, not enough data was documented about the College and there was limited understanding of the Context of the study.

Merriam and Tisdell (2015, p162) stated that:

> *'document is often used as an umbrella term to refer to a wide range of written, visual, digital, and physical material relevant to the study'.*

The documents I used were publicly and easily available, and I accessed all of them online. Since they were in a public domain, getting permission to use them was not necessary (Bowen, 2009).

There were many merits to using documents in this study. The documents analysed provided valuable, free and rich information easily accessible without having to spend time, money and effort collecting it (Bowen, 2009; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Some information such as country population, employment statistics and college budget may not be possible to be collected in this study, and would require access and permissions from different bodies, people and institutions. Since the documents were readily available, they were unobtrusive in the data collection process (Bowen, 2009; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Yin, 2014). The documents analysed provided general, broad and historical data about the Omani HE context, Ibri College and E-learning PD. They helped in understanding the research problem, framing the research questions and focus and guiding the design of the study.

Ibri College reports were downloaded from the College website (www.ibrict.edu.om). The Omani Accreditation Authority Audit was publicly available and downloaded from: (http://www.oaaa.gov.om/Institution.aspx#Inst_ReviewDwnld). I attempted to search for other documents from different sources such as the Ministry of Higher Education, the Ministry of Manpower and academic journals. I found these documents based on my previous knowledge and by using search engines.

The use of documents provided useful information that informed the other methods, especially with the interviews with managers. Documents, in contrast to many other methods, are stable and therefore could be viewed repeatedly and anytime, and in the case of online documents available anywhere (Yin, 2014). Documents in this study provided historical data of issues such as the developments at the College and the changes in E-learning and PD policy and practices at the College.

However, there were many limitations to the use of documents. The documents I analysed were not developed for research purposes, so it was not clear how, why and when and by whom the data was collected, analysed and presented (Bowen, 2009; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The documents were not treated as 'facts', but they were critically examined and treated as social products that may not be precise, accurate, complete or even correct (Bowen, 2009; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). This is evident in the OAAA report to the College, where they questioned some of the statistics, methodology and information published by the College. The information published did not fit all the data gathered from the other methods, such as the information provided by the College management and lecturers. Publicly available documents might be made available because they show a positive image about the institution and serve their agenda. Therefore, any references to practices that are not satisfactory might be hidden.

5.9 Piloting

Blaxter (2010, p138) defined piloting as:

> *'the process whereby you try out the research techniques and methods which you have in mind, see how well they work in practice, and if necessary, modify your plans accordingly'.*

In this study, I piloted the questionnaire, interviews, focus group at Ibri College from the 3rd of November 2015 to the 19th of November 2015. I reflected on the experience and improved the data collection methods.

First, the survey was distributed to a conveniently selected sample of 30 lecturers from the different departments at the College. They were conveniently selected based on their availability at the time of distributing the survey. I spent some time in each department talking about my research, then distributed a total number of 30 copies to lecturers who volunteered to take part in the study. They were conveniently selected since they showed immediate interest. I told them to complete them at their convenience and leave them at each department receptionist desk. I also explained that participation was voluntary and they could leave the questionnaires incomplete if they changed their minds. 23 questionnaires were returned.

The aim of piloting the questionnaire was to check the clarity of the questionnaire items, its relevance to the topic and to carry out statistical analysis using SPSS to measure its strength. The survey was modified according to the findings after sampling it. The only changes made were reducing the number of items from 56 items to 50 items as table 5 shows.

Table 5: Eliminated Questionnaire Items and Reasons for their Elimination

Item Number	Item	Reasons for its elimination
1	I have been enriched by the training events I attended	1. It reduces the scale reliability 2. It does not add relevant meaningful information 3. The standard deviation is very low (0.73) 4. The range is low (3 as a minimum and 5 as a maximum)
14	Peer collaboration	1. Reducing reliability 2. The item is not clear and meaningful
15	Asking for students' feedback	1. The item is not very clear and meaningful 2. It reduces reliability. 3. It reduces reliability in a related item (item 21).
20	Peer collaboration	1. Reducing reliability 2. The range is low (only 1, 2, 3 were chosen)
21	Asking for students' feedback	1. Reducing reliability
49	I feel nervous when I face technical problems	1. Repeating item 48 in other words. The results also are similar. 2. Reducing reliability

After questionnaires, the focus group was piloted with five lecturers. The aim of this was to explore the topic, to decide whether the prompts and questions need modifications, and to examine the structure of the focus group method itself. For example, the seating arrangement, place, timing and length of the focus group. This was done in one session that was one hour long. The following points were discussed in piloting of focus groups: E-learning and formal PD, E-learning and informal PD, and E-learning and their teaching practice. However, due to time constraints during the piloting stage, lecturers were not involved in planning and teaching a lesson.

Before piloting focus group, the plan was to have *seven sessions*. The piloting stage showed that although a lot of lecturers were interested, bringing them together was very challenging. There was no common free time among them. Furthermore, I did not want

to risk having a higher level of study dropout rate if lecturers felt that they do not have time to take part in seven sessions. Another change was deciding to include more lecturers during the field stage, before moving to lesson planning and lesson teaching. In addition to the five lecturers who took part in this stage, another seven lecturers took part at the same session. At the end, five lecturers completed all the stages, which proved that involving additional lecturers was effective.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with two lecturers and a head of section; one of the lecturers was a qualified trainer. The aim of this was to explore the topic from different perspectives. Each interview was up to 1 hour long. Based on that, the interview questions were modified based on the results gathered. The original plan was to have one hour and a half interviews. However, the pilot stage showed that many lecturers voiced concerned about the length of the interviews. Therefore, I decided to reduce the number of questions and to make the interview up to 1 hour long. I also decided to allow greater flexibility in the flow of conversations, since the different participants were better at answering different kind of questions. Furthermore, I decided to add customized questions to participants based on their backgrounds or experiences. These customized questions were prepared for each lecturer or manager before interviews, based on their backgrounds, experiences or job positions.

All of this enabled me to test the data collection methods and to implement initial data analysis to see if these tools had the potential to answer the research questions adequately. Figure 18 summarizes the piloting stage participants.

Figure 18: The Pilot Study Participants

5.10 Ethics

As a researcher, I attempted to be ethical in all stages of research starting from choice of topic and methods, to representation of findings and analysis. This section summarises the ethical procedures followed in this study after getting an approval from the University of Southampton ERGO team (Ethics and Research Governance Online).

This was an ethnographic case study, and the participants were lecturers, managers and support staff at Ibri College of Technology. After securing an ERGO approval from the University of Southampton to conduct the study (See Appendix J), I went to the College to seek permission to conduct the study. I had a meeting with the College Dean and the Assistant Deans about my study and gave them an information sheet I prepared (Appendix L). They showed full support and offered to help with any way they can. The Dean signed a copy of the information sheet and asked his secretary to make copies of it and circulate it as an internal memo to all the College Departments and Centres. This was done to ensure that my presence as a researcher is known in addition to the informing staff about topic, focus and methods of the study. It was also done to show that the College management supports this study and it is carried out with their knowledge and consent.

The first data collection method employed was the questionnaire. The questionnaire (Appendix A) was anonymous and participants did not have to write their names or any other information that may enable anyone to identify them. I printed out over 200 hard copies of the questionnaire and distributed them by hand to all lecturers at the College. This was time and effort consuming, but it allowed me to spend time with lecturers briefing them about my research. I provided a box in each room and left it at the secretary's table. Lecturers were told that completing the survey was voluntary and that if they decided to complete it, they should leave it at the box provided. This was done to ensure that there was no pressure to completing it if they were asked to complete and return it to me. There was no consent form attached with the survey, since by completing it they agreed to take part in the study. The information provided at the top of the questionnaire informed them about the purpose of the study, confidentiality, length of completion and the use of information for research purposes only. Participation in the questionnaire was voluntary and this was emphasised in a written and verbal forms. Participants gave their consent by completing and returning the survey. The survey was kept as short as possible, so that lecturers could complete it in less than 20 minutes.

Interview participants were briefed about the study verbally, by email (e.g. Appendix P) and by participant information sheets (Appendix F). In the interviews, selection was based on the position, random selection, and purposive selection of interesting cases of lecturers who completed the survey and decided to leave their contact details for interviews. For example, the college dean, head of departments and head of section were chosen purposively because of their positions. Trainers were also chosen purposively because of their role in delivering training and E-learning and PD committee members were interviewed. The rest was a random selection of lecturers with different experiences, age, gender and nationality. The interview participant information sheet was sent to them in order to ask them to volunteer to take part in the study. At the end of the survey (Appendix A), participants who decided to take part in interviews were asked to leave their contact details, so that an interview could be arranged. In the interviews and focus groups, participants were reminded that their voice would be recorded. In addition to sending the participant information sheets by email, hard copies were distributed to lecturers.

There was no pressure on anyone to take part in the study, and I repeatedly emphasised that participation is voluntary. Repeating the information sheet details verbally was done to make sure that participants were fully aware of their rights and the purpose of the study. In some interviews, I kept checking the time to make sure they did not exceed 1 hour long as promised, even if they conversations were interesting. The participants signed a consent sheet provided (Appendix I).

The focus group members were all from the English language Centre. An email with the focus group details and the participant information sheet was sent to all lecturers at the English Language Centre (Appendix K and Appendix G), in addition to distributing hard copies to lecturers at the ELC. Focus group participants were volunteers who replied to me by email or face to face. As part of the focus group process, lectures were informed, verbally and using the information sheet, that following the lesson planning activity there would be classroom observations of them teaching the lessons planned. They were informed that they could drop out at any stage if they changed their minds. Focus group members, as part of the lesson planning and lesson teaching activity, were reminded that their voice would be recorded (See information sheet Appendix G and consent form Appendix H).

Observation of classroom teaching, as part of the focus group activity, was done after getting the consent of lecturers (See Appendices G and H). After the first focus group session, I reminded the participants about their rights. I reminded them again when they decided to take part in a lesson planning activity following the focus group session. After the lesson planning activity, I reminded them again of their rights, and one lecturer immediately decided not to take part in the study. I observed only 5 lessons, where lecturers invited me to attend their classes. I did not put any pressure on the 7 lecturers who took part in the lesson planning activity, to make sure that I did not attend a class unless I was invited.

Appendix (M) shows an email I sent to inform lectures that focus group sessions would not start until they start the summer semester, since they were busy marking final exams papers. This was done to ensure that they were not under any pressure, since end of semesters were the busiest time for them, while beginning of semesters tend to be the least busy. General observation of day-to-day activities at the college was obtained after getting permission the College Dean as explained earlier, who circulated the information sheet as a memo to all College departments and centres.

It was made clear to the participants that they could withdraw from taking part in the study at any time, without having to explain why. This was done to ensure that they were willing to take part in it without any pressure. In the consent sheets, this was written clearly. I also explained verbally that they could withdraw from taking part in the research at any point, including after completion of the study if they wished not to include their part in the study.

I believe that study did not cause any kind of distress, discomfort or inconvenience to the participants. Taking part in the study was voluntary. Participants were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any point, without any negative consequences. The questionnaire, interview questions and focus groups did not include any intrusive or sensitive questions. The length of each part was agreed at the beginning. The questionnaire did not take more than 20 minutes, while each interview did not exceed 1 hour long. I attempted to make classroom observation as unobtrusive as possible, by sitting at the back of the class to write notes. Participants in interviews and focus groups were asked permission to use a voice recorder. The participants were informed that research is confidential, anonymous and used for academic purposes only. They were informed that the data would be stored safely in a computer protected password and not shared with anyone except the supervisors.

Anonymity and confidentiality were a priority in the process of data collection, storing, analysis and writing up. The participants were informed about the anonymity and confidentiality of the study verbally and in writing in the information sheets. All the data such as notes and recording are kept in a safe place, in a password protected laptop. Even if the laptop got stolen, I can remotely access the data and delete it. All hard copies of data are kept in a locked and safe place. This data will be later destroyed when it is no longer needed. Names of the participants and any descriptions that may make them identifiable were altered, so that even after thesis completion no one would be able to identify them. All the information gathered is used for academic purposes. Data will be kept safe in line with the UK Data Protection Act and University of Southampton Data Management Policy.

In the interviews, focus groups, and observation, pseudonyms were used instead of the real names of participants. Furthermore, personal descriptions were altered whenever necessary so that no one within the College would be able to identify them. This was done to protect them and to ensure that they could freely express their opinions. For example, instead of describing someone as a head of a specific department, head of department was used. For the dean and assistant deans, 'senior manager' was used. The documents analysed were all publicly available documents, so there was no need to get permission to use them.

I gave all the participants my email address, so that if they decide to ask questions or withdraw they would be able to contact me. I also provided contact details of my supervisors, ERGO office, and my ERGO number to raise any concerns if they had any.

5.11 Coding and Thematic Analysis

This section discusses the coding method followed in this study and themes generated as a result of that. First, it will start with a brief discussion about transcription and

'memoing' and the manner in which they were applied in this study. This is followed by information about the coding method and processes followed. This will end with themes generated based on this process. The themes will later be linked to Macro, Meso and Micro levels as discussed in my Conceptual Framework.

The first step taken was transcribing data, in the form of over 32 hours of audio, by following an 'edited transcription' approach, where I transcribed words and did not include incomplete words, sounds, laughs, false starts and repeated words (Miles et al., 2013; Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). I kept those where I felt they carried a relevant meaning; for example, when a lecturer emphasised a word by saying it loudly and repeated it. I also edited grammatical mistakes. The following step was checking transcription quality, filling missing details and correcting mistakes. I kept 'memoing' throughout the transcription and coding processes by writing notes on my reflections on data, ideas as they come to mind, issues discussed, participants, context and my own experience and thinking process (Glaser & Holton, 2004; Miles et al., 2013; Punch, 2013). The subsequent step was inserting and sorting all data in the data management tool NVivo, which was helpful for managing the huge amount of data generated.

The next step was data coding, which is the process of putting names, labels, phrases and sentences against pieces of data (Miles & Huberman; 2013; Punch, 2003). Miles et al. (2013) emphasised the importance of coding by stating that 'coding is analysis' where researchers engage and immerse themselves in data. The coding methods followed were mainly two: first deductive and inductive coding; and second descriptive (initial) coding and analytical coding.

Deductive coding, which is sometimes called top-down or a priori coding, was done by applying a pre-set list of codes based on the literature review and conceptual framework on data, by linking pieces of data with these codes (Miles et al., 2013; Saldana, 2015; Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). Table 6 shows examples of deductive codes.

Table 6: Development of some Deductive Codes

Codes	Definition	Outcome and Final Code
Lecturers	Anything Relevant to Lecturers	I found that those were too broad and did not produce meaningful and clear data I removed 'lecturers' because it is too broad
Managers	Anything relevant to managers	I changed managers to management, and many codes were associated with it as a result of inductive coding (e.g. support structures, Needs Analysis)
TPACK	Lecturers' and managers' Technological, Pedagogical and Technological Knowledge	I removed it and the sub-codes below it because the study does not intend to 'measure' lecturers' knowledge. I changed it to 'E-learning experiences'
Informal learning	Defined in Literature Review chapter	It is important but later I found it too broad with a lot of codes that could be divided into different codes. I changed informal learning to: lecturer' communities, collaboration and communication
Content/Domain	Specialisation (Business, English, IT and Engineering) Content is within a domain (e.g. writing, listening, accounting, etc.)	I found it very important so I decided to create many codes related to it: • E-learning and domain • PD and Domain (including domain of trainers/trainees) • PD in discipline (e.g. how to teach business)
Pedagogy	Defined in Literature Review	I found it important but too general, so I divided it into: • PD in Pedagogy • E-learning usefulness (pedagogically)

Experiences	E-learning PD personal experiences	I kept it as it is
TAM (Technology Usefulness, Ease of Use, Intention to Use)	See conceptual framework chapter	At the beginning I wrote all the TAM components, but later as I went through the interviews coding them it became apparent that a better way of coding is to merge themes. For example, instead of intention to use E-learning, E-learning usefulness was enough. Ease of use was initially kept because I thought it is still important since many staff members talked about that – but later after going through more interviews I decided that ease of use is part of E-learning PD, because they did not see ease of use as independent, but dependent on the training provided

Inductive coding was done by following a 'bottom-up' approach, by going through data identifying issues (Punch, 2013). Many of these themes emerged from data and were not predicted or included in the pre-set codes. For example, some managers and lecturers talked about lecturers who do not have teaching qualifications, and the impact that has on E-learning PD. I decided that this is an important issue and added 'not having a teaching qualification' as a code. Another example is 'staff resistance to E-learning PD'. I added this code because some lecturers questioned the usefulness of PD or the use of E-learning. It was tempting to create codes for so many issues; however, I tried to make them limited in order not to be overwhelmed with the amount of codes (Punch, 2013). Furthermore, one of the aims of coding was 'data reduction', so that I could use nodes to create themes and subthemes and highlight the most relevant data (Miles et al., 2013). Table 7 shows some examples of the inductive codes I created.

Table 7: Development of some Inductive Codes

Codes	Definition	Outcome and Final Code
Classroom Observations	Classroom Observations by managers Peer classroom observation	There is plenty of data related to it – I decided to keep it as a subtheme under the theme: forms of PD Initially I wrote it as 'observation', but added classroom to make it clearer
Induction	Induction given to newly joined lecturers	I kept it as a subtheme under the theme: Forms of PD
Resources	All kinds of resources – see codes next column	There is plenty of data related to resources and the impact they make on E-learning PD. Resources as a theme has these sub-themes: • Time • Money • Staff Expertise • Technology Availability and quality
Forms of PD	Self-explanatory	• Seminars • Observations (by management – peer observation) • Conferences • Induction

Deductive and inductive codes can be either descriptive or analytical (Miles et al., 2013; Saldana, 2015). Descriptive coding is referred to by many other names such as first level coding, initial coding, low inference coding and basic coding (Miles et al., 2013; Punch, 2013; Saldana, 2015). The Codes in tables 6 and 7 are descriptive codes, which were part of initial analyses to identify concepts, relationships and establish a general

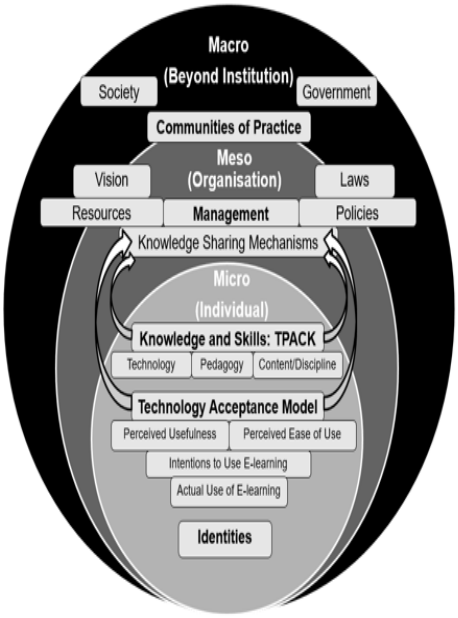
understanding of data (Miles et al., 2013; Punch, 2013). Descriptive coding was useful for starting a second deeper coding stage (Miles et al., 2013).

A deeper level of coding required going beyond data and identifying 'analytical codes' (Miles et al., 2013; Punch, 2013; Richards, 2014; Saldana, 2015). Punch (2005) argues that starting with low inference descriptive codes and moving to high inference analytical codes is a helpful and systematic method for the researcher. Similarly, Miles et al. (2013) stated that descriptive coding can set the basis for conducing deeper analytical coding.

The process followed to reach analytical codes was as follows. First, in order not to divert from the research focus, I wrote the Research Questions and main components of the Conceptual Framework against the Inductive and Deductive Codes generated. The Research Questions, Conceptual Framework, Inductive and Deductive codes where all used as a lens to extract analytical codes; based on my judgements of the most remarkable data generated from this study. Figure 19 shows the Conceptual Framework, research questions and the descriptive inductive and deductive codes.

Research Questions

1. What are lecturers' and managers' perceptions of using E-learning in teaching?
1.1. What are lecturers' pedagogical, technological and content considerations and experiences with E-learning?
1.2. What are lecturers' perceptions of the usefulness of planning for and teaching using E-learning?
2. What are lecturers' and managers' perceptions of E-learning PD at Ibri College of Technology?
2.1. How does formal learning occur at Ibri College of Technology?
2.2. How does informal learning occur at Ibri College of Technology?



Inductive and Deductive Codes:

Macro:

Government - Laws, Policies and bylaws - Other HEIs - Wider Community

Meso:

Institutional Culture: Communities, communication and collaboration

PD: Management - Forms of PD - Feedback – Follow up – Formal Support Structures Classroom observations (peer-observation/observations by managers) – Coaching-mentoring – Induction and joining Ibri College – Self-development – Frequency of PD – Internal vs External training and trainers – Needs analysis and assessment – Optional vs compulsory PD – Lecturers with non-teaching qualifications – PD in Discipline – PD in Pedagogy

E-learning: E-learning and domain – E-learning PD

Resources: Expertise – technology availability and quality - Money – Rewards and accreditation – staff - time

Micro:

E-learning: E-learning pedagogical usefulness – E-learning experiences

PD: Engagement and interest in PD – PD experiences – Quality of PD – Lectures' interactions – Domain of trainers – Role of domain

Figure 19: A Tool for keeping focus while extracting analytical tools

Based on the Research Questions, Conceptual Framework, descriptive codes and going through data, I iteratively made judgements about the most prominent themes found in this study that should form the structure for analysis. This process enabled me to generate themes which are focused, yet combine the various issues relevant to this study. After many attempts of writing, rewriting, and going through data and Figure 19. I decided to finalise the analytical themes as shown in Table 8.

Table 8: Analysis Themes

Macro Level Themes
Undermining E-learning PD by Lecturers' Contract Policies
Lack of Effective PD Leave Policies
Lack of Investment in E-learning PD and not having a PD Budget
Absence of Academic Promotions and Promoting Lecturers based on Years
Non-Academic Professional Development
Dearth of Collaboration with HEIs and Constraining Lecturers to College Resources
Meso Level Themes
Inadequate Utilization of College Resources and Internal Expertise
Absence of Clear E-learning PD Accountability and Disparity between Policies and Practices
Lecturers' Collaboration and Hidden Bridges and Boundaries Among them
Training for the Sake of Training without Analysing Needs
Mistrust and Miscommunication between Managers and Lecturers
PD to Fix Deficits? Negative Connotations Associated with E-learning PD at College
Macro Level Themes
Limited E-learning Use despite Favourable E-learning Attitudes
E-learning Pedagogical Anxiety and Fear of Showing Incompetence
Lecturers' Frustration with and Resistance to E-learning PD
The Missing link between E-learning knowledge and E-learning Pedagogical Use

Accordingly, I planned initially to organise findings and analysis around these themes, starting with the Macro level, followed by findings at the organisational level (Meso level) and ending with findings at the individual level (Macro level). However, later I decided to simplify the analysis by having two levels: Context of E-learning PD, which includes Macro and Meso level, and the second was Individual level.

Table 9 shows the finalised themes, based on continuous analysis of codes, data and the themes created.

Table 9: Analysis Themes (Final Version)

The E-learning PD Context at Ibri College
Management of Lecturers' E-learning Professional Development
Absence of Clear E-learning PD Accountability and Disparity between Policies and Practices
Undermining E-learning PD by Lecturers' Contract Policies
Lack of Investment in E-learning PD and not having a PD Budget
Lack of Interest in E-learning PD due to Absence of Promotions System
Needs Analysis: Training for the Sake of Training without Analysing Needs
College Resources and Staff Expertise: Inadequate Utilisation of College Resources and Internal Expertise
Forms of PD Provision
The Micro Level
Favourable Attitudes, Limited Use: Limited E-learning use despite favourable attitudes toward it
Lecturers' Frustration with and Resistance to E-learning PD
Anxiety toward the Pedagogical use of E-learning and Fear of showing Incompetence
Perceived Lack of Managerial Support
E-learning Pedagogical Use: The Gap between E-learning PD and E-learning Pedagogical Application
Lecturers' Collaboration and informal E-learning PD
The Lesson Planning and Lesson Teaching Activity: Focus Group discussion, lesson planning and teaching the lesson planned

Chapter 6: **Findings**

6.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the study findings. These findings are organised according to the themes identified in the coding and thematic analysis processes discussed in the Methodology Chapter. The themes are related to the Macro (National policy), Meso (Organisational) and Micro (Individual) levels discussed in the Conceptual Framework of this study. Accordingly, the Chapter is divided into two main parts:

- The Context: the findings here are both at the Macro and Meso level. This context was examined using documentary analysis and interviews with managers. Questionnaire findings will be presented under a separate section before the context, because the questionnaire collected background information about the E-learning PD context at Ibri College.
- Individual issues at the Micro level. The sources of data were interviews and focus group discussions with lecturers, ethnographic observation, observations of PD, lesson-planning activity and classroom observations.

The following section will present the questionnaire findings. It will be followed by Context of E-learning PD. The final section will focus on individual (Micro) level issues.

6.2 Questionnaire Findings

This section presents the findings of the questionnaire used in the study. The purpose of this questionnaire was to collect information about E-learning PD practices at Ibri College and lecturers' perceptions of E-learning PD potential in improving teaching and learning and the role of College management. Analysis of questionnaire findings was vital for getting an overall picture of the E-learning PD context at College and lecturers'

experiences and perceptions and informing the subsequent data Collection methods used.

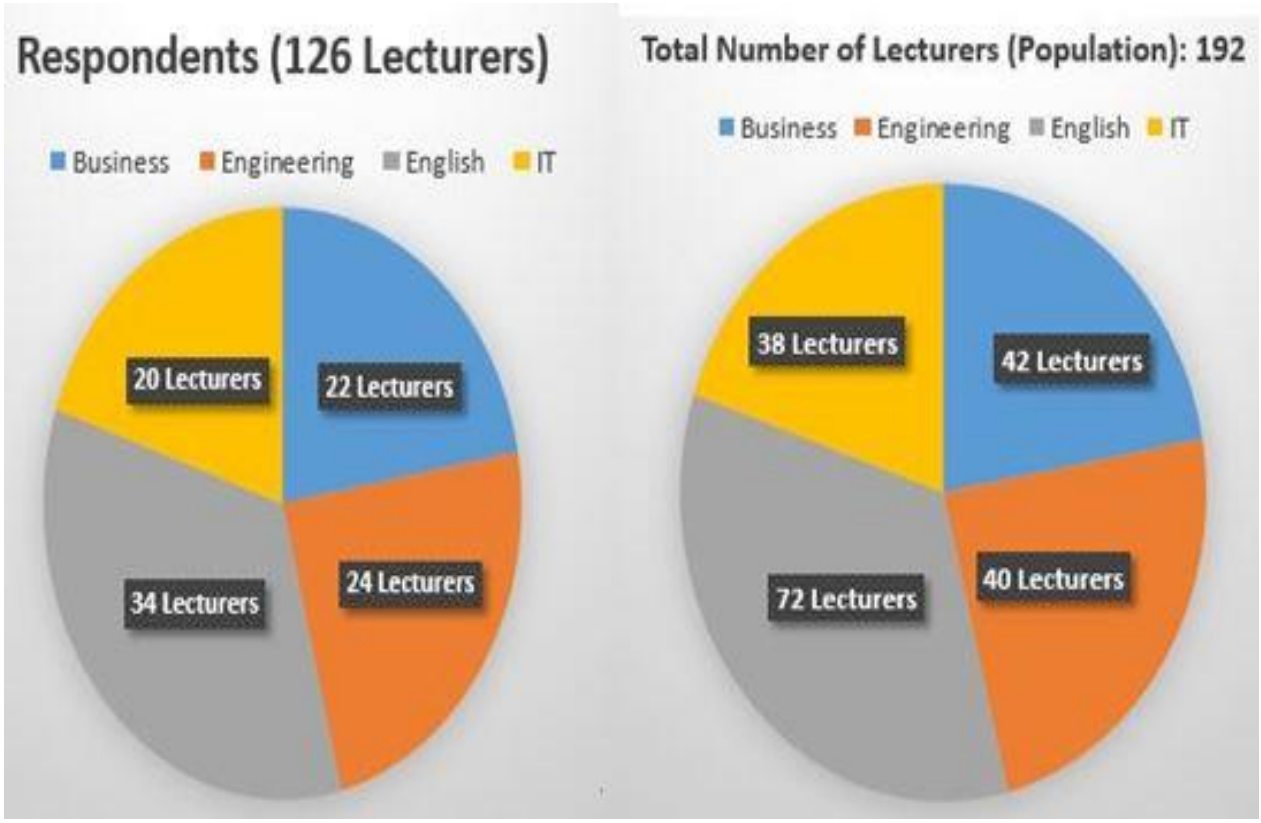


Figure 20: Questionnaire Sample and Lecturers' Population

The questionnaire respondents, as Figure 20 shows, were 126 lecturers out of 192 lecturers at the College (response rate 65%). The four academic departments at the College varied in the number of lecturers where English had the highest number of lecturers (72 lecturers at 37%), followed by Business (42 lecturers at 22%), then Engineering (40 lecturers at 21%) and finally Information Technology (38 lecturers at 20%). Interestingly, the respondents' numbers reflected lecturers' numbers where respondents from English were the highest (34 lecturers) (27%), then Engineering (24 lecturers) (20%) then Business (22 lecturers) (17%) and finally Information Technology (20 lecturers) (16%). However, the response rate of lecturers within each department was over 50% in Business, Engineering and IT, whereas it was less than 50% in English (34 lecturers out of 72). It was not clear why response rates varied; however, this disproportion was not statistically significant and the overall response rate was relatively

high. Lecturers from the English Language Centre had significantly lower use of E-learning compared to lecturers from other academic departments, despite having positive attitudes toward E-learning PD importance among all academic departments.

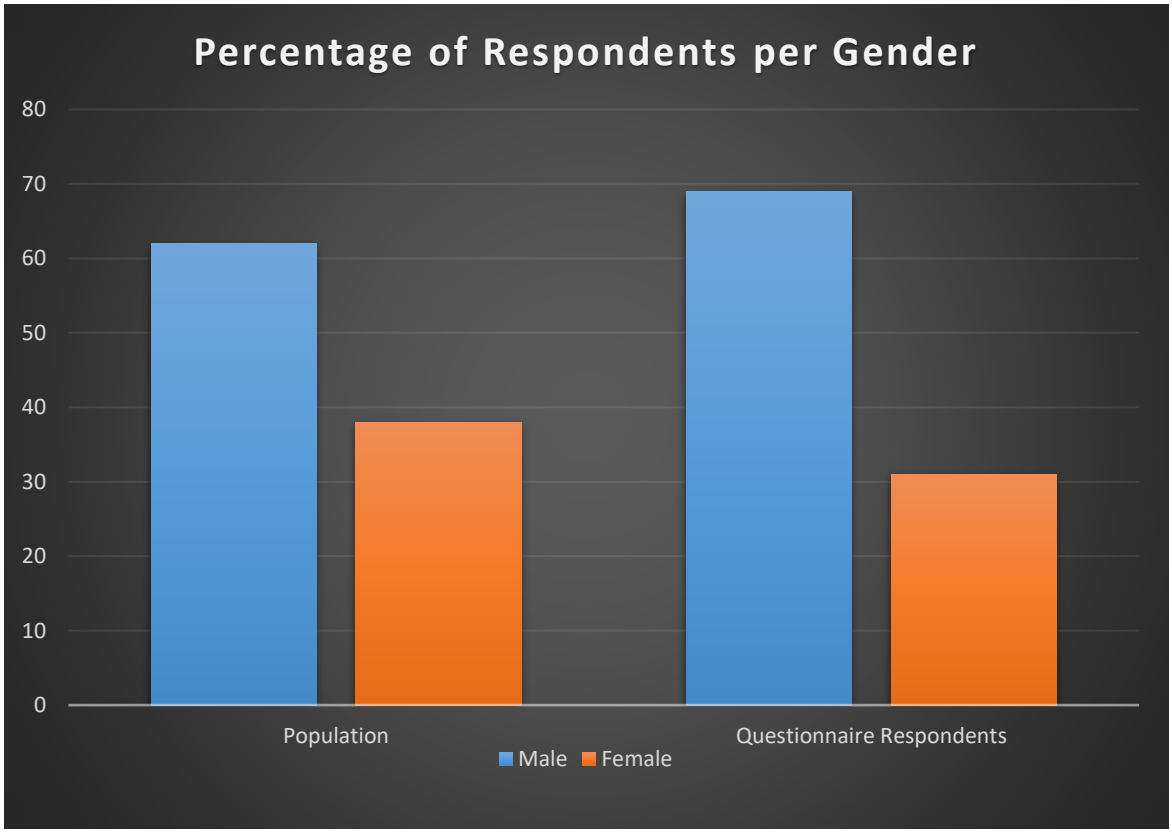


Figure 21: Gender of Questionnaire Respondents

Regarding gender of respondents, the majority of questionnaire respondents were male lecturers (70%) compared to about 30% female lecturers. As Figure 21 shows, the majority of College lecturers were male (around 60%) and female lecturers were around 40%. This shows a slightly higher response rate among male lecturers than female lecturers, compared to the total percentage of male to female lecturers at the College. There were no statistically significant differences in responses to questionnaire between male and female lecturers.

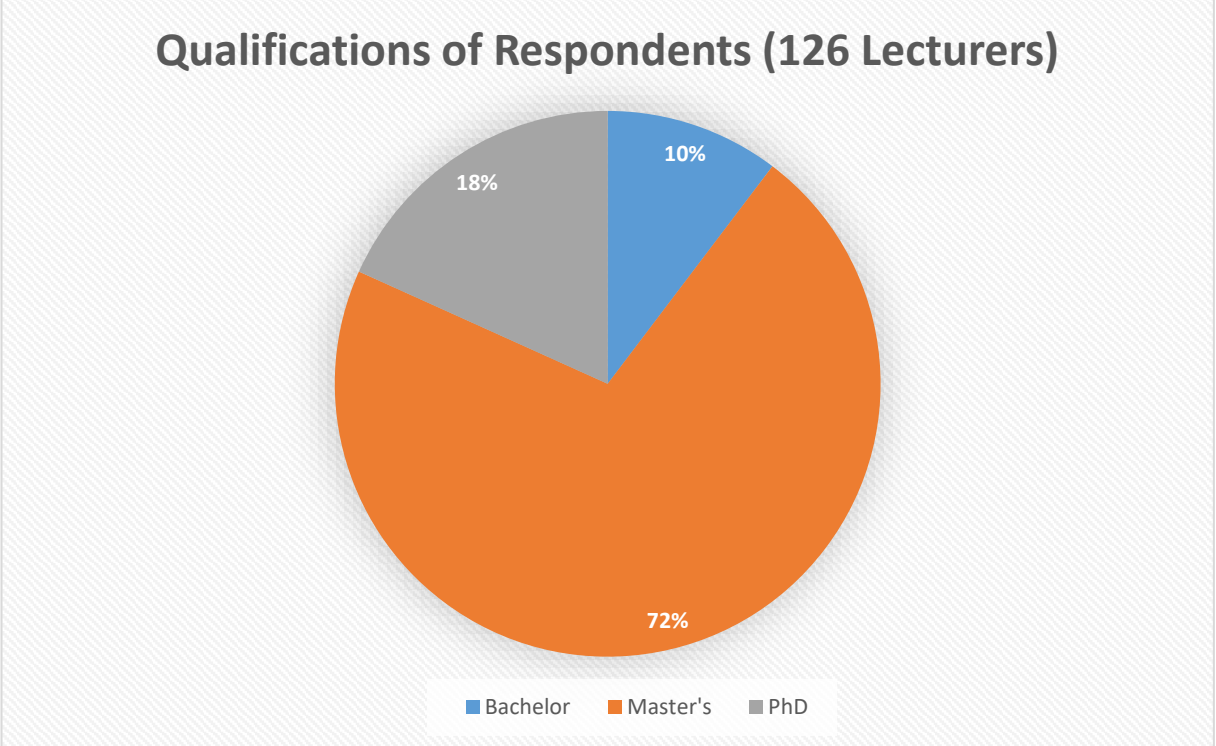


Figure 22: Qualifications of Questionnaire Respondents

The questionnaire collected information about lecturers' qualifications, age and teaching experiences. Most respondents had a Master's degree (90 lecturers) (71%), followed by PhD (23 lecturers) (18%) and then Bachelor degree (13 lecturers) (10%). Figure 22 shows the qualifications of lecturers who completed the questionnaire. Analysis of responses based on qualifications showed that higher qualifications corresponded with higher use of Moodle, Smartboards and getting supplementary materials from the Internet. Furthermore, lecturers with higher qualifications had higher engagement in independent learning activities such as reading, online learning and research.

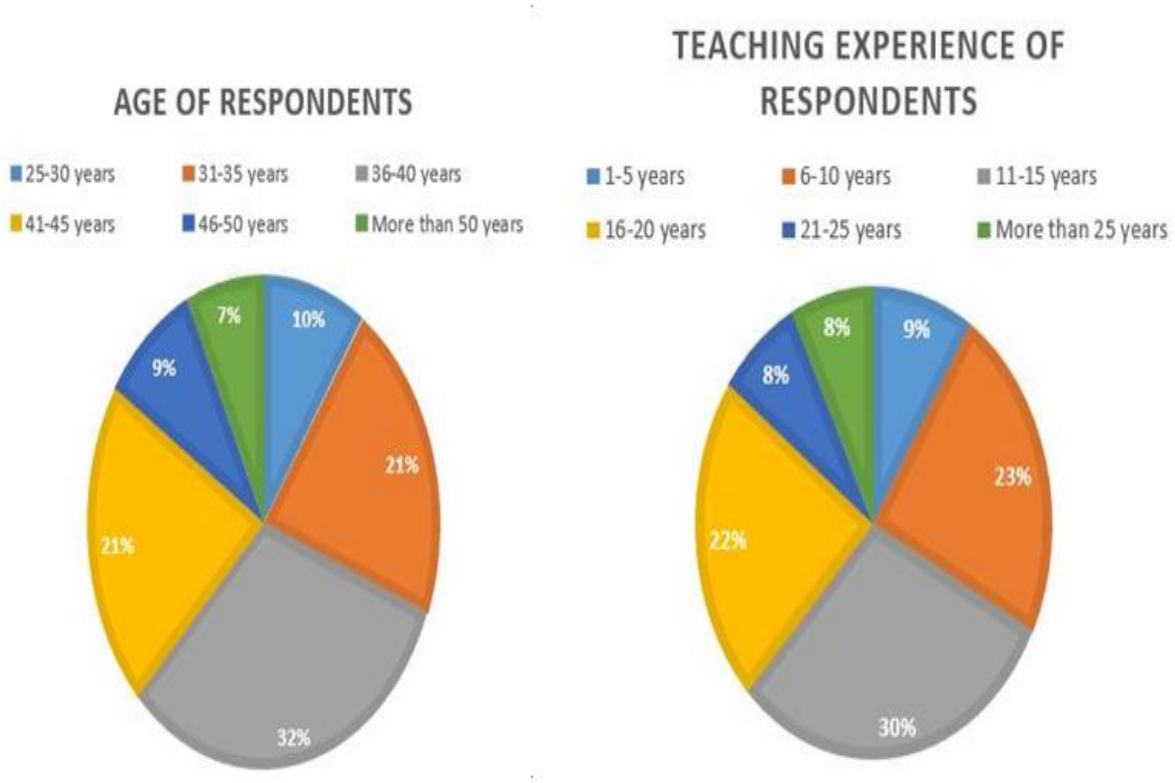


Figure 23: Age Range and Teaching Experience of Questionnaire Respondents

Figure 23 shows that there seems to be a clear relationship between age of respondents and their teaching experience. Lecturers' age group of 36 to 40 years old was the highest and the rest were distributed almost equally around this group. Similarly, most lecturers had a teaching experience between 11 and 25 years and the remaining lecturers were distributed almost evenly around this group. Perceptions toward E-learning PD were almost similar among all age groups. Younger lecturers in particular had slightly higher positive attitudes toward the importance of E-learning for improving teaching and learning. Lecturers' years of experience at Ibri College was negatively associated with E-learning PD satisfaction.

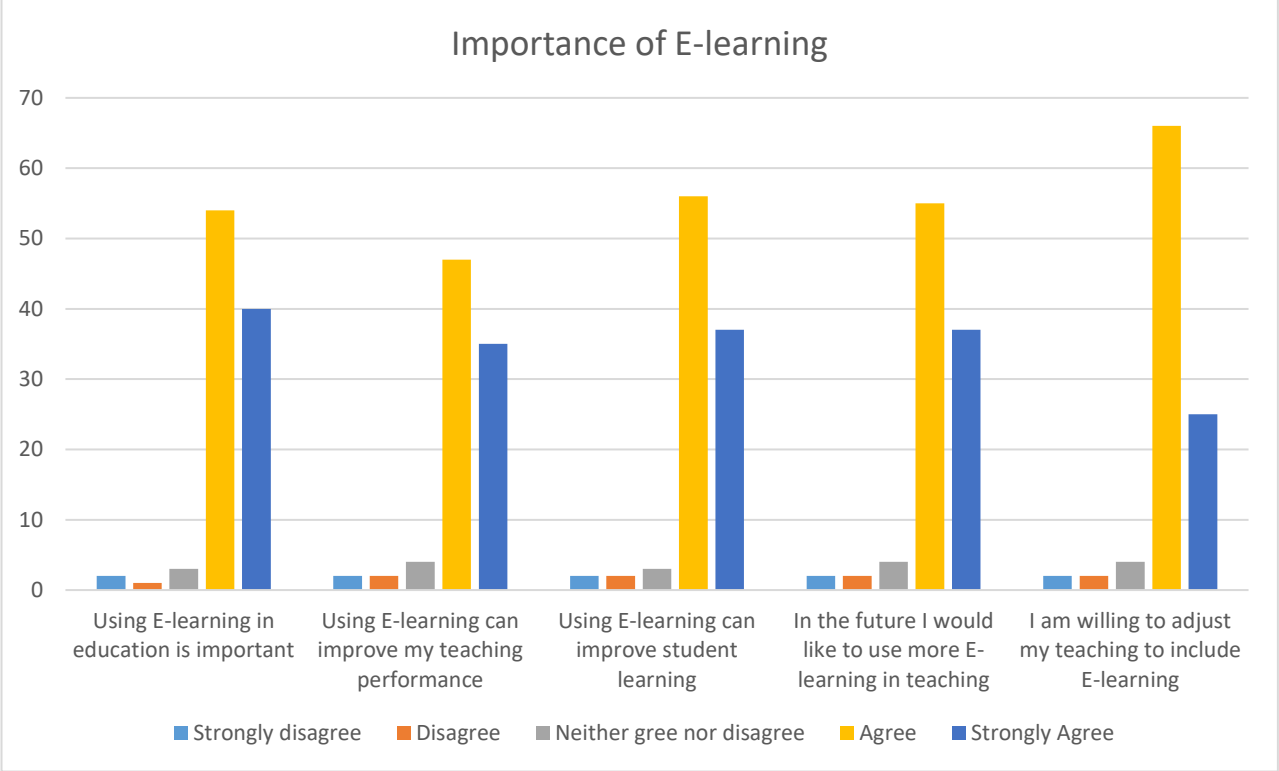


Figure 24: Importance of E-learning for Questionnaire Respondents

The responses showed that lecturers had remarkably positive attitudes toward E-learning usefulness and this can be clearly visible in Figure 24. The vast majority of lecturers (93%) thought that E-learning is important in education and similarly (92%) thought that E-learning could improve teaching performance and (92%) student learning. This could be a motivation for lecturers' willingness (92%) to use E-learning more often in teaching and their willingness to adjust their teaching (91%) to include E-learning.

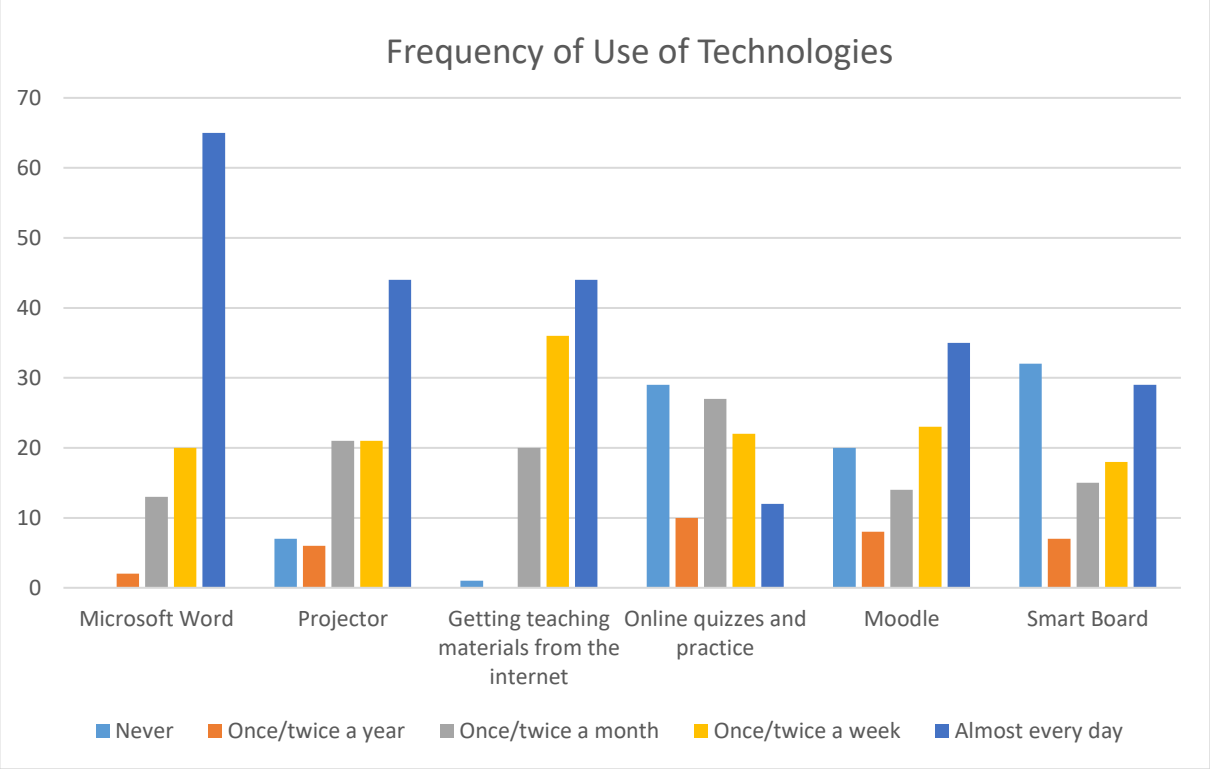


Figure 25: Frequency of E-learning Use

Lecturers used some forms of technologies more frequently than others as can be seen in Figure 25. The most frequently used technology was Microsoft Word, where 65% of lecturers used it every day. This could be due to its necessity to everyday practice and simplicity of the software. Getting supplementary materials from the Internet and using projectors were common practices done almost every day by a little bit less than half the participants (45%). This is a considerable percentage and shows that lecturers frequently kept looking for additional teaching materials. The least frequently used E-learning tool was online practices and quizzes, where most lecturers had never used them and a quarter of the lecturers (27%) used them once or twice a month. Lecturers' use of Moodle and Smartboard varied considerably where lecturers' use spread from never using them or using them almost every day.

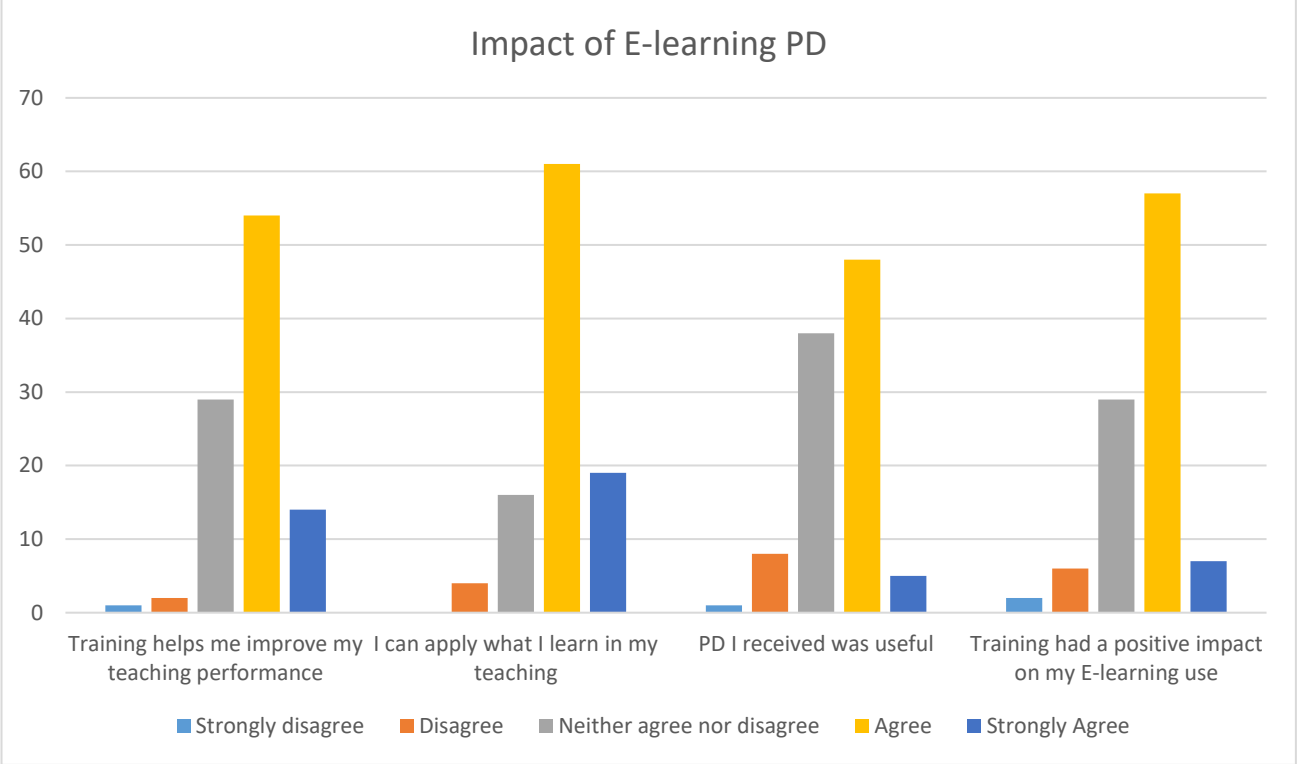


Figure 26: Impact of E-learning PD

The majority of lecturers had positive attitudes toward PD and E-learning PD (see Figure 26). Most lecturers thought that training helped improve their teaching performance (68%) and that that they could apply what they learned in their teaching (80%). The majority of lecturers agreed that training had a positive impact on their use of E-learning (64%). Lecturers seemed more sceptical about the usefulness of the training they received, since only around half of them agreed that it was useful.

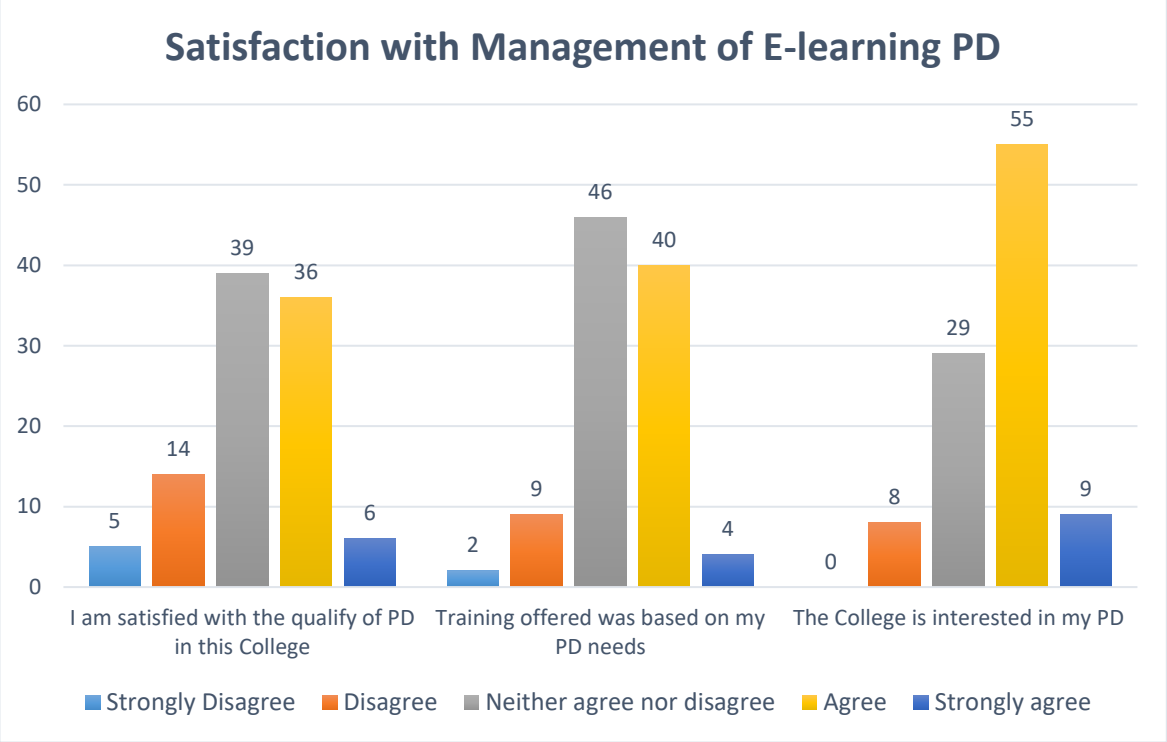


Figure 27: Satisfaction with Management of E-learning PD

Despite the favourable attitudes towards PD, lecturers were less satisfied with the quality of PD and matching PD to their needs. Since the questionnaire could not provide an explanation for this dissatisfaction, this issue was investigated later in the interviews. Figure 27 shows that a relatively low percentage of lecturers were satisfied with the quality of PD (42%) and most lecturers 58% were unsure or unsatisfied. Almost half of the respondents (46%) were unsure that the training they received was tailored to their needs. However, most lecturers (64%) felt that Ibri College was interested in their PD, but a significant number (29%) were unsure or disagreed (8%). These figures showed divided perceptions about training quality and relevance, which were relevant to the role of the administration in managing PD practices.

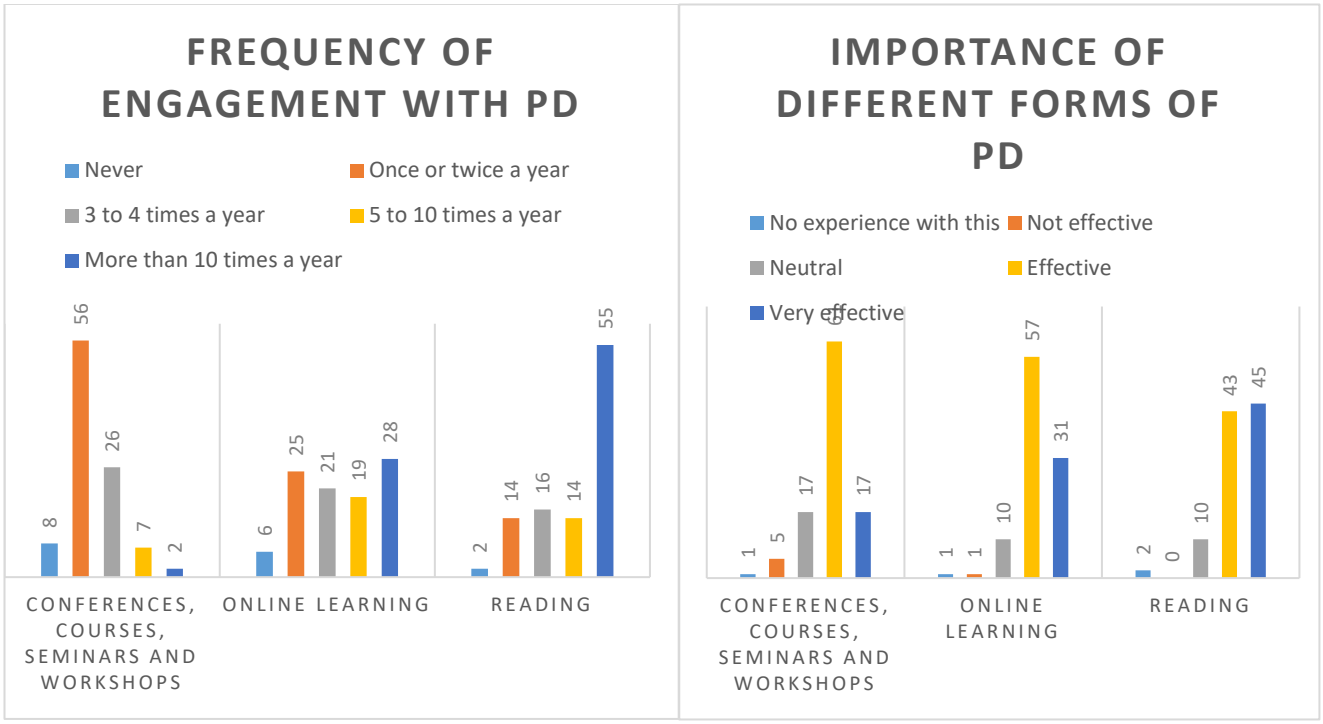


Figure 28: Lecturers' Engagement with Different Forms of PD and their Perceptions of their Importance

Lecturers engaged in certain forms of PD more than other forms and they rated their importance differently. Interestingly, reading (88%), online learning (88%), conferences, courses, seminars and workshops (78%) were all regarded as either important or very important. This means that lecturers valued both independent online learning and reading and formal learning almost equally. However, the frequency of taking part in conferences, courses and seminars was low, since most lecturers (56%) took part in them only once or twice a year. Despite the lack of formal PD opportunities, lecturers resorted to self-development through reading and self-learning.

6.3 The E-learning PD Context at Ibri College

6.3.1 Introduction

In this Context section, I will present findings related to the context of E-learning PD at Ibri College of Technology. It was based on documentary analysis (Ibri College, 2011, 2013 & 2016; OAAA, 2014) and interviews with managers in order to examine issues at the organisational level and national policy such as managers' attitudes to E-learning PD, E-learning PD policies, formal support structures and investment in E-learning PD. Documentary analysis and interviews will be presented in tandem since they are interrelated. The impact of the context on lecturers' E-learning PD will be discussed at the Individual level (see 6.4: The Micro Level).

Documentary analysis was vital for understanding the E-learning PD Context. It was done by analysing all the documents relevant to E-learning PD at the College: College Quality Audit reports (2011, 2013, and 2016) and the feedback report from the OAAA (2014) (See Methodology). These College reports and the OAAA feedback were of paramount importance for the College because the College, like all HEIs in Oman, is required to publish quality reports and meet quality standards set by the OAAA in order to get accreditation and continue its academic programmes. For this reason, the OAAA recommendations related to E-learning PD were crucial because they were based on a review of College reports and College visits.

The following analysis is organised according to the themes as identified in the Methods Chapter, which are the following:

Table 10: E-learning PD Context Themes

Theme No.	Theme
1	Management of Lecturers' E-learning PD
2	E-learning PD Accountability and Disparity between Policies and Practices
3	Undermining E-learning PD by Lecturers' Contract Policies
4	Lack of Effective PD Leave Policies
5	Lack of Investment in E-learning PD
6	Lack of Interest in E-learning PD due to Absence of Promotions Structure
7	E-learning PD Needs Analysis
8	College Resources and Staff Expertise
9	Forms of PD Provision

Analysis begins with the College management and the E-learning PD policies, practices, roles and support structures. This is related to the themes following it, which is E-learning PD accountability and disparity between policies and practices. College lecturers' work contracts, which were either with the Government (Ministry of Manpower) or with private recruitment agencies, had an impact on their E-learning PD experiences and this was analysed here. After work contracts, leave policies theme discusses how lecturers' PD was undermined by policies and managers' practices. The following theme will be financial investment in E-learning PD. Absence of academic promotions were perceived by some managers as counterproductive. The remaining themes will focus on different themes such as dearth of collaboration between Ibri College and HEIs, not matching training to lecturers' needs, College resources and internal expertise and finally forms of PD provision. These will be analysed separately for the sake of clarity in analysis but they are interrelated and references to each other will be made whenever necessary.

6.3.2 Management of Lecturers' E-learning Professional Development

This section focuses on the management of lecturers' E-learning PD at the national policy level and the institutional level. This includes findings about Ministry regulations, College

governance, managers' formal E-learning PD responsibilities, E-learning PD support structures and E-learning PD provision. An important outcome discussed here was the critique of E-learning PD at Ibri College from an accreditation authority.

A considerable emphasis and interest in E-learning was shown by Ibri College in its Quality reports (2011, 2013 & 2016) and the feedback from the OAAA (2014). These reports and the OAAA report were of supreme significance for the College because Academic Accreditation from the OAAA is a requirement for all HEIs in Oman and the College needs it in order to continue its academic programmes. According to Ibri College (2013), E-learning skills were 'paramount' for students in order to improve the quality of teaching and learning, update students' knowledge, promote a lifelong learning culture and equip graduates with the technological knowledge needed for employment. For these reasons, Ibri College stated that it was 'committed' to developing technology constantly (2013). The College also stated that it was planning to provide E-learning PD for lecturers. However, the College did not specify or have any E-learning training plans. I found that the College placed an emphasis in its documents on updating technologies. Later, we will see that this emphasis on purchasing and updating technologies was not met by adequate provision of E-learning PD (Section 6.3.6).

Analysis of College reports (2011, 2013 & 2016) and OAAA (2014) feedback showed that E-learning PD at the College had many limitations. The College did not have an E-learning PD strategy or an E-learning teaching strategy. The College was urged by the OAAA (2014) to create a comprehensive E-learning strategy that includes the use of E-learning in teaching and learning. The College did not have a plan for future learning technologies based on student need (Ibri College, 2013; OAAA, 2014). Moodle, according to Ibri College (2013), was used as a learning platform where lecturers could create courses and a space for discussions. However, the OAAA (2014) found that Moodle use consisted of only uploading notes without adding value to teaching and learning. In other words, Moodle was used as a repository for supplementary materials. It was not clear why lecturers posted these materials and whether students referred to them. Furthermore, it was not known whether this use was driven by the management emphasis on E-learning strategy.

To make things more complicated, Ibri College had no definition of E-learning (OAAA, 2014) and it was not known what was meant by E-learning in its reports and in the questionnaires distributed to lecturers which gathered information for the report. According to OAAA (2014), it was not enough to plan for a 100% use of Moodle, as indicated by the College portfolio, but there was a need to consider how it could add value to teaching and learning. This emphasis from the management on '100%' Moodle use could be a reason for lecturers' upload of unnecessary materials, but this issue was not investigated or addressed by the College. These materials were regarded unnecessary because they were not clearly related to the curriculum and there was no evidence that students were using these resources.

Responsibilities of Ibri College towards lecturers' PD were clearly specified by the College Management in the College Quality Manuals (2013 & 2016). The Head of Human Resources Department had the overall responsibility for E-learning PD, assisted by committees and Heads of Departments; and under the general guidance of the Assistant Dean for Administrative and Financial Affairs (Ibri College, 2013 & 2016). Three committees were responsible for PD and E-learning at the College: The Staff Professional Development Committee, the Human Resource Development Committee and the E-learning Committee (Ibri College, 2013). The Human Resource Development Committee was responsible for planning and managing staff PD at the college level, while the Staff development Committee was responsible for providing and supporting PD at the departmental level (Ibri College, 2013). PD practices were supposed to be based on needs analysis conducted by the Staff Development Committee, with members from each academic department, the Human Resources Department and from the College management (Ibri College, 2013). The next theme (6.3.3) will focus on the disparity between these formal responsibilities and the actual practices that took place at the College.

There was lack of information reported by Ibri College about E-learning PD, and the little information available was too general, with poor accuracy and without adequate detail or

explanation of methodology. The only sources of information found were College Quality reports (2011; 2013 & 2016) and feedback from the OAAA (2014). The College and OAAA reports were vital documents that contained information covering all aspects related to College such as the College performance, practices, policies and management. However, there were very few details related to E-learning PD. The College, like all HEIs in Oman, is required by law to write these reports and submit them to the OAAA in order to get institutional accreditation and continue its programmes. The College documents had limited description of its PD strategy and it did not have an E-learning or an E-learning PD strategy. The OAAA criticised the absence of any reported use of smartboards among lecturers, and it was not known if and to what extent this facility was used despite investing considerable financial resources in them (Ibri College, 2013; OAAA, 2014). Ibri College (2013) stated it planned to increase lecturers' use of E-learning resources by implementing training programmes for lecturers (Ibri College, 2013). However, the College did not specify any detail regarding the kinds of programmes that would be provided, their purpose, trainers or training strategy.

Another important criticism by the OAAA (2014) for the College was investing considerable financial resources on technologies (Ibri College, 2013) without evidence of their use or having an E-learning strategy. The College purchased Smartboards in 2010 which were hardly ever used, then replaced them with newer Smartboards in 2014 which were again rarely used (OAAA, 2014). The issue was applicable to many forms of E-learning such as smartboards, Moodle, computer labs and the audio-visual room. A Head of Section talked about the audio-visual room criticising the College investment in it:

> *'They spent all this money on computers, headphones and CDs without consulting us or lecturers. Nobody is using it (the Audio-Visual Room) now because there are only 20 computers and we normally have more than 25 students in each class. All that money was wasted'.*

This suggests that there was lack of communication between the Educational Technologies Centre, the College senior management, the academic departments and lecturers. In addition, it would appear that the College prioritized financial investment

without adequate consultation and without developing an E-learning PD strategy and a comprehensive E-learning strategy.

It is notable that the depth of information documented by the College was limited and its accuracy and the methodology followed in gathering it were poor (OAAA, 2014). The OAAA (2014) rebuked and questioned the College report and its methodology for being weak and vague. For instance, the surveys used by the College were imprecise, too generic and failed to explain terms (OAAA, 2014). Those surveys were based on general satisfaction with a low response rate and vague methods of assessment (OAAA, 2014). Respondents to the surveys conducted by the College were left to guess the meaning of some terms, such as E-learning and professional development. Lecturers were asked whether they used E-learning, without explaining what E-learning was, how they used it, how often and why they used it. Asking a yes/no question was a poor method of asking about E-learning use. Many issues in the College questionnaire remained unexplained. For instance, student satisfaction with the Internet was 2.0 out of five while for staff it was 3.5 (Ibri College, 2013) without a clear explanation for this disparity. Another example of unexplained issues in the survey was that lecturer satisfaction with educational technology resources was 3.97 while it was only 1.5 for students (OAAA, 2014). When lecturers and students were interviewed later by the OAAA, the OAAA found no explanation for this discrepancy (OAAA, 2014). The OAAA (2014) recommended improving the quality of data collection, by designing better surveys, ensuring representativeness or respondents and supporting surveys with interviews. Lacking basic information about E-learning PD practices deprived the College of information that could be used for understanding and developing practices.

The next theme focuses on E-learning PD accountability and disparity between policies and practices. Although related to the Management of E-learning PD theme, it is presented under a separate theme to highlight its importance.

6.3.3 Absence of Clear E-learning PD Accountability and Disparity between Policies and Practices

There were disparities between E-learning PD responsibility as stated in the College documents (discussed in 6.3.2) and in real practices. Furthermore, there was ambiguity in who was responsible for E-learning PD since a casual approach was followed in taking PD responsibility. Training was normally confined to lecturers within individual departments without proper collaboration among academic departments, which contradicted the College PD policies. These issues were central for understanding how formal E-learning PD occurs at the College and managers' perceptions of it, two important research questions investigated in this study.

E-learning PD roles, support structures and responsibilities specified in the College documents were not followed or utilised by the management. This was evident by comparing statements in College documents with managers' interviews. This led to a haphazard approach to PD where departmental managers or lecturers organised training as they found appropriate or convenient. Furthermore, this seemed to be a reason for the lack of interdepartmental collaboration since each department had to rely on its own internal resources and organise training internally without sufficient collaboration among departments or with the senior management. This contradicted the College policy of organising all training by the Head of the Human Resources Department under the supervision of the Assistant Dean for Academic Affairs (see Section 6.3.2.). Interviews with College Senior Managers, Head of Departments and Heads of Sections showed that they all agreed that currently lecturers' PD and E-learning PD were conducted without referring to the Human Resources Department or involving it. Consequently, there was lack of guidance and support and E-learning PD responsibilities were not taken. This resulted in decentralised training where departments organised PD without guidance or support from the top management and there was limited inter-departmental collaboration. Many managers pointed out that many of these policies were only on paper and not applied. A Head of Department protested against this lack of commitment to policies and lack of support for E-learning and PD practices:

> *'At the moment, they [Senior Management and Human Resources] are not even aware of what is going on in the name of staff development in the departments, they are isolated. That is clear deviation from our policy and its implementation. Here comes the role of the higher officials. Once you have the policy, you have to implement whatever is stated in the policy.'*

An important issue that meant that E-learning PD was haphazard was that the College senior managers had limited involvement, knowledge and engagement with lecturers' PD. For example, a Senior Manager responsible for formal training did not have a clear idea about E-learning PD practices at the College and he stated that departments did whatever they found suitable for them. He stated that:

> *'We don't have actually a system, an organized system for professional development'.*

Many other managers reinforced this statement and indicated the lack of an integrated training approach or strategies. Middle management, lower management and lecturers took almost full responsibility of PD and E-learning practice. This showed a major contradiction between policy and practice. A Head of Section stated that:

> *'We do everything independently without referring to the College Management. At the end of the year, we write a summary of our PD activities organised for the Quality Assurance Department. I do not know whether they have a look at it or not, but we do not get any feedback. We just send it at the end of each academic year.'*

This experience was shared by managers in all academic departments where all decisions were made within departments without referring to Human Resources or the College Senior Management. This showed that there was lack of follow up or interest in training and departmental managers and lecturers felt that they could not rely on committees or senior management. A Head of Department showed discontent with the current situation stating that:

'Departments do whatever they find suitable for them without communicating with HR (Human Resources) or Assistant Dean. This has to change and all PD should start first from HR Department'.

None of the departmental managers interviewed felt that they did not need senior management or Human Resources support or intervention, which contradicted a senior manager's view that departments could be self-sufficient in their E-learning PD practices and the current PD situation was acceptable.

Another support structure created by the College that was not utilised was the E-learning and PD committees: The Human Resources Development Committee, the Staff Professional Development Committee and the E-learning Committee. The study showed that discrepancies between the committees' roles and E-learning PD practices taking place at the College were common. Interviews showed that individual departments followed their own approaches without adhering to the guidelines or referring to these committees and their official roles. This fuelled the haphazard nature of E-learning PD where committees which were supposed to guide, organise and monitor E-learning PD were not utilised. Most PD or E-learning PD events were organised without referring to these committees. Consequently, formal E-learning PD practices were limited and not based on lecturers' needs. A Head of Department stated that:

'The role of committees should be revised. Many conferences and training events were organised without involving the PD Committee members'.

Departmental managers and committee members showed dissatisfaction with the follow up received from senior management. One of the committee members talked about the lack of follow up from management stating that:

'They [the management] consider our committee as a departmental thing, so they never ask us to do anything and never ask us what we do in our committee'.

Although committee members were from all College departments, their roles were mainly constrained to their own departments. This was another contradiction of the

College policy of central E-learning and PD committees, since interviews with committee members within departments showed there was lack of understanding and limited collaboration between the PD committee members from the different academic departments.

While responsibilities appeared to be delegated to committees and departmental managers, lack of co-ordination and follow up created significant issues relating to best use of resources, alignment to organisational strategies and staff satisfaction when training was not perceived as aligned to individual needs. For example, a Head of Section who was also a Head of the PD Committee within her department commented on the feedback and support received from the management by saying:

> *'We prepare a report about the PD committee activities. It is only required by the QA [Quality Assurance] unit, that's it. I do not know if any of the college administration look at it …. But there is no feedback or comments'.*

This could be interpreted as a lack of satisfaction with the follow up and support provided to the committees. Departmental managers and PD organisers did not even know whether anyone looked at their reports, or if reports were only kept for documentation purposes. A Head of Department talked about 'waste' of resources, since departments organised training only for lecturers within their departments even when it would be useful for lecturers in all departments. A Head of Department emphasised that this contradicted the College policies and created duplication of training, lack of engagement and waste of resources.

Interestingly, many managers thought that there was a 'common vision', common purpose and mutual understanding among them regarding E-learning PD. However, interviews showed there were many misconceptions and misunderstandings among them. A Head of Department refused to take part in an interview because according to him Heads of Departments and Heads of Sections had a common view on things:

'You do not need to interview all of us. We always meet and work as a team and if you speak to one of us it is like you have spoken to everyone'.

Another Senior Manager initially did not want to take part in an interview stating that he would just say the same points, since he regularly met with the other Assistant Deans. These misconceptions seemed to be driven by expectations that statements from the QA Manual and the policies there were translated into practice:

'We work as a team. We meet regularly and we have College policies that guide us'.

None of the managers interviewed pointed out the fact that policies were still being developed and there were no E-learning or E-learning PD policies (Ibri College, 2013 & 2016; OAAA, 2014) (discussed in Section 6.3.2). The disparity between rhetoric of 'common understanding' and interview data seemed to be partly caused by not prioritising PD and E-learning PD and the absence of an E-learning PD strategy. The College management emphasised working on Quality Assurance training in order to get accreditation over other forms of PD more directly linked to pedagogy. There was also some blame between managers at different levels, where senior managers blamed middle and lower managers and vice-versa. For instance, a Senior Manager stated that:

'I think it is a misunderstanding of policies. Some Heads of Departments do not know the Human Resources regulations well, although they are available in the College website and hard copies'.

This form of blame and disagreement among various managerial levels was common. However, an Assistant Dean was vocal about the differences he had with other Senior Managers and criticised the limited level of engagement that senior managers had with E-learning PD and ignoring policies. He said that:

'We have policies and they would be effective if applied, but it is easier for the management to give all the work to departments and not get involved.'

Managers' views regarding E-learning PD were varied where some managers supported centrality of training and thought that the College Management should have a more

active role, whereas others thought that departments could manage PD on their own. Some managers were happy with the current practices, while other managers were critical and thought that fundamental changes were necessary.

The following section discusses the impact of lecturers' work contracts and their impact on lecturers' PD engagement.

6.3.4 Undermining E-learning PD by Lecturers' Contract Policies

Interviews with managers showed that there was significant policy discrimination that favoured lecturers employed by the Ministry over lecturers employed through recruitment agencies. This issue affected the majority of lecturers, since around 75% of lecturers were employed through agencies while the rest were employed directly through the government (Ibri College, 2016; Interview with HoD). As we will see later (section 6.4), the policy of employing lecturers directly or through agencies, then treating them unequally affected lecturers' and managers' engagement and experiences with E-learning PD negatively, in addition to creating a negative atmosphere where lecturers felt disconnected from the Ministry of Manpower, the sponsor and regulator of the College. Heads of Departments and senior managers at the College raised this issue and its impact on E-learning PD equity and inclusivity. For instance, a Head of Section talked about PD equity and inclusivity:

> *'The Ministry does not treat agency recruited lecturers as staff members. They do not get any training and the Ministry refuses to get involved in any issue related to them'.*

The nature of these contracts and the different laws, regulations and lecturers' rights meant that E-learning PD engagement and experiences were affected by contract type, even though lecturers' duties were identical regardless of their employment status; which will be discussed at the Micro Level (section 6.4).

The study revealed that none of the recruitment agencies invested any resources on the PD of its lecturers and the Ministry did not take any responsibility in providing training to them. This policy of not enforcing PD in Agency lecturers' contracts and not taking any responsibility in their PD was demotivating, discriminatory and had a negative impact on lecturers' E-learning PD experiences. I raised this issue with some managers and they indicated that the Ministry could not force companies to pay for training, and companies were not willing to pay for any kind of PD since it was not a requirement. A Senior Manager said:

'We do not have authority to tell them [recruitment agencies] what to do'.

A Head of Department argued that these companies should provide training at least a few times a year. For this reason, many managers in the interviews repeated that internal training was the best solution to this problem (See Forms of PD in section 6.3.11). A Head of Department added that the PD situation was not much better for lecturers with government contracts, since they rarely had a chance to engage with PD opportunities beyond the College.

Many of the following points refer to lecturers' contract policies. Lecturers are referred to either as Ministry-recruited lecturers or Agency-recruited lecturers.

6.3.5 Lack of Effective PD Leave Policies

Interviews with managers revealed that they viewed the absence of effective PD leave policies as a significant obstacle that undermined lectures' engagement with PD opportunities beyond the College and limited their ability to support lecturers who needed a leave for PD purposes. This had a negative impact on all forms of PD including E-learning PD. Interviews and documentary analysis showed that the College was restricted by government regulations that did not permit leave for PD purposes and did not tolerate absenteeism for any reason including PD (Ibri College, 2013 & 2016; Interviews). For

instance, a Head of Section expressed his inability to take part in PD activities outside the College or to support lecturers:

> *'Without having any policy, I cannot go beyond that. I have to follow the rules and regulations specified by the Ministry of Manpower'.*

Attending PD events was made difficult by the absence of 'PD leave' and lecturers were expected to be at College for at least seven hours on work days and fingerprint scanners were used to monitor that (Ibri College, 2016). The strict fingerprint scanning attendance policy from the Ministry prevented lecturers from attending PD events even if they did not have teaching duties and did not have to be physically present at College. A Head of Department indicated that there were legal restrictions to allowing lecturers to attend external PD, even when they did not have teaching duties.

There was some tension between managers and staff where a few managers defended the attendance policies set by the Ministry. For instance, a Senior Manager viewed fingerprint scanners as helpful for the management since they made it easier for them to follow lecturers' attendance and performance. This contradicted lecturers' view that attendance could not be used to judge lecturers' performance. A Head of Department supported the attendance policies and argued that:

> *'If lecturers have good reasons to leave early we always approve that, if they do not have to teach'.*

As we will see later (Section 6.4.3), some lecturers contradicted this view and argued that they were not able to attend PD events even when they did not have teaching duties and did not have to be available at the College.

The only policy I found (Ministry Memo, 2015 & 2018) from the Ministry was allowing government-contracted lecturers to attend PD outside College only when the Ministry nominated and sent them. Some managers viewed this policy as ineffective since the

Ministry did not provide adequate PD opportunities. The Ministry did not take any responsibility in providing training for agency recruited lecturers and the recruitment companies were not obliged to invest any money in their PD. A recent Ministry Circular showed that the policy remained the same, where the Ministry asked the College to send its annual training needs for Government employed staff only (Administrative Circular No 1/2018 regarding the annual training plan for Ministry of Manpower employees). A Head of Department criticised the absence of PD funding, stating that:

'These [recruiting agencies] are Business people. They would never pay any single Baisa (Penny) for any kind of training.'

There was no policy that would allow lecturers to attend PD events when they would be personally willing to cover all their PD costs. Interviews with managers and analysis of College Quality Manuals (2013 & 2016) showed that lecturers who would miss a workday at College would lose salary for the days they were absent because it was considered a breach of attendance regulations set by the Ministry. On top of that, they might suffer other consequences for missing workdays such as warnings and termination of contract for agency-recruited lecturers (Ibri College, 2016; Interviews).

While Senior Managers defended attendance policies, Middle and low-level managers tended to sympathise with lecturers. Many middle and low-level managers viewed the merit of flexible policies and were against the blanket policy set by the Ministry, which was strict and left them unable to support lecturers. A Head of Department stated:

'Sometimes some staff members may apply to present something in some other countries… The Ministry will never allow anyone of them to go out. Some staff members say I can pay for my ticket, for everything, but at least release me or give me 1, 2, 3 days, administrative leave. The answer is always negative. If you want to go, you will lose money for those days'.

Some College managers blamed the Ministry and expressed that they were doing their jobs. For instance, a Senior Manager stated that:

'These regulations come from the Ministry … otherwise we always try to support our lecturers. What we can do is focus on professional development within the College and keep sending requests to the Ministry for training. We have lecturers here who have very good experiences and qualifications; and we encourage them to share their ideas with others'.

However, the management pointed that sometimes lecturers were given permission to leave early. A Senior Manager talked about this point:

'Sometimes we give lecturers permission to leave early if they have good reasons or for professional development and in this case, they have to complete a form, get approval from their HoD, then sign out'.

However, Early Leave contributed to the haphazard nature of PD, as we will see later (Section 6.4.5). Lectures complained about management's discrimination as Early Leave for PD purposes was granted in some cases and declined in others without a clear reason for these decisions.

The strict attendance policy did not support lecturers who wished to attend PD events far from the College even if allowed by College management. Sometimes the College management allowed lecturers to attend external PD by asking them to sign in early, attend a PD event, and come back later to sign out, or complete an Early Leave Form. This was done due to the absence of PD leave policy. Senior Managers viewed it as a solution, stating that the College supported lecturers by allowing them to attend conferences, subject to getting approval since lecturers had to abide to regulations set by the government. A Senior Manager talked about lack of funding and E-learning PD opportunities and supporting lecturers by giving early leave to attend PD in other HEIs:

'This does not mean that we do not give them opportunities to benefit from training here at the College or in other colleges and universities … We allow them to leave early to attend conferences in Sultan Qaboos University or private universities'.

We will see later (Section 6.4.5) that lecturers were not satisfied with the management's support for Early Leave and they viewed it as ineffective and inconsistent.

Another type of support from the management was giving Emergency Leave to lecturers in order to attend PD in other HEIs. A Senior Manager talked about Emergency Leave saying:

> *'Sometimes we allow lecturers to attend training or conferences using their emergency leave. They have five days a year but they can take two days in a row … Recently the Ministry asked us to be strict about this leave so that it is used only for emergencies'.*

Since emergency leave could not be more than two days in a row, it was of limited use especially for taking part in PD abroad. Furthermore, lecturers stated that five days a year was not enough and they usually needed to keep it for emergency circumstances. A Head of Department talked about these regulations stating that:

> *'We have to abide by the Ministry rules and regulations. If they do not see training as priority, nothing will change'.*

The following section focuses on investment in E-learning and E-learning PD by the College and the Ministry and the forms of financial support provided (for instance, purchasing technologies or investment in E-learning PD).

6.3.6 Lack of Investment in E-learning PD and not having a PD Budget

Ibri College placed considerable emphasis on investing in technologies financially. According to Ibri College (2013), the College is 'committed' to developing technology constantly. However, this rhetoric seemed to apply more to financial investment in technologies such as smartboards in classrooms and labs than investment in training (Ibri College, 2013; OAAA, 2014). For instance, the College opened an Audio-Visual room to encourage lecturers' use of technology in teaching. Ibri College indicated that it attempted to ensure that 80% of its technologies and teaching aids were 'latest'

technologies (Ibri College, 2013). However, this was a vague statement since it did not specify what and how technology would be considered 'latest'. This was similar to another statement that the College planned to 'equip labs with 70% of latest technologies' (Ibri College, 2011, p93). Ibri College (2013 & 2016) reported that as the number of students kept increasing significantly, this was not accompanied by an adequate increase in computers and learning resources, and stated that it planned to update technologies and maintain the ratio of PCs to students (Ibri College, 2013 & 2016).

Despite considerable financial investment in purchasing technologies, lack of investment in training limited the use of these technologies since lecturers did not know how to use them. The College was criticized by the OAAA (2014) and by some managers for lack of provision of E-learning PD. For instance, a Head of Section criticised purchasing smartboards in 2010 and replacing them in 2014 with newer models without providing adequate training for lecturers and that resulted in limited E-learning use. According to OAAA (2014), most lecturers did not know how to use E-learning and E-learning use in teaching was limited because the College did not provide enough E-learning training. The College updated Quality Manual (2016) still emphasised purchasing technologies and there was little emphasis placed on E-learning PD.

Another reason for lack of E-learning use was purchasing technologies without assessing lecturers' needs. For instance, a Head of Section talked about wasting resources on preparing an audio-visual room that had never been utilised by lecturers because it had space for 20 students while most classes consisted of more than 25 students. Another Head of Section complained about spending resources on an earlier model of smartboards and replacing them a few years later without proper consultation with lecturers or managers within academic departments. Some lecturers talked about their need for more affordable technologies such as tablets (iPads), audio technologies and computers in the classrooms which were not available (Section 6.4.2). It was not clear on what basis technologies were purchased and the College documents did not have any policies or regulations related to that. Many lecturers were not satisfied with the

availability and quality of technologies in the College. This dissatisfaction among lecturers was mainly with portable technologies (Audio players, laptops and tablets), computers in classrooms and computer labs, technologies in temporary classrooms (caravans) and Wi-Fi speed and reliability.

Managers did not think that the Ministry invested enough in E-learning PD and that had a negative impact on lecturers' PD (impact will be discussed in Section 6.4). Interviews with Senior Managers and analysis of the Ibri Quality Manual (2013) showed that the College budget came entirely from the Ministry and covered mainly basic running costs like staff salaries, student allowances, equipment, books and stationery. Resources affected lecturers' E-learning PD engagement and managers' ability to manage E-learning PD. After receiving the budget from the Ministry, the Dean, Assistant Deans and the Head of Financial Affairs would meet to discuss how the budget would be spent (Ibri College, 2013). This meant that the College had some freedom and flexibility in using available monetary resources. A senior manager at Ibri College described the process:

> *'At the beginning of each academic year … we contact all departments to get details about the training needs … After that, we analyse these forms … (and) try to secure funding from the Ministry … For lecturers, the only obstacles for organising PD events are financial limitations, because we depend on money from the Ministry. Lecturers who work under the Ministry of Manpower are supposed to get funding for training from the Ministry and lecturers who work under companies from these companies'.*

Some managers stated that the budget was not enough to cover PD costs; therefore, funding requests would be sent to the Ministry and to local and national businesses. A Senior Manager stated that:

> *'The College does not have enough financial resources to cover the cost of sending lecturers to conferences or inviting trainers. We send all our training requirements to the Ministry and they offer training once in a*

while, but it is not up to the level of lecturers' expectations and we received complaints from lecturers many times'.

However, this manager stated that although these requests were continuously sent to the Ministry, most of them were not granted. In other words, sending requests to the Ministry was not a solution to the lack of E-learning PD provision. Another Senior Manager emphasised this point, adding that the management used other solutions like looking for sponsors for PD or depending on College lecturers themselves to develop each other. There was a general agreement at the management level that this issue would not get better soon, due to the economic situation, financial pressure and growing student numbers.

Various factors made lecturers' PD costly. For instance, a Head of Department argued that Lecturers' PD was made difficult due to the higher cost associated with specialist training for lecturers. He argued that the generic training that was adequate for administrative staff was not satisfactory for lecturers who complained about it:

'I think lecturer PD is more important than support staff PD, but we cannot do a lot because most training requests for lecturers are not granted. Lecturers' professional development costs more money. Lecturers need specialist trainers'.

Other issues that added to the costs of E-learning PD was the absence of the PD Leave Policy discussed earlier (section 6.3.5), since it added extra costs which neither the Ministry nor the College would cover. Furthermore, some lecturers would be willing to pay for their own PD costs if given PD leave, due to the lack of PD provision.

An important challenge that hindered PD and required extra costs was the geographical location of the College far from major cities. This was associated with increasing PD costs, such as transportation and accommodation costs required for inviting professionals to Ibri

College or sending College lecturers for PD events outside the College. A Head of Section argued that:

> *'Bringing specialists from outside the college is not possible (because) … we do not have any support from the Ministry or the College… (and) we cannot afford paying for transportation and accommodation'.*

Consequently, College lecturers had limited opportunities to engage with other professionals beyond the College which constrained them to PD delivered predominantly by their colleagues. A Head of Section stated that there were:

> *'Financial constraints, geographical constraints and above all there is no clear-cut policy to develop in this area (E-learning). It is really disappointing that we have to do this all the time'.*

This resulted in a dearth of lecturers' engagement with other professionals, which was made more complicated by the absence of PD leave for lecturers (See PD Leave Policies). Managers resented the financial constrains to E-learning PD and they viewed them as a major source for lecturers' limited contact with other HEIs and the limited invitations to lecturers and trainers to Ibri College. This dissatisfaction was more evident among departmental managers and lecturers. A Head of Section stated that:

> *'If the college provides financial assistance, we would be able to invite experts to conduct training not only limiting ourselves to resources within the department, but to experiences outside the college. We cannot just simply conduct some kind of training without monetary resources'.*

We will see later in the Micro Level that lecturers valued engaging with professionals outside Ibri College and appreciated the limited opportunities provided such as going to conferences or inviting practitioners to the College. However, the College management did not offer any solutions or strategies that would enhance lecturers' exposure to professionals from outside their College.

6.3.7 Lack of Interest in E-learning PD due to Absence of Promotions Structure

According to managers, the promotions system, which was based on years of service and job position, and the absence of academic promotions resulted in a lack of interest in E-learning PD. Promotions based on years of service were only for Government employed lecturers regardless of performance, while agency recruited lecturers were not entitled to promotions. An alternative way of being promoted was by moving from lecturing to managerial positions. Therefore, doing managerial work was the only option for lecturers to get promotions. Furthermore, this created a hierarchical environment where authority and financial incentives were based on the managerial ranking in the College. A Head of Section stated that:

> *'There is no career promotional concept in this type of job environment. If you are joining here as a lecturer, you will be a lecturer as long as you are in this profession.'*

He added that for this reason people who joined the College used it as a '*springboard*' to other HEIs, where lecturers used their time to get a PhD if they had a Master, or to publish papers if they had a PhD. According to him, lecturers would be interested in E-learning PD if they saw that it gave them promotion opportunities. This showed that there was lack of an integrated PD approach, which could be partially caused by undervaluing teaching and engagement in PD related to teaching and learning.

6.3.8 Needs Analysis: Training for the Sake of Training without Analysing Needs

The College management showed a lack of awareness of or interest in lecturers' PD needs, and training programmes were implemented without analysing or gathering lectures' needs. A Senior Manager stated that PD was not based on any kind of needs analysis and departments provided training in whatever they perceived valuable for lecturers or convenient to implement. According to him, some lecturers even received basic training in areas they were experts in. A Senior Manager said that:

'Sometimes your, the management nominates you for an English course and your English is very good as a lecturer in English. I am not exaggerating, it sometimes happens like that. If the institution follows [Training Needs Analysis], it will of course lead to effective training.'

A Head of Department agreed and added that the management should have analysed lecturers' needs as specified earlier in the College PD policy. However, as stated earlier in the Management of E-learning PD theme, the College had only a general PD policy and it did not have an E-learning PD policy or strategies. Consequently, there were no institutional E-learning PD strategies or guidelines.

PD topic choice was determined following various approaches without actually following a systematic method in analysing lecturers' needs. Common ways of determining PD choice were lecturers' requests, lecturers' expertise that they could share, classroom observations and sometimes students' complains. Topic choice was determined by Managers within academic departments or by lecturers, whereas Senior Managers and HR Department were not involved (See 6.3.3). A common approach followed was asking lecturers to provide training in an area of their expertise or a topic of their choice.

Decisions to provide E-learning PD were made individually without following a systematic approach or an institutional strategy in investigating lecturers' E-learning PD needs. According to a Head of Section, E-learning PD in her department was driven by two reasons. The first reason was repeated requests from lecturers to get E-learning PD. The other reason was classroom observations where she noticed that some lecturers did not know how to use some forms of E-learning. Although classroom observations and requests from lecturers could constitute part of an institutional E-learning PD needs analysis approach, this manager made decisions based on her personal experience without a further investigation of lecturers E-learning PD needs. A Head of Department complained about the haphazard nature and absence of strategy in selecting training topics:

> *'[Organising PD based on needs of lecturers] is not going on. What is going on, staff members suggest topics or maybe the HoD; and they decide some of the areas. Then the presentation is given or the workshop is conducted, where HR department is completely isolated. They are not involved at all. They are not even reported'.*

Some managers claimed that PD programmes were beneficial for lecturers even though they were not based on lecturers' needs, while other managers disagreed. A Head of Section stated that due to a lack of expertise within the College, training was delivered without analysing needs:

> *'To be honest I think we cannot be very selective or demanding because we have limitations here. We have lecturers with different experiences and we ask them to deliver training in a topic of their choice. What is important is to have training programmes where lecturers share and learn from each other'.*

However, a Senior Manager and a Head of Department stated that ignorance of lecturers' needs could be a reason for lecturers' resistance to PD. A Senior Manager believed that without understanding the training needs of lecturers, the management could not blame lecturers for low interest and attendance. However, most managers believed that PD should be kept mandatory since some lecturers may not attend regardless of the effectiveness of training.

6.3.9 College Resources and Staff Expertise: Inadequate Utilization of College Resources and Internal Expertise

Inadequate use of College resources such as financial resources, physical resources and lecturers' experiences resulted in an inability to make the best use of resources available and the strengths of lecturers. Furthermore, it was common for managers within academic departments to blame Senior Managers and the Ministry, and Senior Managers

to blame the Ministry, Departmental managers or lecturers. All of these shortcomings were caused by what appeared to be a limited understanding of formal and informal E-learning PD. For instance, the study showed earlier that the College wasted resources on smartboards which were replaced by newer smartboards after a few years without analysing or assessing whether they were being used and how. Another unwise investment was in the audio-visual room, which was never used by lecturers.

The study revealed that the College policy of funding PD events through industry sponsorship was effective but many managers argued that it needed better regulations and management. Due to the limited resources from the Ministry, the College management encouraged organising PD sponsored by businesses. Each academic department at the College was encouraged to organise one conference a year. A Senior Manage at the College stated that:

> *'I think getting resources from sponsors is an effective strategy and we have been able to organise many professional development events'.*

However, interviews showed that the Ministry did not take a role in communicating with perspective sponsors and this was normally left to middle management and lecturers. A Head of Section talked about PD sponsorship:

> *'Big corporations usually have social responsibility schemes … we try to approach them as early as possible … But depending on them limits our ability in organising conferences, like we can't do more than one conference a year'.*

A Head of Section was unhappy due to the difficulty in funding a conference at her department, where lecturers themselves went to communicate with local businesses:

> *'We have sent letters to most companies here in Ibri and we received a lot of promises but nothing back'.*

Later they were able to secure limited funding from a local businessman:

> *'The budget was 400 Omani rials, donated by a member of the Council. We contacted many other people but we could not get any single rial.*

> *Before receiving this donation, we were considering asking lecturers to donate money for the conference. The College said they could only support us with providing lunch to the conference attendees.'*

Although this was the only annual conference at that department, they struggled to find sponsorship for it. Thinking about collecting donations from lecturers showed how desperate they were before the event. Their discussions while planning for it revealed that plenty of effort and focus went into securing the conference budget. Some PD committee members complained that a lot of the money collected from sponsors went to non-PD events, such as national events and student recreational events. A member of a conference organising committee stated that:

> *'Some activities are not important for lecturers or students and a lot of money is spent on them ... I think the College should make lecturers' development a priority'.*

The study showed that inability to capitalise on the strengths of the lecturing team and limited understanding of lecturers' potential to improve PD practices hampered formal and informal E-learning PD. Furthermore, it limited management's ability to make the best use of the lecturing staff. The College management emphasised continuing some practices which they viewed as effective, such as annual conferences within academic departments and one-off 'workshops' (See next theme: Forms of PD). Although some managers valued lecturers' collaborative informal learning by organising gatherings and meetings, these initiatives were individual approaches rather than an institutional strategy. However, we will see later (See forms of PD) that managers and lecturers considered Module coordination as effective and encouraged collegial learning and sharing.

An important finding in the study was lecturers' diversity at the College and the informal learning opportunities created by that. Managers valued lecturers' diversity and viewed it as a source of learning if lecturers collaborated. There were some individual initiatives by

managers to support informal learning. For instance, a manager stated that it is not enough to have different nationalities within the College, but there should be a community where knowledge sharing would be encouraged:

> *'In the Language Centre we have people from 20 different countries. We have people from the States, from Australia, Canada, Britain, Poland, Ukraine, Pakistan, from many and different creeds here. There should be some kind of community, which may help these cultures mingle together and cooperate. This can happen only if you try to find an environment, a rich environment, where they talk'.*

Many other managers talked about lecturers' diversity and its importance for the College, but no systematic approach was followed to capitalise on this diversity. The only form of informal/formal learning adapted by the College was Module Coordination (See Forms of PD) where lecturers teaching a specific subject shared and learned from each other.

6.3.10 Forms of PD Provision

The study revealed that the College offered many PD forms within (in-house PD) and outside (external PD) the College. Within the College, in-house PD took many forms such as conferences, workshops, presentations, meetings, coordination and classroom observations. External PD took many forms mainly conferences, but there were industrial visits, courses and workshops. In-house PD was mainly delivered by lecturers, technicians and managers, and sometimes by visiting professionals. External PD was sometimes supported by the College and sometimes based entirely on lecturers' initiatives. In addition to formal PD, lecturers engaged in many informal PD forms such as Communities of Practice, informal gatherings, collegial support and coordination. The frequency of engagement with some forms of PD and their satisfaction with it was analysed earlier in the questionnaire and this was supplemented by data gathered in the interviews, focus groups discussions and observations.

A PD support structure that was viewed as effective by the management was module 'coordination'. Coordinators were lecturers appointed by Heads of Departments to be in charge of a specific Module and all lecturers teaching that Module. Departmental and Senior Managers alike valued the importance of coordinators and regarded them as important for developing lecturers' collaboration, practices and communication with management. Coordination, although formally structured, provided an informal learning ground where lecturers teaching common modules shared tips, stories, and teaching materials and learned from each other. A Senior Manager praised coordination and viewed this form of support structure as effective:

> *'Course coordinators support lecturers by sharing knowledge and best practices. They are similar to a chain linking or connecting the management vision and lecturers. They work closely with lecturers and support them all the way starting from planning to teaching the module and ending with end of semester assessment.'*

The management depended on coordinators for many issues such as communicating pedagogical goals, answering questions, curriculum support and assessment strategies. A Head of Department emphasised the importance of coordinators by saying that:

> *'level coordination is very important because lecturers get support all the time, and they keep us updated with the things that happen within each level or module.'*

However, this view among managers was not shared by all lecturers and there was some scepticism and dissatisfaction with the level of support provided (See 6.4.5: Perceived Lack of Managerial Support). Coordinators were nominated by departmental managers based on their judgements of lecturers' abilities to fulfil the duties of these roles. A Head of Department said that:

> *'Usually we chose the best lecturers or lecturers who have good communication skills. We ask them whether they would like to be coordinators and they are free to accept or not'.*

A common form of PD within and outside the College was conferences. Within the College, each academic department was asked by the management to organise an annual conference. Managers valued these conferences. E-learning sessions within conferences were common and popular among lecturers, although no conferences were exclusively dedicated to E-learning.

Interviews and observations showed that the most common type of E-learning PD provided within the College was 'workshops'. The term Workshop was used because the College management emphasised the importance of participants taking an active role in PD events. However, these 'workshops' commonly took the form of a presentation followed by questions and answers. In many cases, technicians within the Educational Technologies Centre delivered E-learning training, but some academic departments had lecturers who provided E-learning training to their colleagues.

Classroom observation was an institutional strategy at Ibri College carried out by departmental managers by observing lecturers. Commonly, observation was done by observing lecturers who recently joined the College (Institutional strategy and interviews), or for lecturers when their students complain about their teaching performance and thus they were considered 'weak' lecturers (interviews). Although some managers stated that observations were 'for PD purposes', they stated that important decisions were made based on them, such as warnings and termination of contracts. As we will see later (Micro Level), this could be a reason for lecturers' resistance to it and negative attitudes toward it, because classroom observations were associated with weaknesses or poor experience. Some managers made decisions about lecturers' E-learning PD needs based on these observations, where lecturers' use of technology was one of the recommendations made by some managers. In one interview, a Head of Section stated that some lecturers were not capable of using simple forms of E-learning, like a projector.

There were other forms of PD provided less frequently. For instance, meetings between managers and lecturers were conducted a few times a year. Another form of PD provided

was institutional or industrial visits. For instance, some Business lecturers visited Muscat Securities Market, some IT lecturers visited the Information Technologies Authority and some English Language Centre lecturers visited the British Council.

In this section, I presented forms of PD and E-learning PD lecturers engaged with. The impact on lecturers will discussed at the Individual level (Micro Level).

6.3.11 Conclusion

In this section, I analysed the findings related to the context. This was done by documentary analysis and interviews with managers.

This study identified that national and institutional policies had a considerable impact on E-learning PD practices. The current policies discriminated in favour of Government employed lecturers over agency-recruited lecturers. This was found to be a major reason for lack of lecturers' engagement with E-learning PD. Agency recruited lecturers did not have any PD support from their agencies and the Ministry did not provide training for them. These discrepancies affected PD provision, leave and promotional opportunities. E-learning PD was not based on lecturers' needs. Furthermore, there was clear disparity between E-learning PD policies and practices. Formal responsibilities towards E-learning PD were not taken and there was a lack of accountability in terms of who should be responsible for E-learning PD.

The policy of enforcing attendance and asking lecturers to be physically present at College at all times and the absence of a PD leave policy was a major obstacle hindering lecturers' PD. This resulted in limiting lecturers' ability to engage with PD outside the College. This affected periods where lecturers had teaching duties, but also periods where they did not have teaching duties or work that required physical presence. This included cases where

the management authorised lecturers to attend PD events but the use of fingerprint scanners and completing an early leave form was required. This also placed lectures at Ibri College at a disadvantage compared to many other HEIs, since the College was remote from major cities where PD events would take place frequently.

The study showed a lack of PD investment by the Ministry in its lecturers and no investment at all by agencies in their lecturers. Furthermore, there were no policy or regulations related to PD budget or spending at the level of the Ministry or the College. Since almost three quarter of lecturers were agency lecturers, this demonstrated the scale of the issue and an important reason for lectures' dissatisfaction. The Ministry budget was not enough to cover PD costs, but at the same time did not make it easy for lecturers to pay for their own PD with its strict attendance policy that did not take into account any valid reasons that lecturers may had, including taking a PD leave. The Ministry policy of not allowing the College to invest in its services or facilities deprived the College of important sources of income that could be used for E-learning PD purposes.

Ibri College provided limited opportunities for lecturers to engage with professionals outside their College, due to the dearth of engagement and collaboration between the College and other HEIs. This was attributed to many factors such as poor PD leave policies, lack of PD funding, the College location and poor collaboration between Ibri College and other HEIs, including a College a few minutes away from the College.

The promotion system was found to be an important factor that undermined initiatives to place more emphasis on E-learning PD by providing a rewarding scheme that would recognise excellence in teaching rather than managerial duties. In the College, two possible methods of promotions were found: job position and years of service. The first way to get promotions was moving from being a lecturer to a manager, which was discouraging lecturers from taking part in PD activities related to E-learning and pedagogy in general. Furthermore, another kind of financial promotions for Ministry employed lecturers was based on years of service regardless of performance; while agency recruited

lecturers never got promotions. Many managers and lecturers argued that talented lecturers were lost and resigned since they went to look for environments that encouraged academic development and growth.

Some of the training provided by the Ministry was found to be 'non-academic', where lecturers were sent by the Ministry to attend PD events that were generic for any employee. Those included courses and workshops related to time-management, interpersonal skills, work management skills, having positive work attitudes and others. In some cases, the training was provided by private companies that used 'academic' titles to attract the Ministry. Lecturers talked about training given by trainers who were never academics or lecturers, and not related to their profession. However, lecturers appreciated training given by Industry experts in their field even if they had no links to the teaching profession, such training by the Omani Information Technology Authority for IT lecturers and training by businesses or business persons for Business lecturers. This training was specific in lecturers' field and by experts.

6.4 The Micro Level

6.4.1 Introduction

As was detailed in the Methods Chapter, the micro-level findings are based on interviews with eighteen College lecturers, focus group discussions with twelve ELC lecturers and classroom observation of five ELC lecturers.

The findings at the Micro level are concerned with individual level factors that affect lecturers' E-learning PD. Examining individual factors constitutes the core of this study since all the research questions are directly related to lecturers. The E-learning PD context in which lecturers existed affected lecturers' experiences and perceptions; therefore, references to the Context will be made whenever necessary. The Micro Level includes lecturers' E-learning and E-learning PD experiences and perceptions. Formal learning was investigated, in addition to informal learning such as lecturers' communities, collegial collaboration and knowledge sharing mechanism among lecturers at the College. Findings in this section, as shown in Table 11, were structured around the themes identified in the thematic analysis process discussed earlier in the Findings Chapter.

Table 11: Micro Level Themes

Micro Level Themes
Favourable Attitudes, Limited Use: Limited E-learning Use despite Favourable Attitudes Toward it
Lecturers' Frustration with and Resistance to E-learning PD
Anxiety toward the Pedagogical Use of E-learning and Fear of Showing Incompetence
Perceived Lack of Managerial Support
E-learning Pedagogical Use: The Gap between E-learning PD and E-learning Pedagogical Application
Lecturers' Collaboration and Informal E-learning PD
The Lesson Planning and Lesson Teaching Activity: Focus Group Discussion, Lesson Planning and Teaching the Lesson Planned

6.4.2 Favourable Attitudes, Limited Use: Limited E-learning use despite Favourable Attitudes toward it

This theme focuses on the interesting discrepancy between lecturers' favourable attitudes toward E-learning and their limited use of it. Interviews and focus group discussions with lecturers showed that although the vast majority of lecturers had positive attitudes toward E-learning (93% in the questionnaire) and E-learning PD usefulness, their use of E-learning was limited. Understanding lecturers' perceptions and usage of E-learning were key to answering the research questions specifically to questions related to pedagogical perceptions and use of E-learning. The subsequent themes will present the reasons for the disparity between the overall agreement among lecturers that E-learning was important for them, and the considerable lack of their E-learning use (Questionnaire: 30% have never used Smart Board or Online Practices, 20% have never used Moodle). These questionnaire findings were supported by claims from managers and statements from lecturers, who attributed lack of E-learning use to various reasons which will be detailed in the following themes.

An important theme identified in the study was E-learning capacity to enhance teaching and learning. The vast majority of lecturers thought there were pedagogical advantages associated with E-learning use. One advantage seen by some lecturers was enabling students to learn collaboratively. For instance, a lecturer who taught writing talked about his experience in developing students' learning using Moodle discussions and Moodle quizzes:

'It is very easy. I just write a topic for discussion in Moodle and they discuss it there. I think they like it.'

In addition to enabling collaborative student learning and communication, there were other pedagogical benefits mentioned by lecturers such as saving time, effort and learning anytime and anywhere. A lecturer who used online quizzes as practices for students gave an example:

'Sometimes I give them quizzes and they immediately see their scores'.

This lecturer said he saved time in certain quizzes that involved multiple choice, word completion, matching and other forms of quizzes. Another lecturer talked about using a website for a similar purpose, because she found it more user-friendly than Moodle. An interesting pedagogical advantage as seen by some lecturers was getting the attention of students. In this view, E-learning use resulted in better student engagement and focus, and consequently better learning:

'Now wherever you look you find students with gadgets. We used to read books, but if you go to the library, you will find them busy with their mobile phones … I think we should find a way to use them in the classroom to improve learning'.

However, some lecturers challenged this view and argued that their job was not to 'entertain' students, but to develop their skills and knowledge. Similar views were expressed in the following theme (6.4.3: Lecturers' frustration and resistance) where some lecturers showed some resistance to E-learning and E-learning PD, or argued that they were not equipped with the skills and knowledge necessary to make E-learning use effective.

Lecturers perceived other advantages of E-learning use such as communicating with professionals around the world, updating knowledge, enhancing education accessibility and reducing costs. E-learning use to communicate with other lecturers or specialists around the world was seen as valuable. For instance, a lecturer talked about learning a lot from webinars where he found there were common issues between him and other lecturers around the world. E-learning knowledge was seen as important for keeping up with changes in Higher Education and making education more affordable and accessible. For instance, a lecturer stated that:

> *'Now everybody feels that E-learning has made everything very easy. In the classroom, we use many technologies like Smart Board. Technology has made our work easier and teaching and learning also smoother'.*

It was interesting that some lecturers talked about this motivation to use E-learning because, according to them, the College should emulate good practices in 'good universities'. For instance, a lecturer stated that keeping up to date in this profession required adapting best practices from leading research universities, including adapting E-learning practices. Another lecturer stated that keeping up with modern changes in education, including E-learning, was a necessity for College lecturers.

6.4.3 Lecturers' Frustration with and Resistance to E-learning PD

This theme incorporates three sub-themes. The first sub-theme focuses on frustration with quality and quantity of E-learning PD and resources. The second sub-theme focuses on Policies which were frequently viewed by lecturers as major hindrances to E-learning PD practices. Some of the policies analysed were leave policies, lecturers' contracts and promotions policies. The last sub-theme focuses on lecturers' resistance to E-learning PD. Perceived lack of managerial support was a fundamental source of lecturers' frustration and thus it is linked to this theme, but it will be analysed under a separate theme (Theme 6.4.5: Perceived lack of managerial support).

A. Frustration with Quality and Quantity of E-learning PD and Resources

Lecturers at the College were disappointed with the quantity and quality of E-learning PD provided. Given the haphazard nature of PD provision due to the lack of accountability, lack of interest and lack of Investment in E-learning PD, most lecturers reported that they received very limited or no E-learning PD and poor quality of training. Furthermore, some lecturers were frustrated with the limited availability or poor quality of some E-learning resources and they claimed that this had a negative impact on their E-learning use.

The lack of E-learning PD provision was a prominent theme highlighted constantly by lecturers and managers. For instance, a lecturer who worked at the College for four years stated that:

> *'I have had only three PD opportunities from the Ministry, twice in Muscat and once in Dubai. That is less than once a year and it is not enough'.*

Lecturers with recruitment-agency contracts did not get any PD from agencies regardless of the number of years they spent working for them. One lecturer protested against this saying that:

> *'I have worked five years for the College and I have never received any training from them'.*

College lecturers were mainly constrained to the PD opportunities arranged by the College within the College campus (See Context: Forms of PD provision) and they had very limited opportunities to engage with professionals from other HEIs.

Another cause of frustration, aside from the lack of E-learning PD provision, was that lecturers perceived the quality of training provided to be poor. Quality of E-learning PD was a source of distress for lecturers, and there was a feeling that it did not equip them with the skills and knowledge necessary to use E-learning in their practices. The

occasional E-learning PD events provided were characterised as being of poor quality and very generic without tailoring training to lecturers' needs. Receiving E-learning training from technicians or from lecturers who did not make explicit references to lecturers' practice was criticised by many lecturers for being too broad and of limited value. For instance, lecturers talked about the limited value of 'technical' training where lecturers were shown by technicians or lecturers Smart Board and Moodle functions without making references to practical teaching practice or pedagogical implications of E-learning use such as E-learning use for a specific discipline or course (see Theme: E-learning Pedagogical Use). A lecturer talked about her experience in Moodle training saying that:

> *'I thought that I will have a chance to experiment with it. What the trainer did, he showed us a few PowerPoint slides about Moodle then showed us some of the functions there'.*

This training was delivered in a computer lab and this lecturer had the impression that lecturers would have a chance to practice with Moodle. Other Moodle PD were delivered in classrooms and the same technical training strategy was followed. Interestingly, there were no complaints about the complexity of technologies and almost all lecturers viewed E-learning as valuable regardless of effort or time needed for learning it. This finding was supported with various examples where lecturers viewed themselves as competent in technologies, but not confident or competent in using E-learning for teaching. Thus, a clear distinction was made between knowing how to use a type of technology and knowing how to use it effectively to enhance teaching.

Availability and quality of E-learning resources were important factors in whether and how lecturers decided to use E-learning. Lecturers regarded the lack or poor quality of some technologies such as laptops, CD players, tablets and computers in classrooms as demotivating. Many complained about the shortage of laptops, their slowness, weight and the frequent technical issues experienced with them. Some lecturers had to alter their teaching plans or lost time due to facing technical issues with laptops or because they found all laptops were taken. Furthermore, a few lecturers were disappointed with the absence of PCs and speakers inside classrooms, which would have enabled them to

use E-learning without having to carry laptops and CD players. Some technologies like tablets were regarded as more convenient and user-friendly than laptops, PCs or computer laboratories. A lecturer talked about using his own iPad to connect to projectors instead of the laptops that he found heavy, slow and outdated. According to him, more lecturers would find it more convenient and would use technology more frequently if the College provided tablets. However, he added that he still had to carry the College CD players, which he found as heavy and outdated, since the iPad volume was low. Another lecturer showed me how he used his own speakers and a flash a memory to play audio tracks instead of using College CD players:

> *'I use this instead of carrying CD players that are very heavy; and I teach in Caravans that are far away from the building. Could you imagine if I carry a big CD player and walk more than 300 or 400 meters? That's really difficult'.*

CD players were seen as inconvenient and time consuming since finding audio tracks had to be done manually. For instance, to reach audio track number 50 a lecturer would have to click on next 49 times. This issue was likely to stem from lack of E-learning pedagogical or investment strategies (See Context: Absence of E-learning Accountability).

An important issue that kept emerging during fieldwork was the use of temporary classrooms (caravans) for teaching. Lack of availability of technologies in the temporary classrooms (caravans) was a major source of dissatisfaction among lecturers. The College had more than 25 caravans and they lacked basic E-learning resources such as laptops/PCs, Wi-Fi (or slow Wi-Fi), audio technologies and projectors. A Head of Section stated that:

> *'One of the obstacles we have in this college is that we have to teach in the caravans, where lecturers do not have access to anything that is related to technology. The only choice is to carry a portable overhead projector. I noticed that some lecturers do not know how to use it... I noticed that from a classroom observation. A lecturer used pictures and I asked her why do not you use an OHP and she said she does not know how to use it'.*

We will see later in the Micro Level that lecturers viewed these OHPs as heavy and inconvenient. Many lecturers complained about absence of Wi-Fi or its slowness when available in Caravans, which did not permit them to use technology for certain pedagogical purposes such as streaming videos or opening web pages. A lecturer talked about his experience in planning for a lecture that involved using smartphones for an exercise, and it failed due to low Internet speed there. Another lecturer talked about downloading videos as a solution for Wi-Fi sluggishness, but he found it time consuming. The College had portable OHPs for lecturers use in the caravans. Lecturers considered carrying them and laminating slides complicated and tiresome. Furthermore, there was no form of technology that would enable lecturers to use videos there. A lecturer talked about her experience in using OHPs by drawing an interesting comparison of the level of effort and time needed to plan for a lesson that involved E-learning between normal classrooms and temporary classrooms:

> *'When I was teaching in caravans, I would have to put a lot of effort getting images, because I was teaching listening and speaking …. I have to search for images, I have to run around, get coloured photocopies, then run around, get them laminated, and then give them to the class so that I can teach listening and speaking. It involves a lot of time for preparation. Now, when I'm teaching in the classrooms, all I have to do is search for coloured images, put them on a PowerPoint, connect my iPad to the Smartboard, show them the images, I'm done. What would usually take me two hours to prepare for one class just takes me 15 minutes'.*

Most lecturers avoided using technologies in caravans altogether. However, some lecturers needed to use CD players because they were teaching listening/speaking skills or other modules that required some form of technology. Many of these caravans had been there since 2009 and their numbers kept growing due to the shortage of classrooms compared to the increasing number of students. College managers stated that caravans were an unavoidable temporary solution since a new building was under construction (ELC Building). These small caravans had only tables, chairs and a whiteboard. Despite the continuing criticism from lecturers, managers did not offer any solution, other than saying

that these issues would be over when the new ELC building opens (Still not open to date). A Head of Section stated that:

'Teaching in the caravans is a big obstacle [in the use of E-learning]. Once we move to classrooms in the new building things will get better'.

However, the availability of technologies in normal classrooms was not seen as a guarantee for lecturers' E-learning use. For instance, A Head of Section stated that the availability of technologies in the main building was not enough since lecturers needed to be trained in how to use them:

'In classrooms, most lecturers have access to smartboards, and they can use PowerPoint presentations. They need to be trained how to use the Smartboard. There is a lack of using any kind of E-learning software and programs. We need training in how to use all of these.'

Some managers argued that even available technologies in normal classrooms were rarely used due to lack of training.

Many lecturers expressed dissatisfaction with the role of Senior Management in tailoring PD to their needs. A lecturer complained about this form of training stating that:

'I am a lecturer and I need training in issues related to my job …. Clearly, this training is not designed for us and it shows lack of interest in our professional development. It shows that the management does not know or does not care about our needs'.

B. Frustration with Policies

Lecturers and mangers continuously frowned upon what they perceived as a negative impact of leave policies, contract policies and promotions policies on E-learning PD (see Context). Lecturers' viewed these policies as crucial factors for their engagement with PD and regarded them as hindrances to institutional and personal PD initiatives. Lecturers

felt that contract policies had a negative impact on agency-recruited lecturers constraining their engagement with PD practices. Furthermore, perhaps unsurprisingly, lecturers felt that the situation was made worse by the absence of PD leave, since not enough E-learning PD was provided and at the same time, lecturers were not given opportunities to attend PD activities outside the College even when they were personally willing to pay for all PD costs. The absence of an academic promotional structure was seen as demotivational, discouraging lecturers from taking part in PD and showing a lack of appreciation of teaching and lecturers.

The study revealed that the absence of effective PD leave policies was a significant obstacle that undermined lectures' engagement with PD opportunities beyond the College. For instance, a lecturer who delivered training and took part in many conferences stated that he looked for events that took place during weekends or coincided with College holidays, which left little room for PD. He stated that:

> *'I asked the management here once for two days off to attend a conference in Bahrain and the answer was an immediate no'.*

Lecturers' frustration was a direct reflection of the restricted policies as discussed in the Context, and it limited lecturers' ability to participate in PD events outside College, because on the one hand the Ministry did not invest enough in PD, and on the other hand it did not allow lecturers to get PD leave even when they were willing to cover all costs. For example, a lecturer's paper was accepted in a conference in the UK and he was ready to pay for everything himself but his request for leave was declined by the College Management and he was told that he would lose salary for each day and risk his contract being terminated:

> *'It is really sad to hear all the talk about quality and in reality, we do not get support when we try to develop ourselves. I did not ask the College for anything except a few days off to attend this conference. How do they expect us to teach well if we do not develop ourselves?'*

The conference theme was Educational technologies and this lecturer was keen to develop his E-learning and pedagogical skills. This policy did not take into account whether lecturers had teaching duties or not, or whether they needed to be physically available at College. This issue was made more complicated by the compulsory use of fingerprint scanners from the Ministry. A lecturer talked about his experience when he was granted early leave from the College:

> *'Instead of allowing me to go earlier a day before the workshop, I had to drive all the way to College in the opposite direction to Muscat, sign in and then drive to Muscat'.*

Due to these constraints, lecturers felt that the Ministry did not see PD as a priority.

Absence of PD leave put lecturers who work in Muscat and major cities at an advantage, since they could professionally develop themselves by attending events at one of the various HEIs there. A Head of Section talked of her experience when she was a lecturer at the Higher College of Technology in Muscat:

> *'When I was in Muscat, lecturers used to attend PD events in other HEIs all the time because they were many PD activities there; also, the timetable was left free on Thursday afternoon'.*

This feeling of being at a disadvantage due to the geographical location of the College was common. This feeling was shared by lecturers who had work experience in Muscat and some lecturers who had not. For instance, a lecturer who started his career in Ibri talked about his experience with PD:

> *'Driving three hours to Muscat, attending a workshop for two or three hours and then driving three hours back is exhausting and risky'.*

This lecturer asked for solutions for lecturers in Colleges far from Muscat to solve the problem of lack of PD opportunities in Ibri.

Findings

Contract policies had an immensely negative impact on lecturers' E-learning PD experiences, perceptions and morale (See Context). This had a damaging effect on lecturers' interest in PD and sense of belonging to the College, since they felt that their basic rights such as equal PD opportunities, leave and pay were violated. For instance, none of the lecturers interviewed had ever been sent for PD by their agencies. Lecturers kept raising this discrimination throughout the study, for instance a lecturer said:

'I have worked five years for the College and I have never received any training from them'.

Furthermore, they indicated that they kept looking for solutions by protesting in person, by email, through government officials and using social networks. I asked lecturers and managers whether agencies provided PD opportunities and the answer was always negative.

Some lecturers argued that the absence of academic promotions was a reason for their lack of engagement with E-learning PD, since absence of incentives demonstrated a lack of interest in PD. The absence of reward was seen as demotivational by lecturers and affected their career advancement or promotional prospects. A lecturer who was enthusiastic about PD and delivering training talked about his future saying that PD or E-learning PD would not move his career prospects further, because doing managerial work was the only way upwards in the College. Some lecturers or Heads of Sections talked openly about their plans to move to other HEIs because they felt that their careers were stuck. A lecturer talked about one of his colleagues who left to go to another University a few years ago:

'He left [to another university] and immediately he started going to conferences, publishing papers and improving himself. He will be promoted soon based on his work, not based on admin work like here'.

Other lecturers cited similar examples, where they argued that academic promotion could create a healthy PD environment and raise interest in PD. This was viewed as a reason for emigration of talent, an issue that was raised by a lecturer who stated that:

'I think this College is losing its best talent. Personally, I always try to develop myself because Ibri College is not my last destination. In other countries or in SQU you move up from being lecturer, to senior lecturer to associate professor then professor'.

According to this view, there should be an incentive for lecturers to engage and develop E-learning PD practices at the College.

C. Resistance to E-learning PD

Although the overwhelming majority of lecturers showed positive attitudes to E-learning, a few lecturers in the interviews showed resistance to E-learning and E-learning PD. Their opinion was that their teaching approaches were effective and there was no need to change them by introducing technology. This point of view argues that if existing teaching approaches are effective; there is no need to experiment with new methods. Furthermore, tried and tested approaches were a 'safe-zone' whereas using E-learning would require learning new skills or going through novel approaches in the classroom.

An interesting relationship between lecturers' age and E-learning use was evident. Extended years of experience and resistance to E-learning were seen as compatible, where lecturers were affected by their education and the manner in which they were taught. For instance, one lecturer stated that he was reaching retirement age and he was not interested in changing his methods or in attending E-learning PD:

'I have been teaching English for more than twenty-five years now. I do not want to change the way I teach. Young lectures should learn about technologies'.

Prior education was seen as a factor that affected E-learning, where some lecturers linked their previous education where E-learning was not used to their current practices. However, a lecturer with a long teaching experience stated that learning did not stop with age and lecturers should continue learning throughout their profession until retirement. This lecturer delivered Smartboard training to other lecturers within his department.

Perceptions that E-learning could not enhance practice was a reason why a few lecturers resisted E-learning use and E-learning PD. For instance, a lecturer stated:

> *'If you want students to work, you must use the board. If you want them to have a very comfortable life, prepare PPT. They will be happy with the PPT. They will go with the PPT and they will think this is the only thing available in the world.'*

This shows that there was resistance to E-learning due to beliefs about pedagogy and learning. This lecturer was against using PowerPoint presentations because he thought that students should learn through a process, and technology would only show them the product. Providing training in how to use technologies would not result in a change in lecturers' behaviour, because the issue here was deeper and related to pedagogical beliefs about E-learning.

Resistance to E-learning PD came in various guises. For instance, some resistance was due to dissatisfaction with the lack of external trainers and new opportunities, where lecturers did not want to get training from their colleagues. Some lecturers held negative attitudes toward getting training from their colleagues because they had negative perceptions about them.

6.4.4 Anxiety toward the Pedagogical use of E-learning and Fear of showing Incompetence

This theme focuses on lecturers' fears and worries associated with E-learning use in their classrooms. Throughout the study, many lectures expressed feelings of anxiety toward using E-learning in their teaching. There was a fear of making mistakes in front of students. This was made worse by feelings that the management was not supportive of

use of technology and that students' complaints would negatively affect them even if their intentions were to develop their teaching practice and students' learning.

Sources of lecturers' anxiety were varied such as fear of losing classroom control, lack of confidence in E-learning skills, and feelings that there might be negative consequences from the College management if they lost control when certain technologies were used such as Smartphones. There was a feeling among many lecturers that conventional teaching methods were safer and did not require technical experience or learning new skills. For instance, lecturers talked about technical problems they experienced such as Wi-Fi connectivity problems and issues with some technologies such as projectors and laptops. A lecturer talked about her experience where students used technology for purposes other than learning, which disturbed their learning and took their attention away:

> *'I used to allow students to use dictionaries because they do not understand some words and I cannot speak Arabic. I noticed that some students opened WhatsApp, Instagram and other applications. That is why I ask them now to bring paper dictionaries.'*

Another lecturer talked about her experience with students when she took them to a computer lab and some students browsed websites irrelevant to the learning tasks provided:

> *'Some students misused [technology]… Now I discourage using technology. Students should not use it because when we tell them to do one thing they do another thing… When I saw one student, other students used the Internet for something else. I could not concentrate on everybody'.*

A lecturer talked about the difference between E-learning inside or outside the classroom, and argued that experimenting with a Virtual Learning Environment (Moodle) poses less risk for him since it was done outside the classroom. According to this view, the spontaneous nature of classroom dynamics requires extra care and preparation.

In addition to fear of losing classroom control, there were other pedagogical worries among lecturers. For instance, some lecturers questioned the applicability of E-learning PD to their practice. This will be discussed in Theme: E-learning Pedagogical Use.

6.4.5 Perceived Lack of Managerial Support

A frequent theme that emerged in the study was lecturers' dissatisfaction with the College Management's support for E-learning PD. The role of the management and the forms of E-learning PD provided at the College were analysed earlier in the Context section. Lecturers viewed lack of managerial support as a key reason for the lack of E-learning use. They continually blamed the management for what they saw as a lack of support, lack of provision and limited quality of training. The study showed earlier that there were no E-learning or E-learning PD strategies and engagement of Senior Management was minimal where departments were left to do what they felt necessary for them without support, guidance or follow up from Senior Management.

Lecturers' blamed the College Management for the lack of E-learning PD provision. Many lecturers talked about receiving limited training or spending years at College without receiving any E-learning PD. For instance, a lecturer talked about his experience:

'This is my third year here and I have never received any kind of E-learning training, not even once'.

Lecturers' views contradicted some managers' views that the College provided adequate E-learning training for its lecturers. A Head of Section talked about successfully providing Smartboard training:

'Now basic training with Smartboard is completed, and we are comfortable with that'.

The contradicting statements showed a profound gap in perceptions toward E-learning PD at the College, where lecturers complained about lack of training whereas managers

felt that training opportunities were sufficient. For instance, a lecturer talked about 'wasting' financial resources on technologies without providing training:

'[Smartboards] are unnecessarily dead investment. At least they should give us training'.

Timing of E-learning PD was an important reason for missing the limited E-learning PD opportunities, since lecturers were not permitted to attend PD events unless they had no teaching duties. The management organised some E-learning training and only lecturers who did not have teaching duties were allowed to attend. A lecturer talked about missing three training programmes due to her busy schedule:

'They should set a time when there are no classes… They conducted Smartboard training I think two or three times but I was not able to attend because of teaching'.

Lecturers missed many E-learning PD programmes due to training coinciding with their classes, which was common because of having considerably high teaching loads. A Head of Section addressed this issue:

'We had one E-learning training this semester… Most lecturers were busy with their classes'.

Managers did not think that there was capacity to enhance attendance or provide better training, putting the blame on lack of resources such as classrooms and lecturers. On the contrary, lecturers asked for dedicated PD time where all lecturers would be free. For example, a lecturer compared the situation in Ibri College to his previous College, where a few hours a week were left free for all lecturers to be used for PD or other College activities.

Lecturers and managers had strong standpoints either in favour or against in-house PD. lecturers felt that in-house PD was constraining them to the limited resources within the College, whereas managers viewed it as a solution for the lack of funding. Many managers talked about the value of the various experiences, qualifications and backgrounds of

lecturers that could be used if lecturers shared more with other lecturers. Managers encouraged peer training by sending emails to lecturers or encouraging them verbally. Although College lecturers' experiences were regarded as valuable by lecturers and manager, lecturers argued that getting exposed to new experiences beyond the College was necessary. For instance, a Head of Section stated:

> *'I think we need professionals from outside the College to come and address issues. What we are doing now is that we depend on lecturers from here to present to other lecturers'.*

This Head of Section felt that lecturers' needs could not be met with internal PD only. Lecturers thought that learning from new and fresh E-learning PD experiences was crucial for them. Furthermore, lecturers talked about knowing their colleagues and learning from them informally, which made formal training by them redundant. A lecturer talked about his preference for experiences from trainers and academics other than his colleagues:

> *'I prefer trainers from other universities because I know my colleagues and I already have a good idea about them. Also, we can chat and learn from them anytime. I think fresh experiences are more important and at the same time more refreshing and interesting'.*

Some lecturers felt that not enough was being done in order to collaborate with other HEIs. Lecturers talked about their experiences attending conferences and asked for more PD opportunities. A lecturer stated that:

> *'We have seven Colleges of Technology but we do not know anything about them. At least once a year we could have a conference and learn from each other'.*

Another theme that emerged from the research was the lack of trust and communication between managers and lecturers. For instance, lecturers talked about their dissatisfaction with classroom observations (See Context: Forms of PD) because they perceived that this was normally done to new lecturers to get their contracts extended and to 'weak'

lecturers with complaints from students or managers. Because of this view, lecturers resented classroom observations because they felt that PD purpose was to 'fix' their deficits or weaknesses. Although College managers stated that classroom observations formed part of PD, lecturers had negative attitudes towards observations. An example of contradiction of views was a Head of Section view that resistance to classroom observations was lecturers' mistakes:

> *'Some of them argue, why me … has anybody reported something against me? and so on. Some of them, when we have a discussion with them after the class, they would be totally defensive. We tell them that we are not against you'.*

In the interviews, some managers stated that the aim of PD was to improve the 'weaknesses' of lecturers. Lecturers did not trust managers and did not feel comfortable allowing them in their classrooms. A lecturer talked about his negative experience with observations:

> *'I am confident about the way I teach and I think there is nothing wrong with it… I was told that we would have a constructive discussion after observation. What happened is that he [Head of Section] asked me to change things... I tried to explain but there was clear power difference and I felt that there was no room for discussion, so I had to follow his recommendations'.*

This lecturer went through another observation where he had to demonstrate that he followed the Head of Section's 'recommendations', but went back to normal practices after that. This 'developmental' purpose of observations was conflicting, since it was normally done to lecturers when managers received complaints about them or to new lecturers, which associated it with weaknesses or lack of experience. Furthermore, managers stated that observations may result in termination of lecturers' contracts if they performed badly and did not improve. A Head of Section stated that:

> *'There are some lecturers that are not teaching effectively and they have no motivation to improve ... their family and private lives as ways more important … and they do not want to put that kind of time and effort into PD'.*

This could be a reason why some lecturers had negative attitudes to PD, due to the negative connotations sometimes associated with PD. A lecturer talked about his resistance to observation:

> *'I do not want anyone inside my class. I have had only bad experiences from them'.*

These bad experiences were in the form of forcing lecturers to adapt managers' opinions and pedagogical approaches, in addition to writing negative reports about lecturers. Claiming that the purpose of observations was only for 'developmental purposes' was rejected by lecturers and it was contradicted by managers themselves.

Another related issue was that there was a feeling among some lecturers that the management discouraged the use of certain technologies with students in the classroom. For instance, lecturers felt that the use of smartphones for pedagogical purposes could be interpreted as time wasting and a sign of lack of classroom control. A lecturer shared his experience when he used a collaborative writing task using a website:

> *'Students sometimes make noise when they learn. This is normal because they were discussing the task and learning from each other … later that day the Head of Department told me not to use or allow the use of mobile phones while teaching'.*

A memo was sent from the College management to all lecturers asking them not to use smartphones while teaching. However, no alternative solutions were given to lecturers and the College did not have portable gadgets for this purpose such as iPads (tablets). Lecturers argued that the College should either welcome smartphones use or purchase tablets. For instance, a lecturer talked about fear of including tasks that included smartphone use because that might result in negative consequences from the management.

Lecturers talked about their experiences of missing out on training within or outside the College due to having teaching duties at the time of training. Timing of training was a common obstacle hindering PD attendance. Many lecturers talked about inability to attend PD activities due to having teaching duties, exam invigilation or marking of exam papers. Some lecturers felt that management did not prioritise E-learning PD otherwise, they would have found appropriate time for it. A lecturer talked about missing the only conference that year that he could have attended:

> *'Foundation lecturers were free that week and attended the conference. I teach post-foundation and we had exams that week, so we could not go. This was the only conference the College gave us a chance to attend this year and I missed it'.*

Another lecturer talked about an important conference in another HEI. Only four lecturers were allowed to attend it since lecturers had teaching duties that week. Even within the College, lecturers could attend PD only if they had free time. Outside the College, lecturers would sometimes not be permitted to leave even if they did not have teaching duties because of the strict Leave Policies. This policy did not take into account whether lecturers needed to be present at the College or not, which resulted in lack of engagement with other HEIs.

The College management's use of 'Emergency Leave' and 'Early Leave' as a means to allow lecturers to engage with external PD, although sometimes was useful in the existing circumstances, was found by lecturers as inconsistent, unclear and with limited usefulness. Furthermore, using these options sparingly limited lecturers' use of it and their engagement with external PD. Some lecturers did not view them as adequate solutions and argued that management did not always grant them when lecturers asked for them. A lecturer shared his experience:

> *'I have no lectures on Thursday and I asked to leave early to attend a workshop in Muscat so they agreed. The second time they gave me additional work related to QA and said since you are free you can help us with this'.*

Another lecturer talked about this inconsistent use stating that:

> *'Once I asked for emergency leave to attend a conference but the College refused. I know lecturers who attended conferences using emergency leave and the management allowed them … this year, I attended a conference abroad and told the management that I have family emergency, and they approved my emergency leave'.*

The Staff Leave Policy (Policy 3) and the Staff Attendance Policy (Policy 4) in the College Quality Assurance Manual (2016) did not include PD as a possible reason for leave. A lecturer protested against these policies and stated:

> *'There should be a system where we can attend conferences without having to use Emergency Leave or Early Leave. We do not understand how we should take emergency leave, because if we ask in advance they will say no you have teaching this day and if we do not tell them they may not consider it emergency leave and deduct from our salary'.*

Most lecturers had teaching duties five days a week for most of the Academic year. In short, emergency leave, although used sometimes for PD purposes, was used unsystematically and unclearly and most lecturers did not think of it as an option for PD purposes.

This research revealed that there was a conflict of PD interest between lecturers and managers where they had different views regarding PD. Lecturers asked for E-learning PD and pedagogical PD, while the management emphasised Quality Assurance (QA) PD so that lecturers could write the Quality reports for the OAAA and then the College could get accreditation. Although institutional accreditation was essential for the College, lecturers frowned upon having to undergo through all QA PD and writing reports while their other PD needs were not met. For instance, a Senior Manager defended the lack of E-learning PD by stating that lecturers benefited from Quality Assurance PD. He stated that:

'Quality Assurance is not just a document we produce. Lecturers do not understand that well. Quality Assurance covers all work aspects and lecturers' PD is one important part of it'.

Lecturers did not see that QA PD could enhance their practices, and argued that it distracted the management from lecturers' PD, including E-learning PD. A lecturer talked about this saying:

'I think the management is too concerned with Quality Assurance and getting Accreditation and they do not pay enough attention to lecturer professional development'.

Lecturers commented on the lack of support they received when they joined the College, which meant that some lecturers were not able to cope with the institutional and student expectations and were not able to understand the institutional E-learning expectations. The 'induction' programme provided by the College was perceived by the lecturers as too general and did not meet expectations. Some lecturers were shown how to use the available technologies at the College while others did not receive training. Some lecturers had a chance to observe other lecturers teach, while others had to teach from their first day:

'Everything was new to me. Immediately after joining they just gave me books and I started teaching'.

Having to teach immediately with limited or no support was a common experience with lecturers. Furthermore, E-learning PD for new lecturers was not done systematically and it was up to some managers to organise training for them. A Head of Department talked about failure of having induction programmes for joining lecturers which resulted in termination of some contracts:

'He was a very good lecturer, but here, he failed… no induction was given to him about the students and culture here… Right after I joined here, I saw three people after two months they were gone… I wanted to know why they are leaving. They said that the moment we realized how to deal with the students, the moment they were informed by the HoD

> *that you cannot cope with the expectations of the students and you better leave the place… I'm pretty sure a good induction programme plays a major role for any employee to adjust to an environment which is completely new to him'.*

Although this statement was about PD in general, E-learning PD was included since most lecturers did not receive training in how to use them. Lecturers shared their experiences in the lack of a structured formal PD for new employees, which made their jobs more complicated. Furthermore, they did not know how to use the available technologies in the College such as Moodle and E-learning. Other lecturers did not know the E-learning expectations from the institution. For instance, a lecturer created a WhatsApp group for students without their consent, which drew criticism from students and managers. Due to the lack of formal training for new lecturers, they relied on their colleagues. For instance, a lecturer talked about his story:

> *'My colleagues were quite nice and helpful and they helped me at the beginning with work expectations here, the procedures and ways to deal with students. It's very different from my home country: the way they react, the studying style, or how they do things… because of the colleagues only I learned all these things. They taught me how to teach and how handle students, because it's not that easy'.*

The following theme will focus on E-learning pedagogical use and the role of E-learning PD in equipping lecturers with the skills and knowledge necessary to use E-learning in their practice. It is relevant to this theme, perceived lack of managerial support, because the training provided was linked to lecturers' use of E-learning in teaching.

6.4.6 E-learning Pedagogical Use: The Gap between E-learning PD and E-learning Pedagogical Application

An important theme identified in the study was the lack of lecturers' understanding of how E-learning may be used to enhance teaching and learning. This point was discussed briefly earlier and this theme will focus entirely on it. This was predominantly caused by the lack of E-learning PD and the failure of existing training to draw clear links between training and practice. This resulted in a lack of lecturers' understanding of the manner in which some institutional regulations, specifically curriculum and examinations, could be compatible with E-learning use. This missing link between training and practice could be attributed to the absence of E-learning and E-learning PD strategies. Investigating pedagogical application of E-learning and the impact of E-learning PD were core areas in this study.

E-learning PD provided by the College was primarily technical and lacked clear links to pedagogy. Lecturers who received E-learning training complained about its general nature and lack of clarity about its applicability to their practice. For instance, some lecturers did not know how some technologies could enhance their teaching in general, let alone teaching their modules. In fact, sometimes training was delivered without making references to teaching. It was done by showing steps in using software, where to click and functions available in software. For example, a lecturer talked about Moodle PD:

> *'We sat in a room packed with lecturers. They told us click here and click there and it was over. We did not even have a chance to practice with it'.*

The outcome of this form of E-learning PD was better understanding of E-learning as a technology but limited understanding of fundamental E-learning pedagogical usage and value.

Another issue questioned by some lecturers was the applicability of some technologies in teaching. A lecturer talked about a session he attended in using video quizzes to teach

vocabulary, where the trainer created an original video that included questions that appeared while watching it:

> *'The quiz was amazing, but how much time did she spend preparing it? It was part of her Master's thesis and she spent months preparing it. Do you think we can spend months to prepare one quiz?'*

This lecturer questioned the applicability of this technology, since preparing this kind of quizzes required experience in various computer programs, which the presenter explained in her presentation.

A profoundly significant finding in the study was the perception of some lecturers that E-learning activities conflicted with the curriculum. For instance, a lecturer talked about the mismatch between E-learning PD and institutional pedagogical expectations:

> *'I do not know how I could use E-learning in a manner that would prepare students for the exams. I have to finish the curriculum and I do not have time to use E-learning'.*

This was an example of many lecturers questioning the compatibility of E-learning with College pedagogical regulations which emphasised assessment based on examinations from unified curriculums. E-learning was commonly viewed as a distraction to curriculum, rather than a tool that could enhance curriculum delivery. Some lecturers felt that E-learning meant shifting away from the semester delivery plans given by their departments. There was a feeling that teaching their curriculum without using technology would keep them focused on task. In this view, E-learning and content delivery could not go hand in hand. A lecturer talked about this point saying:

> *'It would be nice to show videos or have online quizzes, but our main objective is to teach students and prepare them for final exam, not entertain them.'*

These views which regarded E-learning as a distraction could demonstrate some reasons for lecturers' avoidance of E-learning use in the classroom. In other words, some lecturers

thought that there was no time to teach using E-learning, while others thought that E-learning could only 'entertain' students, and was not suitable for the College curriculum. This showed that E-learning PD failed to show lecturers how E-learning could improve their practices. Continuing to provide technical training would not likely develop E-learning use if lecturers continued to regard E-learning as a distraction to their curriculum and pedagogical practices.

Another interesting finding was the disparity of views among lecturers regarding the value of E-learning to their specific disciplines or modules and some felt that the E-learning PD they received had no links to their practices. In other words, some lectures thought that E-learning was not suitable to their specialisations or the modules they teach. Some lecturers did not understand the pedagogical applications of E-learning to their specific disciplines and claimed that E-learning would be more useful to other disciplines more than their own. For instance, a mechanical engineering lecturer thought that his discipline depended more on practical practice than theory, which made E-learning irrelevant. However, a lecturer in the same field had an opposite view and stated that videos were essential teaching tools to show steps that would be hard to explain using words. This was an example of many conflicting views which showed a lack of understanding of how E-learning could be used in teaching. A lecturer stated that:

'Teaching a subject with the help of technology cannot be the same for all subjects. It depends on nature of the subject.'

Lecturers gave examples of training where they felt no clear links to pedagogy and their discipline were made. According to some lecturers, getting general E-learning training from technicians from the Educational Technologies Centre resulted in general training which they found irrelevant to pedagogy. They argued that technicians could not explain how lecturers could use technology in their disciplines.

There was conflict of interests in technology PD, where the management sometimes provided training in technologies essential for non-pedagogical purposes and considered that an effective form of E-learning PD. For instance, the management organised training

in the use of some technologies such as Microsoft Word, Microsoft Excel (for exam results) and the Learning Management System (for attendance, class lists, etc.) and considered it as a form of E-learning. Lecturers regarded these technologies as essential for administrative parts of lecturers' work rather than pedagogy. Lecturers received E-mails with instructions on how to use some technologies such as Moodle and Smartboard, and lecturers were unsatisfied with that.

The following sections focus on informal learning and how lecturers collaborated and learned from each other. Furthermore, there is analysis of the lecturers' communities of practice and how some lecturers belonged to these communities and others did not.

6.4.7 Lecturers' Collaboration and Informal E-learning PD

The study revealed that despite valuing formal E-learning PD by lecturers and asking for more and better training, lecturers claimed that most of their learning was informal from their colleagues. Informal learning became increasingly prominent throughout the study as lecturers talked about their E-learning PD experiences and relying on their peers more than formal PD. It seems that dependence on informal learning was a direct outcome of the lack of formal PD. Furthermore, many other factors encouraged informal learning such as mutual understanding and trust among communities of practice, and sharing similar interests, experiences and backgrounds. Informal learning occurred frequently among 'communities' where lecturers' communities were formed based on interests, trusts, understandings, nationalities and other things in common. Some groups were incidentally formed while others were intentionally formed by the management such as Coordination or by lecturers themselves (See Context: Forms of PD).

Lecturers and managers appreciated lecturers' diversity at the College, and it was considered a valuable learning resource. This diversity included various issues such as nationalities, cultural backgrounds and experiences. Lecturers and managers argued that

valuable learning opportunities would be available if lecturers learned from each other. For example, a lecturer said that:

> *'In our centre we have more than 20 nationalities. We learn about the teaching culture from those who come from the UK, the USA, South Africa and other countries'.*

This point was emphasised by other lecturers who viewed coming from different parts of the world and having different academic experiences, qualifications and educational backgrounds was enriching as they learned from each other. However, lecturers argued that without having a culture of sharing and trust where informal learning is encouraged, taking advantage of this diversity would be limited.

Lecturers shared their experiences in engaging in various informal learning practices, which they regarded as valuable to their pedagogical and E-learning PD. Starting from joining the College, lecturers relied on their colleagues to learn about pedagogy, E-learning and the culture. Relying on colleagues was motivated by ease of approaching them, the non-judgemental and sympathetic nature of informal learning and the absence or lack of formal PD. For these reasons, lecturers also relied heavily on colleagues to learn about E-learning. A lecturer talked about his preference for informal E-learning PD:

> *Personally, I learn better about technologies informally… If I want to have something, I know you are good so I will come to you and I will ask. You will teach me according to my level of thinking. In formal training, they give us all commonly and some of understand well and others do not understand. Informal learning is better. The main advantage with informal what happens is, we feel relaxed. We will not have any tension.'*

This lecturer argued that his informal E-learning experiences were better, while other lecturers did not receive any E-learning PD so they had to rely on their colleagues or develop themselves. There was a common feeling that approaching the management for support came with risks as they considered managers judgemental and non-cooperative. Other forms of informal learning were based on pedagogical and emotional support

where lecturers talked about frustrations, day-to-day occurrences or classroom activities. An important form of informal learning, which was closely linked to formal learning, were discussions occurred around formal training, as this lecturer illustrated:

> *'Sometimes it is not about the [PD event], but about meeting people and talking about the strategies and cultures that we have in each college. You learn a lot from this'.*

Lecturers valued engaging in discussions with others around PD activities and argued that they learned a lot from them. However, E-learning PD activities were normally organised at times of busy teaching schedules where lecturers did not have time to talk before or after PD events. In many cases, training was conducted following a top-down approach where lecturers did not have a chance to engage with trainers or lecturers regarding E-learning PD content. This limited informal learning opportunities that could occur around or during E-learning PD activities. A lecturer talked about his experience in getting support from coordinators. According to her, she felt less intimidated asking a colleague rather than the management. She said that:

> *'I find it much easier to approach my colleagues who are level coordinators, because they are available and I feel free to ask any questions. Also, I do not feel worried when I say I do not understand something or I need help. The management here quickly judges you when you do something wrong, so I do not ask them'.*

Having shared interests, goals or modules were common incentives for informal learning. For instance, lecturers teaching similar modules talked about sharing their experiences, learning materials and tips with their colleagues. Some lecturers formed communities of practice based on their shared interests and goals; for instance, there was a special interest group in educational research. However, although many lecturers expressed interest E-learning, there was no common community among them. The formally structured E-learning committee (See Context: Forms of PD) failed to form a community and lecturers rarely met other members of the committee or shared experiences with

them. The PD committee was working haphazardly and its members did not have a clear idea what other members of the committee were doing.

Learning and collaboration between lecturers tended to be limited beyond the boundaries set by groups of lecturers. For instance, many communities were based on shared nationalities, experiences, disciplines or interests. Collaboration between lecturers from different disciplines was very limited. A Head of Department criticised the lack of lecturers' engagement with PD beyond their departments, even when it was relevant to them. Although some lecturers and managers described the College as a 'melting pot', there was a tendency among lecturers and managers to form communities based on cultural backgrounds. An E-learning trainer talked about seeking advice and help from colleagues, where he would first approach lecturers from the same nationality:

> *'If I am the new guy, I would not approach you regarding the do's and don'ts. I would ask first my fellow Filipinos… What are the things that I should do in this College and country? Then the confirmation will come from you, from the Omanis'.*

Some lecturers talked about their resistance to break these boundaries such as nationality. Lecturers identified other barriers; for instance, a lecturer talked about status where lecturers with higher qualifications or from certain backgrounds viewed themselves as more important than others. Although forming communities was usually regarded as valuable, there were instances where some communities hindered learning and PD. A lecturer who noticed these groups and their negative effect on the training she delivered said:

> *'There are pro-admin [Collaborating with the management] and anti-admin groups [Against the College Management]. We should have team building activities for the whole College to minimize if not eradicate this kind of behaviour'.*

According to her, some lecturers resisted E-learning PD because they were against the management. These groups had a negative impact on PD and E-learning PD at the College.

Some lecturers valued the open-door policy by some managers and argued that it created informal learning opportunities. For instance, lecturers talked about a friendly and supportive environment created by a manager who kept an open door by inviting lecturers daily to his office for tea/coffee to chat about the ongoing activities in the department. The informal nature of these gatherings was appreciated by lecturers and they expressed learning from colleagues. However, a lecturer stated that these kinds of interactions were unstructured and basic and formal PD would be more informative. It seemed that informal learning was valuable but it could not eliminate the need for structured formal E-learning PD. A manager in another department had a similar view where he argued that intensifying formal PD opportunities would be better due to its structured and systematic nature. The management encouraged informal learning by appointing module coordinators who shared materials, teaching strategies and tips with other lecturers.

The following theme will focus on the lesson planning and lesson teaching activity used in the study, in the form of focus group, lesson-planning activity, teaching the lesson planned then reflecting on the lessons taught.

6.4.8 The Lesson Planning and Lesson Teaching Activity: Focus Group discussion, lesson planning and teaching the lesson planned

This theme will focus on the lesson planning and lesson teaching activity used in the study (See Methodology Chapter) following four steps:

1) Focus group discussions with ELC lecturers about E-learning PD
2) Lecturers sat together and planned for lessons that involved E-learning use for the lessons they would normally teach
3) Lecturers delivered the lessons they planned and I observed all the lessons
4) Lecturers reflected on their lessons and their experiences in E-learning use

This activity was useful for understanding lecturers' considerations in lesson planning and delivery when they use E-learning. In addition, the group discussions showed the role of informal learning and formal E-learning PD from their perspectives. Understanding the connection between technology, E-learning pedagogical perceptions and E-learning PD perceptions was a key purpose of this activity.

A. Focus Group Discussions

Focus group discussions were with 12 ELC lecturers and were recorded and analysed thematically. The findings were similar to the findings discussed in the interview themes presented earlier. In the focus group discussions, lecturers shared personal stories, experiences and perspectives with other lecturers. For instance, when a lecturer shared a thought, others confirmed it, disagreed with it or shared a personal experience related to it. Lecturers talked about lack of E-learning PD opportunities and poor quality of training provided by the College. They also discussed the challenge of limited resources including financial resources, technology resources and the use of caravans in teaching (See Context). Other issues highlighted were formal and informal E-learning PD and the importance of getting exposed to other professionals and training outside the College in addition to E-learning PD within the College. At the end of the focus group session, lecturers were reminded about the next step, lesson-planning activity, and were given a choice to either come mentally prepared or think about it during the activity.

B. Lesson Planning Activity

The lesson planning activity involved seven lecturers and was recorded and analysed. It demonstrated interesting variations in lecturers' perceptions and approaches to E-learning use. Some lecturers were enthusiastic and talked about detailed plans for E-learning use with the aid of several technologies, while others were not enthusiastic about E-learning but decided to experiment with it. Lecturers were given freedom to plan alone or with others. They spent some time writing their plans and then we discussed what they have written.

Using videos was the most popular form of technology among lectures because they regarded it as 'visually appealing' and interesting for students and consequently would 'attract' their attention and keep them focused on tasks. Lecturers planned to follow videos with exercises and discussions around it such as writing, vocabulary and speaking. Lecturers had different ideas about the purpose of using videos in their lessons and they attempted to enhance their existing practices by introducing it to support their teaching. A lecturer talked about motivating students by using videos:

> *'The aim of E-learning use is to motivate the students. I hope when they watch the video about the campus and feel motivated'.*

A lecturer who had strong opinions in favour of E-learning said that she would send a video to all students so that they could see it at home and in the classroom, there would be exercises related to that video. According to her, that would save classroom time and students would be able to see it as many times as they would like. However, another lecturer was sceptical of the extent of E-learning usefulness because she believed that:

> *'Both technology and traditional learning are important because as much as you write with your hand the images captured by eyes and the brain, it reflects immediately when you start writing or speaking'.*

This lecturer decided to use only students' smartphones to translate words for a vocabulary exercise and to show them the phonetic symbols so that they would understand how words should be pronounced. Furthermore, she planned to ask them to see images in Google if they could not understand the meaning of some words. When she noticed that all other lecturers planned to use videos in their lessons, she decided to add that to her plan.

As lecturers shared and explained their planned lessons, they engaged in interesting and productive conversations about the pedagogical value of E-learning and teaching strategies that would be used. During this process, some lecturers decided to modify their plans or adapt some ideas of other lecturers. Lecturers asked for clarification about processes that other lecturers would follow in delivering their planned lessons and shared

their opinions about them. For instance, a lecturer talked about a vocabulary competition following watching a video, and a lecturer asked:

'What are the criteria to decide the marks?'

This provoked interesting discussions about E-learning for educational games, quizzes and assessment in general. The lecturer who planned for this competition said that this was a fun activity and the criteria could be made simple. Another lecturer explained the purpose of asking students to search for an interesting video and speak about it:

'The purpose is to encourage them to use English outside the classroom… In the classroom I cannot let everyone speak so I want them to speak English more often outside the classroom'.

Some lecturers talked about practical challenges due to the limited E-learning resources that could be used in the caravans and the decisions they made in order to use E-learning there. For instance, a lecturer stated that:

'The only E-learning tool that can be used in the caravans where I teach is the Overhead Projector. I decided to use an Overhead Projector … to explain the diagrams and the components of the lesson to simplify the structure for the students'.

Lecturers decided to use the technologies they felt confident about. However, some of them experimented with new E-learning practices such as using videos or allowing smartphone use to look up the meaning of words in vocabulary lessons. At the end, lecturers were asked whether they were happy to be observed when they teach their lessons. Only one lecturer refused because he did not like having another person in his classroom due to negative experiences he had when managers observed him.

C. Classroom Observation of Planned Lessons

Observations of lecturers teaching their planned lessons showed a remarkable representation of E-learning use. Out of the seven lecturers who planned for lessons, five lecturers taught their lessons. One lecturer decided not to take part in it and another was

too busy and later decided not to teach the lesson. Some lecturers were able to use technology smoothly as they planned and students engaged in all the activities involved without any difficulties while others faced some difficulties. Lecturers' lessons involved the use of various E-learning tools such as videos, smartphones, laptops, CD players, WhatsApp and Smartboard. Analysis here will be divided into two parts: lessons taught in the main building and lessons taught in the caravans. The available E-learning resources in each classroom affected lecturers' experiences; hence, this was the purpose of dividing this analysis accordingly.

Lecturers used various technologies in the lessons taught in the main building. As discussed in the Context, all classrooms in the main building had projectors, Wi-Fi connectivity and Smartboards (See Context: College Resources). Wi-Fi connectivity was an important issue in the lessons taught in the main building. In one classroom observation, a lecturer used an online quiz related to a grammar lesson he taught and asked students to complete it using their mobile phones. Students kept trying to connect to Wi-Fi and the web page would not open. Some students opened it by disconnecting Wi-Fi and using their mobile data. The lecturer then asked students to connect using their mobile data. Some did that happily, while others complained that they did not have enough data credit or said that they did not want to use their own data allowances. The lecturer decided not to complete the activity and told them it would be done in another session, online or on paper. Lecturers who used projectors or smartboards had to carry laptops and sometimes CD players for audio. In one observation, one lecturer went to her class 10 minutes earlier to set up everything. She had to go twice, first to carry her textbooks, supplementary materials, whiteboard pens, and the second time to bring a laptop and speakers. She complained that these were heavy and outdated. There was a smartboard equipped with speakers there, but she did not know how to use it. Another lecturer, who learned it by herself, used it. However, this lecturer still had to carry a laptop to connect it to the Smartboard.

Lack of resources was challenging for many lecturers, since lack of or poor quality of ICT infrastructure did not enable them to use E-learning effectively. Lecturers who taught their lessons in the caravans had challenging experiences since they did not have any form of technology (some caravans had poor Wi-Fi connectivity – See Context: Resources). I observed the process through which a lecturer used technology in a caravan. First, he asked my help to carry a portable over-head projector and he carried a laptop, his books and laminated papers. Setting up the overhead projector took some time, and it was used to project examples of students' writing project. After that, the lecturer asked students to complete a task watching a video he downloaded on his laptop (due to Wi-Fi unavailability). Although the caravan was small, students could not see or hear the video from their seats, so the lecturer asked them all to stand up and go near the laptop. Most of the students at the back stood up and went to the front near the laptop. That took some time and created some disorder since there were 26 students in that class. The lecturer decided not to show another video he downloaded and used the textbook and whiteboard instead. Another lecturer wanted to show a video to students in the caravans by asking them students to search for it on YouTube using their smartphones. The Wi-Fi connectivity was very poor in that class and students disconnected Wi-Fi and watched the videos in groups. The lecturer gave her phone to a group of students who could not see the video. After some time, most students were able to see the video.

Interestingly, lessons that involved less use of E-learning did not go well, probably due to having less experience or having less favourable attitudes toward E-learning. For instance, a lecturer who asked students to look up the meaning of words could not control the class and students did not want to put their phones down. She decided to abandon the exercise and explain the meaning of words herself. This showed that although some lecturers had more complicated uses of technology, they were able to deliver better than others who used one simple form of E-learning such as videos or phone dictionaries.

D. Reflections of the Lessons Taught

Reflections on the lessons planned focused on lecturers' perspectives on their lessons. This included discussing how they felt their lessons went, the value added by E-learning

use and how they would improve their lessons and use E-learning in the future. Five lecturers reflected on their lessons.

Lecturers emphasised the importance of setting up technology before teaching because carrying laptops, CD players, textbooks, supplementary materials, and whiteboard markers was hard to do in one go. A lecturer talked about the time needed to set up the laptop, connect it to the projector and speakers. She talked about the quality and heaviness of these technologies:

'It is a burden and I wish the College could provide better laptops and speakers.'

Another lecturer discussed the time wasted waiting for the laptop to start. He said that next time he would check the laptop before the class in order not to waste time. Lecturers did not like carrying all E-learning resources or having to carry half of them then the other half later. However, one lecturer only knew how to use the Smartboard and how to use the speakers attached to it. She had only to carry a laptop to connect it there.

Considering the availability, quality and affordability of technologies was important for lecturers. For instance, lecturers who taught in the caravans felt that planning for lessons that involved using Wi-Fi or showing videos using laptops did not go smoothly and was of limited value. The lecturer who used his laptop to show videos talked about what went wrong in his lesson:

'I do not think I will do this again. Carrying all this equipment in this hot weather and asking for help to carry them. It is the first time I use a laptop in these caravans and it did not go well. In normal classrooms, I have used it to connect to the projector and it worked'.

Lecturers who used some E-learning tools in caravans such as Wi-Fi, Over Head projectors and laptops stated that they would not use technology again there because it was complicated and did not go well.

Empowering students and enhancing student's collaboration and student-centred learning were viewed as important strengths of E-learning. A lecturer talked about the way videos encouraged students to work in groups and learn from each other. Grasping the attention of students, making learning more enjoyable and involving students in collaborative learning exercises were viewed as some of the most important benefits of using E-learning in their lessons. However, one lecturer felt that his use of projector was lecturer-centred where students were receptive and passive. He said that he would try to encourage students to engage more with the content and interact more with each other in order to improve his E-learning use in the future.

Lecturers unanimously felt that E-learning use created an interesting learning environment that students enjoyed, interacted more with and learned better from. The lecturer who was initially sceptical about E-learning use ended with positive attitudes about E-learning usefulness, particularly for creating a more engaging learning environment for students:

'It stimulates students better and convinces them more. It makes them more engaged with the subject they are studying'.

6.4.9 Conclusion

Lecturers' E-learning PD practices and perceptions was the fundamental focus of this study, hence findings at the individual (Micro) level were of paramount importance. The findings were presented according to the themes identified in the thematic analysis process (See Methodology), which were closely linked to the Research Questions of this study.

The study showed that although lecturers overwhelmingly had positive attitudes toward E-learning, their use of it in practice was limited due to a number of constraints. Some of

the advantages of E-learning highlighted in this study were enabling collaborative learning, creating an interesting and thought-provoking learning environment and saving time and resources. Lecturers' limited use of E-learning was caused by many challenges such as limited E-learning PD, poor quality of PD, some policies that hinder E-learning PD, lack of managers' support and limited resources.

The lack of training opportunities was regarded as a major hindrance to E-learning use. Lecturers had limited E-learning PD opportunities and they had limited opportunities to engage with other professionals other than their colleagues, due to various financial, policy and geographical constraints. Lecturers felt that the E-learning PD provided did not prepare them to use E-learning in their practice as most of E-learning PD was general without clear associations or references to teaching and learning. Furthermore, training was frequently in the form of presentations where lecturers did not have opportunities to experiment with technologies during training. For all these reasons, many lecturers felt anxious about E-learning use in teaching and feared losing control of classroom or not being able to teach well. Some lecturers stated that using familiar tried and trusted methods was easier, a safer option or more effective for them.

The perceived lack of managerial support was an important theme highlighted by the majority of lecturers who took part in the study. Managers were blamed for the lack of E-learning PD and its poor quality. Lecturers did not trust managers' intentions with some types of PD. For example, lecturers resented classroom observations, which they mainly viewed as judgemental. Managers repeatedly argued that the purpose of observations was the development of lecturers' practice, but they admitted that it was usually for lecturers who they perceived as poor performing (with complaints) or who were new. Furthermore, the argument that classroom observation was 'only for developmental purposes' was contradicted by managers themselves, who stated that they could result in negative outcomes such as termination of contracts if lecturers could not improve. Lecturers viewed that this judgemental nature of PD was also applicable to other forms of

PD, where PD was viewed as a tool to 'fix weaknesses'. For these reasons, lecturers appreciated and engaged frequently in informal learning with their colleagues.

The study lesson planning and lesson teaching activity involved focus group discussions, lesson-planning activity, teaching the planned lessons and reflecting on these lessons. The activity was vital for understanding lecturers' E-learning perceptions and practices. It highlighted important issues such as importance of matching planning with technology availability and quality, matching E-learning with pedagogical and curriculum goals and using E-learning to create an active student-centred learning environment.

6.5 Findings Chapter Conclusion

This Chapter presented the study findings and it consisted of two parts: The E-learning PD Context and E-learning PD at the individual level. Themes of each level were identified through a thematic analysis process, which kept into account the research questions and the conceptual framework of the study.

At the context level, analysis of findings showed there were many national and institutional policies and practices associated with E-learning PD. The study revealed that there was evidence of discrimination of lecturers based on their contract type and this had negative implications on lecturers' PD engagement and experiences. Another policy that constrained PD engagement was the strict attendance policy where lecturers were required to be physically present at College even if they did not have teaching or other duties that required their presence, which consequently placed limitations on lecturers' PD engagement with other HEIs. An important finding in the study was the limited financial and strategic (policy) investment in E-learning PD, compared to prioritising financial investment on E-learning resources. On top of providing limited financial resources for E-learning PD, lecturers were not allowed to take PD leave even if they were willing to cover their PD costs. The non-academic promotions system was identified as an obstacle to E-learning PD, since pedagogical improvement and teaching were not

associated with promotions, and the only career advancement was in the form of taking managerial duties. The E-learning PD provision was not based on needs of lecturers. Furthermore, the strategies in the College Quality Manual were not compatible with real practice and that resulted in the lack of E-learning PD accountability and disparity between policy and practice.

At the individual level, lecturers' E-learning and E-learning PD experiences and perspectives were examined. An important finding was that the majority of lecturers had positive attitudes toward E-learning, but they had limited use of it due to various hindrances they identified, such as limited E-learning PD, poor quality of E-learning PD and anxiety and lack of confidence toward using technology in teaching. Lecturers placed considerable blame on managers for what they considered as lack of managerial support. This was identified as a major reason for the lack of E-learning PD implementation and uptake. Lecturers engaged frequently in informal E-learning PD and most of them claimed they learned informally from colleagues more than through formal training. This was partly due to a lack of trust and miscommunication with managers and the lack of PD provision, but also to the nature of informal learning where collegial assistance would be precise to needs, timely whenever issues would arise and assistance was regarded as non-judgemental. Lecturers' communities had boundaries based on shared interests, nationalities, departments (disciplines) or age. These communities were viewed as valuable learning communities of practices but there were viewed by others as closed walls 'factions' that limited engagement beyond their boundaries. The study lesson planning and lesson teaching activity showed that lecturers faced pedagogical challenges when they used E-learning in the form of resources, alignment with institutional policies (curriculum and examinations), and lack of E-learning pedagogical expertise.

Chapter 7: **Discussion and Conclusion**

7.1 Introduction

This Chapter begins by bringing together the most significant findings related to each research question.

This Chapter discusses the findings under two themes that emerged as the most prominent and analytically useful:

1. Strategic and coherent E-learning PD Policy: lack of understanding of the link between technology and pedagogy
2. Informal Learning, lecturers' agency and communities of practice

The purpose of choosing these two discussion themes were selected as they constituted the heart of this study and the most significant findings were around them. The first theme looks at formal learning and management of E-learning PD, while the second looks at lecturers' informal learning and lecturer agency and PD. In this study, lecturer agency refers to lecturers' active involvement and sense of responsibility towards their E-learning PD. Calvert (2016, p4) defined agency as the following:

> *'the capacity of teachers to act purposefully and constructively to direct their professional growth and contribute to the growth of their colleagues'*

Lecturer agency is sometimes compared to 'structure', or the social and external factors that motivate or inhibit behaviour (Elder-Vass, 2010; Priestley et al., 2012). Lecturer agency refers to lecturers' responsibility and power in controlling and shaping their PD, while structure refers to the environmental and contextual factors that shape lecturers' PD (Giddens, 2013; Hilferty, 2008). Agency and structure should not be viewed as contrasting, because lecturers could be active creators of their PD environment and also be influenced by external factors (Giddens, 2013; Hilferty, 2008). In this chapter, lecturer agency will be analysed by investigating lecturers' and managers' involvement and roles

in E-learning PD, the personal and contextual factors that impact lecturers' E-learning PD, optional and mandatory PD, and the role of lecturers' communities in E-learning PD.

This study makes a significant contribution by providing a critical perspective on the theoretical models used in this research, by evaluating the theoretical models of CoP by Lave and Wenger (1991), TAM by Davis (1986), TPACK by Mishra and Koehler (2006) and the Three Nested Levels of PD by Twining et al. (2013). Based on evaluation of these theoretical models and analysing the data, the second theoretical contribution was creating an original Conceptual Framework. This Conceptual Framework, which was initially created based on a critical evaluation of the theoretical models, kept evolving throughout the data collection and data analysis process. The third contribution was contextual, since the characteristics of the college investigated posed unique challenges not seen in other studies. The study was conducted in a remotely located HEI, with little engagement with other HEIs and with a lack of PD funding. This resulted in relying mainly on internal resources within the College. Most studies that investigate E-learning tend to be conducted in developed countries in HEIs where lecturers had opportunities to engage with academics from other HEIs. There is a lack of understanding of challenges faced by HEIs that face similar characteristics with Ibri College. In the Omani context, no in-depth study on lecturers' E-learning PD has been conducted and no studies on E-learning PD at the Colleges of Technology have been found. A key finding was the tendency of lecturers to have positive ideal perceptions about E-learning, however they questioned its applicability once practical pedagogical and curricula issues related to their daily practice were involved.

In considering the recommendations and implications for practice I will discuss the policy, practice and research recommendations and the implications of this research on the context and on E-learning PD research in general. This includes recommendations for further studies.

The next section discusses the theoretical, methodological and practical limitations of this study and the steps taken in order to overcome and minimize them. This includes a discussion of the limitations of the theoretical models and research methodologies adopted, since they had different limitations that affected this study.

The last section is an evaluation of the Conceptual Framework used in this study based on its importance, the challenges faced in the process of using it, its strengths and limitations and its applicability to other studies.

7.2 Answers to the Research Questions

1. What are lecturers' and managers' perceptions of E-learning use in teaching?

Lecturers and managers had overwhelmingly positive attitudes toward the pedagogical benefits of E-learning where E-learning was viewed as vital for enhancing teaching and learning. Crucially, however, lecturers' use of E-learning in teaching was limited due to lack of training, lack of confidence in using E-learning in their classrooms or perceptions that E-learning use would distract them from the curriculum. For example, some lecturers did not see E-learning use as compatible with the curriculum and felt that using it would distract students from learning. The limited E-learning PD provision, its poor quality and its vague relevance to teaching were viewed as major reasons for the lack of E-learning uptake. Lecturers felt that the technical training frequently provided by technicians and sometimes by lecturers, did not equip them with the skills and knowledge necessary for E-learning use in teaching. Practical pedagogical applications were often left vague. For instance, a lecturer who delivered training in creating videos for online quizzes presented her Master's dissertation project. This was seen as impractical for most lecturers due to the complexity of technologies used and the time required to create that content. Hence, practical applications of E-learning PD were vague.

Managers valued E-learning but there was lack of support for E-learning PD since there was no clear accountability toward it and College policies were either unsupportive or not

implemented. The College did not have an E-learning PD strategy and did not have an E-learning teaching and learning strategy. Consequently, there were no strategies that would guide lecturers' use of E-learning or guide the College in providing the training required to improve lecturers' practice. PD responsibilities were supposed to be guided by the HR Department under the supervision of an assistant dean, but in practice they were not involved in lecturers' PD and all PD decisions were made within academic departments. Consequently, a haphazard approach was followed by departmental managers where different PD approaches were followed based on their personal preferences and views. Another support structure that was created and not utilised was the College Committees, where some of them were not active and others operated randomly without coordination among their members and without follow up from senior management. The training provided was often irrelevant or delivered by lecturers with little understanding of lecturers' needs.

2. What are lecturers' E-learning pedagogical and technological perceptions, considerations and experiences?

Lecturers' E-learning experiences varied considerably, from being non-users to being regular users, and from using simple E-learning applications, like projectors, to more advanced applications like VLEs, online quizzes, Smartboards and collaborative learning exercises. Some lecturers used E-learning resources frequently and encouraged others by providing training and informal support. A small number of lecturers questioned the usefulness of E-learning as they perceived traditional pedagogical approaches as more effective for them, safer to use and more suitable to students' needs.

Classroom control was a key issue for lecturers' decision to use E-learning. Some lecturers felt that technologies distracted students and made them unable to control learning where students would engage in activities irrelevant to learning tasks provided. Others felt that E-learning made learning more effective and made students more interested and more focused on learning tasks.

Lecturers felt that the management did not support E-learning use and that it would be safer for lecturers to teach without using E-learning. In general, lecturers felt that they were not equipped with the skills and knowledge necessary to use E-learning inside classrooms and they demanded more and better training. Furthermore, non-availability of some resources such as tablets, better Wi-Fi and better laptops was seen as a hindrance.

The availability of E-learning resources and convenience of their use affected lecturers' decisions to use E-learning. The availability of technologies inside classrooms influenced lecturers' E-learning use as carrying portable technologies like CD players, over-head projectors and laptops to the classroom was seen as inconvenient. Having to spend time setting up technologies such as laptops and projectors was seen as a factor discouraging E-learning use.

Attitudes toward E-learning potential for supporting curricula were divided, where lecturers either felt that E-learning was supporting or distracting them from focusing on curriculum. This was a crucial issue since assessment practices were based on curriculum followed and diversion from it would have negative effects on students and lecturers.

Lecturers' use of E-learning in teaching was influenced by perceptions toward curriculum, pedagogy and students' needs. When lecturers planned for a lesson that involved E-learning use, they initially decided to use technologies that they were familiar with, but later some of them decided to use other technologies when they heard the ideas of other lecturers. Although not all lessons went as lecturers planned and not all lecturers were in favour of E-learning use, all lecturers stated that E-learning use enhanced teaching and learning and they learned from their experiences. Lecturers felt that observing other lecturers teaching their lessons would be useful to learn different strategies and learn how to use E-learning more effectively. They also appreciated planning for lessons together as they learned from the ideas of others.

3. What are lecturers' and managers' perceptions of E-learning PD at Ibri College of Technology?

Lecturers and managers tended to have contrasting perspectives toward E-learning PD practices at the College. In general, managers felt E-learning PD was sufficiently provided albeit that they saw room for improvement. Lack of resources was seen by managers as a hindrance that did not enable them to improve E-learning PD practices. On the other hand, lecturers felt that they received little or no E-learning PD. Lecturers felt that the quality of E-learning training provided was unsatisfactory and it did not prepare them to use E-learning in their practice. Some technology training provided for lecturers was related to non-pedagogical applications such as student attendance, administrative duties and assessment. This was regarded by some managers as E-learning PD provision, despite not having direct pedagogical applications. In the same way, Kirkwood and Price (2014) found that managers tended to be interested in saving costs and time rather than being interested in E-learning pedagogical uses.

1.1. How does formal learning occur at Ibri College of Technology?

Due to various policy, geographical and financial limitations, lecturers were constrained mainly to structured formal training opportunities within the College delivered predominantly by their colleagues, technicians or managers. Academic departments organised annual conferences where lecturers had opportunities to engage with other professionals and this was appreciated by lecturers and managers and was seen as beneficial. Taking part in PD events outside the College was seen as valuable but lecturers had limited opportunities. Both managers and lecturers agreed that E-learning PD was conducted without a proper needs analysis. However, some departmental managers followed individual rather than structured approaches, by collecting lecturers' needs or organising training based on classroom observations, lecturers' demands, students' complaints or managers' subjective views of lecturers' needs.

1.2. How does informal learning occur at Ibri College of Technology?

Crucially, informal learning was regarded as the most common source of E-learning PD at the College, due to the lack of training, its poor quality and the trust that lecturers shared with their colleagues. Informal learning took many forms such as asking for help when issues arose and sharing tips, information, experiences and stories. However, it was regarded by the majority of lecturers as limited and could not replace formal PD, because it was unstructured and with many other limitations. For instance, informal learning occurred mainly among communities within the College based on interests, nationalities and trust, thus lecturers did not feel comfortable asking for help from anyone outside their own group. In other cases, it was not known who to speak to and lecturers relied on self-study when their close peers could not help or were perceived as unable to provide assistance. The management use of coordination, where a lecturer would be responsible for each module, was effective in supporting lecturers in teaching modules. However, there was no evidence that there was support for other lecturers' communities, except the Research Consultancy Committee which was established based on a community of lecturers interested in research.

7.3 Discussion Themes

This section presents a discussion of the two most prominent themes that emerged in this study. These were identified based on an overall analysis of the study findings, where issues of formal and informal E-learning PD were significant.

The first theme is related to formal E-learning PD and focuses on management of E-learning PD and linking training to lecturers' practice. Furthermore, it looks at the lack of lecturers' and managers' understanding of the potential of technology to enhance pedagogy in the College. The second discussion theme focuses on informal learning, lecturers' agency and communities of practice. This includes discussions of lecturers' involvement in learning and whether they were active participants in learning or passive receivers of training.

7.3.1 Lack of Coherent E-learning PD Policy: Lack of Understanding of the Link between Pedagogy and Technology

Due to the lack of coherent E-learning PD management and absence of clear accountability, E-learning PD practices were scarce, haphazard, disconnected from lecturers' pedagogical practice and unfit for lecturers' needs and expectations. Lack of an E-learning PD strategy and an E-learning teaching strategy meant that PD was not conducted based on institutional or pedagogical goals, regulations and needs, but rather commonly conducted for the sake of conducting training based on lecturers' expertise. For instance, some managers stated that they asked volunteers to deliver training in a topic of their choice based on their experiences. Furthermore, investment in technologies and E-learning PD were not based on a strategy because the College did not have an E-learning PD strategy or a strategy on purchasing or updating technologies. There was overemphasis on financial investment on technologies by purchasing and updating technologies more than investment on lecturers' E-learning PD by spending resources on training.

As we saw earlier, the lack of PD strategy and haphazard training approach is common in organisations. For example, Watty et al. (2016) investigated E-learning resistance in ten Australian HEIs, where they argued that change was often steered by 'individual champions', rather than led by institutional initiatives. The participants attributed this to the lack of coherent E-learning strategies, and E-learning use was promoted by individual enthusiasts rather than institutional policies or initiatives.

The lack of a holistic E-learning PD approach meant that E-learning PD was not supported with policies and training responsibilities were either not taken or not compatible with lecturers' needs. The policy of organising PD under the supervision of the Head of HR and an Assistant Dean was not followed and that resulted in incoherent strategies and

random approaches followed by departmental managers. Managers seemed more interested in technology use for administrative practices (e.g. technology use for assessment scores or student attendance) and considered that a form of E-learning, which was different from lecturers' view of E-learning. That could be partially caused by the lack of an institutional definition of E-learning and E-learning PD and lack of a comprehensive E-learning strategy that would benefit lecturers and managers. Furthermore, it was also caused by lack of a comprehensive strategy where lecturers were not consulted. This approach echoes previous studies. For example, King and Boyatt (2015) found in their study of faculty adoption of E-learning in Warwick University, the UK, that E-learning strategies, when they existed, were often driven by technology focus and developed without consultation with lecturers. In their study, participants also emphasised the need of an E-learning institutional and pedagogical strategies and a clear definition of E-learning.

Another example of a policy that was not followed was the needs analysis policy. Lecturers' needs were supposed to be collected and analysed, and then training would be implemented based on training needs. The College did not gather or analyse lecturers' needs and E-learning PD was often conducted for the sake of conducting training. Managers stated that they would continue this approach, of emphasising training coverage over quality, by stating that their goal was to deliver E-learning training to all lecturers. A manager talked about pedagogical training stating that it should be a second stage after providing E-learning training to all lecturers. Although this could result in some positive outcomes, it could also be counterproductive if training was not matched to needs, overwhelmed lecturers with technical details, or was seen as inapplicable or not beneficial to practice. Overwhelming lecturers with technical details about what technologies can do, without considering what features lecturers need and clarifying how they could pedagogically apply them could result in perceptions that E-learning is complicated or ineffective. For instance, a lecturer complained that a training event in Smartboard involved plenty of technical details that she immediately forgot after training. She stated that she lost confidence as she felt that she could not remember details and could not find a way to apply E-learning in her classroom.

An important aspect when analysing needs is considering whose needs should be analysed. For instance, analysing E-learning needs of lecturers and mangers could result in training that meets lecturers' needs and institutional needs. Applying E-learning training based on managers' needs could result in training that aims only at reducing costs, saving time or increasing control over lecturers and students.

The College management continued creating committees, a support structure commonly used at the College, despite the fact that some of these committees were not active or were not fulfilling their duties. Committee members commonly operated independently only within their departments, despite having members from all other academic departments which they were supposed to work with. The management delegated E-learning and PD responsibilities, but there was no adequate follow up or support. E-learning PD was conducted within academic departments without having a coherent managerial support or accountability and without having policies and strategies for E-learning or E-learning PD.

The College investment in E-learning resources and E-learning PD lacked a coherent strategy. This was shown by the College spending of resources on technologies without properly consulting lecturers and departmental managers. The only strategy found in the College Manual (2016) was updating technology constantly and maintaining the student to PC ratio. It was not clear who were the people involved in decisions related to technology spending and how these decisions were made. The same issue occurred when investment was made on the audio-visual room which lecturers were not able to use for teaching. Interestingly, lack of financial resources was seen as a major cause for the lack of PD, despite spending valuable resources on technologies. This indicated that the College was not able to capitalise on the resources available and resources were spent without following any clear strategy. This resulted in purchasing technologies without conducing a pre- or post-investment analysis. These findings are similar to King and

Boyatt's (2015) study of E-learning adoption at the University of Warwick, where their findings showed that having an institutional strategy for providing resources and having a strategy for their use were essential for effective practices. Furthermore, participants argued that there was a need for a combined top-down and bottom-up approach for a better E-learning resources improvement strategy.

E-learning PD provision was affected by a lack of understanding of how technology could be used *pedagogically*. E-learning PD was commonly in the form of technical training by showing lecturers how technologies worked. Emphasis was on *what* E-leaning can do and its technical functionalities, without adequate discussions of *why* and *how* E-learning should be used. This training was frequently conducted by technicians with non-academic IT qualifications. However, lack of pedagogical emphasis was present even when lecturers delivered E-learning. Due to this 'technical' approach towards E-learning PD, more focus was paid to technologies that the management felt lecturers did not know how to use, such as Smartboards and VLEs by providing step-by-step guidance on system functionalities. However, the study showed that lecturers' use of technologies they knew how to use well was low, due to lack of understanding of their pedagogical use and how they enhance teaching and learning. For instance, the use of smartphones for learning purposes and the use of videos was not clear for lecturers because their pedagogical use, value to teaching and relevance to curriculum were unclear. Therefore, the issue of E-learning PD was not a simple matter of knowing how technology functioned, which was the prominent focus of E-learning PD at the College. These findings were relevant to Westberry et al. (2015) research where some lecturers resisted videoconferencing as an E-learning tool due to conflicts between pre-existing pedagogical practices and the new practices associated with the *new* technology. This lack of interest in pedagogy was clear in the training provided where references to teaching in general or teaching specific subjects were rarely made. Hauptman (2015) investigated the views of practitioners at a HEI in the USA and found that although they valued E-learning usefulness, they did not know how to use it to enhance practice.

In training events, normally there were no real examples from the curriculum and the link between E-learning and pedagogy were not clarified. Managers showed interest in increasing quantity of E-learning PD provided without questioning its quality, expecting that lecturers would find a way to benefit from and apply what they learn. In other words, E-learning PD for managers meant providing training for all lecturers and lecturers were expected to find a way to apply what they learned.

As we saw in the Findings chapter, lecturers had a passive role in E-learning PD events which were commonly didactic, top-down and in the form of presentations. In most cases, there was no room for discussions, debates or active involvement of learners. Consequently, lecturers who had sceptical views of E-learning were not provided with opportunities to discuss their views in formal E-learning PD events, since E-learning enhancement to practice was shown as definite outcome of E-learning use. Interestingly, Kirkwood and Price (2014) in their literature review of 47 articles in E-learning use in HE found that E-learning is associated with enhancement in learning and hence the term Technology Enhanced Learning, which they found to be used in an inconsiderate manner, (TEL) is increasingly used.

In this study, the findings suggested that there is risk of blindly associating any use of technology with enhancement in teaching and learning. There were many examples of lecturers' dissatisfaction with this didactic approach to training. For instance, a lecturer stated that she hoped training would involve discussions of when to use E-learning and when not, because the training she attended only showed how to use E-learning. Another lecturer was disappointed because the training did not make any clear references to the curriculum and he regarded E-learning as 'entertainment' for students and a diversion from the curriculum. The College management and trainers seemed unaware of lecturers' pedagogical concerns and emphasised that in order to improve practices, more E-learning should be provided. The relationship between E-learning, pedagogy and curriculum was not addressed well by managers and trainers, despite lecturers' concerns and lack of understanding about it.

Lecturers complained about being overwhelmed with technical details about technology in E-learning training without having opportunities to practice and without having discussions about pedagogical applications. Some lecturers claimed that they forgot what they have learned immediately after training. Furthermore, this created a feeling that technologies were complicated and their use required advanced technical skills since they were shown a lot of functions at once, without understanding how they could be used to enhance teaching and learning.

The College management emphasised increasing the quantity of E-learning PD and making attendance compulsory. This view that training should be compulsory seemed to be partly driven by an emphasis on increasing provision for all lecturers, prioritising quantity over quality, and views that PD was useful for improving the weaknesses of lecturers. It underlines that mandatory training does not guarantee learning if training practices were not developed. Kennedy (2016, p973) had a similar attitude toward mandatory training stating that:

'Mandatory PD creates a problem [because] … attendance is mandatory but learning is not'

Kennedy added that this form of training could create more noise to lecturers' busy working environment. The findings of my study seem to support this observation, which indicated that giving lecturers more freedom to attend based on their judgement of suitability of training could improve PD practices. Although this could result in lower attendance for some PD events, it could show which forms of training were seen as important by lecturers and at the same time gives lecturers ownership and authority of their own learning. Continuing to make attendance compulsory without improving quality or matching needs to training could result in further dissatisfaction with training, or ultimately to resistance to E-learning PD.

7.3.2 Informal Learning, Lecturers' Agency and Communities of Practice

At the College, it seemed that there was a prominent PD culture of placing lecturers by managers and by lecturers themselves as recipients of PD rather than active participants in it. Managers viewed themselves as responsible for PD practices and lecturers placed most of the blame on managers for the lack of PD and its quality without suggesting taking a more active part in improving practices. For lecturers, improving E-learning PD practices could be done mainly by the management, for example by providing better management, more support and training and better policies. Interestingly, although most PD events were delivered by lecturers, in the interviews most lecturers saw themselves as recipients of training or unable to improve practices without managerial support. Lecturers as passive recipients of training appeared as an institutional culture and a common view among lecturers and managers.

Some Lecturers held negative attitudes toward E-learning PD, many of these negative views could be linked to the perception that PD was an institutional rather than an individual responsibility. Lecturers were usually passive recipients of PD, despite having most of the training delivered by colleagues. Lecturers regarded training as inadequate since its quality, frequency and suitability to needs were regularly criticised and the management was blamed. The study findings showed that the majority of lecturers held positive attitudes toward technology, which was contrary to the findings of Watty et al. (2016), who found that the majority of lecturers resisted E-learning. Their small-scale study involved only 13 academics from 10 HEIs and academics did not talk about their own experiences, but about perceptions about reasons for other lecturers' resistance to E-learning. In this research, emphasis was paid to first-hand experiences, which goes beyond perceptions about other academics or general perceptions about E-learning usefulness.

A major source of discontent with formal PD was the view that it was conducted to fix deficits. Managers emphasised conducting training to 'fix' lecturers' weaknesses. This was

clear by focusing on problems that lecturers face, in classroom observations or based on student complaints and then asking lecturers to deliver training related to that. Lecturers were not interested in activities that showed them incompetent and considered some PD forms as basic. In other words, focusing on the strengths of the lecturing team, instead of the weaknesses of some lectures, may be a possible solution to the negative image associated with training. Another reason for negative attitudes toward E-learning PD was the power imbalance between lecturers and mangers, since promotions and authority were based on managerial positions. Consequently, lecturers felt undervalued and engagement in PD that aimed to improve pedagogical practices were seen as activities that would not lead to any career improvement. Kyndt et al. (2016, p1139) findings were comparable:

> *'Career mobility were consistently identified [as crucial to lecturer PD] and their presence enhances learning … the lack of these career opportunities… inhibits [lecturer] learning'.*

Due to the management's view that PD was conducted to address lecturers' weaknesses and deficits, attendance of PD events was made compulsory. At departmental levels, managers used classroom observations and students' complaints to organise training based on problems lecturers faced. Although improving practices based on needs could inform PD practices, organising regular activities based on it resulted in lecturers associating training with fixing lecturers' weaknesses. Lecturer led PD initiatives were not visible and managers took the role of encouraging lecturers to deliver training to their colleagues.

Lecturers viewed themselves as active members of informal learning communities where they engaged in learning activities with colleagues which were seen as beneficial. These learning activities were seen as more productive to the extent that most lecturers stated that they learned more from informal learning than formal learning. This was caused by several reasons, including the lack of E-learning PD, its poor quality and the nature of informal learning which was spontaneous and non-judgemental. These groups constituted what Lave and Wenger (1991) described as a community of practice. The shared interests (domain), repertoire of experiences and tools (practice) and ease of

access to colleagues and regular engagement with them (community) made members of these groups accessible to each other regularly and learning was achieved. Furthermore, in these CoPs learning was not a product received from trainers, but learning was collaboratively constructed by daily interactions among lectures' communities' members.

Communities were formed based on regular interaction and shared factors among their members. For instance, lecturers within a single department were more likely to form a community than lecturers from different departments. Similarly, lecturers teaching a specific module tended to engage frequently with other lecturers teaching the same module, sharing tips, experiences and ideas face to face and sharing teaching materials by email or by sharing hard copies. Due to the trust established among community members, lecturers felt comfortable sharing experiences or asking for help. In some cases, lecturers felt comfortable sharing difficulties they faced, which they would not share with managers in order not to be judged negatively. As a result, lecturers were able to get professional and emotional support from other lectures by complaining about issues they face, seeking advice or reassurances from colleagues, which led to improving their teaching and student learning. These Communities were effective for improving lecturers and learning informally. These findings were similar to Thomson and Trigwell (2016) findings, where they found that 'corridor' conversations to manage teaching helped lecturers by getting ideas from other practitioners.

Although the benefits of collegial support and informal learning were recognised and valued by lecturers and managers, individual interests and activities did not normally flourish into communities where like-minded lecturers formed communities of practice. For instance, E-learning was seen as valuable for teaching and learning by the majority of lecturers interviewed and in the questionnaire, but there was no community that brought together lecturers and managers interested in it. Similarly, interest in PD did not result in forming communities. The formal PD and E-learning committees formed by the management failed to form communities that would gather lecturers and encourage sharing practice, although this was one of the goals of the E-learning and PD committees.

There was an exception of a research group, which was established bottom-up by lecturers themselves, and lecturers from different departments met to improve research skills at the College. This community started with a few lecturers and managers interested in research where they supported each other informally, then that grew to a bigger group which was later recognised and adapted by the College. Regular PD activities were organised by this community. This could be a good example of lecturers' agency which could result in improving E-learning PD by lecturer-directed learning.

Having an inactive support structure could have negative impact on practices if lecturers relied on it but it did not meet expectations. The study showed that lecturers showed no signs of taking initiatives in forming a CoP interested in E-learning, although there was clear interest in E-learning. This was partly caused by the presence of the institutionally formed E-learning committee and PD committee, which were supposed to improve E-learning and PD practices at the College but showed no visible activities. In other words, lecturers waited for these committees to fulfil these duties and blamed them and the management for the lack of E-learning PD. Lecturers did not feel that there was a need to form a CoP that would have similar objectives to a formally structured committee.

Although informal lecturers' communities were commonly recognised as beneficial by lecturers and managers, they tended to be undervalued and underestimated by them. Lecturers and managers viewed PD as normally constituted of formal activities, whereas informal learning was kept on the side lines, recognising its value and expecting it to occur naturally without interference and without a need to promote it. For instance, many managers valued lecturers' diversity and they viewed it as essential for sharing practices formally in the form of 'workshops'. None of the managers interviewed talked about promoting collegial lecturers' collaboration, when asked how PD occurs or how it could be improved. These results were reflected in other studies, for instance, Gerken et al. (2016) found that traditionally lecturer PD meant for managers formal In-Service Training (INSET), not informal collegial learning. Manuti et al. (2015) found that formal and informal learning often overlapped. In this study, informal learning and formal learning overlapped, for instance, when lecturers emphasised learning from informal

discussions around formal PD events. Diversity of lecturers' nationalities, experiences and backgrounds was frequently valued by lecturers and managers for enriching informal learning, but that was kept for lecturers to find a way to benefit from them, rather than adapting an institutional strategy to enhance informal learning networks among lecturers at the College or encouraging engaging with lecturers' communities beyond the college face-to-face or online. Some lecturers and managers felt that informal learning was of limited value because it was normally unstructured and could not be controlled or predicted by the management, and they thought that formal PD activities were more important.

Informal learning was beneficial in many ways for lecturers. Lecturers shared tips, experiences and stories about their day-to-day occurrences in the classroom; and consequently, gained an insight about other lecturers' pedagogical practices. This is compatible with Thomson and Trigwell (2016) finding that managing teaching was one of the top forms of informal learning among lecturers. However, the distinction made by Thomson and Trigwell (2016) between 'venting' and 'reassuring' appeared unclear, since complaining about issues lecturers faced where also opportunities to learn and to reassure themselves about some of their practices.

This study revealed that having some conditions such as common time, space, formal PD structure and supportive management could encourage informal learning. For instance, the common lecturer offices and the informal gatherings in managers' offices were seen as valuable opportunities to learn. Other studies also found that physical proximity among lecturers, having common spaces and time had an impact on lecturers' informal engagement with other lecturers (e.g. Kyndt et al., 2016; Thomson and Trigwell, 2016). Having a common time was seen in this study, and many other studies, as crucial for improving PD practices, since it improves attendance and at the same it enables lecturers and managers to plan activities more easily.

7.4 Contribution to Knowledge

This research contributes to the growing body of research in the use of E-learning in Higher Education and the role of lecturer PD in improving E-learning practices, and within the very specific context of one College in Oman. Research on lecturers' E-learning PD is still not well understood for various reasons including its complexity and wide range of factors involved, continuous changes in technologies and in Higher Education (HE) and the traditional focus on formal learning over informal learning. Due to this complexity and prioritising technology over pedagogy, the majority of studies tend to focus on formal E-learning PD, on technologies rather than pedagogical use of technologies and on perceptions of lecturers rather than actual practice. In this section, I will discuss the contributions made by this research.

1. Theoretical and Conceptual

The first contribution was a critical evaluation of four learning theories and the creation of an original Conceptual Framework. This critique and the Conceptual Framework kept evolving in an iterative way based on the findings of this research.

TAM attempts to explain individual motivations for E-learning use; therefore, it does not explain the sociocultural aspects of technology use such as the effect of colleagues, managers and the context (Bagozzi, 2007). Oye et al. (2014) argue that TAM has strong behavioural elements and assumes intention to act result in actual acts. In this study, there was evidence that intentions to use E-learning, in most cases did not result in E-learning use. Furthermore, ease of use was not seen as a factor affecting lecturers' decision to use technology, as impact on teaching and learning was seen as the most important factor. One of the advantages of TAM is also a limitation. TAM is widely used because of its simplicity and because of its suitability for a wide range of technologies and context (Prieto et al., 2016). However, this simplicity, as it has been argued in this study, was achieved by eliminating many crucial factors such as contextual, managerial and other issues that affect E-learning use. Furthermore, there is no clear-cut evidence that

perceptions of usefulness and ease of use translate into actual use, and many studies found contrasting results.

TPACK was designed for pre-service teachers who took a two-year E-learning design-based course. It emphasised the role of knowledge over experience, measuring knowledge and knowledge 'growth' over time using pre- and post-tests. These were some of the limitations that gradually reduced its importance for this study. Although measuring knowledge could be acceptable to pre-service teachers used to sitting in exams, lecturers in this research, regardless of their years of experiences, would not have welcomed tests that measure their knowledge or would have had a negative attitude toward this study. Furthermore, the questionnaire items developed for TPACK emphasise assessing knowledge, and many studies attempt to show growth in knowledge based on E-learning PD. These studies tend to emphasise the role of technology led PD with expectations of growth of TPACK knowledge as a result of training. Another limitation is that studies that employ TPACK tend to emphasise training interventions, and does not normally investigate naturally occurring E-learning PD initiatives. Furthermore, in this study lecturers' E-learning PD was largely informal and TPACK does not explain well how it can be used to conceptualise informal learning.

The study has shown that CoP is of limited value for several reasons. CoP does not explain well how formal learning occurs or how the management could use CoP as a PD tool (Roberts, 2006). Furthermore, it does not explain how self-learning occurs and the boundaries for determining the level of interaction for judging what is a community is not clear (Cox, 2005; Duguid, 2005). For instance, in this study some lecturers reported having interests in using E-learning and in getting some tips from colleagues in E-learning from time to time, so CoP does not clarify whether these interactions among lecturers make them a Community in the Practice of developing E-learning. Lave and Wenger (1991) stated that a CoP cannot be called a community unless there is regular interaction, but the word 'regular' is open to many interpretations. Following the development of CoP as a theory over time, it has evolved and there are varied interpretations of it among

researchers, which could be a reason for its widespread use, since it means different things to different researchers (Cox, 2005; Duguid, 2005; Li et al., 2009). Lave and Wenger themselves modified many aspects of the theory, for example by abandoning the concept of legitimate peripheral participation (Lave & Wenger, 1998) and CoP as only relevant to informal learning. In short, there is no consistency in terminologies, where latter descriptions of CoP differed from early. For instance, Wenger et al. (2002) discussed the managerial applications of CoP, which was described by Cox (2005) as a 'manual' for managers for CoP use. However, the managerial use of CoP was criticised for failing due to becoming another form of top-down training, rather than lecturer led PD (Cox, 2005). In this study, findings suggested that Module coordination was an effective form of a CoP supported by management, which suggests that CoPs supported by management could be effective if lecturers did not perceive them as another form of control or top-down didactic training.

The Conceptual Framework designed specifically for this study combines different features of the four models used, based on my perspectives on the strengths and limitations of them and based on the requirements of this study. No other study was found that combined all these four models together and built a conceptual framework based on them. In the literature review, I found that a common approach to investigate E-learning was through following a simple approach, for example by adopting a single learning theory. This could be partially attributed to time and financial constraints that made following a simple approach more practical. Earlier, in the Conceptual Framework chapter, I argued that adopting a single theory would have produced findings dependent on the features of each theory and the methodological approaches typically associated with them.

2. Contextual Contribution

E-learning PD research in HE in the Arabian Peninsula is under-investigated and most studies have been conducted in European or North American countries. Within Oman, a few small-scale studies have been conducted about E-learning PD by a limited number of researchers. Most of these researchers were from a single HEI, Sultan Qaboos University.

No studies were found related to E-learning PD at Ibri College of Technology and a handful of documents were published about the College (OAAA, 2014 & Ibri College, 2011, 2013, 2016). Hence, this study has made a major contribution to the Context of E-learning PD at the level of Ibri College, which shares many contextual features with the other six Colleges of Technology of Oman. Furthermore, the Context Chapter contributed to the understanding of E-learning PD in the Omani context in general.

3. Appreciating E-learning and Questioning its Applicability for Curricula Enhancement

The literature on E-learning PD tends to show a positive image about E-learning with little room for discussions about lecturers' perceptions of the limitations of E-learning. This could be a reason for the advent of some terms like Technology Enhanced Learning, making a value judgement by associating technology with enhancement. Islam et al. (2015) found that not much is discussed in terms of the limitations of E-learning use and studies should look more closely at the pedagogical challenges lecturers face.

In this study, the ethnographic approach followed allowed lecturers to freely express their attitudes toward E-learning PD. In order not to talk only about their perceptions of 'ideal' cases of E-learning use, discussions were focused on their personal experiences by talking about real life examples. Interestingly, lecturers tended to have remarkably positive attitudes when they talk about E-learning in general, but start questioning its usefulness when asked about specific examples of its usefulness or use for the modules they teach. This showed that there was a profound gap between 'ideal' perceptions of E-learning and practical perceptions of E-learning use. This was only identified by probing into lecturers' actual attempts to use E-learning and investigating the practical issues that lecturers consider when they consider using or experiment with E-learning use.

7.5 Recommendations and Implications for Practice

This research could provide valuable information for researchers and policy makers to understand and improve E-learning PD at the College, in HEIs in general and in particular HEIs that share similar geographical and contextual characteristics with the College.

The study revealed the sensitivity associated with creating support structures and assigning responsibilities without sufficiently measuring their effectiveness or providing adequate follow up. In many cases, this can have negative impacts on E-learning PD, instead of developing practice. Lecturers and managers relying on ineffective resources could create haphazard approaches to PD, create dissatisfaction among lecturers and discourage lecturers from forming CoPs due to reliance on the management and the support structures created. Improving practices may require understanding the different needs of lecturers and managers. This can be done by continually consulting lecturers and managers, and creating effective support structures that can fulfil their duties. Furthermore, this requires continuous assessment of the support structures created and developing support based on needs.

This study showed that it is of fundamental importance to create E-learning PD and E-learning pedagogical strategies to improve practices. This includes defining E-learning and E-learning PD, college policies and regulations for promoting them, and analysing lecturers' needs. In order to do that, HEIs should gather solid and reliable information about E-learning PD and lecturers needs in order to assess E-learning PD needs, create a strategy and an action plan to improve E-learning PD practices. In order to improve teaching practice, HEIs should value and support teaching and create effective strategies for appreciating excellence in teaching and learning. This requires valuing teaching and learning and valuing PD. Creating new policies such as E-learning pedagogical policy, E-learning PD policy and teaching policy could have a positive impact on E-learning PD. Creating a holistic E-learning PD approach would require considering the relevance of curriculum to E-learning, since it was a major concern for lecturers. In this study, the

vague connections between curriculum and E-learning discouraged lecturers from E-learning use.

Creating a PD culture that provides a non-judgemental environment could foster lectures' CoPs and encourage them to collaborate and learn informally. In order to do that, the College, and HEIs in general, should exhibit a positive image about PD and focus on the strengths of the lecturing team, rather than the weaknesses of a few. Focusing on 'fixing' lecturers creates a negative image that can have a profoundly negative impact where learning and PD is perceived as a sign of incompetence.

HEIs need to value and support lecturers to improve their internal and external networks in order to enhance formal and informal learning. Internal and external networks were seen by lecturers in this study as key components of effective E-learning PD practices. In other words, the College should create an environment where lecturers' communities flourish within the College and beyond it, so that a culture of sharing expertise is created.

Continuous assessment of policies, regulations and roles should be conducted to avoid creating support structures that would not be utilised, like the staff PD committee and the needs analysis policy. These committees, if created and not supported, created an impression for managers that E-learning and PD duties were fulfilled, since responsibilities were delegated but they did not have proper follow up of them. Aside from the issue of creating policies and strategies and not following them, revising E-learning PD by capitalising on the expertise of lecturers and giving them more ownership of their learning may have a positive impact on practice.

Further research should be conducted on lecturers' informal learning as a venue for PD in HE, since most research focuses on formal learning (Kyndt et al., 2016; Thomson, 2015).

Furthermore, additional studies should focus on realistic challenges that lecturers face, rather than looking at ideal cases of E-learning use.

More studies should focus on real life examples of E-learning use in curriculum, which may resemble the real challenges and experiences lecturers' face, rather than designing 'ideal' lessons where the sole focus is on technology use. Furthermore, focusing on pedagogy is important, since it is common to focus on training interventions and the use of technologies.

7.6 Limitations of the Study

The study was affected by many methodological, theoretical, contextual and practical limitations. This section addresses the main limitations of this research.

This study was limited methodologically due to the limited time, scope and resources available. Lecturers' E-learning PD, as explained earlier, is a complicated area of research and in this study the main focus was formal and informal E-learning PD perceptions and experiences of lecturers and managers. The findings revealed that other factors, not within the scope of this study, had an impact on E-learning PD. For instance, national policy and regulations from the regulator of the College, the Ministry of Manpower, were perceived as crucial. Due to time limitation, it was not possible to involve officials from the government in this research. Furthermore, as explained in the literature review, the ultimate aim of E-learning PD is the enhancement of teaching and learning. Again, examining the impact on students' learning was not within the scope of this study due to time and practical limitation, since this study was conducted by a single researcher for a limited period of time. The lesson planning and teaching activity was conducted only with ELC lecturers, due to the time it required. Replicating the same activity with different disciplines could show how lecturers use E-learning differently for different disciplines or modules.

There were practical limitations that occurred during the data collection process and they had an impact on this research. For example, there were limited contextual information available about the College since only four documents related to the College were found and investigated. One document was by the OAAA (2014) and another was by the College in different versions, containing similar details with some updates (Ibri College, 2011, 2013, 2016). This resulted in difficulty in tailoring the data collection tools such as the interview questions. The interview questions were continuously developed based on the light of new information available, issues that need investigation and saturation reached in some areas investigated. Due to lecturers' busy schedules, the dropout rate in the lesson planning and lesson teaching activity was high, where out of the 12 lecturers that took part in the focus group discussions, only five taught their lessons.

7.7 Evaluation of the Conceptual Framework

The Conceptual Framework was essential for guiding the research by highlighting the most important constructs and theories that affected this study, and the relationships among them. An in-depth discussion of the Conceptual Framework, the rationale for its use, its components and the strengths and limitations of its underlying theories and constructs were discussed earlier in the Conceptual Framework chapter. In this section, I will evaluate the importance of its use in this study, its strengths and limitations and how other researchers could implement it in their studies.

The Conceptual Framework was essential for guiding this research and highlighting the most important aspects to be investigated, analysed and reported. Due to the complexity of E-learning PD and the substantial data that were generated from the multiple data collection methods that were used, this Conceptual Framework was important for guiding data collection and evaluating the importance and the relevance of data collected. The Conceptual Framework evolved iteratively throughout the research process, and the continuous evaluation of it assisted in reflecting on the importance of the constructs, theories, methodology and data, and the relationships between various constructs. For

example, reflection was essential for determining what forms of data were more prominent than others and how data from different sources would be integrated and reported (e.g. the macro and meso levels in the Conceptual Framework were used to organise and report the context of the study, followed by individual factors at the micro level).

The iterative process in developing the Conceptual Framework required the creation of several versions, which made the research process more complicated and time consuming. Some constructs in the Conceptual Framework that were initially regarded as important were not supported by adequate data; which required refining the Framework further. This was time consuming and required continuous revisions of both the Conceptual Framework and Literature Review chapters. Furthermore, the data collection process had to be modified to focus on emerging issues and changes in the Conceptual Framework. This extra time and effort could be seen as a limitation. However, I think that continuous reflection throughout the research process enabled me to improve both the data collection and the data analysis processes. The constant review and revision of the Conceptual Framework acted as a quality steer in supporting rigorous analysis of the data.

There were some limitations regarding the applicability of the theories that were used in the Conceptual Framework, as follows. Perceived ease of use in the TAM lacked adequate evidence in this study, and the majority of the lecturers did not perceive it as important for their intentions to use E-learning. Rather, they perceived other factors, such as E-learning pedagogical enhancement, classroom management and compatibility with curriculum and assessment methods, as important.

In addition, the TPACK's emphasis on formal training, knowledge assessment and analysis and training interventions in research were of limited value for this study because TPACK was designed for pre-service educators. Items from the TPACK questionnaires were removed from the questionnaire to avoid any negative impacts on lecturers' willingness to participate, which could have occurred if they had perceived it as an assessment of

their knowledge. CoP was important for highlighting informal learning communities, but this study found ambiguity in the level of interaction required to call a group of lecturers a 'community'.

Another limitation was that the macro level was investigated through documentary analysis and interviews with managers and no data from government officials were gathered due to time and resource limitations. Therefore, it was not possible to further investigate the points that were raised by managers and reported in documents by involving government officials.

Finally, the Conceptual Framework involved a wide variety of factors, which resulted in better data about some factors than others. Vision and the identities of lecturers, which were highlighted in the Conceptual Framework, could have been investigated further due to their complexity. However, this would have required more time and other forms of data collection, such as longer or multiple interviews, to obtain a better understanding of participants' identities, biographies and backgrounds. Other limitations, which were related to the underlying theories that formed the Conceptual Framework, were discussed earlier in the Conceptual Framework chapter.

Despite the discussed limitations, I believe that the strengths of the Conceptual Framework outweigh its limitations. Using the Conceptual Framework enabled me to gain a better understanding of E-learning PD, to have confidence in the findings and to produce coherent research. Furthermore, the Conceptual Framework enabled me to continuously reflect on the research process and to make judgements on the main issues that needed to be investigated and reported.

This Conceptual Framework has considerable potential for use by other researchers to investigate E-learning PD, especially by those who are seeking a deep understanding of E-

learning PD. However, researchers must evaluate the importance of the different theories and constructs in the Conceptual Framework and tailor them according to their studies' research questions and specific contexts. The Framework devised specifically for Ibri College has applications for other Colleges in Oman as a starting point for comparative analysis and to support national debate around the efficacy of specific professional development approaches especially in relation to such as an important area of technological affordances as part of fourth industrial age learning and teaching debates.

Appendices

Appendix A Questionnaire

Teachers' Professional Development in ICT at Ibri College of Technology

Researcher name: Abdulsalam Maktoum Almanthari / ***Ethics reference***: 17803

Thank you for taking time to complete this questionnaire. I am a PhD research student at the University of Southampton, the UK. The research project is part of my PhD degree thesis, which focuses on the professional development of teachers in Information and Communication Technologies (ICT). If you agree to take part in the study, please complete this questionnaire. The questionnaire will not take more than 15 minutes. At the end of the questionnaire, there is an option to tick on a box and add your contact details if you would like to take part in interviews. Your responses will be kept completely confidential and used only for research purposes.

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

1. Gender
   a. Female
   b. Male

2. Age range
   a. 25-30
   b. 31-35
   c. 36-40
   d. 41-45
   e. 46-50
   f. 50+

3. Department
   a. Business
   b. Engineering
   c. English
   d. Information Technology

4. Teaching experience
   a. 1-5 years
   b. 6-10 years
   c. 11-15 years
   d. 16-20 years
   e. 20-25 years
   f. +25 years

5. Teaching experience at Ibri College of Technology
   a. 1 year
   b. 2 years
   c. 3 years
   d. 4 years
   e. 5 years
   f. 5+ years

6. Qualification
   a. Bachelor degree
   b. Master
   c. PhD

Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) is a broad concept that can mean many different things. In this questionnaire, ICT refers to digital technologies, including hardware, software and communication technologies. That is, the digital tools we use such as computers, laptops, iPads, smart phones, interactive whiteboards, software programs, emails, Moodle, etc.

CPD: Continuing Professional Development
ICT: Information and Communication Technologies

Part A: Teacher Professional Development					
A.1. To what extent do you agree with the following statements?	**Strongly Disagree**	**Disagree**	**Neither Agree nor Disagree**	**Agree**	**Strongly Agree**
1. My college is interested in my CPD					
2. The training offered meets my CPD needs					
3. Training helps me improve my teaching performance					
4. Training is based on my CPD needs					
5. The CPD training I have received was useful					

1

Appendix A

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
6. I can apply what I learn in my teaching					
7. I am satisfied with the quality of CPD at the college					
8. The college has a clear CPD vision and strategy					
9. Training had a positive impact on my use of ICT					
10. I learn a lot from informal discussions with colleagues					
11. Training should come mainly from colleagues, not from professionals coming from external organizations					
A.2. How often per year do you engage in the following activities?	**0**	**Once or Twice a year**	**3 to 4 times a year**	**5 to 10 times a year**	**More than 10 times a year**
12. Conferences, Courses, seminars and workshops					
13. Online learning (videos, reading, journals, teaching ideas, etc.)					
14. Conducting research					
15. Reading					
A.3. Which activities have been most effective for you?	**Very effective**	**Effective**	**Neutral**	**Not effective**	**No experience with this**
16. Conferences, Courses, seminars and workshops					
17. Online learning (videos, reading, journals, teaching ideas, etc.)					
18. Conducting research					
19. Reading					
A.4. To what extent have the following factors affected your access to CPD?	**Very positive**	**Positive**	**No impact**	**Negative**	**Very negative**
20. Location of training					
21. Workload					
22. Timing of training					
23. Suitability of training to my needs					
24. College and department management					
25. College policies					
26. Connection between training and teaching					
A.5. How much impact has your CPD activities had on the following	**Very significant**	**significant**	**No impact**	**negative**	**Very negative**
27. Overall professional understanding					
28. Your confidence and self-esteem					
29. Collaboration among teachers					

Part B: Information and Communication Technologies					
B.1. How often do you use the following technologies?	**Almost everyday**	**Once/twice a week**	**Once/twice a month**	**Once/twice a year**	**Never**
30. Supplementary teaching materials from the Internet					
31. Microsoft word/PowerPoint/Excel					
32. Projector (for example, to show a video, slides, pictures)					
33. Online practice and quizzes					
34. Laptop/iPad/Tablet in the classroom					
35. Interactive Smart board					
36. Moodle					
37. Google scholar/google books/online academic journals					
38. Teaching using computers in the computer lap					
39. Communicating with students online with email, Moodle, etc.					
B.2. To what extent do you agree with the following statements?	**Strongly Disagree**	**Disagree**	**Neither Agree or Disagree**	**Agree**	**Strongly Agree**
40. Using ICT in education is important					
41. Using ICT can improve my teaching performance					
42. Using ICT can improve student learning					
43. I am worried about my ability in using ICT for teaching					
44. In the future I would like to use technologies more in teaching					
45. I am willing to adjust my teaching to include ICT					
46. In this institution, teachers are expected to use ICT					
47. When I need face technical issues, the support staff help me					
48. My college should encourage the use of ICT					
49. My job would be difficult without ICT					
50. I know about a lot of different technologies and learn them easily					

Please provide contact details *if you are willing to take part in an interview* to discuss your opinions about the professional development of teachers in ICT.

Name: _____

Contact details: _____

Thank you

Appendix B Lecturer Interview Guide and Questions

Lecturer Interview Guide and Questions

Researcher name: Abdulsalam Maktoum Almanthari / ***Ethics reference***: 17803

Steps:

Before the interview: giving the participant information sheet and talking about the research purpose and interview process.

At the beginning of the interview: Welcoming and giving the consent form. Then reminding them about *confidentiality* and using *a voice recorder*.

Date and time:

Place:

Subject:

Teaching experience:

Interview questions:

A. Opening Questions:

1. Can you tell me about your teaching experience?

B. Continuing Professional Development

2. Can you tell me about your experience with professional development at this college?

3. What would you want to get out of PD?

4. What sort of training would you like to see made available at the college? And why?

5. Some people report that they learn a lot from colleagues. Can you share your personal experience in learning from colleagues?
6. I would like to know about recent training you attended and what happened there. And whether people had a chance to interact.

C. E-learning

7. What is your experience with using E-learning in the teaching?
8. In your opinion, has teaching and learning changed as a result of technology?
9. What encourages or discourages you from using technology in your classroom?
10. People may learn about E-learning in different ways like formal training, getting help from colleagues or through self-learning. How do you learn best about E-learning?
11. Have you received any training or guidance in using E-learning?
12. Do you use technology to support your teaching?
13. What kind of training would help you become more confident in using E-learning for teaching?
14. Do you have anything else that you would like to add?

Appendix C Manager Interview Guide and Questions

Researcher name: Abdulsalam Maktoum Almanthari / ***Ethics reference***: 17803

Steps:

Before the interview: giving the participant information sheet and talking about the research purpose and interview process.

At the beginning of the interview: Welcoming and giving the consent form. Then reminding them about *confidentiality* and using *a voice recorder*.

Date and time:

Place:

Department:

Interview questions:

A. Opening Questions

1. Can you tell me about your managerial experience?

B. Continuing Professional Development

2. Can you tell me about the professional development practices at this college?
3. What would you consider as successful outcomes of training?
4. What sort of training would you like to see made available at the college? And why?
5. Given the choice, what would you do to make lecturer training more effective?

6. Do you think that lecturers have a chance to interact effectively during training events? If yes, how do they interact?

C. E-learning

7. Do you think that technology has affected teaching and learning? And how?
8. What does effective technology use in teaching mean to you?
9. What do lecturers need in order to use technology in the classroom effectively?
10. What are the classroom management issues that lecturers need to consider to use technology effectively?
11. What kind of training would enhance lecturers' confidence in using E-learning for teaching?
12. What would you consider as a successful outcome of E-learning PD?
13. Is professional development a personal or institutional responsibility?
14. In order to meet the needs of the college, what type of training should be made available?
15. Do you have anything else that you would like to add

Appendix D Observation Guide

(Professional Development Activity)

(Lecture, seminar, workshop, tutorial, etc.)

Researcher name: Abdulsalam Maktoum Almanthari / ***Ethics reference***: 17803

Name of session:

Date and time:

No. of attendees:

Department/centre (is it within department or inter-departmental?):

Venue:

Brief description of professional development activity:

Aims:

Outcomes:

What are the learning outcomes? (E.g. knowledge, skills, general/subject-related, etc.)

Communication and participation

Communication between trainer and trainees and among trainees themselves, level of engagement, engagement techniques, seating arrangement, interactions, creating interest, etc.

Presentation:

Kind of technology and tools used, structure, organisation of content, etc.

Links to lecturers' classroom and pedagogy

Appendix D

Other notes

Appendix E Lesson Planning and Lesson Teaching Activity Guide

Researcher name: Abdulsalam Maktoum Almanthari / ***Ethics reference***: 17803

Steps:

Before the focus groups: send a participant information sheet to all lecturers at the English language centre.

At the beginning of the first session: give the consent forms and explain what it involves.

Session 1 (1 hour 30 mins): E-learning and the teaching practice

Formal and informal E-learning Professional Development

Notes: At the end of this session, tell them about that the next meeting will be about a lesson planning activity. Advise them to think about the lesson they will plan.

Activity (1 hour): Lesson planning session

Classroom Observation (1 hour): Teaching the planned lesson

Session 2 (1 hour 30 minutes) Reflections about the lesson planning activity and teaching it

Session 1: Part A: E-learning and the teaching practice

Date and time:

Attendees: English language lecturers

No. of attendees:

Venue:

1. **What are your experiences with using E-learning in this college?**
2. **What challenges do you face in using E-learning in their classes?**
3. **What are the things that encourage or discourage you from using E-learning in your classrooms?**
4. **What would make you more confident in using E-learning in your classrooms?**
5. **Does the college encourage or support you to use E-learning in teaching?**
6. **How do you think lecturer teaching views and approaches affect their views toward technology?**

Part B: Formal and Informal E-learning PD

1. **What is your experience with PD at the college?**
2. **Can you talk about your personal experiences in attending formal training activities?**
3. **How relevant is formal training for classroom practices?**
4. **Have you received any E-learning PD at Ibri College? Please describe your experiences.**
5. **How do lecturers learn from each other outside of formal courses?**
6. **Does the college culture encourages sharing ideas and experiences? Please explain and given examples.**
7. **Some lecturers report that they learn best from colleagues. Does that connect to your own experiences?**

Lesson Planning Activity

Date and time:

Attendees: English language lecturers

No. of attendees:

Venue:

Seating arrangement: a round table

The researcher role here is to observe the activity without any intervention. A voice recorder will be used so that their discussion can be analysed later. The observation guide will help in writing down notes of the processes involved in lesson planning activity.

Observation guide

1. **The lesson content and the manner in which E-learning is integrated.**
2. **The discussions on pedagogy and how E-learning might affect or add value to it.**
3. **The discussions on how technology is used to enhance learning**
4. **Discussion on how to plan and arrange for E-learning use in the lesson**

Notes:

Appendix E

Observation Guide

(Teaching the lesson planned)

Researcher name: Abdulsalam Maktoum Almanthari / ***Ethics reference***: 17803

Skill and topic taught in the lesson:

Date and time:

No. of students:

Brief description of the lesson:

Aims of technology use

Outcomes:

What are the learning outcomes?

Communication and participation

Communication between lecturer and students and among students themselves, level of engagement, engagement techniques, seating arrangement, interactions, creating interest, etc.

Presentation:

Kind of technology and tools used, structure, organisation of content, etc.

How technology is used to enhance teaching?

Other notes

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Focus Group Session 2:

Reflections about the lesson planning activity and teaching it

Researcher name: Abdulsalam Maktoum Almanthari / ***Ethics reference***: 17803

Date and time:

Attendees: English language lecturers

No. of attendees:

Venue:

1. **Tell me about your experience of running the lesson. What was it like?**
2. **Can you talk about the value of the use of E-learning in it?**
3. **In your opinion, how effective the lesson was?**
4. **Is there any gap between what you planned for and what happened in the classroom?**
5. **Do you think that using technology made the lesson better? Why?**
6. **Did the use of technology affect your pedagogy, such as classroom control, delivery of content, time management and so on?**
7. **How would you plan for the lesson again?**
8. **How would you teach the lesson again?**
9. **How do you think E-learning affected classroom dynamics and interactions?**
10. **Has any of your views toward E-learning use in the classroom changed?**

Appendix F Participant Information Sheet (Interviews)

(Interviews)

Study Title: Continuing Professional Development of Lecturers in E-learning: An exploration of the E-learning professional development culture, perceptions, and practices at Ibri College of Technology in Oman.

Researcher: Abdulsalam Maktoum Almanthari **Ethics number**: 17803

Please read this information carefully before deciding to take part in this research. If you are happy to participate you will be asked to sign a consent form.

What is the research about?

I am a PhD research student at the University of Southampton, the UK. The research project is part of my PhD degree thesis. It focuses on the professional development of lecturers in E-learning. Ibri College of Technology will serve as a case study site where the discussions surrounding E-learning professional development in this research project will be investigated. The purpose of this study is to investigate lecturers' and managers' perceptions and attitudes toward E-learning professional development and technology enhanced teaching and learning. The study aims to explore day-to-day practices and processes, institutional support structures, interaction between managers and lecturers, interaction among lecturers themselves, and the formal and informal lecturer learning culture.

Why have I been chosen?

The participants in this projects are lecturers and administrators at Ibri College of Technology. Your voluntary participation is highly valuable to colleting the data needed for this study.

What will happen to me if I take part?

If you agree to take part, we will arrange for a time and a place of your convenience within the Ibri College of Technology campus, to talk for up to one hour about your opinions on the professional development of lecturers in E-learning. The conversation will be audio recorded to be analysed later.

Are there any benefits in my taking part?

You might find this study interesting and makes you reflect and think consciously about your position on professional development and technology enhanced teaching and learning. This study can be a medium where you can express your opinions. You will contribute to our understanding of E-learning professional development at Ibri College of Technology which may help in improving it. The results of this study will benefit lecturers, managers and researchers in higher education institutions.

Are there any risks involved?

There are no real risks to being involved in this research.

Will my participation be confidential?

All the information obtained in this study will be kept strictly confidential. The information gathered and recordings will be kept in a password protected laptop and will not be shared with anyone, except the research supervisor. This information will be later destroyed when it is no longer needed. Pseudonyms will be used to hide the identity of participants and any descriptions which may make the identifiable will be altered. Information will be kept safe in line with the UK Data Protection Act and University of Southampton policy.

What happens if I change my mind?

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You can withdraw from this study at any time.

What happens if something goes wrong?

If you have any concerns or complaints about this study, you may contact:

Head of Research Governance, rginfo@soton.ac.uk, phone +44 (0) 238 595058

Where can I get more information?

If you have any questions about the study, you can contact me using the following details:

Abdulsalam Maktoum Almanthari

Southampton Education School

University of Southampton

Email: a.almanthari@soton.ac.uk or a.m.almanthari@gmail.com

Phone: Oman: 92295274 UK: +44 (0) 7474313004

Supervisor: Dr. Michaela Brockmann, Brockmann@soton.ac.uk, phone +44 (0) 238 597252

Professor Kalwant Bhopal, Director of Postgraduate Research Degrees

K.Bhopal@soton.ac.uk Phone +44 (0) 238 593474

Appendix G Participant Information Sheet (Focus Group and Lesson Planning and Lesson Teaching Activity)

Participant Information Sheet

(Focus Group and Activity)

Study Title: Continuing Professional Development of Lecturers in E-learning: An exploration of the E-learning professional development culture, perceptions, and practices at Ibri College of Technology in Oman.

Researcher: Abdulsalam Maktoum Almanthari **Ethics number**: 17803

Please read this information carefully before deciding to take part in this research. If you are happy to participate you will be asked to sign a consent form.

What is the research about?

I am a PhD research student at the University of Southampton, the UK. The research project is part of my PhD degree thesis. It focuses on the professional development of lecturers in E-learning. Ibri College of Technology will serve as a case study site where the discussions surrounding E-learning professional development in this research project will be investigated. The purpose of this study is to investigate lecturers' perceptions and attitudes toward E-learning professional development and technology enhanced teaching and learning. The study aims to explore day-to-day practices and processes, institutional support structures, interaction between managers and lecturers, interaction among lecturers themselves, and the formal and informal learning culture.

Why have I been chosen?

The participants in this projects are lecturers and administrators at Ibri College of Technology. Your voluntary participation is highly valuable to colleting the data needed for this study.

What will happen to me if I take part?

If you are agree to take part in focus group, you will be involved in focus group discussions, lesson planning activity, and classroom observation. The focus group members are up to seven lecturers from the English Language Centre at Ibri College of Technology. There will be two focus group sessions, one hour each. The discussions will be audio recorded. The lesson planning activity will be for one hour. And the lesson planned will be taught by the participants and observed by the researcher. The researcher will write down notes of the lesson planning and teaching activities. This means that the study will take around 4 hours of your time.

Are there any benefits in my taking part?

You might find this study interesting and makes you reflect and think consciously about your position on professional development and technology enhanced teaching and learning. This study can be a medium where you can express your opinions. You will contribute to our understanding of E-learning professional development at Ibri College of Technology which may help in improving it. The results of this study will benefit lecturers, managers and researchers in higher education institutions.

Are there any risks involved?

There are no real risks to being involved in this research.

Will my participation be confidential?

Focus groups naturally involve many participants who discuss things openly. Therefore, complete confidentiality and anonymity cannot be guaranteed, but all the focus group participants will be asked to respect each other and to confine their discussions in the focus group. All the information obtained in this study will be kept strictly confidential by the researcher. The information gathered will be kept in a password protected laptop and will not be shared with anyone, except the research supervisor. This information will be later destroyed when it is no longer needed. Pseudonyms will be used to hide the identity of participants and any descriptions which may make the identifiable will be altered. Information will be kept safe in line with the UK Data Protection Act and University of Southampton policy.

What happens if I change my mind?

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You can withdraw from this study at any time.

What happens if something goes wrong?

If you have any concerns or complaints about this study, you may contact:

Head of Research Governance, rginfo@soton.ac.uk, phone +44 (0) 238 595058

Where can I get more information?

If you have any questions about the study, you can contact me using the following details:

Abdulsalam Maktoum Almanthari

Southampton Education School

University of Southampton

Email: a.almanthari@soton.ac.uk or a.m.almanthari@gmail.com

Phone: Oman: 92295274 UK: +44 (0) 7474313004

Supervisor: Dr. Michaela Brockmann, Brockmann@soton.ac.uk, phone +44 (0) 238 597252

Professor Kalwant Bhopal, Director of Postgraduate Research Degrees

K.Bhopal@soton.ac.uk Phone +44 (0) 238 593474

Appendix H CONSENT FORM (Focus Groups and Lesson Planning and Teaching Activity)

Study title: Continuing Professional Development of Lecturers in E-learning: An exploration of the E-learning professional development culture, perceptions, and practices at Ibri College of Technology in Oman.

Researcher name: Abdulsalam Maktoum Almanthari / ***Student number***: 26691396

Ethics reference: 17803

Please initial the boxes if you agree with the statements:

I have read and understood the focus group information sheet (26th of October 2015 version 1) and this document, and have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study. ☐

I agree to take part in this research project and agree for my data to be recorded and used for the purpose of this study ☐

I understand that my responses will be anonymised in reports of the research ☐

I understand my participation is voluntary and I may withdraw at any time without my legal rights ☐

Data Protection

I understand that information collected about me during my participation in this study will be stored on a password protected computer and that this information will only be used for the purpose of this study

Thank you for your time and cooperation

Name of participant ……

Signature of participant……..

Date……

Appendix I CONSENT FORM (Interviews)

Study title: Continuing Professional Development of Lecturers in E-learning: An exploration of the E-learning professional development culture, perceptions, and practices at Ibri College of Technology in Oman.

Researcher name: Abdulsalam Maktoum Almanthari / ***Student number***: 26691396

Ethics reference: 17803

Please initial the boxes if you agree with the statements:

I have read and understood the interview information sheet (26th of October 2015 version 1) and this document, and have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study. ☐

I agree to take part in this research project and agree for my data to be recorded and used for the purpose of this study ☐

I understand that my responses will be anonymised in reports of the research ☐

I understand my participation is voluntary and I may withdraw at any time without my legal rights being affected ☐

Data Protection

I understand that information collected about me during my participation in this study will be stored on a password protected computer and that this information will only be used for the purpose of this study

Thank you for your time and cooperation

Name of participant ……

Signature of participant……..

Date……

Appendix J ERGO Submission

This version updated December 2013

SSEGM ETHICS SUB-COMMITTEE APPLICATION FORM

Please note:

- ***You must not begin data collection for your study until ethical approval has been obtained.***
- ***It is your responsibility to follow the University of Southampton's Ethics Policy and any relevant academic or professional guidelines in the conduct of your study. This includes providing appropriate information sheets and consent forms, and ensuring confidentiality in the storage and use of data.***
- ***It is also your responsibility to provide full and accurate information in completing this form.***

1. Name: Abdulsallam Maktoum Ali Almanthari

2. Current Position: PhD Research Student at the University of Southampton

3. Contact Details:

Division/School: Southampton Education School

Email a.almanthari@soton.ac.uk a.m.almanthari@gmail.com

Phone 07474313004 (the UK) (+968)92295274 (Oman)

4. Is your study being conducted as part of an education qualification?

Yes, PhD in Education

5. If Yes, please give the name of your supervisor

Dr. Michaela Brockmann and Dr. Michael Tomlinson

6. Title of your project:

Continuing Professional Development of Lecturers in E-Learning: An exploration of the E-learning professional development culture, perceptions, and practices at Ibri College of Technology in Oman.

7. Briefly describe the rationale, study aims and the relevant research questions of your study

With the increasing interest in educational technologies, understanding the role of lecturers and lecturer professional development in E-learning became important. E-learning professional development usually focuses on IT skills, with lack of focus on how technology can enhance teaching and learning. Studies that looked at lecturers' attitudes, confidence and skills with E-learning have been criticized for failing to address pedagogical issues when lecturers think of integrating E-learning in their practice. There is also a lack of understanding of the pedagogical decisions made when lecturers use E-learning to teach a specific area such as English, math or art.

Numerous studies have indicated that there is a profound gap in our understanding of what makes E-learning PD result in real changes in lecturers' practices and perceptions. Even when lecturers' perceptions toward technology enhanced teaching become more positive after training, this is not necessarily followed with noticeable changes in E-learning use in their classrooms. This study will discuss these issues and some of the most prominent discussions regarding E-learning PD. It will seek getting a deep understanding of how E-learning PD occurs and how it relates to the teaching practice. The study will focus on lecturers' perceptions and attitudes toward E-learning PD and technology enhanced teaching and learning, day-to-day practices and processes, institutional support structures, interaction between managers and lecturers, interaction among lecturers themselves, and the formal and informal lecturer learning culture at the college. Ibri College of

Appendix J

Technology will serve as the case study site where the discussions surrounding E-learning PD in this research project will be investigated. Ibri College invested substantial financial resources on educational technologies; since, according to them, technology skills are 'paramount' to improving the quality of teaching and learning. This study will involve lecturers from different domains. This will be followed by a special focus later on English language lecturers. The purpose of the focus on the domain is to understand how lecturers within a specific area link E-learning and E-learning PD with pedagogy and the subject they teach.

The research questions in this study are:

1. How does formal and informal E-learning learning occur at Ibri College of Technology?
    1.1. What are lecturers' and managers' perceptions of the value of E-learning professional development?
    1.2. What are lecturers' and managers' perceptions of formal and informal E-learning professional development practices?
    1.3. What are the perceptions of lecturers of the factors that support or hinder E-learning Professional development?

2. What are lecturers' and managers' perceptions of E-learning in teaching?
    2.1. How do lecturers and managers perceive E-learning usefulness in enhancing student learning?
    2.2. How do lecturers and managers perceive the applicability of E-learning in teaching?
    2.3. What are the perceptions of lecturers of the pedagogical factors that affect the use of E-learning in teaching?
    2.4. What are lecturers' perceptions of E-learning usefulness in teaching a specific subject?
    2.5. What are lecturers' perceptions of the usefulness of planning for and teaching E-learning-enhanced lessons?

8. Describe the design of your study

The design of this study is an exploratory sequential mixed methods design. This means that the study prioritizes qualitative data collection and analysis using focus groups, interviews and observations, while a quantitative phase using a survey is used to explore the topic, identify any issues and patters and give a quantitative overview of some the issues in this research. This study adopts a case study approach where Ibri College of Technology serves as a case study site where

the discussions surrounding E-learning professional development will be investigated from different perspectives. The study will include a pilot study for three weeks from 3rd of November 2015 to 19th of November 2015. This will be followed by a field work stage for 10 weeks from the 3rd of February to the 16th of April 2016. Information on the piloting and field work stages are detailed below.

A. Piloting:

The researcher will pilot the survey, interviews, observation and focus groups at Ibri College of Technology, in Oman, from the 3rd of November 2015 to the 19th of November 2015. First, the survey, which is based on the TPACK survey developed by Schmidt (2009) will be distributed to a random sample of 20 lecturers. The aim of this is to check the clarity of the survey items, its relevance to the topic and to carry out statistical analysis using SPSS to measure its strength. The length of survey completion will be tested so that it does not exceed the time indicated to lecturers for completing it, which is up to 20 minutes. After that, the focus group will be piloted with 5 lecturers. The aim of this is to explore the topic, to decide whether the prompts and questions need modifications, and whether the seating arrangement, place, timing are suitable. This will be done for one session which will last for one hour. The following points will be discussed in the piloting of focus groups: E-learning and formal PD, E-learning and informal PD, and E-learning and their teaching practice. Semi-structured interviews will be conducted with five lecturers, a trainer, a head of department and a head of section. The aim of this is to explore the topic from different perspectives. Each interview will be up to 1 hour long. All of this will enable the researcher to test the data collection methods and to implement initial data analysis. This will be followed by getting ready for the Upgrade from MPhil to PhD, which is planned in January 2016. Next stage will be the field work.

B. Field Work

Field work will be conducted over a period of 10 weeks, from the 2nd of February 2016 to the 16th of April 2016. It will happen in one site: Ibri College of Technology, in Ibri, Oman. Multiple methods will be used to gather data: focus groups, interviews, surveys and observation. The mixed methods used in this study are qualitatively dominated.

- **Survey**

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In this study, a survey is going to be distributed to 200 lecturers at Ibri College of Technology. This survey is based on the TPACK survey by Schmidt (2009). The survey will be anonymous. The information provided at the beginning of the survey will inform the participants of the time, anonymity and purpose of the survey. A tick box will be provided if participants wish to take part in an interview. In this case, they will provide their contact details so that they can be interviewed later. The survey used is attached with this document.

- **Focus groups**

Use of focus group in this study aims at investigating lecturers' perceptions when they discuss different issues related to E-learning PD and technology enhanced teaching and learning. The sessions move gradually from general discussions about E-learning and E-learning PD, to more specific issues such as pedagogical, technological and content considerations, by planning for a technology-enhanced lesson. This is done to encourage lecturers to think consciously and to make decisions on pedagogy, technology and the subject they teach. In order to facilitate discussions, lecturers will be given prompts in order to ensure that discussions remain flowing and focused on the topic. The study will involve one focus group with 7 lecturers. The lecturers will meet for four weeks: one hour and a half twice, and one hour twice. In these 4 weeks, there will be 2 focus group session, one lesson planning session and a classroom observation. The lesson planning session and the focus group session following it aim at making links between E-learning and the classes they teach. Lecturers will teach the lesson planned.

Focus Groups (FG)

FG Session 1	**E-learning and the teaching practice + Formal and informal E-learning PD**	**Duration: 1hr 30mins**
Activity	**Lesson planning session**	**Duration: 1 hour**
Observation	**Teaching the planned lesson**	**Duration: 1 hour**
FG Session 2	**Reflections about the lesson planning activity and teaching it**	**Duration: 1hr 30mins**

Planning for a lesson may require bringing together a variety of ideas such as choice of technology, purpose of use, content taught and student engagement. These issues are key to getting a deep understanding of what happens when lecturers link technology to their classrooms. After the first

focus group session, lecturers will work together to plan for a lesson. In order to enable them to think about how the lesson should be planned, they will be informed about the lesson planning activity at the end of the first session. They will be informed that the next meeting will be to work together to write a lesson plan. The aim of informing them earlier to enable lecturers to think about the activity and to be mentally prepared for it. This will facilitate the activity of writing a lesson plan for a technology enhanced lesson. During the lesson planning session, lecturers will work together to produce one lesson plan.

After writing the lesson plan, lecturers will teach the lesson planned. The lessons taught will be observed by the researcher. Lesson observation will be explained in the observation section. In the second focus group session, lecturers will share their experiences in teaching the lesson. Furthermore, they will reflect on the pedagogical choices made for planning and teaching the lesson and the choices they made in order to integrate E-learning. Examples of these pedagogical considerations could be: PPP (Presentation of content, Practice and Production), skills taught, classroom control, time management, creating interest, etc. Lecturers will reflect on their experience, its usefulness and suggest how this form of lecturer-led PD would improve. The focus group questions are included with this submission.

- **Observation**

The researcher will observe the issues related to formal and informal E-learning PD at Ibri College. The study will observe day to-day practices and interaction in the organization, including formal and informal learning. In addition, there will be classroom observation as part of the focus group exercise. The observations are guided by the research questions and the aspects and issues identified in the literature. Observation of classrooms will be done after getting the consent of the lecturers, as part of the consent form specified for the focus group. Observation of professional development activities will be carried out after getting permission from trainers. The College management will be informed that ethnographic observation will be carried out during the period of data collection.

The study will involve observing formal E-learning PD organized by Ibri College. This includes observing the E-learning PD activities that may take place there during the data collection process, such as the college planned training in using smartboards and possibly Moodle (Ibri College, 2013). Ibri College is planning to implement training in using smartboards and Moodle, so observing the

training sessions and the informal discussions among lecturers can give us insight into the nature of E-learning PD there. It is not clear how many formal E-learning PD activities are going to be held there during that period. Ibri College has stated its intention to provide training in E-learning, so observing that can give an insight into the nature of these activities within the college. It can reveal the processes of planning, focus, delivery, interactions and structure of E-learning PD at Ibri College.

The researcher will observe formal and informal E-learning PD at Ibri College. This is done by following an ethnographic approach, by spending an extended period of time (from 2/2/2016 to 15/4/2016) at Ibri College observing lecturer collaboration, managerial support, the work environment, and the institutional day-to-day practices. Ethnography is the study of day-to-day practices through observation, which occurs in the natural occurring place of phenomena and where observation is typically detailed and unstructured (Atkinson & Hammersley, 1994). It is a subjective experience by the researcher where he/she immerses personally in the ongoing activities in a place or a culture (Wolcott, 2005; Pole & Morrison, 2003). The researcher is going to spend the time allocated for field work at the College. During this time, field notes will be taken of the work day-to-day practices and any issues related to E-learning PD. These will be unstructured details of the researcher's observations of the College. In addition to the field notes, the researcher will continuously note down his reflections of his observations of how formal and informal learning takes place and the relationship between the two. These notes and reflections will be taken continuously at the time of observations and kept for a record, in order not to forget any important details.

This study will seek to understand the processes involved in lecturer conceptualization of how E-learning-enhanced lessons are planned and the manner in which these lessons are taught. This aims at linking lecturers' perceptions with the actual teaching practice. Following the first session of the focus group meeting and lesson planning activity, the researcher will observe how lecturers teach their planned lesson. This can tell us about how lecturers use E-learning in their classrooms. The researcher will take notes of what happens in the classroom such as classroom dynamics, interaction, delivery of content and the manner in which E-learning is used. This observation is open ended but guided by the research questions, focus of research and an observation guide. Observation of these classes will be done by getting the consent of lecturers, as part of getting lecturers' consent for the focus group. Taking part in the focus group which involves observing these

classrooms will be done if lecturers permit the researcher to access their classes. The classroom observation guide is attached with the focus group guide.

- **Interviews**

The study will adopt semi-structured interviewing. It means that the researcher prepares a list of questions that serve as a guide for the interview, but allows flexibility depending on the flow of the interview. The sample to be interviewed will include fifteen lecturers, a college dean, three head of departments, four head of sections and six trainers, and focus group members. The interviewees will be asked questions based on their job positions. For example, the college dean and head of departments will be asked about their attitudes toward the management process of PD, while trainers will be asked about the processes involved when they plan for a training activity. Each interview will be up to 1 hour long. The interviews will be audio-recorded after getting the consent of participants, who will sign a consent sheet. These interviews will be transcribed later by the researcher. The aim of these interviews is to get a deeper understanding of the perceptions and attitudes towards E-learning and E-learning PD. Interviews will attempt to capture lecturers' perceptions towards technology enhanced learning, E-learning PD, and their personal experiences with them. The interview questions are included with this submission.

9. Who are the research participants?

The participants will be lecturers at Ibri College of Technology and the College management (the college dean, head of departments, and head of sections).

In the piloting stage, the participants will be 20 lecturers in the survey, 5 lecturers in the focus group and 8 people in in the interviews. The interviewees will be 5 lecturers, a trainer, a head of section and a head of department. The 5 participants in the focus group are English language lecturers at the college.

In the field work stage, the participants will be 200 lecturers in the survey, 7 lecturers in the focus group, and 36 people in the interviews. The interviewees will 22 lecturers, 6 trainers, 4 head of sections, 3 head of departments, and the college dean. The 7 lecturers in the focus group are all from the English Language Centre at Ibri College of Technology.

10. If you are going to analyse secondary data, from where are you obtaining it?

Not applicable. There is no secondary data directly relevant to this study.

11. If you are collecting primary data, how will you identify and approach the participants to recruit them to your study?

Please upload a copy of the information sheet if you are using one – or if you are not using one please explain why.

This is a case study, so all the participants will be lecturers and administrators from Ibri College of Technology. Participants will be briefed about the study verbally, by email and by Participant information sheets. In addition to sending the participant information sheets by email, hard copies will be distributed to lecturers.

The survey will be distributed to all lecturers at Ibri College of Technology. The number of lecturers is over 200. Hard copies of the survey will be distributed in each staff room, and lecturers who complete it will return it in a box provided in each room. There is no consent form attached with the survey, since by completing it they agree to take part in the study. The information provided at the top of the survey informs them about the purpose of the study, confidentiality, length of completion and the use of information for research purposes only.

The focus group members will be from the English language Centre. An email with the focus group participant information sheet will be sent to all lecturers at the English Language Centre, and focus group participants will be volunteers who reply to this email.

In the interviews, selection is based on the position, random selection, and purposive selection of interesting cases of lecturers who completed the survey and decided to leave their contact details for interviews. For example, the college dean, head of departments and head of section are chosen

purposively because of their positions. Trainers are also chosen purposively because of their role in delivering training. The rest will be a random selection of lecturers with different experiences, age, gender and nationality. The interview participant information sheet will be sent to them in order to ask them to volunteer to take part in the study. In the survey some participants may wish to take part in interviews, so there will tick on a box provided box at the end of the survey leave their contact details for interviews. The information sheets used is attached with this document.

12. Will participants be taking part in your study without their knowledge and consent at the time (e.g. covert observation of people)? If yes, please explain why this is necessary.

No

13. If you answered 'no' to question 13, how will you obtain the consent of participants?

All the consent forms are provided with this submission.

For the survey: Participation in the survey is voluntary. Participants will be giving their consent by completing and returning the survey.

For the interviews, observation and focus groups: Participants will be briefed verbally, by email and by information sheets about the study. A consent form will be given to all the participants in the study. The consent forms are attached to this submission.

14. Is there any reason to believe participants may not be able to give full informed consent? If yes, what steps do you propose to take to safeguard their interests?

No

15. If participants are under the responsibility or care of others (such as parents/carers, teachers or medical staff) what plans do you have to obtain permission to approach the participants to take part in the study?

Not applicable. All the participants are staff at Ibri College of Technology.

16. Describe what participation in your study will involve for study participants. Please attach copies of any questionnaires and/or interview schedules and/or observation topic list to be used

Survey:

First, the participants will complete a paper questionnaire. In the cover page of the questionnaire, they will read information about it, then complete it in less than 20 minutes.

Interviews:

Each interviewee is going to spend up to 1 hour with the researcher. These interviews will be audio recorded, after getting their consent. The interviewees will complete a consent form prior to taking part in the interviews.

Focus groups:

The focus groups involve 2 sessions, 1 lesson planning activity and 1 classroom observation. Each of these activities is up to 1 hour long. As part of the focus group activity, lecturers will teach the lesson they planned in their classroom. That means the researcher will spend a 1 hour session in each participant classroom to observe the technology enhanced lesson prepared and planned by lecturers. That means that participants have to dedicate 4 hours of their time to taking part in the focus groups.

Observation:

Observation of formal professional development activities means that the trainers give permission to the researcher in attending these activities. Observation of classroom teaching, as part of the focus group activity, will require the consent of lecturers. Ethnographic observation of day-to-day activities at the college will be obtained from the College dean.

17. How will you make it clear to participants that they may withdraw consent to participate at any point during the research without penalty?

It will made clear to the participants that they can withdraw from taking part in the study at any time, without having to explain why. This is done to ensure that they are willing to take part in it without any pressure from the researcher. In the consent sheets, this will be written clearly. The researcher will also explain verbally that they can withdraw from taking part in the research at any point, including after completion of the study if they wish not to include their part in the study.

18. Detail any possible distress, discomfort, inconvenience or other adverse effects the participants may experience, including after the study, and you will deal with this.

The researcher believes that the study will not cause any kind of distress, discomfort or inconvenience to the participants. Taking part in the study is voluntary. The participants will be informed about the purpose of the study verbally and using a consent form. Participants will be informed that they can withdraw from the study at any point, without any negative consequences. The questionnaire, interview questions and focus groups will not include any intrusive or sensitive questions. The length of each part will be agreed at the beginning. The survey will not take more than 20 minutes, while each interview will not exceed 1 hour long. Focus group will take up to 5 hours of the volunteered participants. The classroom observation and observation of professional development activities will not be intrusive. The researcher will sit down in the corner or at the back to write notes. Participants in interviews and focus groups will be asked whether they permit the researcher to use a voice recorder. The participants will be informed that research will be confidential, anonymous and used for academic purposes only. They will be informed that the data will be stored safely in a computer protected password and not shared with anyone except the supervisors.

19. How will you maintain participant anonymity and confidentiality in collecting, analysing and writing up your data?

Anonymity and confidentiality will be a priority in the process of data collection, storing, analysis and writing up. The participants will be informed about the anonymity and confidentiality of the

study verbally and in writing in the information sheets. All the data such as notes and recording will be kept in a safe place, in a password protected laptop. Even if the laptop got stolen, the researcher can remotely access the data and delete it, using the iCloud settings in his laptop. The password to this iCloud is also password protected, with an additional protection using a mobile phone message code if the password was stolen. Any hard copies of data will be kept locked with a key in a safe.

The questionnaires will be anonymous, where the researcher distributes the questionnaires and participants do not have to write their names or any other information that may enable anyone to identify them. Even the researcher will not know which participants returned the questionnaires, since they will return them to a box left in each staff room. However, if the survey respondents choose to volunteer to take part in interviews, they will tick on a box provided and write their contact details. In the interviews, focus groups, and observation, the researcher will not reveal the real names of the participants, and pseudonyms will be used. Furthermore, personal descriptions may be altered if necessary so that no one within the College can identify them. This will be done to protect them and to ensure that they can freely express their opinions. The data collected will not be accessible to anyone, except the researcher and my supervisors.

20. How will you store your data securely during and after the study?

Data collected in this study will be saved in a password protected laptop, and later destroyed. All the recordings will be saved in the computer. Any hard documents will be locked in a safe place and destroyed when they are no longer needed. All these documents are only accessible by the researcher and the supervisors. Names of the participants and any descriptions that can make them identifiable will be altered, so that even after thesis completion no one can identify them. All the information gathered will only be used for academic purposes. Data will be kept safe in line with the UK Data Protection Act and University of Southampton Data Management Policy.

21. Describe any plans you have for feeding back the findings of the study to participants.

The participants will be given the email address of the researcher, if they wish to ask any questions or see the findings of the study. This will be written in the information sheet. Participants will also receive the phone number of the researcher, if they have any questions, concerns or if they would like to know more about the study.

22. What are the main ethical issues raised by your research and how do you intend to manage these?

Before starting the study, permission from the College dean will be obtained to carry out research. After that, participant information sheets will be distributed so that each participant will have a chance to read it carefully and understanding what taking part in it involves. When they agree to take part, they will have time to read the consent sheet and sign it if they agree. They will also be told verbally by the researcher about the study and confidentiality of the study. Some participants might feel worried that not taking part in the study or withdrawing is not polite. However, the researcher will make sure that he indicates verbally and using consent forms that taking part in voluntary and withdrawing is acceptable at any point during the research. The participants are likely to be very busy, so the researcher will stick to the time limit agreed even if the conversation was very interesting. Accessibility to data will be restricted to the researcher and the supervisors. All data will be kept in a password protected laptop, and hard copies will be locked with a key in a safe place in the researcher's home.

23. Please outline any other information you feel may be relevant to this submission.

The researcher believes that he has given all the details needed by the ethics committee.

Appendix K Email (Focus Group and Classroom Observations)

From: Mr. Abdulsalam Al-Manthari

Sent 21 March 2016 09:45

To: ELC Staff

Cc: (I have hidden their names here: Dean, Assistant Dean for Academic Affairs, Assistant Dean for Administrative and Financial Affairs, Head of ELC, Head of Sections in the ELC)

Subject: Focus Group Discussions: PhD Research Project

Dear ELC Lecturers,

I am looking for volunteers from the ELC to take part in focus group discussions, which is part of my PhD research project. Please read the information below. If interested, please reply to this email by *Thursday, the 31st of March 2016*. This activity is divided into 4 sessions. Each week there will be a 1-hour session. Timing is flexible according to your convenience and preference. There are no obligations and you can withdraw from the study anytime.

Kind regards,

Abdulsalam Almanthari

PhD Research Student

School of Education

University of Southampton

Participant Information Sheet

(Focus Group)

Study Title: Continuing Professional Development of Lecturers in E-learning: An exploration of the E-learning professional development culture, perceptions, and practices at Ibri College of Technology in Oman.

Researcher: Abdulsalam Maktoum Almanthari **Ethics number**: 17803

Please read this information carefully before deciding to take part in this research. If you are happy to participate you will be asked to sign a consent form.

What is the research about?

I am a PhD research student at the University of Southampton, the UK. The research project is part of my PhD degree thesis. It focuses on the professional development of lecturers in E-learning. Ibri College of Technology will serve as a case study site where the discussions surrounding E-learning professional development in this research project will be investigated. The purpose of this study is to investigate lecturers' perceptions and attitudes toward E-learning professional development and technology enhanced teaching and learning. The study aims to explore day-to-day practices and processes, institutional support structures, interaction between managers and lecturers, interaction among lecturers themselves, and the formal and informal lecturer learning culture.

Why have I been chosen?

The participants in this projects are lecturers and administrators at Ibri College of Technology. Your voluntary participation is highly valuable to colleting the data needed for this study.

What will happen to me if I take part?

If you are agree to take part in focus group, you will be involved in focus group discussions, lesson planning activity, and classroom observation. The focus group members are up to seven lecturers from the English Language Centre at Ibri College of Technology. There will be two focus group sessions, one hour each. The discussions will be audio recorded. The lesson planning activity will be for one hour. And the lesson planned will be taught by the participants and observed by the researcher. The research will write down notes of the lesson planning and teaching activities. This means that the study will take around 4 hours of your time.

Are there any benefits in my taking part?

You might find this study interesting and makes you reflect and think consciously about your position on professional development and technology enhanced teaching and learning. This study can be a medium where you can express your opinions. You will contribute to our understanding of E-learning professional development at Ibri College of Technology which may help in improving it. The results of this study will benefit lecturers, managers and researchers in higher education institutions.

Are there any risks involved?

There are no real risks to being involved in this research.

Will my participation be confidential?

However, focus groups naturally involve many participants who discuss things openly. Therefore, complete confidentiality and anonymity cannot be guaranteed, but all the focus group participants will be asked to respect each other and to confine their discussions in the focus group. All the information obtained in this study will be kept strictly confidential by the researcher. The information gathered will be kept in a password protected laptop and will not be shared with anyone, except the research supervisor. This information will be later destroyed when it is no longer needed. Pseudonyms will be used to hide the identity of participants and any descriptions which may make the identifiable will be altered. Information will be kept safe in line with the UK Data Protection Act and University of Southampton policy.

What happens if I change my mind?

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You can withdraw from this study at any time.

What happens if something goes wrong?

If you have any concerns or complaints about this study, you may contact:

Head of Research Governance, rginfo@soton.ac.uk, phone +44 (0) 238 595058

Where can I get more information?

If you have any questions about the study, you can contact me using the following details:

Abdulsalam Maktoum Almanthari

Southampton Education School

University of Southampton

Email: a.almanthari@soton.ac.uk or a.m.almanthari@gmail.com

Phone: Oman: 92295274 UK: +44 (0) 7474313004

Supervisor: Dr. Michaela Brockmann, Brockmann@soton.ac.uk, phone +44 (0) 238 597252

Professor Kalwant Bhopal, Director of Postgraduate Research Degrees

K.Bhopal@soton.ac.uk Phone +44 (0) 238 593474

Appendix L Research Information and Permission

This information and permission to carry out research was distributed by the College Dean to all the College Departments as an internal memo, signed by the College Dean

Dear Dr. Abdullah Al Maskari

The Dean of Ibri College of Technology

Topic: Asking for your permission to conduct research at Ibri College of Technology.

I would like to thank you first for your kind support for my PhD research. Below you can find information about my study.

Study Title: Continuing Professional Development of Lecturers in E-learning: An exploration of the E-learning professional development culture, perceptions, and practices at Ibri College of Technology in Oman.

Researcher: Abdulsalam Maktoum Almanthari **Ethics number**: 17803

What is the research about?

I am a PhD research student at the University of Southampton, the UK. The research project is part of my PhD degree thesis. It focuses on the professional development of lecturers in E-learning. Ibri College of Technology will serve as a case study site where the discussions surrounding E-learning professional development in this research project will be investigated. The purpose of this study is to investigate lecturers' perceptions and attitudes toward E-learning

professional development and technology enhanced teaching and learning. The study aims to explore day-to-day practices and processes, institutional support structures, interaction between managers and lecturers, interaction among lecturers themselves, and the formal and informal lecturer learning culture. The participants will be from all the college academic departments and the college management, but a special focus will be paid to English language lecturers and the way they use educational technologies in teaching.

Will participation be confidential?

All the information obtained in this study will be kept strictly confidential by the researcher. The information gathered will be kept in a password protected laptop and will not be shared with anyone, except the research supervisor. This information will be later destroyed when it is no longer needed. Pseudonyms will be used to hide the identity of participants and any descriptions which may make the identifiable will be altered. Information will be kept safe in line with the UK Data Protection Act and University of Southampton policy.

What happens if participants change their minds?

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. Participants can withdraw from this study at any time.

Where can I get more information?

If you have any questions about the study, you can contact me using the following details:

Abdulsalam Maktoum Almanthari

Southampton Education School, University of Southampton

Email: a.almanthari@soton.ac.uk Phone: 92295274

Supervisor: Dr. Michaela Brockmann, Brockmann@soton.ac.uk, phone +44 (0) 238 597252

The Research Instruments:

Appendix L

A. Questionnaires

First, the participants will complete a paper questionnaire. In the cover page of the questionnaire, they will read information about it, then complete it in less than 15 minutes.

B. Interviews

Each interviewee is going to spend up to 1 hour with the researcher. These interviews will be audio recorded, after getting their consent. The interviewees will complete a consent form prior to taking part in the interviews. In the interviews, selection is based on the position, random selection, and purposive selection of interesting cases of lecturers who completed the survey and decided to leave their contact details for interviews. For example, the college dean, head of departments and head of section are chosen purposively because of their positions. Trainers are also chosen purposively because of their role in delivering training. The rest will be a random selection of lecturers with different experiences, age, gender and nationality. The interview participant information sheet will be sent to them by email in order to ask them to volunteer to take part in the study.

C. Focus groups

The focus group members will be from the English language Centre. An email with the focus group participant information sheet will be sent to all lecturers at the English Language Centre, and focus group participants will be volunteers who reply to this email. The focus groups involve 4 sessions: 2 group discussions, 1 lesson planning activity and 1 classroom observation. Each of these activities is up to 1 hour long. As part of the focus group activity, lecturers will teach the lesson they planned in their classroom. That means the researcher will spend a 1-hour session in each participant classroom to observe the technology enhanced lesson prepared and planned by lecturers. That means that participants have to dedicate 4 hours of their time to taking part in the focus groups.

D. Observation

Observation of formal professional development activities means that the trainers give permission to the researcher in attending these activities. Observation of classroom teaching, as part of the focus group activity, will require the consent of lecturers. Ethnographic observation of day-to-day activities at the college will be obtained from the College dean.

At the end, I would like to thank you again for your time and support. If you have any questions or would like to know more about the study, I will be happy to talk to you.

Kind Regards,

Abdulsalam Almanthari

Appendix M Follow Up Email to Focus Group

From: Mr. Abdulsalam Al-Manthari

Sent: 28 March 2016 12:25

To: ELC Staff

Cc: (I have hidden their names here – managers)

Subject: Timing of Group Discussion

Dear ELC Lecturers,

I would like to let you know that the focus group discussion will not take place before the beginning of the summer semester. I am aware that this week lecturers are busy with exams and with marking next week. The discussions will be thought provoking and interesting. Refreshments and food will be provided during and after the meetings.

If you are interested in taking part of have any questions, please contact me.

Best wishes,

Abdulsalam Almanthari

Appendix N Email: First Focus Group Session

_____

From: Mr. Abdulsalam Al-Manthari

Sent: 25 April 2016 09:33

To: (Names Hidden)

Subject: Focus Group Discussion

Dear (Names Hidden),

Thank you for completing the Doodle poll and choosing to take part in the group discussion.

The best time that suit everyone is tomorrow from 12:00 to 1:00.

I will book the VIP room for this purpose, and if it is already booked I will let you know.

I attached some questions that we will discuss; however, there is no need to prepare anything. The discussion will be semi-structured so we may talk about any issues that arise in the discussion.

Best wishes,

Abdulsalam

Appendix O Email: Lesson Planning

From: Mr. Abdulsalam Al-Manthari

Sent: 26 April 2016 15:45

To: (Names Hidden

Subject: Group Discussion

Dear colleagues,

I would like to express my sincere gratitude for your time and contributions in the group discussion. Next week, I hope that you will join us for another discussion. This time it is going to focus on the practical aspects of technology use. It will be only 45 minutes long.

The discussion will be about how to prepare for a lesson that involves the use of technology. I am aware that you teach different levels and skills, so the discussions will be around what technology to use, how to use it and the aims of use. Before the discussion, you may think of a normal lesson you teach this semester and how you can enhance teaching by using technology inside and/or outside the classroom.

Below is a link for choosing the best time. Please choose all the times that suit you. The more times you choose the better chances we have in finding a common time.

Here is the link:

http://doodle.com/poll/eqzffvsia984cixm

Best wishes,

Abdulsalam Almanthari

Appendix P Interview Email

Dear (…….)

I would like to express my sincere gratitude for completing the questionnaire and your interest in taking part in an interview.

I attached a copy of the participant information sheet here. Please let me know which date and time suit you best to take part in an interview.

I would like to remind you that participation in the study is voluntary. Your participation is highly valuable to collecting the data needed for this research.

Kind regards,

Abdulsalam

Appendix Q School Education in Oman

As a result of the rapid increase in the number of students and schools after 1970, there was a huge and urgent demand for teachers (AlBandary, 2005). However, there had been no teacher-training HEIs until 1985, and the Ministry of Education had to depend heavily for a long period of time on teachers from other countries to compensate for the limited number of Omani teachers, who had to travel abroad to receive training (AlBandary, 2005). Because of the rapidly increasing number of students, the initial focus was on the quantity of teachers over quality (AlBandary, 2005). The first teacher education institution was established in 1985, followed by six Colleges of Education starting from 1994. Later, the number of years of study at the College of Education was raised from two to four years, offering a Bachelor degree instead of a Diploma.

One of the aims of Omani education system is to modernize Omani society in order to prepare students for the future, where technology and new inventions are affecting various aspects of life (UNESCO, 2011). ICT was introduced as a separate subject taught from grade 1 and also integrated with other subjects (Porcaro & Al Musawi, 2011) and English is now taught from grade 1 instead of grade 4 (UNESCO, 2011). Upon completion of schooling, students use the Central Admission Centre to list their choices of HEIs. This online central system places students in HEIs according to their priorities and their results and the majority of students get places.

In 1998, the government started an educational overhaul that attempted to improve educational standards (Ministry of Education, 2008). This educational reform attempted to modernize education by reducing examination and memorization focus, updating curriculums, and introducing critical thinking skills, student-centered learning, continuous assessment and projects (Porcaro, 2011a). The Ministry of Education felt that the old educational system has become outdated and it relied heavily on rote learning, which resulted in student passiveness and dependence on teachers (UNESCO, 2011).

Appendix Q

A common form of PD followed by the Ministry of Education is based on a cascade organizational model, where trainers are trained centrally by the Ministry, and then they go back to their regions to deliver training to teachers (Ministry of Education, 2008; UNESCO, 2011). This enables the Ministry to use resources efficiently and train a large number of teachers. In 2003, a participatory training programme was introduced to 30 schools, then expanded to 100 schools by 2005 (Ministry of Education, 2008). The Ministry is planning to encourage more training within schools in the future (Ministry of Education, 2008).

Appendix R E-learning PD for School Teachers in Oman

In Oman, ICT is taught separately in schools from grade 1 to 12; also, it is integrated into other subjects. The educational portal was launched in 2007 by the Ministry of Education as a gate to connect policymakers, administrators, school teachers, students and parents (Al-Busaidi & Al-Shihi, 2010; Osman, 2010). It provides resources for the community and enables them to share information, ideas and to communicate by many means such as online chats and forums (Osman, 2010). In addition, it is the main gateway to the electronic services offered by the Ministry of Education (Osman, 2010). For example,

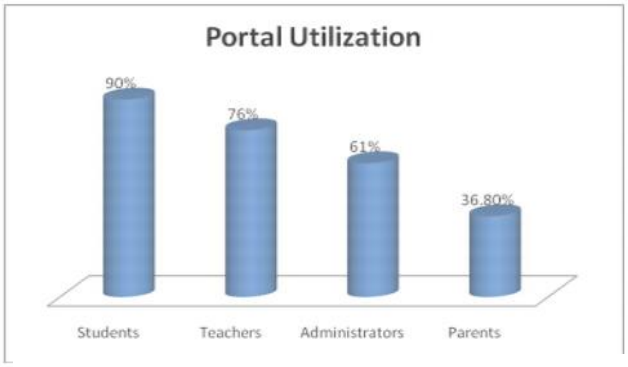

Figure: Educational Portal Utilization at the Education Portal

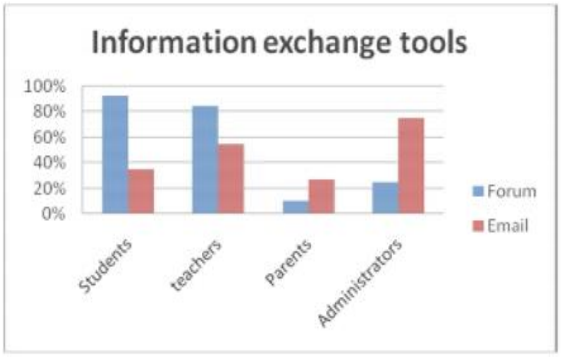

Figure: Information Exchange Tools at the Education Portal

parents can keep track of their children's progress, grades, timetables and absence records (Al-Busaidi & Al-Shihi, 2010; Osman, 2010). Osman (2010) examined the exchange mechanisms between students, teachers, administrators, policymakers and parents in the educational portal and the level of its utilization and accessibility. A random sample of 400 participants took part in the study by completing a Likert scale survey. The figure below shows portal utilization and information exchange tools among participants. Teachers indicated that most of the emphasis went to developing the technology (hardware and software), while not enough training and PD were given, and teachers are simply assumed to develop the skills and facilitate the e-portal on their own. The graph above shows that students and teachers took an active role in the forum, while administrators tend to use emails more frequently to disseminate information such as announcements and news. The authors described teachers as 'authentic' users, while students as 'immigrant' users of the educational portal, since teachers were supposed to

use it more frequently to exchange ideas. However, the results revealed that students used the educational portal more than teachers.

Teachers in Oman may need training and support to understand how to use technologies and how to manage student learning when they use them. Al-Adi (2009) investigated the use of the Internet as a teaching resource for 24 in-service English language teachers in Oman. Most teachers (90%) did not have any knowledge about uses such as wikis and blogs. Teachers reported dissatisfaction with the quality of training and lack of skills to manage learning using technology. This included not understanding how to manage learning, classroom control, and keeping the students on task. Teachers learned most of the Internet skills themselves or through friends. One of their reasons for not using the Internet was time pressure and the need to stay focused on task and finishing the textbook before the end of the semester. In the study, all teachers had positive attitudes towards the Internet as a teaching resource; however, most of them did not use the Internet in their classes.

Even with the government invests in large-scale projects to promote E-learning use; basic issues like internet accessibility may limit the effectiveness of these projects. For example, Sales et al. (2008) talked about the Omani Online Teacher Training project, which involved the piloting, development and implementation of an e-learning program for English, Science and Mathematics in schools. This program was developed by the partnership of the Omani Ministry of Education, the U.S Department of State's Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI), and a U.S based company called 'Seward', which specializes in online learning. The program lasted for 17 months from February 2006 to July 2007. According to Sales et al. (2008), this project was essential to help the MOE determine the feasibility of online teacher training in Oman. The aims of the OOTT project were to provide training for the school teachers, to provide a tool (software) and skills to develop future online courses, and to pilot the program in three schools. 12 staff from the MOE received training in the design, development and implementation of online courses. The training was in the form of courses and through the collaborative design of instructional materials.

Three online courses were developed in English and Arabic, for teaching Science, English and Mathematics. This included lesson plans, objectives, activities, assessment and video demonstrations. This course was piloted in three schools and 15 teachers took part in it. Their progress was being following online. However, despite the fact that 11 teachers started the online course, only six teachers had fully completed the course. When teachers were interviewed later, they indicated that slow internet connection made it difficult to do the course, especially to watch the videos. Most of the people who finished the course accessed the course in cafes where internet speed was fast. This project was done almost a decade ago and broadband accessibility was lower at that time. Despite all these difficulties, teachers and students reported benefiting and enjoying the active learning methods taught in the course. The last aim was achieved by producing the software tool, which can be used for future online training. However, there is no reported use of this software. Furthermore, the study gathered data mainly from the six teachers who completed the course.

Some studies show that although teachers think that distance PD programmes are effective, the social engagement aspect can be low if E-learning tools are not accessible or user friendly. For example, Al-Balushi and Al-Abdali (2014) looked at using Moodle for a distance PD programme to train 19 science school teachers in creative teaching. The training programme lasted for 36 days, and a pre and post-experimental survey design was implemented. The results showed that the programme was effective in involving teachers cognitively and pedagogically. However, the social presence element in the programme was the least successful. The interactions among teachers and participations in discussion forums were less than expected, although reminders were sent to participants in the form of emails or text messages to take part in discussions. The advantage of using distance education was allowing learners more flexibility to learn anytime anywhere. The authors argue that integrating the PD program with social networks like WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram or Twitter, could make training more accessible and easier with smart phones. This way, teachers can respond very easily without having to log in into Moodle or constantly check for new discussions. Teachers argued that their teaching load and additional responsibilities did not give them enough time to take part in Moodle discussions.

Al-Rabaani (2008) investigated the attitudes and skills of 622 Omani social studies teachers in the use of computers for instruction, using a survey. The results showed that although teachers had positive attitudes towards the use of computers in teaching, most of them believed that they lack necessary computer skills. The results revealed that three out of four teachers own a computer at home and half of them have internet accessibility at home. Most teachers have never attended a computer course, and learned computer skills depending on themselves or others, which is similar to Al-Adi's (2009) observation. Half of the teachers did not know any website related to their subject, social science. The vast majority (around 90%) of teachers wish to attend training in computer use and training in computer use for teaching. The study revealed that use of the internet to support teaching was low, and concluded that the Ministry of Education should raise awareness of the benefits of internet resources, and develop teachers' skills in using computers. Al-Rabaani (2008) argues that it is not enough to increase computer resources in schools if teachers do not know how to benefit from them.

Appendix S Private HEIs in Oman

The number of private HEIs in Oman increased from only 1 in 1995 to 27 in 2013 (Ministry of Higher Education, 2013). The government gives private HIEs many incentives such as scholarships for students, tax exemption, free land and financial grants such as a one-time grant of 17 million rials (around $44 million/£30 million) (Donn & Manthri, 2010; Gregory, 2001; Oxford Business Group, 2010). There was a recommendation to introduce soft loans in order to increase participation, with the government covering all the interest or reducing it (Al-Lamki, 2002; Gregory, 2001). Private HEIs serve professionals who wish to study part time. For example, 20% of the students in one private HEI are taking their courses part time (Gregory, 2001). Public HEIs lack this flexibility; since their traditional target are school graduates and they are fully financially dependent on the government. However, this is changing slowly. For example, the Colleges of Technology started providing part-time degrees for the public for fees, starting from 2013/14 (Oman News Agency, 2014). This is a considerable shift since they started getting fees for their degrees, and they opened their doors to employees. Private HEIs are affiliated with foreign universities in order to enhance quality of their programs (Prakash et al., 2013) and they are overseen by the Ministry of Higher Education.

Appendix T Measuring TPACK

This section represents the different questionnaires analysed that measure TPACK.

One of the most widely used TPACK surveys is the one developed by Schmidt, Baran, Thompson, Mishra, et al. (2009) and posted on the website tpack.org. The initial scale included 75 Likert scale items, which was reduced to 47 after confirmatory factor analysis. The scale measures all the seven subscales of TPACK, with high reliability ranging from 0.75 to 0.92. Although the scale includes four specializations of practitioners: Mathematics, Social Sciences, Science and Literacy, researchers can modify the wording of items to make them suitable to their respondents. One of the apparent merits of this survey is its potential to be used for a wide variety of situations, due to the general characteristics and wording of its items. However, this could also be characterized as one of the shortcomings of this survey, because it could be too general for specific studies. Therefore, many researchers have modified Schmidt's survey to tailor it to their specific needs (Koh et al., 2010; Shin et al., 2009; Zelkowski et al., 2013).

In many studies the 7 TPACK subscales could not be found in exploratory factor analysis, probably because the boundaries between them are 'fuzzy' (Jimoyiannis & Komis, 2007). For example, Archambault and Crippen (2009) developed a 24 Likert-type item survey to measure online TPACK PD for 596 online teachers. They found it difficult to reproduce the seven TPACK factors during factor analysis. Zelkowski et al. (2013) deleted the items that do not relate to mathematics and added 22 new items. However, only four factors out of the seven TPACK subscales had a clear pattern and the rest loaded on more than one factor, so they were eliminated. Many studies suggested new measurement methods, or developed previous ones for in-service, or pre-service, in general or for specific subjects (Voogt et al., 2013). For example, scales are modified for specific pedagogies, technologies, subjects, or measurement methods, resulting in different scales (Jimoyiannis & Komis, 2007). TPACK measurement could be through self-reports (e.g.

Likert scales, open-ended questionnaires, diaries) or performance-based (e.g. observations) (Abbitt, 2011; Koehler et al., 2012). The aims of measurement could be to measure the effect of PD or to get a 'snapshot' of the current teachers' TPACK status (Jimoyiannis & Komis, 2007). Self-report measures are most commonly used, because they are easily administered and analysed (Koehler et al., 2012).

One of the main reasons for the development of different scales is the fact that TPACK emphasises the role of content (Koehler et al., 2012). Although Schmidt's survey could be used for different fields after rewording a few items, some researchers attempted to add new items specific to their subject area. Shin et al. (2009) examined in-service history teachers' integration of E-learning using TPACK using Schmidt's scale. A few items related to teaching were added and items related to other subjects were deleted. Pre- and post-tests were used to measure change because of a PD programme. Harris et al. (2010) claim that they developed and tested the first performance-based TPACK instrument. This instrument is based on Britten and Cassady (2006) Technology Integration Assessment Instrument (TATI), by analysing lesson plans and giving them scores. TATI does not look only whether technology is used, but how it is used to enhance learning based on seven dimensions in their lesson planning. Hofer et al. (2011) measured TPACK by videotaping lessons, which were later reviewed by 11 experts and given a score. Hofer et al. (2011) argue that videos provide a very rich source for understanding how knowledge integrates with teacher's practice, while lesson plans show only their knowledge and planning. Koh et al. (2010) developed a scale specifically for teachers' use of the web and called it TPACK-Web. Jimoyiannis and Komis (2007) developed the Technological Pedagogical Science Knowledge (TPASK) scale for science education.

Although there has been progress in the ability of measuring TPACK, there is no widely accepted instrument that is adequately reliable and conveniently administered (Abbitt, 2011; Jimoyiannis & Komis, 2007; Koehler et al., 2013). Koehler and Mishra (2005) admit that though this model give us a better understanding of E-learning PD, no single framework can give all the answers.

Appendix T

After considering all the major TPACK measurement tools, this study initially adapted many items from Schmidt, Baran, Thompson, Koehler, et al. (2009) survey. It was initially viewed as the most suitable scale for this study because of the relevance of its items, its simplicity and clarity. In the Questionnaire section in the Methodology Chapter, I specified which items were considered and why some items were eliminated later.

Appendix U Focus Group 1

Researcher: Abdulsalam

Participants: Eman, Angie, John, Mailizar, Amna, Elizabeth

Venue: The VIP Room at the College

Abdulsalam: I would like you to talk about teacher professional development at the college. Please share you experiences with the others here.

John: Actually, in the college we usually have workshops and presentations by teachers and by the head of centre. Mostly they are about how to deal with students and classroom management.

Fatima: Now it is my third year here, and as Mr. Abdullah said, we have workshops. Last year there was a symposium, and there are classroom observations.

Elizabeth: The College provides certain workshops but there is a need for more. The college started to send teachers to conferences, but the college should do this more.

John: Also teacher professional development courses in Muscat and other places and to attend different conferences in Oman and abroad.

Fatima: The number of those sent to conferences should be maximized.

Eman: I do agree with the views of my colleagues. We live in a technology driven era. This age is called the information age. The education sector has seen a series of developments and ICT is the latest development that has been incorporated into the education system. Teachers are here to give knowledge to the student community. They should have some kind of professional development every now and then at frequent intervals. If you take Ibri College of Technology into account, the college and the ELC are taking initiatives to conduct workshops and presentations, but as my friends said, we have to increase the number of

workshops conducted, otherwise I feel that the investments made into ICT will be become futile if we do not give enough professional development workshops to teachers.

Fatima: When I came here, at least they should give three months or four months of training. Everything was new to me … (**John:** In how to deal with students)… (**Mailizar:** In how to deliver the syllabus) … but nothing happened. They just gave me a course and I started teaching. (**John:** You only have two days of observation and then you start teaching). I did not even have two days, I had only one observation. So my training was actually my teaching for the whole year.

Elizabeth: But during staff induction, I mean there should be staff induction when new staff enter the college in different ways like conducting workshops to be a guide for the teacher. Giving a timetable and a textbook is not enough.

Fatima: Also about college E-learning, until now I have not opened that one.

John: With courses, I mean with workshops every single teacher needs to be up to date with new information, new techniques and new strategies in teaching. I can say most of the teachers in the college register their names to attend workshops organised by the British Council in Muscat. And it is very difficult to go after college hours to Muscat, attend this course for two hours and come back. So this is difficult but we need that. Many teachers try to go every single month or every two months.

Eman: So the college should facilitate and bring people to give training to all teachers. May I also make a point, when we organise professional development programs, we should see that all teachers get benefit. Because the timing should be fixed in such a way that teachers get benefit. Here we find that only some teachers who are free attend the course, and the other teachers cannot attend because they are not free.

John: And even if there is a course, a conference or workshop outside, those who go, maybe 2, 3 or 4, when they come back to the College, they do not share the information, they should held a course or a workshop for teachers to benefit from the training.

Eman: The College can set up a forum and a platform for such teachers to share their knowledge with their colleagues.

Fatima: After conferences we should come back and discuss and share experiences.

John: And unfortunately, here in the Ministry of Manpower, if there is a conference, a course, a workshop, whatever it is, they only send teachers employed by the Ministry of Manpower, not from the companies. Yes! This is something true. We have to say it. We are not sent anywhere. Only those who are employed by the Ministry. This is a big problem. (**Elizabeth:** The same people always attend). So I think from the ELC here in Ibri, we have only seven or eight teachers in the Ministry (**Mailizar:** of the seven one has gone already). Two have gone. So this is a problem. We need training. It is very important for all teachers, because every day we have new things, new technologies, new strategies, new techniques, and we need to bring experts from outside Oman to give presentations.

Abdulsalam: Now we will move to a different point. We talked about what should be done and about external training. Can you talk about the training happening within the College? Your experiences with it and the kind of training you attended.

Mailizar: Besides workshops and seminars, we are also conducting induction programmes. But that is only happening once at the start of the academic year for new staff. New teachers joining the college at the second or third semester miss this induction programmes. So induction is there and the Quality Assurance is serious about it, but during second and third semester it is not functioning properly. This year the quality assurance is meeting once again to discuss this induction. They are appointing teachers responsible for induction in each department. In the ELC, three staff are responsible for induction. Even teachers who joined in the second and third semester are invited to the induction programmes. Those who missed induction will be involved. Yesterday we had a meeting with the quality people. So induction is going to be regular from now, every new teacher will attend it.

Fatima: I do not think I attended an induction. (**Mailizar:** you will).

Mailizar: The quality assurance people are coming from Muscat and other countries. They will come to interview every single teacher to make sure everybody went through induction. Even if did not attend an induction programme when you joined here, you will invited now.

John: Whenever there is training and they ask all the staff together in one place, it takes a long time, more than one hour and people feel bored. This is one thing. Second, you cannot discuss, because if you are the only one asking or discussing they will ask why are you asking

questions let us go. (**Fatima:** yeah). So people do not want to participate in these workshops and courses to get benefit. (**Fatima:** because they are not interested).

Abdulsalam: What about the other forms of training?

Eman: We got training in Moodle, Excel, projectors and Smartboard. But the frequency of such training is low. When the training is given to teachers, we should see that some measures are taken to do the follow up.

John: The problem is that training is only theoretical. You have to do it and practice using for example Moodle, apply some activities.

Eman: Yes, I agree with that. I would like to cite my own experience in India. I worked in a college in India. As part of ICT enable teaching learning culture, we introduced computer labs in our college. But the computer labs in the beginning were not effective because we did not include the labs into the curriculum. And we had a brainstorming session in how to make these computer labs effective. Then we realised that taking students to computer labs should be incorporated into the curriculum. So when we are taking training we should also see that training gets incorporated into the curriculum. Because when we introduce a new system, naturally it affects the pedagogical style or curriculum design, so we should think in that line as to how such ICT training could be incorporated into the curriculum and pedagogical skills.

John: You know eLearning is not that effective in this college.

Eman: Because I think it should be incorporated into the curriculum, otherwise it will remain stagnant.

Mailizar: It should be made compulsory.

John: My son is in Sultan Qaboos University. Every single time he says we have homework, assignment, or something to do, they use eLearning. And they submit their homework, assignments and projects using eLearning.

Eman: Students should be encouraged to use technology to submit their assignments.

John: First teachers have to know how to use it.

Mailizar: Since this college is part of a series of colleges of technology, they only have one policy and unless it comes from the Higher College of Technology, we cannot go on our own I think.

Fatima: But we can start. Training, I do not think I had training here. (**John:** Yes, there is no training). Workshops, maybe, a few. Not because the college organised that, no, the teachers would like to share their experiences. That is it.

Mailizar: Also, we do not have enough time to organise workshops in the college.

Eman: Time is also a big constraint.

Mailizar: We are only free for one week. And we are, we are not at college.

John: I think if teachers are encouraged to present. For example, everyone who presents something is paid. (**Mailizar:** at least some encouragement).

Fatima: or at least have a journal, so we see our work published. This would help us. It would encourage us. But paying, I do not think so.

John: pay them, they will give a lot of presentations. Like what the Ministry of Education did.

Fatima: that is the Ministry of Education. Here we are in the Ministry of Manpower, so it is different.

John: No not different, in all ministries.

Eman: That is part of a motivational strategy that can be tried.

Abdulsalam: You attend professional development activities in the college. How do you feel that is relevant to your teaching practice and your classrooms?

John: to some extent, not that much.

Mailizar: Because we are dealing with foundation students, not everything is relevant to their level. But some of the techniques are useful.

Eman: I think we should bring real experts. When we try to infuse ICT into teaching methodologies real experts should guide us as to how effectively bring ICT into teaching.

Mailizar: That should come from universities, maybe even outside Oman.

Fatima: But our students are different from others, so if we face a problem why do not we ask who would like to do research on this. Then we can solve this problem and have a discussion. This will help us.

John: Teachers do research? (**Fatima:** yes teachers).

Fatima: Till now, and this is my third year, I benefited from two workshops only. Because the others did not have something new for me, or not relevant to my students.

Mailizar: That is (training) not meant for Ibri College.

Elizabeth: And sometimes lack of resources especially in caravans. Like if I want to want to use a computer I have to carry a heavy projector. (**Mailizar:** no way to do that).

Fatima: I also do not like the chairs and tables there. We need tables like this (round table) for group discussion. But it is not possible in the caravans.

John: You have more than 30 desks in one caravan, and you have only 22 students. What would you do? (**Mailizar:** yeah more desks than students). I think here we need courses in how to deal with students, time management, classroom management, exams, syllabus, and a lot of courses, but unfortunately nobody is paying attention to these things.

Abdulsalam: So you all agreed that there is limitations to formal training here at the college (John: and lack of training). Yes, so what about getting help from colleagues? How does it happen? And how do you approach others to ask for advice or help? Can you share your experiences?

John: Sometimes I feel that I need to know more about a certain course or how to do a certain activity, I go to some of my friends and ask them, for example how to do a certain activity or how to make students more active.

Mailizar: Or by sharing the additional materials we prepare beside the textbooks.

John: Most of the materials are self-prepared. We prepare the handouts ourselves.

Fatima: For three years, I taught level two. This year I started teaching level four. So it is something new. They just gave me the books and delivery plan, and they asked me to start teaching. So I went to teachers who have experience in teaching it and asked them for advice.

John: This also happened to me because I used to teach technical writing one and two. This year they gave me level three writing. Fortunately, the same topics in technical Writing 1 are in level 3: compare and contrast, process essay. I started using my previous way of teaching the structure of the essay. After a while, I discovered there is a difference. So we need to be taught how to deal with students.

Fatima: Or at least they should tell us two days before teaching. For example, they give us in the morning and we start teaching in the afternoon (**John:** yes) (**Mailizar:** they give us the books and timetables at the same time) (**Angie:** I think before the end of the semester,

they should give these things to teachers, and teachers come prepared in the next semester.)(**Eman:** We should be given enough time to be prepared)

Eman: The colleagues help each other. We never have problems. We approach them and get advice.

John: I think all level teachers should be involved in preparing the delivery plan.

Angie: If some changes are required according to our needs as well.

John: To discuss how the delivery plan should be like, the changes, the important things, unimportant things. (**Eman:** There should be a meeting so we reach a consensus). For example, this semester in level three, I discovered that there are a lot of things in the delivery plan in level three writing are not important, even in the course book itself. A lot of things we do not need are there.

Fatima: I gave a suggestion of creating our own textbook.

Angie: We can have better ideas from what is in the book. Sometimes we find ourselves nowhere because of the textbook. The delivery plan says something and the book something else.

Fatima: For example, in SQU they created their own textbooks.

Angie: This has to be brought I believe. We should create our own path. That should be discussed, if teachers agree on the materials and their eligibility.

Mailizar: Actually, the delivery plan or scheme of work should be a guideline; it should not force teachers to use the same textbook. There should be freedom for teachers to use their own materials.

Eman: But what about exams?

Mailizar: They should be able to go for the same exam.

Eman: I do not know if I can agree with you. Because if there is there no uniformity in the syllabus that we follow, is it possible for us to enable the students to face the exams?

Angie: Not uniformity, same ideas will be given but teachers choose their own ways of teaching the same ideas. There is nothing wrong with that.

Abdulsalam: Can we move to the next point now. Some teachers report that they learn better from colleagues than formal training. Does that connect to your own experiences?

Mailizar: Yes of course, because the training for one hour or one day (**John:** once a semester) (**Eman:** Once a semester, after that we do take advice from colleagues and they help us informally).

Fatima: But you know some teachers will not go and ask (**Elizabeth:** yes) (**Angie:** Introvert people do not ask. It depends on their character and behaviour). But with Angie and Elizabeth I can go and ask (**Angie:** I do not. I just stick to my own ideas) but some teachers I can never ask them. (**Mailizar:** If someone is not social or not friendly) (**Angie:** not only that, the other person might not entertain you if you go).

John: I remember at the beginning when I started teaching technical writing two, I attended one class taught by one of my friends. I told her I want to attend and see how you teach technical writing two. This is one of the things we need to do, peer observation.

Fatima: Actually, when we see things we learn better than when we just read.

Angie: Both should be there, help from friends and training.

Eman: Formal training and informal training are both important.

Mailizar: Training initially helps teachers to kick-start their job. Eventually, the peers in the college keep helping you through. Every day is a learning day. Training cannot complete your needs here at the college.

Fatima: Sometimes workshops are good but presenters are boring. This is my problem. That is why I prefer discussions and sharing experiences in an informal way.

Mailizar: Yeah informal training. This is a kind of training.

John: A presenter can make his presentation very active if he always asks questions and give time for discussions, not only talking, talking and talking and then saying: any questions?

Fatima: Sometimes when I know the presenter, even without knowing the topic, I would go because I know I will benefit.

Angie: It is better if we have meetings during the semester, where teachers sit and share.

Mailizar: We should get together once in a while to discuss what is working in the classroom and what is not.

Angie: That can be a smaller sort of CPD.

Abdulsalam: Do you feel that the college environment encourages sharing ideas? If you experiences of examples please share with us.

Mailizar: The college environment is friendly (**John:** yeah). People are approachable.

John: We are like one family, especially in the ELC. We can ask anyone, sit with anyone and discuss any issue. (**Mailizar:** Regardless of culture). Ladies and gentlemen sit together and discuss any issue.

Mailizar: People are open-minded here in the ELC.

Fatima: We like helping each other.

Eman: We are like one family. We do not find a problem in approaching people and getting help.

Fatima: maybe because of the head of department.

John: That is because of the long experience of head of department. He has an experience of more than 35 years in dealing with teachers and teaching. He is always trying to keep them as one family.

Abdulsalam: Now let us talk about ICT. What are your experiences in using ICT and educational technologies in the college?

Mailizar: Every classroom is equipped with a projector and teachers can prepare their own materials, carry them in a USB and show them in the classroom.

Eman: We have access to laptops.

Mailizar: Previously, we did not have textbooks. Teachers only used USBs.

Angie: It depends. It if it is in the caravans you do not have projectors.

John: We hope that we get rid of the caravans next year.

Mailizar: We will move to the new building.

John: Then we will be forced to use technology, smartboards, projectors, laptops and everything.

Fatima: When I came here, I was so excited, because it is Ibri College of Technology (emphasized). So yeah, I will come and see everything. When I came here, they asked me to go and teach in a caravan. I said what! Oh my God! I want to tell you what I have learned. I like technology and would like to apply it. I thought about an idea. I told my students, let's try something. I tried finding a video, and sending it by Bluetooth to students. And I told them next class we are going to discuss that video. I also used Voicethread. I asked them to create an email and go to Voicethread and we participated. I created a group there. I put a picture or a question. We discussed with a nickname, but I asked them to write their names. So boys and girls discussed things there and it was really good. I applied it in level one, works, level two, works, but then I have noticed the students face problems in technology. They do not know how to use computers, they do not know how to create an email, and it was a shock. It was a shock for me that they do not have that background. So I asked them last year, let's try something new. I tried WhatsApp in my mobile. I created two groups, girls group and boys group, because I cannot put them together. I just sent them videos, or told them next time we are going to discuss something, or put a picture related to a topic and we discuss it there and they just use audio, because I taught them listening and speaking, so I asked them to record. It actually worked in the first semester, second semester, but the in the third semester it was a disaster. (**John:** What happened in the third semester?). They chatted in Arabic. I told them please do not speak in Arabic. Use English. (**Mailizar:** because you did not teach them from the beginning. They were taught by other teachers). (**John:** But those were new students to you, and they are in the third semester). Yes. (**John:** third semester level one?) Level two. Even they do not participate, they say teacher we do not want. It worked for some, not everyone. I was hoping to have a class here (not the caravans), I have classes here this year. I thought about using the smartboard. But what is the problem? The smartboard is here (one side) and the white board is here (another side). (**John:** so you have to run). So I do not know why they do not put the smartboard next to the whiteboard, so the students were like this (looking at different directions), and I have to reorganize my classroom.

Eman: yes so every now and then you have to make seating arrangements for the students.

Mailizar: And you have to be running between the two boards.

John: The only thing I use here in the college is a laptop with a projector for PowerPoint. That is all.

Fatima: I give them for example, this website; they put a free one-minute video. So students go there, watch it and discuss it. Or games for vocabulary.

John: So you use smartphones for teaching.

Amna: So I tell them go and watch the video, in the class, so they watch it for one minute.

Mailizar: And students like using their mobiles once in a while in the class.

Amna: but you should check whether they are watching the video or on WhatsApp or whatever.

Abdulsalam: Can you talk about the challenges when you use or try to use ICT for teaching?

John: shortages of laptops if you would like to use laptops here, projectors in caravans are not available and it is difficult to use anything in the caravan because internet access is very weak.

Amna: Even sometimes here in classes the internet access is not strong. I used my laptop, but then there were a lot of viruses here because of USBs from students. So I said I will use college laptops, but they are not working.

John: Another problem is that the smartboard is in this side and the whiteboard on the other.

Eman: I too faced problems. When students have doubts in my class I would run to the whiteboard and ask students to turn themselves. So it was a real stumbling block for the teaching process. That limitation should looked into, and there is shortage of laptops, CD players. And whenever we need a laptop, the laptops we take it to a classroom sometimes it

do not work. So next time we ask, should we go or not. We feel reluctant. So that problem is there. There should be proper resources of ICT that facilitate teachers to use them.

Amna: When I came, I thought that I can use eLearning, where I can post anything. At least if they do not know how to use email they write their ID and password and they will have their own page. They will have everything there, any news, any activity. This would help them. But I cannot do this here. There is nothing for foundation, I think.

John: There is a problem with smartboards. Yes they are available. But there are no courses for teachers in how to use them.

Mailizar: Also students do not have background to use technology. They cannot access Moodle. Some people live in remote areas and do not access internet at home.

Amna: They can access here. But the problem is Most of the computers in the boys' lab and girls' lab are not working. I do not know why.

Mailizar: There is no proper maintenance of computers.

Eman: there should be enough technical support whenever we need it.

Mailizar: and regular

Abdulsalam: Have you received any training in using educational technologies at the college? Can you talk about training you have received?

John: limited training.

Angie: It is at the middle of the semester. When we are busy doing something, you receive a mail: 12:00 if you are free go there. It should be systematised.

Amna: Yeah, at the same time, every time.

John: and a one-day course or a one-hour course. It is not week at least, to be able to know and practice.

Eman: Yes, enough practice should be given after the training.

John: One person is talking, and we are looking at the computers, and what to do?

Angie: I suggested that all computers should be connected, and the instructions are there and reach us all. What was happening is that one computer or two were not even opening for one hour. So in this condition the Moodle training was a simple failure.

Mailizar: The College should make it compulsory first. No more paper based work, everything online.

Elizabeth: I think there should be one course of computer-assisted learning. In some colleges, they have a language lab.

Amna: but I do not know why we do not have it here.

John: I hope in the coming years. In the new ELC.

Mailizar: In the new building.

Abdulsalam: What would encourage you to use ICT more at the college, like eLearning, Smartboards, or videos? What would encourage you to use them in your classrooms?

John: availability first. Proper training for using them.

Mailizar: On top on that compulsion. Some pressure and force.

Eman: and frequency of training. Every now and then, we should be given proper training.

John: I agree

Amna: and when I have a workshop on something or a research, I would like try it here, if I have the facilities available here.

Abdulsalam: Do you think that the college encourages you to use ICT?

Eman: It encourages, we have laptops and all, but availability and resources are limited. We have smartboards, smart rooms and all those things are there (**Mailizar:** and smart teachers), but at the same time they should make all these resources available whenever teachers are in need of.

Amna: At first, I was so excited, but later I started getting demotivated. Maybe students have 20% (responsibility), because they do not have technology background, but the 80% is college. Here when I give them an idea that we need something, they say we do not have money, or go there ask that person, then when I go they say we will take your idea and we will try to do it next time. (**Mailizar:** That next time never comes). So I told them I will do everything. I will give you a workshop about it, in how to apply it in our college. They say okay, I will discuss it with this person or that one, and tell you. No one replies... So I have ideas to change or to make our college better.

Angie: So tradition and individual talent should be combined into once force. Individual talent should not be backtracked like that. Take it from everyone.

Amna: I said, let's do a research then I will show them. This is my research, these are my suggestions and this is what I have noticed.

Angie: your workshop was very good. When she came, she gave us a workshop on that. And she was eager.

Mailizar: she got demotivated.

John: Once only (she gave the presentation)

Mailizar: once or twice.

Angie: twice year in Ibri.

Amna: and I presented outside Ibri.

Abdulsalam: Do you think that teaching views affect teachers' views toward using technology?

Mailizar: Sometimes yes, because technology use minimizes teachers' role in the classroom. When they do not want that to happen, they try to maximize themselves, instead of technology.

Eman: Teachers' role in indispensable. Technology is just an aid to help teachers import knowledge. Aids are just aids. Teaching should be student centric. ICT would enable teaching and learning to be student centric.

Angie: If the teacher is not dynamic in using that tool, then students will not be able to get that effect.

Eman: To use ICT we need time. When we try to implement a video or something into our teaching methodology, we need time. Time is a big constraint.

Mailizar: If you have a lot of workload, this is not possible.

Eman: to prepare an ICT based lesson, we should have a meticulous lesson plan. To have that meticulous lesson plan we need to have time.

Amna: And we need time to create the materials.

Eman: We need time to incorporate all those different teaching styles, games, group activities, pair activities, using laptops, using smartboards.

Mailizar: Even if you sacrifice and prepare some materials. There is no guarantee that you continue with the same school for more than a year. Maybe after three months you will teach another skill.

Angie: When I was in Saudi Arabia, they used to call teachers before the end of the semester and give the timetables, ask for their specializations and then assign the subjects for teaching. Not that haphazardly you should be given this one and then you jump to the sea and explore.

John: Regardless of having these materials prepared by teachers, for example I prepare them for level three this semester. I will be given level 4 or technical writing next semester. Why not sharing these materials with others. We suggested that last year where we have a library of all the prepared materials, videos, PowerPoints, available with HoD. And they can be shared. But this is the problem, nobody wants to share his materials with others. Sharing materials is very limited here. At least if we have an idea in how to use Moodle, we can post them there and the others can use them.

Angie: Teachers' seminars and gatherings are very important, every month or fortnight, and talk about what we are doing. We should share not keep it here are our property, because the more you give the better you are equipped.

Eman: Sharing is caring.

Abdulsalam: We are going to finish now. Do you have anything to add related to the things we talked about?

John: The Ministry of Manpower should pay more attention to the courses, technology, teacher development, not only for those under their umbrella, but for all, because we are in the same institution. Training at least once a year, not once a century.

Eman: It should be ongoing, continuing professional development. And proper follow up, after giving the training. To see whether teachers can implement in their classes and their feedback should be collected.

Angie: Total technology teaching is not good for health, because the eyesight is all day on their phone, on that screen, so a little bit of sport should be there, and they can use their resources better. Technology is just an aid, not complete technology teaching, it is going to make them all ill, that is disastrous.

Eman: Students are so obsessed with their mobile phones.

Appendix V Interview 1

Date: 6 December 2015

Interviewer: Abdulsalam

Interviewee: Anna

Venue: The meeting space at the head of ELC office.

Abdulsalam: Last time we talked, your views were interesting. It was interesting to see the proposal you prepared and the way you approached the college management. Can we first talk about this?

Anna: Absolutely, what do you mean by interesting?

Abdulsalam: Because you took the time and were motivated to write this proposal and to talk to the administration. So why do you think this is important?

Anna: Why is it important? Good question. The people who are teaching here, we have a range. We have people who have been actually trained on how to teach and teaching techniques. Actually, the vast majority of those people are the ones inside this department. The others, the specializations, they do not require anybody to go through any kind of teaching certification before stepping foot inside this college. So, you know, in the specializations you get everyone with no certification or training in how to teach. Unfortunately, people think that if you get CELTA, do one-month intensive you know, what constitutes daily workshop kind of a thing you know for one month and then shoot people out to be teaching in real life. This Does Not Work! It does not work. We have the evidence of it all over the place here. That there are some people, that yes they are going to be able

to naturally good at teaching and with the CELTA they are going to develop further, and you know they can get ideas and they have the motivation to be continually growing as educators. And then you get the other folks which are of course the majority, who do not want to put that kind of time and effort into the deal; they have got other stuff that they are doing, their family and their private lives you know as way more important . And so there is a number of people even within the English Language Centre that are not teaching effectively. And they have no motivation to improve. None! There is zero motivation to improve. Zero!

Abdulsalam: And how do you think that can be solved?

Anna: The way it can be solved is you make it a requirement that, and this has been the case in other countries for a very long time, that teachers have to complete a required number of professional development hours every year. You have to! It is part of your assessment every year. How many professional development credits have you done and did you do the minimum amount required. And if you haven't then you go on probation.

Abdulsalam: So you believe it should be a requirement?

Anna: Absolutely yes!

Abdulsalam: But there is already some kind of PD taking place here in the form of ….

Anna: Workshops. That does not work.

Abdulsalam: Why not?

Anna: You know it does not work.

Abdulsalam: I want your opinion.

Anna: What happens in the workshop? When you go to a workshop you get all excited about, or you are in a conference or listening to a lecture, you get excited about learning something that you can use to make yourself more professional. Then you come out of there for the first 24 hours and then you got it in your brain and you are going do something new with this. And then it drains out and then it is gone within a matter of days, this euphoria that happens after a workshop and this new found knowledge is gone. So the point here is that teacher coaching is so much more effective because you have got weekly meetings and somebody so is highly experienced teacher and trained in teacher coaching who will sit and observe the classroom delivery and behaviour of the teacher and together with the teacher come up with shared direction. And it goes on for a year. A year of weekly observations and then followed up with weekly meetings and coming up with plans for the next week and a task for the observed for making a shift in how to deal with things in the classroom. And then in the next week you follow up with that. And this goes on and on. So you have reinforced like concrete the lessons that a person needs in order to be developing as a teacher.

Abdulsalam: So you believe two things. That it should be formal and it should be a requirement at the college. **Anna:** Absolutely. **Abdulsalam**: The second thing is should be continuous.

Anna: There should be PD requirements. Now, this is based on the initial assessment (of teachers). Also you have to train the administrators on how to handle the initial assessment

and working with each teacher and staff member in a compassionate way not a judgemental way and there has to be a programme in place that can address their needs. So my vision, way back then, it was before here, it was in Shinas, to set up a program. But it does not matter. I am leaving now.

Abdulsalam: When you talk about coaching, who should do it?

Anna: A trained person. Ideally, what I would get the top teachers in each department within the college and then have a training semester for those people by someone who has already been trained in teacher coaching. Then, those people can go out and practice this teacher coaching and then let's say two people from each area. So you got the ELC and the other specializations. So you got 8 people and this is exponential. So those 8 people can ultimately do teacher coaching on 8 people. And then you get 64 now. So you got an exponential coverage of the entire system. That is in a perfect world. This is a full time job. So what it means is that you have to have the top teachers for a while, for like a year be paid to do just this. So you would have 2 people from each department and they are not going to be teaching. They are going to be full time coaching teachers.

Abdulsalam: So do you think that teacher coaching, for example, in the ELC, should be done within teachers from the ELC, or it can be done by anyone from any specialisation?

Anna: That is a good question. I think with language teaching, it is a different form of information delivery and exchange. It might be wise to have people who are specifically good in that field who would be doing the coaching of people in that field.

Abdulsalam: Can you tell me briefly about your teaching experience and yourself?

Anna: I have completed 42 years of teaching all over the planet. All across America, Poland, Mexico, Cambridge Kent (but I was working as an editor there), Oman, China, then Oman again. In Oman, I have been in Ibra, Shinas, Buraimi and Ibri. That is 10 years in Oman.

Abdulsalam: In this college, can you tell your experience with PD?

Anna: I am in the staff professional development committee in the ELC. I was the head of staff PD at Shians College. Here, I am almost a silent member of the staff professional development committee. There is an annual event that is put by staff PD committee. And also in between semesters typically there are presentations, lectures by teachers to teachers, workshops. I have done a lot of them over the years.

Abdulsalam: What are the issues that face PD activities here? You said that it is not very effective, why is that?

Anna: It is for any one-day thing. Anything where you do not have a continuous repeated followed up. Let's say that there is a workshop on how to conduct an effective interactive classroom that is student centred. Everybody would be excited about that, but they do not have anything other than the concept. And they have not put it into practice. And actually they do not know how to put it really into practice. Maybe they tried to put it into practice, but it fails and they feel stupid and it is not working right or whatever. And so then bye bye. Now if you were to set up a PD situation in which you had minimally monthly checks, and monthly let's sit and talk about your follow and you have follow up assignments after a workshop. And they have to show the work they have done by filming their classrooms and studying that or whatever. I am just playing around here. But the point here is that you do one shot deal and you are throwing your time away. It is a waste of time. You have to do the follow up. You have to do the reinforcement. You know the story of the three little pigs. The first built a house out of straw because he want to get it done fast. The second one

makes out sticks and the third out of bricks. It took the third one a long time to get it made. The guy that took all the time and effort to build the strong reinforced house survived.

Abdulsalam: Do you think that there is enough interaction during workshops here?

Anna: Typically, the format is you have 40 minutes presentation followed by 20 minutes questions and answers. That is a typical format. With a workshop, if you are doing 2 hours or 3 hours time commitment, it depends on the focus of the workshop. For example, I have done a workshop on Excel and Adobe products; that is going to be top down. You are not going to have let me give you my ideas sort of thing. So it depends on the content.

Abdulsalam: Can we talk for a few minutes about the proposal you have here. You believe that there should be staff assessment and training should be done by experts who follow the progress of teachers.

Anna: Staff assessment is done by administrators. And the administrators will be trained in how to do appropriate staff assessment in order to arrive at how to feed them into the staff PD process. And you also got self-assessment. This is a very important part of the total assessment. So you have the self-assessment done by staff members and the administrator does the classroom observation. Then you sit down with the staff member and discuss both assessments in a completely cooperative mode rather than pointing fingers: You did not do this, you have a problem with this, but you did a little good thing here and you know to work on this. That is something that most administrators do not know, how to give feedback correctly and how to be involved in this. In Shinas, I had training for administrators. It happened only in a brief shiny moment of time. So in addition to self-assessment, we should have training for administrators in order to have effective assessment, which we do not have now.

Abdulsalam: You talked about staff PD credits. How are the credits given?

Anna: I have done research in how organizations do this and how many credit hours they have per year. There are free courses everywhere like Coursera or do a collection of workshops, which I am a little bit against that now, and conferences. They take credits for workshops, they get credits for conferences and they take serious credits for taking a course. It is conceivable that can even be made part of the requirement that they have to do a course per year or something like that. So the assignment of actual number credits to different things I did not iron that thing out yet but I can do that with a little more time doing research. But nobody wants to make it a requirement here. And I do not mean just here, I mean everywhere.

Abdulsalam: Why not? What are the things that make it difficult?

Anna: What is the motivation here? We want people to be improving in their jobs. But you have to put money behind that. So your little annual salary raise will be dependent on you for fulling your staff professional development and a number of other things. But we do not get that. Well, it depends. Expats do not get necessarily annual raises, they are supposed to, but the recruiting companies are very corrupt. I have not had a raise for three years. So it is mainly money.

Abdulsalam: So you submitted this proposal to the college administration. What are the issues that you feel stopped them from putting it into practice?

Anna: One thing is, in order to initiate this teacher coaching scenario, it means that you are going to be losing 2 people from each department and in this case 3 people from the ELC.

Abdulsalam: So this is another issue besides money?

Anna: Well that is money.

Abdulsalam: So initially there were happy about it and they asked you to write it down.

Anna: Yeah, here we have to different scenarios for them. That they were happy about it are still happy about it. The still see the value of it. However, you have more instrumental and more powerful people who dismiss this immediately. It is been said to me that the problem is fear of change or something. You know the theory, we have something that is working and let's let it go like this.

Abdulsalam: Some people report that they learn a lot from colleagues. What is your experience of getting help from others here?

Anna: There used to be a more cooperative environment here, sorry to tell you it is not like that anymore. It is not the same environment and you can talk to anyone who has been here for years.

Abdulsalam: So what would happen if you approach others and ask for help with something?

Anna: The two or three people that are closest to you will help. It has to be your inner circle.

Interview 1 Transcript

Abdulsalam: What is your experience with ICT in teaching?

Anna: I use power point presentations for teaching public speaking. I use the overhead projector for that.

Abdulsalam: Do you use Moodle?

Anna: I have not used Moodle. A million years ago, and I mean this, I used blackboard. Not a million years ago, like 14 years ago, I had courses online on Blackboard.

Abdulsalam: What encourages or discourages you from using technologies in the classroom or for teaching in general?

Anna: That is a very good question. More than anything else it has to do with not having been trained in how to use them. So for instance, every single college of technology that I have worked at in Oman has these very expensive, what do you call these things, (**Abdulsalam**: Smartboards?), smartboards, thank you very much. They have very expensive smartboards; and what do they do? They have one day, not even one day. You go and sit and watch a presentation, by some guys who are not that good at presenting and it lasts for an hour and then you are out. And now you are supposed to know how to do it. I have been in one in every single college that I have taught at. Do I know how to use a smartboard? Hell no I don't. I have no idea, none. Why? It is this what I am talking about. You get and get one hour presentation and you are all excited about it. And then boom it is gone. Why? Because nobody worked with me directly to help me in practicing some of this. That is just in hardware and software. What about actual design of lessons, that would be able to be utilizing the smartboard. Somebody has got to be working with me to design these things the first semester or something until I get a feeling for how to do lesson planning using the power of the smartboard. So the smartboards *Never* get used. At the

put a *ton* of money, I mean lots and lots of money and now they are pulling out the smartboards that never got used and putting in more expensive smartboards, the Bromesias or Promethian or whatever in all the classrooms. I am like oh that is smart. Now the previous smartboards that never get used are now out of date, you are ripping these things out of the classroom and throwing them out and buying new ones that cost even more without coming up with a training programme that is going to work. And it is not just a single thing that people need to be trained on. It is three things, you need to be trained on the hardware, the software, and how to design lessons that incorporate that. There has to be a lot of training that has to go into this to justify the huge amount of money that is going into this in the first place.

Abdulsalam: What would you do to change this?

Anna: I would set up a training. I would have one day of training, and I mean a day of training not one hour, one day of training in the hardware and software, followed by assignments. So then checking in with each person individually, and working with them and following up on the assignments. Once you get the hardware and software done which in not a huge of a deal, but it is a big deal. So that is going to take a month of homework, assignments and follow up. And being on call to assist the teacher with assignments to get them done. And then after that, and the big one is and the most complex ultimately is going to be how to design your lesson plans to be using this to its fullest extent. That is going to take a while. But everything has to be supported, you build that brick house, brick by brick by brick. And then it will last, it will stay, it will be powerful.

Abdulsalam: People learn about technologies in different ways, like formal training, getting help from colleagues, watching videos on YouTube or search engines. How do you learn them best?

Interview 1 Transcript

Anna: I am a visual kinestatic learner. It means that if you tell me how to get to your house I would not get there. The best thing I would draw a map because then I am doing it. As I am actually doing movement it really goes to my brain. If I draw I will never have to see it again it is in my brain.

Abdulsalam: Do you think that technologies effective. Do you think that they make teaching and learning better?

Anna: It is like saying here is a spoon. Do you think it is effective in eating? Do you think that it makes eating better? It is the food that is the main thing. I can it with my hands. But I have a spoon does it make it better? Yeah! It does! It is a tool. Let's say that you need a knife that you need to make something out of food carving it. So the knife would definitely make it a whole lot easier to do what you need to do with that wood. What is more important is the wood, and you will find a way to cut it without a knife.

End of the interview

Appendix W Interview 2

Date: 3 December 2015

Interviewer: Abdulsalam

Interviewee: Buthaina

Venue: The meeting space at the head of ELC office.

Abdulsalam: Can you tell me about your teaching experience and about your managerial experience?

Buthaina: My teaching experience started in 2004 when I started as an EFL (English as a Foreign Language) lecturer. I was doing two things, the foundation programme and the post-foundation programme. After my Master's, I continued being a lecturer. After some time I started my managerial duties, which include all sorts of managing the foundation language programme and the different levels in it, participating in timetabling, allocating teaching hours to teachers, it includes classroom observation, which is very important here; it includes also all sorts of other duties like allocating invigilation duties and exam processing procedures.

Abdulsalam: I know that you are in charge of staff PD committee. Can you tell me about that?

Buthaina: Actually, the staff PD committee for the ELC, not the whole college. It is at the departmental level. What we are trying to do in this committee is to have some sort of staff professional programmes every semester. And we try to diversify the programmes we do. Sometimes we have presentations about classroom related issues. Sometimes we get requests from teachers that they need training in particular areas, so we try to ask for some

help from the IT or ETC (Educational Technologies Centre) departments at the college. And it is really, in my opinion, our programme is a sort of primitive programme because it is not a continuous professional development, as it should be. It is only something that we try to do so that we track the development of our staff and then we deal with some areas where it needs to be dealt with. Especially when it comes to teaching, because I do classroom observation, and sometimes I look at some of the areas that need to be addressed. And in the committee we try to have some workshops according to the classroom observations.

Abdulsalam: There are many points here. Who decides what is the content of PD programmes? Is it based on teachers' needs or observations, or something else?

Buthaina: First of all, it is based on classroom observations. Whenever I go to a classroom observation I sit down after some time and do some analysis for the common things I observe in the classrooms, and I try to see if there is someone who can do a presentation or a workshop to deal with certain area. Another way is staff requests. Sometimes teachers come themselves and ask for a certain area, especially when it comes to technology, or when it comes to using the smartboard or using the teaching programs. But we do not have much. There are many areas that need to be addressed, but because of the lack of people who can give training, we do not cover all areas. We cover only the possible areas we can cover.

Abdulsalam: Is anyone else involved in the observations?

Buthaina: The other head of section is involved and head of the ELC.

Abdulsalam: What about the college management, are they involved in deciding the kind of PD programmes?

Buthaina: No. They consider our committee as a department thing, so they never ask us to do anything and never ask us about we do in our committee. We conduct workshops and training without referring back to them.

Abdulsalam: Do you feel training should be within departments or interdepartmentally?

Buthaina: I think that each department is unique and they need to decide their own programmes, but also staff PD programmes should be carried out by the college. There should be a larger unit, a professional development unit, for the whole college, where they should have members from each department and these people decide the programmes needed for the college. Because sometimes they can provide programmes for all departments. For example, our teachers ask for SmartBoard training, and this is needed by all other departments. It is not an ELC thing, it is a whole college thing. So having a PD unit for the whole college would be better.

Abdulsalam: Do you think that there is enough support from the college?

Buthaina: No there is no support from the college. There is some support like providing a place, providing technical help, if we need someone to present from another department that can be provided. But they do not really get enough support.

Abdulsalam: Is there a PD policy or recommendations for each department?

Buthaina: As far as I know, No. There is no policy regarding PD.

Abdulsalam: What about comments when you give them any kind of report about what is done here?

Buthaina: No, we do not receive any feedback. What we do, at the end of every academic year we prepare a report about the committee activities. It is only required by the QA (Quality Assurance) unit, that's it. I do not know if any of the college administration have a look at it or they see whatever is happening. But there is no feedback or comments.

Abdulsalam: What forms of training are usually provided here at the ELC?

Buthaina: We have mainly two things, teaching related topics and topics related to using technology. These are the only two main things. Like how to use Smartboard or how to use a certain software for teaching.

Abdulsalam: Why there is focus on those areas?

Buthaina: I think the first area because of the classroom observation sessions. And they are all classroom related issues. The second area, using technology issues, because of requests from teachers. They come themselves and ask from training, for example, how to use Word, Excel, and other programmes, and how to use the Smartboard.

Abdulsalam: So the requests come from teachers when it comes to using technology?

Buthaina: Yes

Abdulsalam: Is the motivation only from teachers, or from the college management or external forces like the Ministry or the Oman Academic Accreditation Authority?

Buthaina: Most of the time teachers and observations. Many teachers whenever they feel they need something they come and ask for it. The college management no. The Ministry and the OAAA are not involve, whether they are involved indirectly I do not know.

Abdulsalam: What would you do to make training more effective here at the college?

Buthaina: I think we need professionals from outside the college to come and address issues. What we are doing now is that we depend on teachers from here to present to others. We need real continuous PD, which does not address one area, a teaching area or one technology topic. We need something continuous like giving a course. Like we begin the semester and have a weekly thing as part of a course so teachers improve. Also we need to apply teaching coaching procedures, but here it is not possible. Someone tried to do it but it was rejected by the college management. With the help of one teacher, we prepared a teacher coaching programme that should start at the beginning of the semester. It includes class visits, feedback, discussions with teachers, peer observation and all sorts of things. But the college management did not want it to happen because that teacher needs to be given zero teaching load. The college management said that they cannot give zero load to anyone. If you need to have a real PD programme we need to have special people to do it, but here everyone is busy with teaching hours so we do not have someone who have the ability to do everything.

Abdulsalam: Do you feel that there is enough interaction among teachers in PD activities?

Buthaina: Yes. Whenever we have workshops or seminars almost everyone attends. We have discussions during and after workshops. You feel that many people are interested and the discuss everything.

Abdulsalam: Should training be accredited?

Buthaina: If we are going to a programme, it should be acknowledged in some way. Currently, people attend training but nothing goes to their files. Having a coaching or PD programme, to make it successful, we need to have evaluation for the programme, and give teachers certificates for successful completion of programmes. This is good to motivate teachers to participate and be involved. Without motivating them and acknowledging that they did this, I do not think they will be willing to do it.

Abdulsalam: Do you feel that training can have an effect on teaching practice?

Buthaina: Yes. From my classroom observation, one of the problems we have is that we get teachers who have no experience in language teaching. There were doing something else before. They also do not have CELTA or any qualification in language teaching. (**Abdulsalam**: So what are their qualification?). Literature. They are PhD holders in literature. They were lecturing literature. There is a big group of teachers who do not have a background in language teaching. They have no clue of the proper ways of teaching languages. This affects students negatively. We have good students who do not get everything they should get. They are getting the minimum. One of the things that PD programmes can help this group of teachers, where a programme can be designed for them. By having a background knowledge about language teaching, they can improve their practice in the classroom. Now without any training this practice will continue as it is. Even with classroom observation and giving them feedback, nothing is changing because they need training.

Abdulsalam: You talked about the need for training in using educational technologies. What forms of educational technologies do you mean here?

Anna: One of the obstacles we have in this college is that we have to teach in the caravans, where teachers do not have access to anything that is related to technology. The only choice is to carry a portable overhead projector. I noticed that some teachers do not know how to use it. It is not complicated. I noticed that from a classroom observation. A teacher used pictures and I asked her why do not you use an OHP and she said she does not know how to use it. But in classrooms, most teachers have access to smartboards, and they can use PowerPoint presentations. They need to be trained how to use the Smartboard. There is a lack of using any kind of e-learning software and programmes. We need training in how to use all of these.

Abdulsalam: What kind of programmes do you mean?

Buthaina: In this College, we have Moodle, but teachers can us many other programmes. Last year I was teaching listening and speaking level 2 and I used Edmodo. Edmodo is a virtual classroom where you can assign students. I made a virtual classroom and I assigned all of my students to that classroom. I had a classroom with my two groups. There was interaction and students were posting things related to the classroom. I used to send things to students through it and it worked. Teachers here do not know about these things. Most teachers, I feel, are reluctant to use them. They do not want to complicate things maybe. Or they feel that these programmes are complicated. Also, one things that is stopping them from using technology is that teachers receive delivery plans at the beginning of semester and they want to finish their delivery plans. They have in their minds that if they use technologies that this will make them unable to cover everything in the deliver plan. They think this will take long to do in the classroom and they are afraid they will not be able to cover to delivery plan.

Abdulsalam: Teacher might have a mixture of feelings about ICT. Some teachers might be motivated towards it while others are sceptical and question its value to teaching. What is your position here?

Buthaina: I think technology can be used to help in the classroom, but it is not everything. We cannot take everything in the classroom and make it online, because the student teacher interaction is very important. But since most students now use smart phones, iPads and other devices, that encourages the students to use the language more. Technology is good, but it is not everything and it should not be everything.

Abdulsalam: Do teachers here use Moodle?

Buthaina: We have the e-learning portal Moodle. We tried it once, 2 or 3 years ago and it worked. But again teachers in the caravans do not have any facilities there to use Moodle. Also sometimes, the internet connection is weak. Many teachers feel that it is a waste of their time, so they prefer direct interaction between them and their students. We have the e-learning committee, it is the committee responsible for improving the e-learning and preparing the e-learning portal, but it is not active now because of all the problems, because teachers do not have enough training. We assign training, every semester there is training in Moodle but there is no application for this training. Last year we had two training sessions for Moodle but teachers did not have a chance to apply. Mainly it is connections problems and teachers are not familiar with these procedures, they are not given enough training.

Abdulsalam: So there was training but it was not enough?

Buthaina: It was not enough. It was only one session training in a whole year, where teachers are introduced to Moodle, what it is and how to open an account. So there is no continuous training. After that session there was no other session to show them how to upload things, how to start using it, how to interact with their students through it.

Abdulsalam: What about Smartboard training?

Buthaina: We had training this semester. But it was not for all teachers. Most teachers were busy with their classes. They had to be in their classes, so they came and requested another training session. For this, we have to coordinate with the ETC department, to train teachers. We have this session but I feel it is not enough. We need to have a continuous training programme.

Abdulsalam: What would you do to change this?

Buthaina: I would make it continuous. Also, we can have one free hour every week were all teachers are free at that time. And we can have all the training for everyone in that common hour, but right now we do not have that. At least one hour or one hour and a half. Bringing specialists from outside the college is not possible, because trainers need money and we do not have any support from the ministry or the college. Also teaching in the caravans is a big obstacles. Once we move to classrooms in the new building things will get better.

Abdulsalam: Is training an individual or institutional responsibility?

Buthaina: Both. Teachers know their strengths and weaknesses, so they should seek training and help from others. Also it is institutional, where there are many things like classroom observations, assigning courses according to teachers' needs.

Abdulsalam: You said that you used some forms of technology. What did you use and where did you learn that?

Buthaina: First of all, Moodle. I used Moodle in three years ago in my Technical Communication class for post foundation and project class for level four. For Moodle, we had training. Every year there is only one session or two sessions, that is it. So I had training here at the college in how to use Moodle. The training was not enough. I had to log in and discover things myself. The training is basic, in where to find Moodle in the website, how to log in, how to get a username and a password, and the definitions of tabs. That is it. They do not show you its use, how to make it interactive and how to interact with students through it. The way I used it was basic, but I felt it was good. It helped me communicate with students outside the classroom. Once you have a portal with students, this makes it possible for them to send emails and you reply to them, or even send homework and they send it back there. The other programme I used and I liked is Edmodo. I like it. You can access it from desktop or you can download the app. I learned it myself. I read some articles and this programme was one of the recommended programs to be used, so I downloaded it, opened an account and learned how it works. I used it for speaking and listening class, to send tracks, receive their answers and other things. Many things there can help in the classroom. I also once tried to use WhatsApp but I thought I better not. I was afraid that students would start sending messages and using for other purposes. I never tried to use any programs other than these three.

Abdulsalam: What about the other facilities available at the college?

Buthaina: We have a room in the library that is called the Audio room. The problem with that room is that it is a very small room. Our class size in the foundation is not less than 25 students, we have even more than 30 in some classes. Having a class in this audio room is not possible, because it has only 16 or 18 spaces. That is one facility that is not being used. And teachers are reluctant to use it. Many teachers went there and looked at the place. Once they saw it is a small place not enough for their classes they decided not to use it. The laptops are only used by teachers for PowerPoint presentations. They are not used for anything else. The same thing with OHP to show pictures or slides. We also CD players for listening classes. There are Smartboards in classrooms. Not in all classrooms. Smartboards can be used for teaching, to open programmes and to facilitate teaching. But because teachers are not getting enough training they do not know to use it, so the only thing they are used for is to show PowerPoint presentations. That is it. Which is a big mistake. Teachers do not know how to use them.

Abdulsalam: Do you have anything that you would like to add?

Buthaina: If training is made under a professional development unit at college level, special programmes are made, and special people assigned to work on these programmes, then we can say we have professional development. But now I cannot say that we have real professional development. Not like the way it is done like now, one presentation in the middle of semester and one or two at the end and that is it. Teachers have many things to do, teaching, the committees and other things. So you feel that there are teachers who are overloaded and they do not have time for classroom preparation and the ELC. Training in Moodle and Smartboard is done by ETC. It is only the basics in how to use them. It is not for using them for English language purposes.

Abdulsalam: Can you talk about the atmosphere at the ELC? Do you feel that teachers help each other?

Buthaina: I think yes. I talked about classroom observation. Whenever there is one area that teachers need help in, I go to a teacher who I think might know about it. If they can

know and are willing to give a presentation to others, we do that. So basically teachers here in the ELC help other teachers.

Appendix X Interview 3

Date: 7 December 2015

Interviewer: Abdulsalam

Interviewee: Hassan

Venue: The meeting space at the head of ELC office.

Abdulsalam: At the beginning, I would like to know about yourself. Can you talk about your teaching experience?

Hassan: I am teaching since the last 17 years. I started my career with teaching postgraduate students. Here I am teaching 200 students. I have been in this college for 6 years. I teach management subjects.

Abdulsalam: Are you involved in any of the committees here?

Hassan: I started with strategic planning committee. Then I got involved with Quality Assurance Committee. Now I am heading the research domain for the college. Apart from that in the department level, I am part in the On-Job-Training Committee. That committee looks after the training aspect for the students. Once they finish their studies they have to do On-Job-Training for 8 weeks, then they will be eligible to graduate from the college. So it is a mandatory requirement to do OJT, so I am looking after that committee.

Abdulsalam: I would like to know your experience with professional development at the college.

Hassan: When we came to Oman, this was a different culture. So they oriented us about the culture of Oman and how to deal with students. The culture is different in India. Apart from that, the working styles, the working hours, the reporting structure, all these things are different. So the Human Resources oriented us. That was called the orientation programme, now they call it induction programme. So that was my first experience with training in the College. Apart from that, they trained us in other aspects like quality assurance. There was a team from Muscat who came and trained us in different aspects like ADRI (Approach, Deployment, Results, Improvement), those quality terms. We also got training in Promethean Board, you know, we are using smart board nowadays instead of that marker board. And they oriented us in some soft skills. Apart from that, we do a routine job, like teaching and advising. I am an advisor for 30 students. We got training in the advising process. Yesterday we had training in the new registration model introduced by the Ministry. So training is an ongoing process here.

Abdulsalam: Does training happen within departments, at college level or from external providers?

Hassan: It depends on the nature of training. Some training that involves processes and activities, it happens at the college level. But some things which are only related to departments, like the graduation project guidance, like we have guide students in graduation projects. These things, and things like internal Quality Assurance, and On the Job Training, are department specific and training is within department. Sometimes when the trainers from outside or the college level, which is common, then training is common for all staff members.

Abdulsalam: When you go to training, what kind of things would you like to see happening there?

Hassan: At the end of the day, I should come back with knowledge or something to take. We generally do not look for routine things explained to us; we want to learn something new. This is our expectation. When you work for a long time in an organisation, most of the things you learn by yourself. And training is only to teach you specific things which you do not learn. And to learn from an expert, not from the same level of staff.

Abdulsalam: I would like to know about recent training you attended and what happened there. And whether people had a chance to interact.

Hassan: Yesterday we had training on the registration model, this new model, which is being tested in our college. The ministry wants to introduce it. So the registrar and his support team organised this training programme. What they did they gave us a time, we all reached there and they explained everything elaborately, where we were supposed to go through the online process. But there was a problem with the internet, so we went through the training using one computer where the trainer demonstrated, then we came back and we tried to do these things ourselves. Sometimes problems happen, people should be ready with alternative methods of training. That is what we experienced yesterday.

Abdulsalam: The content of training can be determined by the college management, department management or teachers themselves. What have you seen here at the college?

Hassan: Most of the time training is arranged by college authorities. We have also formed a committee where we have teachers who volunteered to teach other teachers, faculty development committee, who are expert or one or another thing volunteer to teach that to others. Most of the time the college management send a request to nominated people to nominate for a training programme.

Interview 3 Transcript

Abdulsalam: Is there training taking place related to teaching?

Hassan: Yes, we got training in smartboard. We also have some small talks from experienced teachers from the departments. Last year, Dr. Jamil from the ELC had a seminar on how to handle students and all, teaching and learning process.

Abdulsalam: Do you think that can have an impact on teaching?

Hassan: It works like press-ups, sometimes we know that thing but we do not focus on it or give it priority. Sometimes this kind of events let you think over again, take some points from these seminars and workshops and implement them. So that helps.

Abdulsalam: Regarding getting help from colleagues. Some people might be reluctant from going to ask for help from the administration but they have people who they can talk to. Do you think that teachers here and the environment allow for this?

Hassan: It is practiced at departments. Teachers do not join at the same time, so the induction is not given to everyone at the same level. When new people join we cannot expect them to know everything and learn everything overnight, so they need help from other teachers. So actually, what happens here, we do not reinvent the wheel. We do not ask them to learn from scratch. A good example in our department is the course materials, we hand them over to the new teacher, he goes through that, and if he has difficulty, he takes help from a teacher who has already taught that subject. So it becomes easy this way and learn very fast. Otherwise, if he starts to learn by himself, it will take months or years. So he gets into the activity quickly or he learns from colleagues. It is a better and faster way of learning that waiting for a seminar to happen or training. And training sessions are crowded, where you do not get a chance to learn one to one. Here is works like one teacher holding your hand and taking you through all the system. That makes you learn faster than

being in a room where 30 people are listening and one person talking. So there you do not get that personal touch. Where you speak to a colleague and that colleague helps you do that work. Things work faster and smoother in this manner.

Abdulsalam: Can you share your personal experience in learning from colleagues?

Hassan: When I was new here, I was teaching Introduction to Business module, but I was given examples from my country, where the culture is different, company names and religion, so then I was facing problems because were not able to understand these things. I went to HoD (Head of Department) and helped me to change my method of teaching. He said why not you bring Oman specific examples. He helped me understand the culture here. Now almost all the lectures I give, all my examples are from Oman. I have tailored my examples to be easily understood by students. There were many examples like this. There are also many situations where I helped other teachers.

Abdulsalam: I am interested in what you have just said, when teachers help each other. How does it happen? Do teachers come and ask for help? Or does it happen in the form of discussions, stories or other methods?

Hassan: It happens in many ways, like sometimes informal gathering discussions. Like we meet on tea, sometimes you say oh today is a bad day for me and like that. Then you describe your situation and sometimes if there is a senior person, he will volunteer to help you, or most of the time it comes when you feel the stress and because the others are your friends, they notice this and come to ask you what is happening. Then they try to guide you. It usually happens with new teachers, because older teachers have already learned how to swim in this pond. So the pond is not new to them. Generally, new teachers feel the stress it becomes visible on their faces, or when they have informal discussions, and other teachers come to help them sail through. If it is in a bad situation where students complain. Usually students do not complaint to teachers themselves, they go to the HoD. In that case,

the HoD calls this person and counsel and guide him in how to handle this situation. Sometimes if they are busy, they ask a senior teacher to guide him. It is a mix of everything.

Abdulsalam: Do teachers hesitate to approach others to get guidance or help?

Hassan: When it comes to learning, we do not feel that I am too old or too young to learn. Hesitation is there, but over the time when you work as a family, you do not feel that shyness or hesitation when you seek help. If it is about a process or a system, people do not mind. But if it is about learning some course then that hesitation exists.

Abdulsalam: Is there anything that you would like to add about professional development at the college?

Hassan: College is taking more initiative, but we need more. Most of the training here is a routine. Routine training is part of organisations, but should have at least one new programme every semester. At least one new program every semester, because that will add value to training. More specific training should be there. Also it should be about the latest things in the world.

Abdulsalam: So how do you think that should happen? Should it organised by the college management or should teachers take initiative?

Hassan: Teachers are already taking initiative by volunteering to teach other teachers, but I also think management is important. Because we have now is confined only to the teacher resources available here. The management have the ability to reach the other colleges or

institutes outside. They have more scope for getting external resources and external trainers.

Abdulsalam: Is there anything that should be done to improve training at the college?

Hassan: There is no specific room for training or something like that. Here I should have a training department that should focus only on training. There is also no teacher common room or something, so interdisciplinary discussions are not happening. Now we are only confined only to our department, ELC is confined to ELC, and Engineering to Engineering. There is no place, except canteen, where there come for food; and that is not a place for intellectual discussions. So intellectual discussions do not take place, there you talk about food and informal activities. For example, there should be a specific reserved area in the library only for teachers, a reading section. Where teachers from each department come. There should also be a teacher common room, where teacher from different disciplines meet, and interdisciplinary discussions and interdisciplinary research can take place.

Abdulsalam: People might have different feelings about interdisciplinary activities, what is your position?

Hassan: I think we can learn from everybody. If you go back to the root of education, it all started from one discipline. At the end of the day, our aim is to educate and learn. The days are gone where you focus only on Business. Now on how you can make business and communication work. So I will merge business and communication, and it becomes business communication. Similarly, interdisciplinary hybrid kind of stuff in much in demand and people are going beyond course specialisation. These are the days of innovation. Innovation comes when you relate two unrelated things. Business and English are unrelated, Engineering and IT are unrelated, so when you relate two unrelated things it gives you a new discipline and it gives you new knowledge. I support that.

Abdulsalam: Is interdisciplinary collaboration happening now?

Hassan: Some activities. We have a research committee where there are members from all departments. So now, we are planning to come with a research journal for the college, which will have all the disciplines. Now we are focusing on individual contributions, but later we will try to merge so that interdisciplinary research can take place. At the end of the day as an educational institution and as teacher our aim to create knowledge. Knowledge will be created only when we try to look beyond what we know now. So that thing may happen in the future.

Abdulsalam: Now we will take about ICT. What is your experience with ICT use here at the college?

Hassan: In my subject, we have the eLearning Moodle. All the teachers upload their scheme of work, course books, quizzes, previous quiz papers, even additional reading references. We used to give assignments on printed papers. Now we stopped that and we ask students to go to eLearning and download assignments from there. So this is one way of encouraging them to use eLearning. We also have discussion forums, where students or teachers can start discussions. Though not all students use it, but it is slowly picking up. We need to do more to make it popular among students. Coming to classroom teaching aids, I personally use the smartboard, which we call Active Promethean board. This is fantastic and giving me a different experience. All the activities that I do on the board are recorded. They come as notes which can be stored on my laptop. If students want to see how I solved a problem step by step with voice, they can take a copy from my laptop. Visually it is more interesting that looking at one colour. It has many colours and features which you can use. That makes the class more interesting. Even there are highlighters, graphs, timers, calculator, and all the gadgets are there. That makes the class more lively and students enjoy learning. I am very happy with that. I learned that only here in this college, and I have been practicing this since the last four years. In some classes, we do not have smartboards, so I use Power Point.

I use a laptop and all my lectures are in Power Point. That helps the students to refer back. For example, I teach marketing. There are many examples I give through pictures, because a picture tells a thousand words. Even if I write a definition, they do not understand. I will just show them a picture, and they learn it very fast. These are the benefits of ICT use. We use smartboards, E-learning, PowerPoint, and we do not use mobiles much, but only to send messages for exams or for changing a date for anything. We do this through a system, where we can send messages. I can give you one example. There was a seminar in the Chamber of Commerce. I wanted all my students to go there. So what we did, we sent SMS to all of them at night. In the morning, all of them were present. Thirty students were present and attended the seminar. This is the beauty of ICT.

Abdulsalam: You said that you learned the use of smartboard only here. I would like to know your experience in learning how to use it.

Hassan: I have seen that before, but I have never used. In India, I have seen but do not have an opportunity to use. Even I did not get formal training in that before. Here when the committee was formed, I was one of the initial members. They had train the trainer concept. I was chosen as a trainer, who will be trained by the company people, and then I will train the other staff members. They trained us and it was very informative. I came back and practiced it. It was all new and I did not know everything. What I did, I locked myself in a classroom for two hours for three days, and practiced it myself. So that I can face the audience, otherwise what would happen, they will ask me questions and I may not be able to answer. I took it as a challenge to learn it myself, I even watched YouTube. YouTube was a big source for me at that time. At home, I used to watch YouTube, come back and practice here at college. That is how I learned it. Even other department colleagues, like Someith from IT, he was using that before and helped me to learn the basics. But most of the things we learn by practice only. Now I am using it like an expert and train teachers, mostly within department. Also I gave training to IT and engineering staff once. When I trained them, one of them learned well and now he is giving training. So it was like train the trainer concept. I passed all my knowledge to him and he is passing that to others.

Abdulsalam: You gave training to staff from Business, IT and other departments. Do you feel that it is the same?

Hassan: This is only application so it is the same. How they use, depends on them. We just train them how to use the board, like how to download the software, how to calibrate the board, the different drop down menus there, how they can import their lectures from different PPTs, and the different tools the can use. That is basic training. After that, it depends on their practice. We have not organized advanced training programme. We also need different gadgets that the college does not have, like ranking devices. That is the next level probably. They will buy them and we will train them. Now basic training with smartboard is completed, and I think they are comfortable with that.

Abdulsalam: How were you chosen as a smartboard trainer?

Hassan: At that time, when they company people came, I did not have classes. I was also interested. The HoD suggested my name and asked whether I am interested and I said yes. The training was for 2 hours. The training was attended by some teachers.

Abdulsalam: You talked about different forms of ICT. Do you think that they affect learning and teaching?

Hassan: This has pros and cons. If you become too dependent on technology, you lose the personal touch. If I use only PPT and I do not focus on the personal thing, I explain whatever is in the PPD, then they do not learn much. Also it makes them isolated. They will think that PPT is a substitute for teacher. That method should not be followed. It should be a mixture of both technology and the traditional method. The best results will come if there is a blend of both. If students become too much dependent on technology, then it becomes very

difficult feel of learning. They become slaves of technology. Whatever information you give them they will just want to Google it. No one will want to read books, and Google replaces them. So I think that is a bad thing that we should discourage. We should encourage technology because it makes learning cheaper and faster, but there can be drawbacks. Like in our childhood we use to have reading groups, and if not person needs help the others help him. I think those things are going away because he can learn from PPT given by the teacher. So team work and group learning, those things are going to die if are too much dependent on technology. This is what I feel. And what I noticed in my classes if I depend too much on technology. They will think that their companion or friend is technology, not you or the other students. So that is one big challenge.

Abdulsalam: So how can you have the correct blend?

Hassan: You have to design a way in which you deliver your pedagogy. What I do in most my classes, I teach them something through PPT but the examples I do not put them there, I talk about them. I want them to write things down, so that forces them to bring the traditional aspect along with the modern aspect of learning. I will give you also one example. The class activities are purely done in the traditional way. At that time, they do not look at the board. Sometimes you have to give it a break; otherwise, they will lose the habit from learning the traditional way. We have to keep the traditional way a live, otherwise it will stop.

Abdulsalam: So do you mean that technology can isolate students?

Hassan: Now we have things like remote classrooms. In my previous institute, we had a concept there, where I used to record my lectures and give them in a CD to students who can play them at home. They do not feel the importance of the teacher there, or if they want to ask, they ask a message, email or a chat. That face-to-face interaction and learning carry much more impact.

Abdulsalam: What would encourage or discourage you from using ICT?

Hassan: I definitely want to use technology because that makes my job easy. When I use technology, I do not forget all the points I want to tell in a class. Technology is a guiding tool for me. Also technology makes me maintain my speed, so that I finish content fast. Like when I have shortage of time I can go through the PPT faster. But sometimes it works negatively. When I become dependent in technology, I feel that if I do not use technology I have not taught students even if I cover all the points.

Abdulsalam: People may learn about technology in different ways. What do you feel is the best way for you to learn about ICT?

Hassan: When it comes to technical points only experts can teach you better. Sometimes when you routine work you can learn from colleagues, but they are busy with their own work. They may not have time like a dedicated software trainer. The trainer is dedicated to teach you, but your colleagues are busy with other things so they may spend five or ten minutes for you. They may not give you 100% attention or teach you a 100% the things you want to learn. So it may take you a long time because he is not doing that rigorously, but a structured training program makes the learning better. When you talk to a colleague, whether you learn or not makes no impact on him. It works as a problem and solution.

Abdulsalam: As a trainer, what would you do to make the current training better?

Hassan: More practical. At the end, the theoretical or a lecture method motivates them to understand that this is one facility that exists. But practice makes perfect. Activity based

learning is more fruitful and bring more learning that lecture method. The theory part is okay now, but we need to give them practice. If teachers do not take it seriously, whatever I do would have no impact. So we need to motivate them.

Abdulsalam: Anything else that would you like to add?

We have to go with the time. Now the students are more techno savvy. If we ask them to write, they feel that it is not related to them. Most of them do not use pen and paper, and they feel it is a kind of burden and stressful for them. We need to use the gadgets that they use right now. We should not separate these gadgets from them because that can be discouraging. We need to find a way to use these gadgets as a medium for learning. That is going to be the next big challenge. Classrooms are going to be redundant. That is what I feel. After five years, nobody would like to sit in a classroom for two hours. We have to find alternative sources in delivering the knowledge without holding them for two hours in the classroom. That time technology will come to rescue us. Smart classrooms will be in use.

I will give you one example, we take feedback on teachers. We used to take feedback on printed papers where students used to tick. Now last year we developed an application that they can download on their smartphones or iPads. And they can give feedback from their smartphones or iPads. This started last year. There were some issues with the internet in the caravans. Students complained that they do not want to use their own data, because they have to pay for that. So now, we are working on that to connect caravans to Wi-Fi. In the main building, it was okay. It is quite a success. Students used their smartphones to complete the teacher feedback. The teacher would be in the front and ask students to log in to Survey Monkey and complete the feedback. It was successful. The only problem was connecting to Wi-Fi in the caravans. So they completed paper feedback. Now they are trying to resolve that. Students like it, because when you allow them to use smartphones they feel happy. It was faster and the completion rate was higher.

We tried to take students to computer labs, but between classes and computer labs students used to run away. So many students were not present in the computer lab to complete the feedback. And it takes time to take them to the computer lab, to open a computer and to register. This takes 30 to 40 minutes. When it is done in a classroom, just in 10 minutes your job is over. And also they like that.

Abdulsalam: Do you think that any of this can be applied to teaching?

Hassan: Why not ask them to use their mobiles to learn. Let us see that as opportunity to teach them, not as a barrier to teaching. Also, do not leave the traditional method and keep it alive. The lectures can be given in traditional mode and activities in their smartphones or iPad. For example in teaching English if you ask them to record their presentations using the voice recorder in the phone, they will experiment and make mistakes and learn. They will learn to speak and correct. These trails will help them learn and overcome mistakes. So let us keep the traditional method and use technology as a separate tool for learning.

Abdulsalam: Do you have anything to add?

The technology in which got my education twenty years ago has changed drastically. We used to use blackboard and chalk. Now these are dreams and obsolete. So with time technologies change. If I want to keep up with technologies, I have to go through professional development. As a teacher, I cannot keep on giving. I also have to take, and then only I can give. There should be input and output of knowledge.

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